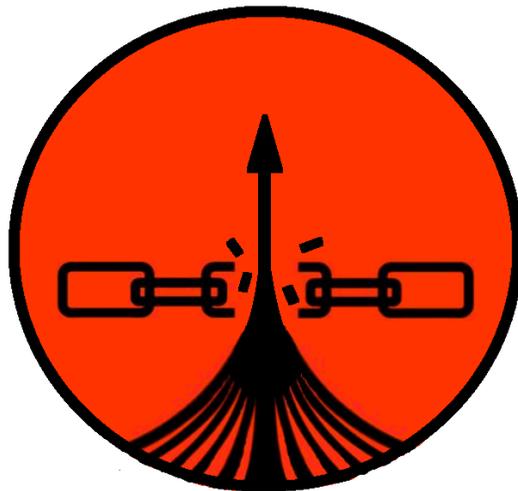


# Concise Library of Communist-Socialism



I have created this collection of selected texts as a definitive, concise testament of Communist-Socialism as it exists here in the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To me, the texts I have included in this pocket library provide a clear and easily digested description of what we advocate, how to achieve it, and how it will work on a daily basis. As well as clearly refute the criticisms of our ideology, and provide effective criticisms of capitalism and other institutions which we oppose.

Many of these authors disagreed over some aspects, especially over the necessity and effect of the transitional state-government. Nonetheless, their works all provide an important piece to the modern ideology of Communist-Socialism, and as such they are, in my opinion, essential. I ask that the reader understand that the fact that these writings represent two different factions of Communist-Socialism: anti-state communists, often called “Libertarian-Communists” or “Anarchists” and represented by a black flag, and pro-state communists most often associated to the ideology of Lenin and Mao, and represented by the solid red flag. But that does not mean they are wholly opposed to each other, indeed the two groups have worked together at least as often as they have opposed each other, and they both provide important perspectives and analysis of capitalism and the state. In order to abolish capitalism and establish a communist system, we cannot attempt to implement the perfect representation of either camp, lest our movement be destroyed by internal conflict as it has in the past. We must instead build a system that is a compromise between both camps. In order to reach that compromise, and to actually eliminate the oppressive capitalist systems which we are currently subjected to, we all must study and understand what each major school of Communist-Socialism advocates, and why.

***“Crowned heads, wealth and privilege may well tremble should ever again the Black and Red unite!” - Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of Germany, after the split between Anarchists and Marxists in 1872***

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# Principles of Communist-Socialism in the 21st Century

*By Adam Denker*

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It is not my intent to suggest that anything I write is essential to communist-socialism on the level of the other texts I have provided in this booklet. But rather that a short concise description of the principles of modern Communist-Socialism is what is essential. I have written these principles to provide such a list, as I have not found one written by anyone else that I felt quite stated things so clearly. I encourage you, if this does not help you, to tear it out of this booklet and replace it with an essay that you feel better describes these principles.

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-1-

## *What is Communism?*

Communism, in short, is stateless socialism. It is a society where total liberation of all people has been achieved, where class no longer exists, and the “means of production” is controlled by the community.

-2-

## *What is Socialism?*

Socialism is a blanket term that is used to refer to all systems where the workplaces, tools, and resources needed to make things, what is commonly called the “means of production,” is owned and controlled by all those who work it. Socialism is the expansion of democracy into the places we all rely on to live, so everyone has a voice in the systems that they already contribute to, like their jobs, and no one has sole control over the places and things that we all need. Often “Socialism” is used by communists to refer to what is more accurately called “State-Socialism,” which is a socialist system that is managed and protected by a state-government, but that is not the only system which qualifies as socialist. The term “socialist” and “communist” are often mistakenly used interchangeably because, as stated above, communism is a type of socialism. All Communists are Socialists, but not all Socialists are Communists. Some socialist tendencies do not seek to eliminate the state, such as “Democratic-Socialism.”

-3-

## *Isn't Socialism tax funded programs, like a welfare state?*

No, that system is called “Social-Democracy,” which is actually the system we already have in the United States. Often, people mistakenly point to Sweden, Norway, and Denmark as examples of “Democratic-Socialism,” but this is not accurate. Those are all Social-Democracies as well, they simply have more robust tax funded programs than the U.S. does. Socialists actually oppose Social-Democracy, because it is still a capitalist system, it still allows wage labor, the means of production to be privately owned, and prohibits the workers from having democratic control of their workplaces. Democratic-Socialists are still socialists, they simply attempt to implement socialism through democratic reforms rather than a revolution, and typically do not seek to eliminate the state. A fully established socialist system would not need any significant welfare system because profit driven production and labor exploitation would be eliminated. Meaning all workers would keep 100% of what they produce with their labor, eliminating poverty, class, and significant wealth inequality. The small portion of the population who cannot work could easily be taken care of with the excess products of the community’s labor, as it would not be destroyed to protect market value. And if not, any welfare system that would be needed to take care of the infirm, would be very small, as there would be no “working poor” like there are now; the only

people who would need such welfare would be those who are physically unable to work. And of course under communism there would be no welfare at all, because there would be no currency. Communism makes all available to all; communism is the community taking care of each other's needs without any restrictions.

-4-

*What is the State?*

The state is not easy to define, and is often used by different communists to refer to different things. Karl Marx used the term to refer to a system by which one class subjugates another. Anarchists use the term to refer to centralized, hierarchical, governmental systems which claim authority over multiple communities. No matter which thing "the state" is used to refer to, all communists seek to eliminate it, although different communist groups use different means and timeframes to eliminate it.

-5-

*What is Anarchism?*

Anarchism is another broad term for anti-capitalist ideologies which also oppose hierarchical and illegitimate authority as they define those terms. Which means that Anarchists seek to eliminate the state, as well as capitalism and organize society around horizontal community based systems and direct democracy. For this reason, Anarchists are one type of Communists.

-6-

*What other types of Communists are there?*

There are many types, but communists are primarily defined by two different tendencies: those who seek to eliminate the state along with capitalism, like Anarchists, and those who seek to build some form of State-Socialist system to transition to communism over time. Anarcho-Communists and Mutualists are examples of the anti-state communists. Leninists and Council-Communists are examples of pro-state communists. All communists have the same ultimate goal, they only differ in how they seek to achieve it.

-7-

*Why do you want to establish communism?*

Communism represents a necessary change from the oppressive nature of capitalism, and all other forms of oppression and exploitation, as well as all the systems which support them. Communism must be established for the same reason that democracy had to be: because all people deserve agency over their lives. Surely you can agree that they cannot have such agency so long as they have no voice in the governmental systems which rule over them. Then how can they have full agency in their lives when they have no voice in the workplaces and resources they need to survive? We cannot tolerate totalitarian dictatorship over the means of production, for the same reason we cannot tolerate totalitarian dictatorship over the government. At the very heart of it, that is what Socialism and communism are: democracy, total democracy. Not the hybrid system of totalitarian dictatorship in one realm of life and democracy in the other, which we have now.

-8-

*Isn't capitalism simply the free exchange of goods and services?*

No. That is called "trade," and it has always existed, and it will likely always exist in some form, even under communism. Capitalism developed out of the "mercantilism" of the 18th century, which in turn developed out of feudalism. Capitalism did not fully emerge until the early 19th century. Capitalism is the commodification of labor and private ownership of the means of

production. Before capitalism, most free workers had far more control over the means of production than they do under capitalism. Through the use of guilds and community ownership of land and other resources, free workers and communities were able to exert collective effort to survive and keep most of what they produced with their labor. Such guilds and free communities existed all across Europe, and indeed the world, until the era of European colonialism and empire.

-9-

*How is Capitalism oppressive?*

Capitalism is oppressive for the same reason that a dictatorship or a monarchy is. It places total control in the hands of an individual, or a small elite group of people, over what everyone relies on to survive. In fact, capitalism bears a great deal of similarities to feudalism. Ownership of most major businesses is heredity, or at least passed from one person to another of their choosing, but one person doesn't own all businesses. Much like there is never one king or one lord which controls all kingdoms or fiefdoms. Often critics of socialism say that "if you don't like your job, you can find a better one!" But this is no different than saying "if you don't like your kingdom, or your lord, or your fiefdom, then you can just move to a better one!" No matter what, you're still being subjugated by an anti-democratic and exploitive system, even if one is slightly less oppressive than another.

Also: under feudalism, a landowner claimed ownership of all that was produced on their land by their serfs. They allowed them to keep just enough to barely survive, and took the bulk of what the serfs produced. Capitalists do the same thing through the use of the wages system. When a worker under capitalism produces a product, the owner then sells the product (or rather usually another worker sells it on behalf of the owner), the owner then takes all of the profit from that sale, and gives the worker back a tiny portion of that profit, far less than the value the worker produced with their work. This is what is called "labor exploitation," and it is similar to how a slave is treated. Except that in most cases a slave was not paid in currency, but rather raw needs like food and shelter, never gaining enough to free themselves from bondage. So too is a modern worker prohibited from gaining such freedom. The majority of jobs pay so little back to the worker from what they produce that it is seldom enough to survive. Meaning that most workers can never earn enough from their labor to pull themselves out of poverty and wretchedness. This is what is called "wage slavery."

-10-

*Why can't I keep my own property under socialism and communism?*

You can, or at least you can keep the property that you are likely thinking of. The misconception that communists want to seize your house and everything you own is an intentional one created by capitalists to scare you. Communists make a distinction between "private property" and "personal property." "Private Property" is not your house, or car, or any of your personal effects, nor even anything you produce solely with your own labor. Those are all "personal property," they are all yours and no one else has a right to them. This is because communism seeks to end exploitation, meaning that whatever you produce yourself is yours. Communism also recognizes housing, food, shelter, and privacy as basic human rights. Meaning you have a right to your own home. "Private Property" only exists under capitalism, because it is the private ownership of the means of production, and under both socialism and communism the means of production is owned and controlled equally by all those who work it. The only time you must give up sole control of something is when it is needed and used by more than just yourself, such as a

workplace. But even then, you don't lose control over it, but rather you control it democratically along with all those who need it and use it.

-11-

*This all sounds very idealistic, how could it ever be possible?*

All new ideas are idealistic, for eons people believed democracy itself was an impossible dream, until they did it. If we never imagine a better way to live, and try to implement it, then nothing will ever change, our lives will never improve. The abolition of slavery was deemed such a daunting and impossible task that the people of the United States put it off for so long that it boiled over into a war that cost millions of lives, but in the end it was achieved, it proved a reality. No matter how difficult the abolition of oppression and exploitation in any form may seem, we have a duty as people to oppose it wholly and fight to end it. It is only through collective effort and constant work to make a change that every change has occurred. This is why we no longer are subjected to the whims of a monarch, why we have the rule of law, why we are no longer serfs toiling in the soil beneath a feudal lord. All of these improvements were implemented because people dared to envision something better, and never stopped working to make their visions a reality, until it was finally done. As the great Anarchist writer Murray Bookchin once wrote: "The assumption that was currently exists must necessarily exist, is the acid which corrodes all visionary thinking."

A better world is possible, but we must fight for it.



# Manifesto of the Communist Party

by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels February 1848

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Written: Late 1847; First Published: February 1848; Source: Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, pp. 98-137; Translated: Samuel Moore in cooperation with Frederick Engels, 1888; Transcribed: by Zodiac and Brian Baggins; Proofed: and corrected against 1888 English Edition by Andy Blunden 2004; Copyleft: Marxists Internet Archive (marxists.org) 1987, 2000, 2010. Permission is granted to distribute this document under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Share-Alike License.

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A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.

Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where is the opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?

Two things result from this fact:

I. Communism is already acknowledged by all European powers to be itself a power.

II. It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a manifesto of the party itself.

To this end, Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London and sketched the following manifesto, to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages.

### **I. Bourgeois and Proletarians\***

The history of all hitherto existing society† is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master‡ and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other – Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

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\* By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live. [Engels, 1888 English edition]

† That is, all written history. In 1847, the pre-history of society, the social organisation existing previous to recorded history, all but unknown. Since then, August von Haxthausen (1792-1866) discovered common ownership of land in Russia, Georg Ludwig von Maurer proved it to be the social foundation from which all Teutonic races started in history, and, by and by, village communities were found to be, or to have been, the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland. The inner organisation of this primitive communistic society was laid bare, in its typical form, by Lewis Henry Morgan's (1818-1861) crowning discovery of the true nature of the gens and its relation to the tribe. With the dissolution of the primeval communities, society begins to be differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes. I have attempted to retrace this dissolution in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, second edition, Stuttgart, 1886. [Engels, 1888 English Edition and 1890 German Edition (with the last sentence omitted)]

‡ Guild-master, that is, a full member of a guild, a master within, not a head of a guild. [Engels, 1888 English Edition]

From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed.

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

The feudal system of industry, in which industrial production was monopolised by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. The guild-masters were pushed on one side by the manufacturing middle class; division of labour between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labour in each single workshop.

Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacturer no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, Modern Industry; the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of the whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois.

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange.

Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class. An oppressed class under the sway of the feudal nobility, an armed and self-governing association in the medieval commune\*: here independent urban republic (as in Italy and Germany); there taxable “third estate” of the monarchy (as in France); afterwards, in the period of manufacturing proper, serving either the semi-feudal or the absolute monarchy as a counterpoise against the nobility, and, in fact, cornerstone of the great monarchies in general, the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part. The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious

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\* This was the name given their urban communities by the townsmen of Italy and France, after they had purchased or conquered their initial rights of self-government from their feudal lords. [Engels, 1890 German edition] “Commune” was the name taken in France by the nascent towns even before they had conquered from their feudal lords and masters local self-government and political rights as the “Third Estate.” Generally speaking, for the economical development of the bourgeoisie, England is here taken as the typical country, for its political development, France. [Engels, 1888 English Edition]

fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

The bourgeoisie has disclosed how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigour in the Middle Ages, which reactionaries so much admire, found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence. It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.

Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese

walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground – what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?

We see then: the means of production and of exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organisation of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder. Into their place stepped free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted in it, and the economic and political sway of the bourgeois class.

A similar movement is going on before our own eyes. Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeois and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly. In these crises, a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises, there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity – the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. The

productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.

The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons – the modern working class – the proletarians.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery, and to the division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by the increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of machinery, etc.

Modern Industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.

The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.

No sooner is the exploitation of the labourer by the manufacturer, so far, at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.

The lower strata of the middle class – the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants – all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.

The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers, then by the workpeople of a factory, then by the operative of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages. At this stage, the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequence of their own active union, but of the union of the bourgeoisie, which class, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet, for a time, able to do so. At this stage, therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies, the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeois. Thus, the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie.

But with the development of industry, the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The increasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon, the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there, the contest breaks out into riots.

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle. And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarian, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years.

This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and, consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself. Thus, the ten-hours' bill in England was carried.

Altogether collisions between the classes of the old society further, in many ways, the course of development of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all time with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles, it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.

Further, as we have already seen, entire sections of the ruling class are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence. These also supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress. Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the progress of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance, they are revolutionary, they are only so in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat.

The "dangerous class", [*lumpenproletariat*] the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.

In the condition of the proletariat, those of old society at large are already virtually swamped.

The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations; modern industry labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become

masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property.

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.

Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.

In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.

Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence. The serf, in the period of serfdom, raised himself to membership in the commune, just as the petty bourgeois, under the yoke of the feudal absolutism, managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the process of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.

The essential conditions for the existence and for the sway of the bourgeois class is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by the revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

## **II. Proletarians and Communists**

In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of communism.

All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.

The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favour of bourgeois property. The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few.

In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.

We Communists have been reproached with the desire of abolishing the right of personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man's own labour, which property is alleged to be the groundwork of all personal freedom, activity and independence.

Hard-won, self-acquired, self-earned property! Do you mean the property of petty artisan and of the small peasant, a form of property that preceded the bourgeois form? There is no need to abolish that; the development of industry has to a great extent already destroyed it, and is still destroying it daily.

Or do you mean the modern bourgeois private property?

But does wage-labour create any property for the labourer? Not a bit. It creates capital, *i.e.*, that kind of property which exploits wage-labour, and which cannot increase except upon condition of begetting a new supply of wage-labour for fresh exploitation. Property, in its present form, is

based on the antagonism of capital and wage labour. Let us examine both sides of this antagonism.

To be a capitalist, is to have not only a purely personal, but a social *status* in production. Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay, in the last resort, only by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion.

Capital is therefore not only personal; it is a social power.

When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character.

Let us now take wage-labour.

The average price of wage-labour is the minimum wage, *i.e.*, that quantum of the means of subsistence which is absolutely requisite to keep the labourer in bare existence as a labourer.

What, therefore, the wage-labourer appropriates by means of his labour, merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence. We by no means intend to abolish this personal appropriation of the products of labour, an appropriation that is made for the maintenance and reproduction of human life, and that leaves no surplus wherewith to command the labour of others. All that we want to do away with is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it.

In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour. In Communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer.

In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality.

And the abolition of this state of things is called by the bourgeois, abolition of individuality and freedom! And rightly so. The abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence, and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly aimed at.

By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying.

But if selling and buying disappears, free selling and buying disappears also. This talk about free selling and buying, and all the other “brave words” of our bourgeois about freedom in general, have a meaning, if any, only in contrast with restricted selling and buying, with the fettered traders of the Middle Ages, but have no meaning when opposed to the Communistic abolition of buying and selling, of the bourgeois conditions of production, and of the bourgeoisie itself.

You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths. You reproach us, therefore, with intending to do away with a form of property, the necessary condition for whose existence is the non-existence of any property for the immense majority of society.

In one word, you reproach us with intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend.

From the moment when labour can no longer be converted into capital, money, or rent, into a social power capable of being monopolised, *i.e.*, from the moment when individual property can

no longer be transformed into bourgeois property, into capital, from that moment, you say, individuality vanishes.

You must, therefore, confess that by “individual” you mean no other person than the bourgeois, than the middle-class owner of property. This person must, indeed, be swept out of the way, and made impossible.

Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriations. It has been objected that upon the abolition of private property, all work will cease, and universal laziness will overtake us.

According to this, bourgeois society ought long ago to have gone to the dogs through sheer idleness; for those of its members who work, acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything do not work. The whole of this objection is but another expression of the tautology: that there can no longer be any wage-labour when there is no longer any capital.

All objections urged against the Communistic mode of producing and appropriating material products, have, in the same way, been urged against the Communistic mode of producing and appropriating intellectual products. Just as, to the bourgeois, the disappearance of class property is the disappearance of production itself, so the disappearance of class culture is to him identical with the disappearance of all culture.

That culture, the loss of which he laments, is, for the enormous majority, a mere training to act as a machine.

But don't wrangle with us so long as you apply, to our intended abolition of bourgeois property, the standard of your bourgeois notions of freedom, culture, law, &c. Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into a law for all, a will whose essential character and direction are determined by the economical conditions of existence of your class.

The selfish misconception that induces you to transform into eternal laws of nature and of reason, the social forms springing from your present mode of production and form of property – historical relations that rise and disappear in the progress of production – this misconception you share with every ruling class that has preceded you. What you see clearly in the case of ancient property, what you admit in the case of feudal property, you are of course forbidden to admit in the case of your own bourgeois form of property.

Abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.

Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty.

But, you say, we destroy the most hallowed of relations, when we replace home education by social.

And your education! Is not that also social, and determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools, &c.? The

Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class. The bourgeois clap-trap about the family and education, about the hallowed co-relation of parents and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of Modern Industry, all the family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour.

But you Communists would introduce community of women, screams the bourgeoisie in chorus. The bourgeois sees his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women.

He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production.

For the rest, nothing is more ridiculous than the virtuous indignation of our bourgeois at the community of women which, they pretend, is to be openly and officially established by the Communists. The Communists have no need to introduce community of women; it has existed almost from time immemorial.

Our bourgeois, not content with having wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives.

Bourgeois marriage is, in reality, a system of wives in common and thus, at the most, what the Communists might possibly be reproached with is that they desire to introduce, in substitution for a hypocritically concealed, an openly legalised community of women. For the rest, it is self-evident that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, *i.e.*, of prostitution both public and private.

The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality.

The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself *the* nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.

National differences and antagonism between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.

The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilised countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another will also be put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.

The charges against Communism made from a religious, a philosophical and, generally, from an ideological standpoint, are not deserving of serious examination.

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conception, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?

What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.

When people speak of the ideas that revolutionise society, they do but express that fact that within the old society the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence.

When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the 18th century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge.

“Undoubtedly,” it will be said, “religious, moral, philosophical, and juridical ideas have been modified in the course of historical development. But religion, morality, philosophy, political science, and law, constantly survived this change.”

“There are, besides, eternal truths, such as Freedom, Justice, etc., that are common to all states of society. But Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience.”

What does this accusation reduce itself to? The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs. But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, *viz.*, the exploitation of one part of society by the other. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms.

The Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involved the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.

But let us have done with the bourgeois objections to Communism.

We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, *i.e.*, of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.

These measures will, of course, be different in different countries.

Nevertheless, in most advanced countries, the following will be pretty generally applicable.

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all rights of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.

5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of waste-lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the populace over the country.
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, &c, &c.

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

### III. Socialist and Communist Literature

#### 1. Reactionary Socialism

##### A) Feudal Socialism

Owing to their historical position, it became the vocation of the aristocracies of France and England to write pamphlets against modern bourgeois society. In the French Revolution of July 1830, and in the English reform agitation, these aristocracies again succumbed to the hateful upstart. Thenceforth, a serious political struggle was altogether out of the question. A literary battle alone remained possible. But even in the domain of literature the old cries of the restoration period had become impossible.\*

In order to arouse sympathy, the aristocracy was obliged to lose sight, apparently, of its own interests, and to formulate their indictment against the bourgeoisie in the interest of the exploited working class alone. Thus, the aristocracy took their revenge by singing lampoons on their new masters and whispering in his ears sinister prophesies of coming catastrophe.

In this way arose feudal Socialism: half lamentation, half lampoon; half an echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history.

The aristocracy, in order to rally the people to them, waved the proletarian alms-bag in front for a banner. But the people, so often as it joined them, saw on their hindquarters the old feudal coats of arms, and deserted with loud and irreverent laughter.

One section of the French Legitimists and "Young England" exhibited this spectacle.

In pointing out that their mode of exploitation was different to that of the bourgeoisie, the feudalists forget that they exploited under circumstances and conditions that were quite different and that are now antiquated. In showing that, under their rule, the modern proletariat never existed, they forget that the modern bourgeoisie is the necessary offspring of their own form of society.

For the rest, so little do they conceal the reactionary character of their criticism that their chief accusation against the bourgeois amounts to this, that under the bourgeois régime a class is being developed which is destined to cut up root and branch the old order of society.

What they upbraid the bourgeoisie with is not so much that it creates a proletariat as that it creates a *revolutionary* proletariat.

In political practice, therefore, they join in all coercive measures against the working class; and in ordinary life, despite their high-falutin phrases, they stoop to pick up the golden apples dropped from the tree of industry, and to barter truth, love, and honour, for traffic in wool, beetroot-sugar, and potato spirits.†

As the parson has ever gone hand in hand with the landlord, so has Clerical Socialism with Feudal Socialism.

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\* Not the English Restoration (1660-1689), but the French Restoration (1814-1830). [Note by Engels to the English edition of 1888.]

† This applies chiefly to Germany, where the landed aristocracy and squirearchy have large portions of their estates cultivated for their own account by stewards, and are, moreover, extensive beetroot-sugar manufacturers and distillers of potato spirits. The wealthier British aristocracy are, as yet, rather above that; but they, too, know how to make up for declining rents by lending their names to floaters or more or less shady joint-stock companies. [Note by Engels to the English edition of 1888.]

Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat.

### **B) Petty-Bourgeois Socialism**

The feudal aristocracy was not the only class that was ruined by the bourgeoisie, not the only class whose conditions of existence pined and perished in the atmosphere of modern bourgeois society. The medieval burgesses and the small peasant proprietors were the precursors of the modern bourgeoisie. In those countries which are but little developed, industrially and commercially, these two classes still vegetate side by side with the rising bourgeoisie.

In countries where modern civilisation has become fully developed, a new class of petty bourgeois has been formed, fluctuating between proletariat and bourgeoisie, and ever renewing itself as a supplementary part of bourgeois society. The individual members of this class, however, are being constantly hurled down into the proletariat by the action of competition, and, as modern industry develops, they even see the moment approaching when they will completely disappear as an independent section of modern society, to be replaced in manufactures, agriculture and commerce, by overlookers, bailiffs and shopmen.

In countries like France, where the peasants constitute far more than half of the population, it was natural that writers who sided with the proletariat against the bourgeoisie should use, in their criticism of the bourgeois *régime*, the standard of the peasant and petty bourgeois, and from the standpoint of these intermediate classes, should take up the cudgels for the working class. Thus arose petty-bourgeois Socialism. Sismondi was the head of this school, not only in France but also in England.

This school of Socialism dissected with great acuteness the contradictions in the conditions of modern production. It laid bare the hypocritical apologies of economists. It proved, incontrovertibly, the disastrous effects of machinery and division of labour; the concentration of capital and land in a few hands; overproduction and crises; it pointed out the inevitable ruin of the petty bourgeois and peasant, the misery of the proletariat, the anarchy in production, the crying inequalities in the distribution of wealth, the industrial war of extermination between nations, the dissolution of old moral bonds, of the old family relations, of the old nationalities. In its positive aims, however, this form of Socialism aspires either to restoring the old means of production and of exchange, and with them the old property relations, and the old society, or to cramping the modern means of production and of exchange within the framework of the old property relations that have been, and were bound to be, exploded by those means. In either case, it is both reactionary and Utopian.

Its last words are: corporate guilds for manufacture; patriarchal relations in agriculture.

Ultimately, when stubborn historical facts had dispersed all intoxicating effects of self-deception, this form of Socialism ended in a miserable fit of the blues.

### **C) German or "True" Socialism**

The Socialist and Communist literature of France, a literature that originated under the pressure of a bourgeoisie in power, and that was the expressions of the struggle against this power, was introduced into Germany at a time when the bourgeoisie, in that country, had just begun its contest with feudal absolutism.

German philosophers, would-be philosophers, and *beaux esprits* (men of letters), eagerly seized on this literature, only forgetting, that when these writings immigrated from France into Germany, French social conditions had not immigrated along with them. In contact with German social conditions, this French literature lost all its immediate practical significance and assumed a purely literary aspect. Thus, to the German philosophers of the Eighteenth Century, the demands of the first French Revolution were nothing more than the demands of “Practical Reason” in general, and the utterance of the will of the revolutionary French bourgeoisie signified, in their eyes, the laws of pure Will, of Will as it was bound to be, of true human Will generally.

The work of the German *literati* consisted solely in bringing the new French ideas into harmony with their ancient philosophical conscience, or rather, in annexing the French ideas without deserting their own philosophic point of view.

This annexation took place in the same way in which a foreign language is appropriated, namely, by translation.

It is well known how the monks wrote silly lives of Catholic Saints *over* the manuscripts on which the classical works of ancient heathendom had been written. The German *literati* reversed this process with the profane French literature. They wrote their philosophical nonsense beneath the French original. For instance, beneath the French criticism of the economic functions of money, they wrote “Alienation of Humanity”, and beneath the French criticism of the bourgeois state they wrote “Dethronement of the Category of the General”, and so forth.

The introduction of these philosophical phrases at the back of the French historical criticisms, they dubbed “Philosophy of Action”, “True Socialism”, “German Science of Socialism”, “Philosophical Foundation of Socialism”, and so on.

The French Socialist and Communist literature was thus completely emasculated. And, since it ceased in the hands of the German to express the struggle of one class with the other, he felt conscious of having overcome “French one-sidedness” and of representing, not true requirements, but the requirements of Truth; not the interests of the proletariat, but the interests of Human Nature, of Man in general, who belongs to no class, has no reality, who exists only in the misty realm of philosophical fantasy.

This German socialism, which took its schoolboy task so seriously and solemnly, and extolled its poor stock-in-trade in such a mountebank fashion, meanwhile gradually lost its pedantic innocence.

The fight of the Germans, and especially of the Prussian bourgeoisie, against feudal aristocracy and absolute monarchy, in other words, the liberal movement, became more earnest.

By this, the long-wished for opportunity was offered to “True” Socialism of confronting the political movement with the Socialist demands, of hurling the traditional anathemas against liberalism, against representative government, against bourgeois competition, bourgeois freedom of the press, bourgeois legislation, bourgeois liberty and equality, and of preaching to the masses that they had nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by this bourgeois movement. German Socialism forgot, in the nick of time, that the French criticism, whose silly echo it was, presupposed the existence of modern bourgeois society, with its corresponding economic conditions of existence, and the political constitution adapted thereto, the very things whose attainment was the object of the pending struggle in Germany.

To the absolute governments, with their following of parsons, professors, country squires, and officials, it served as a welcome scarecrow against the threatening bourgeoisie.

It was a sweet finish, after the bitter pills of flogging and bullets, with which these same governments, just at that time, dosed the German working-class risings.

While this “True” Socialism thus served the government as a weapon for fighting the German bourgeoisie, it, at the same time, directly represented a reactionary interest, the interest of German Philistines. In Germany, the *petty-bourgeois* class, a relic of the sixteenth century, and since then constantly cropping up again under the various forms, is the real social basis of the existing state of things.

To preserve this class is to preserve the existing state of things in Germany. The industrial and political supremacy of the bourgeoisie threatens it with certain destruction – on the one hand, from the concentration of capital; on the other, from the rise of a revolutionary proletariat.

“True” Socialism appeared to kill these two birds with one stone. It spread like an epidemic.

The robe of speculative cobwebs, embroidered with flowers of rhetoric, steeped in the dew of sickly sentiment, this transcendental robe in which the German Socialists wrapped their sorry “eternal truths”, all skin and bone, served to wonderfully increase the sale of their goods amongst such a public.

And on its part German Socialism recognised, more and more, its own calling as the bombastic representative of the petty-bourgeois Philistine.

It proclaimed the German nation to be the model nation, and the German petty Philistine to be the typical man. To every villainous meanness of this model man, it gave a hidden, higher, Socialistic interpretation, the exact contrary of its real character. It went to the extreme length of directly opposing the “brutally destructive” tendency of Communism, and of proclaiming its supreme and impartial contempt of all class struggles. With very few exceptions, all the so-called Socialist and Communist publications that now (1847) circulate in Germany belong to the domain of this foul and enervating literature.\*

## **2) Conservative or Bourgeois Socialism**

A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society.

To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind. This form of socialism has, moreover, been worked out into complete systems.

We may cite Proudhon’s *Philosophie de la Misère* as an example of this form.

The Socialistic bourgeois want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom. They desire the existing state of society, minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat. The bourgeoisie naturally conceives the world in which it is supreme to be the best; and bourgeois Socialism develops this comfortable conception into various more or less complete systems. In requiring the proletariat to carry out such a system, and thereby to march straightway into the social New Jerusalem, it but requires in reality, that the proletariat should remain within the bounds of existing society, but should cast away all its hateful ideas concerning the bourgeoisie.

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\* The revolutionary storm of 1848 swept away this whole shabby tendency and cured its protagonists of the desire to dabble in socialism. The chief representative and classical type of this tendency is Mr Karl Gruen. [Note by Engels to the German edition of 1890.]

A second, and more practical, but less systematic, form of this Socialism sought to depreciate every revolutionary movement in the eyes of the working class by showing that no mere political reform, but only a change in the material conditions of existence, in economical relations, could be of any advantage to them. By changes in the material conditions of existence, this form of Socialism, however, by no means understands abolition of the bourgeois relations of production, an abolition that can be affected only by a revolution, but administrative reforms, based on the continued existence of these relations; reforms, therefore, that in no respect affect the relations between capital and labour, but, at the best, lessen the cost, and simplify the administrative work, of bourgeois government.

Bourgeois Socialism attains adequate expression when, and only when, it becomes a mere figure of speech.

Free trade: for the benefit of the working class. Protective duties: for the benefit of the working class. Prison Reform: for the benefit of the working class. This is the last word and the only seriously meant word of bourgeois socialism.

It is summed up in the phrase: the bourgeois is a bourgeois – for the benefit of the working class.

### **3. Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism**

We do not here refer to that literature which, in every great modern revolution, has always given voice to the demands of the proletariat, such as the writings of Babeuf and others.

The first direct attempts of the proletariat to attain its own ends, made in times of universal excitement, when feudal society was being overthrown, necessarily failed, owing to the then undeveloped state of the proletariat, as well as to the absence of the economic conditions for its emancipation, conditions that had yet to be produced, and could be produced by the impending bourgeois epoch alone. The revolutionary literature that accompanied these first movements of the proletariat had necessarily a reactionary character. It inculcated universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form.

The Socialist and Communist systems, properly so called, those of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, and others, spring into existence in the early undeveloped period, described above, of the struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie (see Section I. Bourgeois and Proletarians).

The founders of these systems see, indeed, the class antagonisms, as well as the action of the decomposing elements in the prevailing form of society. But the proletariat, as yet in its infancy, offers to them the spectacle of a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement.

Since the development of class antagonism keeps even pace with the development of industry, the economic situation, as they find it, does not as yet offer to them the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. They therefore search after a new social science, after new social laws, that are to create these conditions.

Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action; historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones; and the gradual, spontaneous class organisation of the proletariat to an organisation of society especially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans.

In the formation of their plans, they are conscious of caring chiefly for the interests of the working class, as being the most suffering class. Only from the point of view of being the most suffering class does the proletariat exist for them.

The undeveloped state of the class struggle, as well as their own surroundings, causes Socialists of this kind to consider themselves far superior to all class antagonisms. They want to improve

the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favoured. Hence, they habitually appeal to society at large, without the distinction of class; nay, by preference, to the ruling class. For how can people, when once they understand their system, fail to see in it the best possible plan of the best possible state of society?

Hence, they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel.

Such fantastic pictures of future society, painted at a time when the proletariat is still in a very undeveloped state and has but a fantastic conception of its own position, correspond with the first instinctive yearnings of that class for a general reconstruction of society.

But these Socialist and Communist publications contain also a critical element. They attack every principle of existing society. Hence, they are full of the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class. The practical measures proposed in them – such as the abolition of the distinction between town and country, of the family, of the carrying on of industries for the account of private individuals, and of the wage system, the proclamation of social harmony, the conversion of the function of the state into a more superintendence of production – all these proposals point solely to the disappearance of class antagonisms which were, at that time, only just cropping up, and which, in these publications, are recognised in their earliest indistinct and undefined forms only. These proposals, therefore, are of a purely Utopian character.

The significance of Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism bears an inverse relation to historical development. In proportion as the modern class struggle develops and takes definite shape, this fantastic standing apart from the contest, these fantastic attacks on it, lose all practical value and all theoretical justification. Therefore, although the originators of these systems were, in many respects, revolutionary, their disciples have, in every case, formed mere reactionary sects. They hold fast by the original views of their masters, in opposition to the progressive historical development of the proletariat. They, therefore, endeavour, and that consistently, to deaden the class struggle and to reconcile the class antagonisms. They still dream of experimental realisation of their social Utopias, of founding isolated “phalansteres”, of establishing “Home Colonies”, or setting up a “Little Icaria”\* – duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem – and to realise all these castles in the air, they are compelled to appeal to the feelings and purses of the bourgeois. By degrees, they sink into the category of the reactionary [or] conservative Socialists depicted above, differing from these only by more systematic pedantry, and by their fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous effects of their social science. They, therefore, violently oppose all political action on the part of the working class; such action, according to them, can only result from blind unbelief in the new Gospel.

The Owenites in England, and the Fourierists in France, respectively, oppose the Chartists and the *Réformistes*.

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\* *Phalanstères* were Socialist colonies on the plan of Charles Fourier; *Icaria* was the name given by Cabet to his Utopia and, later on, to his American Communist colony. [Note by Engels to the English edition of 1888.] “Home Colonies” were what Owen called his Communist model societies. *Phalanstères* was the name of the public palaces planned by Fourier. *Icaria* was the name given to the Utopian land of fancy, whose Communist institutions Cabet portrayed. [Note by Engels to the German edition of 1890.]

#### **IV. Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties**

Section II has made clear the relations of the Communists to the existing working-class parties, such as the Chartists in England and the Agrarian Reformers in America.

The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement. In France, the Communists ally with the Social-Democrats\* against the conservative and radical bourgeoisie, reserving, however, the right to take up a critical position in regard to phases and illusions traditionally handed down from the great Revolution.

In Switzerland, they support the Radicals, without losing sight of the fact that this party consists of antagonistic elements, partly of Democratic Socialists, in the French sense, partly of radical bourgeois.

In Poland, they support the party that insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation, that party which fomented the insurrection of Cracow in 1846.

In Germany, they fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie.

But they never cease, for a single instant, to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in order that the German workers may straightway use, as so many weapons against the bourgeoisie, the social and political conditions that the bourgeoisie must necessarily introduce along with its supremacy, and in order that, after the fall of the reactionary classes in Germany, the fight against the bourgeoisie itself may immediately begin.

The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution that is bound to be carried out under more advanced conditions of European civilisation and with a much more developed proletariat than that of England was in the seventeenth, and France in the eighteenth century, and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.

In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

In all these movements, they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time.

Finally, they labour everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.

***Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of the world, Unite!***

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\* The party then represented in Parliament by Ledru-Rollin, in literature by Louis Blanc, in the daily press by the *Réforme*. The name of Social-Democracy signifies, with these its inventors, a section of the Democratic or Republican Party more or less tinged with socialism. [Engels, English Edition 1888]



## **The Principles of Communism**

*By Friedrich Engels*

– 1 – *What is Communism?*

Communism is the doctrine of the conditions of the liberation of the proletariat.

– 2 – *What is the proletariat?*

The proletariat is that class in society which lives entirely from the sale of its labor and does not draw profit from any kind of capital; whose weal and woe, whose life and death, whose sole existence depends on the demand for labor – hence, on the changing state of business, on the vagaries of unbridled competition. The proletariat, or the class of proletarians, is, in a word, the working class of the 19th century.<sup>6</sup>

– 3 – *Proletarians, then, have not always existed?*

No. There have always been poor and working classes; and the working class have mostly been poor. But there have not always been workers and poor people living under conditions as they are today; in other words, there have not always been proletarians, any more than there has always been free unbridled competitions.

– 4 – *How did the proletariat originate?*

The Proletariat originated in the industrial revolution, which took place in England in the last half of the last (18th) century, and which has since then been repeated in all the civilized countries of the world.

This industrial revolution was precipitated by the discovery of the steam engine, various spinning machines, the mechanical loom, and a whole series of other mechanical devices. These machines, which were very expensive and hence could be bought only by big capitalists, altered the whole mode of production and displaced the former workers, because the machines turned out cheaper and better commodities than the workers could produce with their inefficient spinning wheels and handlooms. The machines delivered industry wholly into the hands of the big capitalists and rendered entirely worthless the meagre property of the workers (tools, looms, etc.). The result was that the capitalists soon had everything in their hands and nothing remained to the workers. This marked the introduction of the factory system into the textile industry. Once the impulse to the introduction of machinery and the factory system had been given, this system spread quickly to all other branches of industry, especially cloth- and book-printing, pottery, and the metal industries.

Labor was more and more divided among the individual workers so that the worker who previously had done a complete piece of work now did only a part of that piece. This division of labor made it possible to produce things faster and cheaper. It reduced the activity of the individual worker to simple, endlessly repeated mechanical motions which could be performed not only as well but much better by a machine. In this way, all these industries fell, one after another, under the dominance of steam, machinery, and the factory system, just as spinning and weaving had already done.

But at the same time, they also fell into the hands of big capitalists, and their workers were deprived of whatever independence remained to them. Gradually, not only genuine manufacture but also handicrafts came within the province of the factory system as big capitalists increasingly displaced the small master craftsmen by setting up huge workshops, which saved many expenses and permitted an elaborate division of labor.

This is how it has come about that in civilized countries at the present time nearly all kinds of labor are performed in factories – and, in nearly all branches of work, handicrafts and

manufacture have been superseded. This process has, to an ever greater degree, ruined the old middle class, especially the small handicraftsmen; it has entirely transformed the condition of the workers; and two new classes have been created which are gradually swallowing up all the others. These are:

(i) The class of big capitalists, who, in all civilized countries, are already in almost exclusive possession of all the means of subsistence and of the instruments (machines, factories) and materials necessary for the production of the means of subsistence. This is the bourgeois class, or the bourgeoisie.

(ii) The class of the wholly propertyless, who are obliged to sell their labor to the bourgeoisie in order to get, in exchange, the means of subsistence for their support. This is called the class of proletarians, or the proletariat.

– 5 – *Under what conditions does this sale of the labor of the proletarians to the bourgeoisie take place?*

Labor is a commodity, like any other, and its price is therefore determined by exactly the same laws that apply to other commodities. In a regime of big industry or of free competition – as we shall see, the two come to the same thing – the price of a commodity is, on the average, always equal to its cost of production. Hence, the price of labor is also equal to the cost of production of labor.

But, the costs of production of labor consist of precisely the quantity of means of subsistence necessary to enable the worker to continue working, and to prevent the working class from dying out. The worker will therefore get no more for his labor than is necessary for this purpose; the price of labor, or the wage, will, in other words, be the lowest, the minimum, required for the maintenance of life.

However, since business is sometimes better and sometimes worse, it follows that the worker sometimes gets more and sometimes gets less for his commodities. But, again, just as the industrialist, on the average of good times and bad, gets no more and no less for his commodities than what they cost, similarly on the average the worker gets no more and no less than his minimum.

This economic law of wages operates the more strictly the greater the degree to which big industry has taken possession of all branches of production.

– 6 – *What working classes were there before the industrial revolution?*

The working classes have always, according to the different stages of development of society, lived in different circumstances and had different relations to the owning and ruling classes.

In antiquity, the workers were the slaves of the owners, just as they still are in many backward countries and even in the southern part of the United States.

In the Middle Ages, they were the serfs of the land-owning nobility, as they still are in Hungary, Poland, and Russia. In the Middle Ages, and indeed right up to the industrial revolution, there were also journeymen in the cities who worked in the service of petty bourgeois masters.

Gradually, as manufacture developed, these journeymen became manufacturing workers who were even then employed by larger capitalists.

– 7 – *In what way do proletarians differ from slaves?*

The slave is sold once and for all; the proletarian must sell himself daily and hourly.

The individual slave, property of one master, is assured an existence, however miserable it may be, because of the master's interest. The individual proletarian, property as it were of the entire

bourgeois class which buys his labor only when someone has need of it, has no secure existence. This existence is assured only to the class as a whole.

The slave is outside competition; the proletarian is in it and experiences all its vagaries.

The slave counts as a thing, not as a member of society. Thus, the slave can have a better existence than the proletarian, while the proletarian belongs to a higher stage of social development and, himself, stands on a higher social level than the slave.

The slave frees himself when, of all the relations of private property, he abolishes only the relation of slavery and thereby becomes a proletarian; the proletarian can free himself only by abolishing private property in general.

– 8 – *In what way do proletarians differ from serfs?*

The serf possesses and uses an instrument of production, a piece of land, in exchange for which he gives up a part of his product or part of the services of his labor.

The proletarian works with the instruments of production of another, for the account of this other, in exchange for a part of the product.

The serf gives up, the proletarian receives. The serf has an assured existence, the proletarian has not. The serf is outside competition, the proletarian is in it.

The serf liberates himself in one of three ways: either he runs away to the city and there becomes a handicraftsman; or, instead of products and services, he gives money to his lord and thereby becomes a free tenant; or he overthrows his feudal lord and himself becomes a property owner. In short, by one route or another, he gets into the owning class and enters into competition. The proletarian liberates himself by abolishing competition, private property, and all class differences.

– 9 – *In what way do proletarians differ from handicraftsmen?*

In contrast to the proletarian, the so-called handicraftsman, as he still existed almost everywhere in the past (eighteenth) century and still exists here and there at present, is a proletarian at most temporarily. His goal is to acquire capital himself wherewith to exploit other workers. He can often achieve this goal where guilds still exist or where freedom from guild restrictions has not yet led to the introduction of factory-style methods into the crafts nor yet to fierce competition. But as soon as the factory system has been introduced into the crafts and competition flourishes fully, this perspective dwindles away and the handicraftsman becomes more and more a proletarian. The handicraftsman therefore frees himself by becoming either bourgeois or entering the middle class in general, or becoming a proletarian because of competition (as is now more often the case). In which case he can free himself by joining the proletarian movement, i.e., the more or less communist movement.

– 10 – *In what way do proletarians differ from manufacturing workers?*

The manufacturing worker of the 16th to the 18th centuries still had, with but few exception, an instrument of production in his own possession – his loom, the family spinning wheel, a little plot of land which he cultivated in his spare time. The proletarian has none of these things.

The manufacturing worker almost always lives in the countryside and in a more or less patriarchal relation to his landlord or employer; the proletarian lives, for the most part, in the city and his relation to his employer is purely a cash relation.

The manufacturing worker is torn out of his patriarchal relation by big industry, loses whatever property he still has, and in this way becomes a proletarian.

– 11 – *What were the immediate consequences of the industrial revolution and of the division of society into bourgeoisie and proletariat?*

First, the lower and lower prices of industrial products brought about by machine labor totally destroyed, in all countries of the world, the old system of manufacture or industry based upon hand labor.

In this way, all semi-barbarian countries, which had hitherto been more or less strangers to historical development, and whose industry had been based on manufacture, were violently forced out of their isolation. They bought the cheaper commodities of the English and allowed their own manufacturing workers to be ruined. Countries which had known no progress for thousands of years – for example, India – were thoroughly revolutionized, and even China is now on the way to a revolution.

We have come to the point where a new machine invented in England deprives millions of Chinese workers of their livelihood within a year's time.

In this way, big industry has brought all the people of the Earth into contact with each other, has merged all local markets into one world market, has spread civilization and progress everywhere and has thus ensured that whatever happens in civilized countries will have repercussions in all other countries.

It follows that if the workers in England or France now liberate themselves, this must set off revolution in all other countries – revolutions which, sooner or later, must accomplish the liberation of their respective working class.

Second, wherever big industries displaced manufacture, the bourgeoisie developed in wealth and power to the utmost and made itself the first class of the country. The result was that wherever this happened, the bourgeoisie took political power into its own hands and displaced the hitherto ruling classes, the aristocracy, the guildmasters, and their representative, the absolute monarchy. The bourgeoisie annihilated the power of the aristocracy, the nobility, by abolishing the entailment of estates – in other words, by making landed property subject to purchase and sale, and by doing away with the special privileges of the nobility. It destroyed the power of the guildmasters by abolishing guilds and handicraft privileges. In their place, it put competition – that is, a state of society in which everyone has the right to enter into any branch of industry, the only obstacle being a lack of the necessary capital.

The introduction of free competition is thus public declaration that from now on the members of society are unequal only to the extent that their capitals are unequal, that capital is the decisive power, and that therefore the capitalists, the bourgeoisie, have become the first class in society. Free competition is necessary for the establishment of big industry, because it is the only condition of society in which big industry can make its way.

Having destroyed the social power of the nobility and the guildmasters, the bourgeois also destroyed their political power. Having raised itself to the actual position of first class in society, it proclaims itself to be also the dominant political class. This it does through the introduction of the representative system which rests on bourgeois equality before the law and the recognition of free competition, and in European countries takes the form of constitutional monarchy. In these constitutional monarchies, only those who possess a certain capital are voters – that is to say, only members of the bourgeoisie. These bourgeois voters choose the deputies, and these bourgeois deputies, by using their right to refuse to vote taxes, choose a bourgeois government.

Third, everywhere the proletariat develops in step with the bourgeoisie. In proportion, as the bourgeoisie grows in wealth, the proletariat grows in numbers. For, since the proletarians can be employed only by capital, and since capital extends only through employing labor, it follows that the growth of the proletariat proceeds at precisely the same pace as the growth of capital.

Simultaneously, this process draws members of the bourgeoisie and proletarians together into the great cities where industry can be carried on most profitably, and by thus throwing great masses in one spot it gives to the proletarians a consciousness of their own strength.

Moreover, the further this process advances, the more new labor-saving machines are invented, the greater is the pressure exercised by big industry on wages, which, as we have seen, sink to their minimum and therewith render the condition of the proletariat increasingly unbearable. The growing dissatisfaction of the proletariat thus joins with its rising power to prepare a proletarian social revolution.

– 12 – *What were the further consequences of the industrial revolution?*

Big industry created in the steam engine, and other machines, the means of endlessly expanding industrial production, speeding it up, and cutting its costs. With production thus facilitated, the free competition, which is necessarily bound up with big industry, assumed the most extreme forms; a multitude of capitalists invaded industry, and, in a short while, more was produced than was needed.

As a consequence, finished commodities could not be sold, and a so-called commercial crisis broke out. Factories had to be closed, their owners went bankrupt, and the workers were without bread. Deepest misery reigned everywhere.

After a time, the superfluous products were sold, the factories began to operate again, wages rose, and gradually business got better than ever.

But it was not long before too many commodities were again produced and a new crisis broke out, only to follow the same course as its predecessor.

Ever since the beginning of this (19th) century, the condition of industry has constantly fluctuated between periods of prosperity and periods of crisis; nearly every five to seven years, a fresh crisis has intervened, always with the greatest hardship for workers, and always accompanied by general revolutionary stirrings and the direct peril to the whole existing order of things.

– 13 – *What follows from these periodic commercial crises?*

First:

That, though big industry in its earliest stage created free competition, it has now outgrown free competition; that, for big industry, competition and generally the individualistic organization of production have become a fetter which it must and will shatter;

that, so long as big industry remains on its present footing, it can be maintained only at the cost of general chaos every seven years, each time threatening the whole of civilization and not only plunging the proletarians into misery but also ruining large sections of the bourgeoisie;

hence, either that big industry must itself be given up, which is an absolute impossibility, or that it makes unavoidably necessary an entirely new organization of society in which production is no longer directed by mutually competing individual industrialists but rather by the whole society operating according to a definite plan and taking account of the needs of all.

Second:

That big industry, and the limitless expansion of production which it makes possible, bring within the range of feasibility a social order in which so much is produced that

every member of society will be in a position to exercise and develop all his powers and faculties in complete freedom.

It thus appears that the very qualities of big industry which, in our present-day society, produce misery and crises are those which, in a different form of society, will abolish this misery and these catastrophic depressions.

We see with the greatest clarity:

- (i) That all these evils are from now on to be ascribed solely to a social order which no longer corresponds to the requirements of the real situation; and
- (ii) That it is possible, through a new social order, to do away with these evils altogether.

*– 14 – What will this new social order have to be like?*

Above all, it will have to take the control of industry and of all branches of production out of the hands of mutually competing individuals, and instead institute a system in which all these branches of production are operated by society as a whole – that is, for the common account, according to a common plan, and with the participation of all members of society.

It will, in other words, abolish competition and replace it with association.

Moreover, since the management of industry by individuals necessarily implies private property, and since competition is in reality merely the manner and form in which the control of industry by private property owners expresses itself, it follows that private property cannot be separated from competition and the individual management of industry. Private property must, therefore, be abolished and in its place must come the common utilization of all instruments of production and the distribution of all products according to common agreement – in a word, what is called the communal ownership of goods.

In fact, the abolition of private property is, doubtless, the shortest and most significant way to characterize the revolution in the whole social order which has been made necessary by the development of industry – and for this reason it is rightly advanced by communists as their main demand.

*– 15 – Was not the abolition of private property possible at an earlier time?*

No. Every change in the social order, every revolution in property relations, is the necessary consequence of the creation of new forces of production which no longer fit into the old property relations.

Private property has not always existed.

When, towards the end of the Middle Ages, there arose a new mode of production which could not be carried on under the then existing feudal and guild forms of property, this manufacture, which had outgrown the old property relations, created a new property form, private property. And for manufacture and the earliest stage of development of big industry, private property was the only possible property form; the social order based on it was the only possible social order. So long as it is not possible to produce so much that there is enough for all, with more left over for expanding the social capital and extending the forces of production – so long as this is not possible, there must always be a ruling class directing the use of society's productive forces, and a poor, oppressed class. How these classes are constituted depends on the stage of development. The agrarian Middle Ages give us the baron and the serf; the cities of the later Middle Ages show us the guildmaster and the journeyman and the day laborer; the 17th century has its manufacturing workers; the 19th has big factory owners and proletarians.

It is clear that, up to now, the forces of production have never been developed to the point where enough could be developed for all, and that private property has become a fetter and a barrier in relation to the further development of the forces of production.

Now, however, the development of big industry has ushered in a new period. Capital and the forces of production have been expanded to an unprecedented extent, and the means are at hand to multiply them without limit in the near future. Moreover, the forces of production have been concentrated in the hands of a few bourgeois, while the great mass of the people are more and more falling into the proletariat, their situation becoming more wretched and intolerable in proportion to the increase of wealth of the bourgeoisie. And finally, these mighty and easily extended forces of production have so far outgrown private property and the bourgeoisie, that they threaten at any moment to unleash the most violent disturbances of the social order. Now, under these conditions, the abolition of private property has become not only possible but absolutely necessary.

– 16 – *Will the peaceful abolition of private property be possible?*

It would be desirable if this could happen, and the communists would certainly be the last to oppose it. Communists know only too well that all conspiracies are not only useless, but even harmful. They know all too well that revolutions are not made intentionally and arbitrarily, but that, everywhere and always, they have been the necessary consequence of conditions which were wholly independent of the will and direction of individual parties and entire classes. But they also see that the development of the proletariat in nearly all civilized countries has been violently suppressed, and that in this way the opponents of communism have been working toward a revolution with all their strength. If the oppressed proletariat is finally driven to revolution, then we communists will defend the interests of the proletarians with deeds as we now defend them with words.

– 17 – *Will it be possible for private property to be abolished at one stroke?*

No, no more than existing forces of production can at one stroke be multiplied to the extent necessary for the creation of a communal society.

In all probability, the proletarian revolution will transform existing society gradually and will be able to abolish private property only when the means of production are available in sufficient quantity.

– 18 – *What will be the course of this revolution?*

Above all, it will establish a democratic constitution, and through this, the direct or indirect dominance of the proletariat. Direct in England, where the proletarians are already a majority of the people. Indirect in France and Germany, where the majority of the people consists not only of proletarians, but also of small peasants and petty bourgeois who are in the process of falling into the proletariat, who are more and more dependent in all their political interests on the proletariat, and who must, therefore, soon adapt to the demands of the proletariat. Perhaps this will cost a second struggle, but the outcome can only be the victory of the proletariat.

Democracy would be wholly valueless to the proletariat if it were not immediately used as a means for putting through measures directed against private property and ensuring the livelihood of the proletariat. The main measures, emerging as the necessary result of existing relations, are the following:

- (i) Limitation of private property through progressive taxation, heavy inheritance taxes, abolition of inheritance through collateral lines (brothers, nephews, etc.) forced loans, etc.

- (ii) Gradual expropriation of landowners, industrialists, railroad magnates and shipowners, partly through competition by state industry, partly directly through compensation in the form of bonds.
- (iii) Confiscation of the possessions of all emigrants and rebels against the majority of the people.
- (iv) Organization of labor or employment of proletarians on publicly owned land, in factories and workshops, with competition among the workers being abolished and with the factory owners, in so far as they still exist, being obliged to pay the same high wages as those paid by the state.
- (v) An equal obligation on all members of society to work until such time as private property has been completely abolished. Formation of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
- (vi) Centralization of money and credit in the hands of the state through a national bank with state capital, and the suppression of all private banks and bankers.
- (vii) Increase in the number of national factories, workshops, railroads, ships; bringing new lands into cultivation and improvement of land already under cultivation – all in proportion to the growth of the capital and labor force at the disposal of the nation.
- (viii) Education of all children, from the moment they can leave their mother's care, in national establishments at national cost. Education and production together.
- (ix) Construction, on public lands, of great palaces as communal dwellings for associated groups of citizens engaged in both industry and agriculture and combining in their way of life the advantages of urban and rural conditions while avoiding the one-sidedness and drawbacks of each.
- (x) Destruction of all unhealthy and jerry-built dwellings in urban districts.
- (xi) Equal inheritance rights for children born in and out of wedlock.
- (xii) Concentration of all means of transportation in the hands of the nation.

It is impossible, of course, to carry out all these measures at once. But one will always bring others in its wake. Once the first radical attack on private property has been launched, the proletariat will find itself forced to go ever further, to concentrate increasingly in the hands of the state all capital, all agriculture, all transport, all trade. All the foregoing measures are directed to this end; and they will become practicable and feasible, capable of producing their centralizing effects to precisely the degree that the proletariat, through its labor, multiplies the country's productive forces.

Finally, when all capital, all production, all exchange have been brought together in the hands of the nation, private property will disappear of its own accord, money will become superfluous, and production will so expand and man so change that society will be able to slough off whatever of its old economic habits may remain.

– 19 – *Will it be possible for this revolution to take place in one country alone?*

No. By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the Earth, and especially the civilized peoples, into such close relation with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others.

Further, it has co-ordinated the social development of the civilized countries to such an extent that, in all of them, bourgeoisie and proletariat have become the decisive classes, and the struggle between them the great struggle of the day. It follows that the communist revolution will not

merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilized countries – that is to say, at least in England, America, France, and Germany.

It will develop in each of these countries more or less rapidly, according as one country or the other has a more developed industry, greater wealth, a more significant mass of productive forces. Hence, it will go slowest and will meet most obstacles in Germany, most rapidly and with the fewest difficulties in England. It will have a powerful impact on the other countries of the world, and will radically alter the course of development which they have followed up to now, while greatly stepping up its pace.

It is a universal revolution and will, accordingly, have a universal range.

– 20 – *What will be the consequences of the ultimate disappearance of private property?*

Society will take all forces of production and means of commerce, as well as the exchange and distribution of products, out of the hands of private capitalists and will manage them in accordance with a plan based on the availability of resources and the needs of the whole society. In this way, most important of all, the evil consequences which are now associated with the conduct of big industry will be abolished.

There will be no more crises; the expanded production, which for the present order of society is overproduction and hence a prevailing cause of misery, will then be insufficient and in need of being expanded much further. Instead of generating misery, overproduction will reach beyond the elementary requirements of society to assure the satisfaction of the needs of all; it will create new needs and, at the same time, the means of satisfying them. It will become the condition of, and the stimulus to, new progress, which will no longer throw the whole social order into confusion, as progress has always done in the past. Big industry, freed from the pressure of private property, will undergo such an expansion that what we now see will seem as petty in comparison as manufacture seems when put beside the big industry of our own day. This development of industry will make available to society a sufficient mass of products to satisfy the needs of everyone.

The same will be true of agriculture, which also suffers from the pressure of private property and is held back by the division of privately owned land into small parcels. Here, existing improvements and scientific procedures will be put into practice, with a resulting leap forward which will assure to society all the products it needs.

In this way, such an abundance of goods will be able to satisfy the needs of all its members.

The division of society into different, mutually hostile classes will then become unnecessary.

Indeed, it will be not only unnecessary but intolerable in the new social order. The existence of classes originated in the division of labor, and the division of labor, as it has been known up to the present, will completely disappear. For mechanical and chemical processes are not enough to bring industrial and agricultural production up to the level we have described; the capacities of the men who make use of these processes must undergo a corresponding development.

Just as the peasants and manufacturing workers of the last century changed their whole way of life and became quite different people when they were drawn into big industry, in the same way, communal control over production by society as a whole, and the resulting new development, will both require an entirely different kind of human material.

People will no longer be, as they are today, subordinated to a single branch of production, bound to it, exploited by it; they will no longer develop *one* of their faculties at the expense of all others; they will no longer know only *one* branch, or one branch of a single branch, of production as a whole. Even industry as it is today is finding such people less and less useful.

Industry controlled by society as a whole, and operated according to a plan, presupposes well-rounded human beings, their faculties developed in balanced fashion, able to see the system of production in its entirety.

The form of the division of labor which makes one a peasant, another a cobbler, a third a factory worker, a fourth a stock-market operator, has already been undermined by machinery and will completely disappear. Education will enable young people quickly to familiarize themselves with the whole system of production and to pass from one branch of production to another in response to the needs of society or their own inclinations. It will, therefore, free them from the one-sided character which the present-day division of labor impresses upon every individual. Communist society will, in this way, make it possible for its members to put their comprehensively developed faculties to full use. But, when this happens, classes will necessarily disappear. It follows that society organized on a communist basis is incompatible with the existence of classes on the one hand, and that the very building of such a society provides the means of abolishing class differences on the other.

A corollary of this is that the difference between city and country is destined to disappear. The management of agriculture and industry by the same people rather than by two different classes of people is, if only for purely material reasons, a necessary condition of communist association. The dispersal of the agricultural population on the land, alongside the crowding of the industrial population into the great cities, is a condition which corresponds to an undeveloped state of both agriculture and industry and can already be felt as an obstacle to further development.

The general co-operation of all members of society for the purpose of planned exploitation of the forces of production, the expansion of production to the point where it will satisfy the needs of all, the abolition of a situation in which the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of the needs of others, the complete liquidation of classes and their conflicts, the rounded development of the capacities of all members of society through the elimination of the present division of labor, through industrial education, through engaging in varying activities, through the participation by all in the enjoyments produced by all, through the combination of city and country – these are the main consequences of the abolition of private property.

– 21 – *What will be the influence of communist society on the family?*

It will transform the relations between the sexes into a purely private matter which concerns only the persons involved and into which society has no occasion to intervene. It can do this since it does away with private property and educates children on a communal basis, and in this way removes the two bases of traditional marriage – the dependence rooted in private property, of the women on the man, and of the children on the parents.

And here is the answer to the outcry of the highly moral philistines against the “community of women”. Community of women is a condition which belongs entirely to bourgeois society and which today finds its complete expression in prostitution. But prostitution is based on private property and falls with it. Thus, communist society, instead of introducing community of women, in fact abolishes it.

– 22 – *What will be the attitude of communism to existing nationalities?*

The nationalities of the peoples associating themselves in accordance with the principle of community will be compelled to mingle with each other as a result of this association and thereby to dissolve themselves, just as the various estate and class distinctions must disappear through the abolition of their basis, private property.<sup>8</sup>

– 23 – *What will be its attitude to existing religions?*

All religions so far have been the expression of historical stages of development of individual peoples or groups of peoples. But communism is the stage of historical development which makes all existing religions superfluous and brings about their disappearance.<sup>9</sup>

– 24 – *How do communists differ from socialists?*

The so-called socialists are divided into three categories.

[ Reactionary Socialists: ]

The first category consists of adherents of a feudal and patriarchal society which has already been destroyed, and is still daily being destroyed, by big industry and world trade and their creation, bourgeois society. This category concludes, from the evils of existing society, that feudal and patriarchal society must be restored because it was free of such evils. In one way or another, all their proposals are directed to this end.

This category of reactionary socialists, for all their seeming partisanship and their scalding tears for the misery of the proletariat, is nevertheless energetically opposed by the communists for the following reasons:

- (i) It strives for something which is entirely impossible.
- (ii) It seeks to establish the rule of the aristocracy, the guildmasters, the small producers, and their retinue of absolute or feudal monarchs, officials, soldiers, and priests – a society which was, to be sure, free of the evils of present-day society but which brought it at least as many evils without even offering to the oppressed workers the prospect of liberation through a communist revolution.
- (iii) As soon as the proletariat becomes revolutionary and communist, these reactionary socialists show their true colors by immediately making common cause with the bourgeoisie against the proletarians.

[ Bourgeois Socialists: ]

The second category consists of adherents of present-day society who have been frightened for its future by the evils to which it necessarily gives rise. What they want, therefore, is to maintain this society while getting rid of the evils which are an inherent part of it.

To this end, some propose mere welfare measures – while others come forward with grandiose systems of reform which, under the pretense of re-organizing society, are in fact intended to preserve the foundations, and hence the life, of existing society.

Communists must unremittingly struggle against these bourgeois socialists because they work for the enemies of communists and protect the society which communists aim to overthrow.

[ Democratic Socialists: ]

Finally, the third category consists of democratic socialists who favor some of the same measures the communists advocate, as described in Question 18, not as part of the transition to communism, however, but as measures which they believe will be sufficient to abolish the misery and evils of present-day society.

These democratic socialists are either proletarians who are not yet sufficiently clear about the conditions of the liberation of their class, or they are representatives of the petty bourgeoisie, a class which, prior to the achievement of democracy and the socialist measures to which it gives rise, has many interests in common with the proletariat.

It follows that, in moments of action, the communists will have to come to an understanding with these democratic socialists, and in general to follow as far as possible a common policy with them – provided that these socialists do not enter into the service of the ruling bourgeoisie and attack the communists.

It is clear that this form of co-operation in action does not exclude the discussion of differences.

– 25 – *What is the attitude of the communists to the other political parties of our time?*

This attitude is different in the different countries.

In England, France, and Belgium, where the bourgeoisie rules, the communists still have a common interest with the various democratic parties, an interest which is all the greater the more closely the socialistic measures they champion approach the aims of the communists – that is, the more clearly and definitely they represent the interests of the proletariat and the more they depend on the proletariat for support. In England, for example, the working-class Chartists are infinitely closer to the communists than the democratic petty bourgeoisie or the so-called Radicals.

In America, where a democratic constitution has already been established, the communists must make the common cause with the party which will turn this constitution against the bourgeoisie and use it in the interests of the proletariat – that is, with the agrarian National Reformers.

In Switzerland, the Radicals, though a very mixed party, are the only group with which the communists can co-operate, and, among these Radicals, the Vaudois and Genevese are the most advanced.

In Germany, finally, the decisive struggle now on the order of the day is that between the bourgeoisie and the absolute monarchy. Since the communists cannot enter upon the decisive struggle between themselves and the bourgeoisie until the bourgeoisie is in power, it follows that it is in the interest of the communists to help the bourgeoisie to power as soon as possible in order the sooner to be able to overthrow it. Against the governments, therefore, the communists must continually support the radical liberal party, taking care to avoid the self-deceptions of the bourgeoisie and not fall for the enticing promises of benefits which a victory for the bourgeoisie would allegedly bring to the proletariat. The sole advantages which the proletariat would derive from a bourgeois victory would consist

(i) in various concessions which would facilitate the unification of the proletariat into a closely knit, battle-worthy, and organized class; and

(ii) in the certainty that, on the very day the absolute monarchies fall, the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat will start. From that day on, the policy of the communists will be the same as it now is in the countries where the bourgeoisie is already in power.



# Selected Chapters from "The Conquest of Bread"

*by Peter Kropotkin*

## Chapter 12: Objections [to Communism]

### I

Let us now examine the principal objections put forth against Communism. Most of them are evidently caused by a simple misunderstanding, yet they raise important questions and merit our attention.

It is not for us to answer the objections raised by authoritarian Communism — we ourselves hold with them. Civilized nations have suffered too much in the long, hard struggle for the emancipation of the individual, to disown their past work and to tolerate a Government that would make itself felt in the smallest details of a citizen's life, even if that Government had no other aim than the good of the community. Should an authoritarian Socialist society ever succeed in establishing itself, it could not last; general discontent would soon force it to break up, or to reorganize itself on principles of liberty.

It is of an Anarchist-Communist society we are about to speak, a society that recognizes the absolute liberty of the individual, that does not admit of any authority, and makes use of no compulsion to drive men to work. Limiting our studies to the economic side of the question, let us see if such a society, composed of men as they are to-day, neither better nor worse, neither more nor less industrious, would have a chance of successful development.

The objection is known. "If the existence of each is guaranteed, and if the necessity of earning wages does not compel men to work, nobody will work. Every man will lay the burden of his work on another if he is not forced to do it himself." Let us first remark the incredible levity with which this objection is raised, without taking into consideration that the question is in reality merely to know, on the one hand, whether you effectively obtain by wage-work the results you aim at; and, on the other hand, whether voluntary work is not already more productive to-day than work stimulated by wages. A question which would require profound study. But whereas in exact sciences men give their opinion on subjects infinitely less important and less complicated after serious research, after carefully collecting and analyzing facts, on this question they will pronounce judgment without appeal, resting satisfied with any one particular event, such as, for example, the want of success of a communist association in America. They act like the barrister, who does not see in the council for the opposite side a representative of a cause, or an opinion contrary to his own, but a simple adversary in an oratorical debate; and if he be lucky enough to find a repartee, does not otherwise care to justify his cause. Therefore the study of this essential basis of all Political Economy, the study of the most favourable conditions for giving society the greatest amount of useful products with the least waste of human energy, does not advance. They

limit themselves to repeating commonplace assertions, or else they pretend ignorance of our assertions.

What is most striking in this levity is that even in capitalist Political Economy you already find a few writers compelled by facts to doubt the axiom put forth by the founders of their science, that the threat of hunger is man's best stimulant for productive work. They begin to perceive that in production a certain collective element is introduced which has been too much neglected up till now, and which might be more important than personal gain. The inferior quality of wage-work, the terrible waste of human energy in modern agricultural and industrial labour, the ever growing quantity of pleasure-seekers, who to-day load their burden on others' shoulders, the absence of a certain animation in production that is becoming more and more apparent; all this begins to preoccupy the economists of the "classical" school. Some of them ask themselves if they have not got on the wrong track: if the imaginary evil being, that was supposed to be tempted exclusively by a bait of lucre or wages, really exists. This heresy penetrates even into universities; it is found in books of orthodox economy.

This does not hinder a great many Socialist reformers to remain partisans of individual remuneration, and defending the old citadel of wagedom, notwithstanding that it is being delivered over stone by stone to the assailants by its former defenders. They fear that without compulsion the masses will not work. But during our own lifetime have we not heard the same fears expressed twice? By the anti-abolitionists in America before Negro emancipation, and by the Russian nobility before the liberation of the serfs? "Without the whip the Negro will not work," said the anti-abolitionist. "Free from their master's supervision the serfs will leave the fields uncultivated," said the Russian serf-owners. It was the refrain of the French noblemen in 1789, the refrain of the Middle Ages, a refrain as old as the world, and we shall hear it every time there is a question of sweeping away an injustice. And each time actual facts give it the lie. The liberated peasant of 1792 ploughed with a wild energy unknown to his ancestors, the emancipated Negro works more than his fathers, and the Russian peasant, after having honoured the honeymoon of his emancipation by celebrating Fridays as well as Sundays, has taken up work with as much eagerness as his liberation was the more complete. There, where the soil is his, he works desperately; that is the exact word for it. The anti-abolitionist refrain can be of value to slave-owners; as to the slaves themselves, they know what it is worth, as they know its motive.

Moreover, who but economists taught us that if a wage-earner's work is but indifferent, an intense and productive work is only obtained from a man who sees his wealth increase in proportion to his efforts? All hymns sung in honour of private property can be reduced to this axiom.

For it is remarkable that when economists, wishing to celebrate the blessings of property, show us how an unproductive, marshy, or stony soil is clothed with rich harvests when cultivated by the peasant proprietor, they in nowise prove their thesis in favour of private property. By admitting: that the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour — which is true — the economists only prove that man really produces most when he works in freedom, when he has a certain choice in his occupations, when he has no overseer to impede him, and lastly, when he sees his work bringing in a profit to him and to others who work like him, but bringing in nothing to idlers. This is all we can deduct from their argumentation, and we maintain the same ourselves.

As to the form of possession of the instruments of labour, they only mention it indirectly in their demonstration, as a guarantee to the cultivator that he shall not be robbed of the profits of his yield nor of his improvements. Besides, in support of their thesis in favour of private property against all other forms of possession, should not the economists demonstrate that under the form of communal property land never produces such rich harvests as when the possession is private? But it is not so; in fact, the contrary has been observed.

Take for example a commune in the canton of Vaud, in the winter time, when all the men of the village go to fell wood in the forest, which belongs to them all. It is precisely during these festivals of toil that the greatest ardour for work and the most considerable display of human energy are apparent. No salaried labour, no effort of a private owner can bear comparison with it. Or let us take a Russian village, when all its inhabitants mow a field belonging to the commune, or farmed by it. There you will see what man can produce when he works in common for communal production. Comrades vie with one another in cutting the widest swath; women bestir themselves in their wake so as not to be distanced by the mowers. It is a festival of labour, in which a hundred people do work in a few hours that would not have been finished in a few days had they worked separately. What a sad contrast compared to the work of the isolated owner!

In fact, we might quote scores of examples among the pioneers of America, in Swiss, German, Russian, and in certain French villages; or the work done in Russia by gangs (artels) of masons, carpenters, boatmen, fishermen, etc., who undertake a task and divide the produce or the remuneration among themselves, without it passing through the intermediary of middlemen. We could also mention the great communal hunts of nomadic tribes, and an infinite number of successful collective enterprises. And in every case we could show the unquestionable superiority of communal work compared to that of the wage-earner or the isolated private owner.

Well-being, that is to say, the satisfaction of physical, artistic, and moral needs, has always been the most powerful stimulant to work. And when a hireling produces bare necessities with difficulty, a free worker, who sees ease and luxury increasing for him and for others in

proportion to his efforts, spends infinitely far more energy and intelligence, and obtains first-class products in far greater abundance. The one feels riveted to misery, the other hopes for ease and luxury in the future. In this lies the whole secret. Therefore a society aiming at the well-being of all, and at the possibility of all enjoying life in all its manifestations, will supply voluntary work which will be infinitely superior and yield far more than work has produced up till now under the goad of slavery, serfdom, or wagedom.

## II

Nowadays, whoever can load on others his share of labour indispensable to existence, does so, and it is admitted that it will always be so.

Now work indispensable to existence is essentially manual. We may be artists or scientists; but none of us can do without things obtained by manual work — bread, clothes, roads, ships, light, heat, etc. And, moreover, however highly artistic or however subtly metaphysical are our pleasures, they all depend on manual labour. And it is precisely this labour — basis of life — that everyone tries to avoid.

We understand perfectly well that it must be so nowadays. Because, to do manual work now, means in reality to shut yourself up for ten or twelve hours a day in an unhealthy workshop, and to remain riveted to the same task for twenty or thirty years, and maybe for your whole life. It means to be doomed to a paltry wage, to the uncertainty of the morrow, to want of work, often to destitution, more often than not to death in a hospital, after having worked forty years to feed, clothe, amuse, and instruct others than yourself and your children. It means to bear the stamp of inferiority all your life, because, whatever the politicians tell us, the manual worker is always considered inferior to the brain worker, and the one who has toiled ten hours in a workshop has not the time, and still less the means, to give himself the high delights of science and art, nor even to prepare himself to appreciate them; he must be content with the crumbs from the table of privileged persons.

We understand that under these conditions manual labour is considered a curse of fate. We understand that all men have but one dream — that of emerging from, or enabling their children to emerge from this inferior state; to create for themselves an “independent” position, which means what? — To also live by other men’s work! As long as there will be a class of manual workers and a class of “brain” workers, black hands and white hands, it will be thus.

What interest, in fact, can this depressing work have for the worker, when he knows that the fate awaiting him from the cradle to the grave will be to live in mediocrity, poverty, and insecurity of the morrow? Therefore, when we see the immense majority of men take up their wretched task every morning, we are surprised at their perseverance, at their zeal for work, at the habit that enables them, like machines blindly obeying an impetus given, to lead this life of misery without

hope for the morrow; without foreseeing ever so vaguely that someday they, or at least their children, will be part of a humanity rich in all the treasures of a bountiful nature, in all the enjoyments of knowledge, scientific and artistic creation, reserved to-day to a few privileged favourites. It is precisely to put an end to this separation between manual and brain work that we want to abolish wagedom, that we want the Social Revolution. Then work will no longer appear a curse of fate: it will become what it should be — the free exercise of *all* the faculties of man.

Moreover, it is time to submit to a serious analysis this legend about superior work, supposed to be obtained under the lash of wagedom. It is enough to visit, not the model factory and workshop that we find now and again, but ordinary factories, to conceive the immense waste of human energy that characterizes modern industry. For one factory more or less rationally organized, there are a hundred or more which waste man's labour, without a more substantial motive than that of perhaps bringing in a few pounds more per day to the employer. Here you see youths from twenty to twenty five years of age, sitting all day long on a bench, their chests sunken in, feverishly shaking their heads and bodies to tie, with the speed of conjurers, the two ends of worthless scraps of cotton, the refuse of the lace-ooms. What progeny will these trembling and rickety bodies bequeath to their country? "But they occupy so little room in the factory, and each of them brings me in sixpence a day," will say the employer. In an immense London factory you could see girls, bald at seventeen from carrying trays of matches on their heads from one room to another, when the simplest machine could wheel the matches to their tables. But...it costs so little, the work of women who have no special trade! What is the use of a machine? When these can do no more, they will be easily replaced...there are so many in the street. On the steps of a mansion on an icy night you will find a bare-footed child asleep, with its bundle of papers in its arms...child-labour costs so little that it may well be employed, every evening, to sell ten penny-worth of papers, of which the poor boy will receive a penny, or a penny half-penny. And lastly, you may see a robust man tramping, dangling his arms; he has been out of work for months. Meanwhile his daughter grows pale in the overheated vapours of the workshop for dressing stuffs, and his son fills blacking pots by hand, or waits hours at the corner of a street till a passer-by enables him to earn a penny.

And so it is everywhere, from San Francisco to Moscow, and from Naples to Stockholm. The waste of human energy is the distinguishing and predominant trait of industry, not to mention trade where it attains still more colossal proportions.

What a sad satire is that name, Political Economy, given to the science of waste of energy under the system of wagedom!

This is not all. If you speak to the director of a well-organized factory, he will naively explain to you that it is difficult nowadays to find a skilful, vigorous, and energetic workman, who works

with a will. “Should such a man present himself among the twenty or thirty who call every Monday asking us for work, he is sure to be received, even if we are reducing the number of our hands. We recognize him at the first glance, and he is always accepted, even though we have to get rid of an older and less active worker the next day.” And the one who has just received notice to quit, and all those who receive it to-morrow, go to reinforce that immense reserve army of capital — workmen out of work — who are only called to the loom or the bench when there is pressure of work, or to oppose strikers. And those others, the average workers that are the refuse of the better-class factories? They join the equally formidable army of aged and indifferent workers that continually circulates between the second-class factories — those which barely cover their expenses and make their way in the world by trickery and snares laid for the buyer, and especially for the consumer in distant countries.

And if you talk to the workmen themselves, you will soon learn that the rule in such factories is — never to do entirely what you are capable of. “Shoddy pay — shoddy work!” this is the advice which the working man receives from his comrades upon entering such a factory. For the workers know that if in a moment of generosity they give way to the entreaties of an employer and consent to intensify the work in order to carry out a pressing order, this nervous work will be exacted in the future as a rule in the scale of wages. Therefore in all such factories they prefer never to produce as much as they can. In certain industries production is limited so as to keep up high prices, and sometimes the password, “Go-canny,” is given, which signifies, “Bad work for bad pay!”

Wage-work is serf-work; it cannot, it must not, produce all that it could produce. And it is high time to disbelieve the legend which represents wagedom as the best incentive to productive work. If industry nowadays brings in a hundred times more than it did in the days of our grandfathers, it is due to the sudden awakening of physical and chemical sciences towards the end of last century; not to the capitalist organization of wagedom, but in spite of that organization.

### III

Those who have seriously studied the question do not deny any of the advantages of Communism, on condition, be it well understood, that Communism be perfectly free, that is to say, Anarchist. They recognize that work paid with money, even disguised under the name of “labour notes,” to Workers’ associations governed by the State, would keep up the characteristics of wagedom and would retain its disadvantages. They agree that the whole system would soon suffer from it, even if society came into possession of the instruments of production. And they admit that, thanks to integral education given to all children, to the laborious habits of civilized societies, with the liberty of choosing and varying their occupations and the attractions of work done by equals for the well-being of all, a Communist society would not be wanting in producers

who would soon make the fertility of the soil triple and tenfold, and give a new impulse to industry.

This our opponents agree to. “But the danger,” they say, “will come from that minority of loafers who will not work, and will not have regular habits in spite of excellent conditions that make work pleasant. To-day the prospect of hunger compels the most refractory to move along with the others. The one who does not arrive in time is dismissed. But a black sheep suffices to contaminate the whole flock, and two or three sluggish or refractory workmen lead the others astray and bring a spirit of disorder and rebellion into the workshop that makes work impossible; so that in the end we shall have to return to a system of compulsion that forces the ringleaders back into the ranks. And is not the system of wages paid in proportion to work performed, the only one that enables compulsion to be employed, without hurting the feelings of the worker? Because all other means would imply the continual intervention of an authority that would be repugnant to free men.”

This, we believe, is the objection fairly stated. It belongs to the category of arguments which try to justify the State, the Penal Law, the Judge, and the Gaoler. “As there are people, a feeble minority, who will not submit to social customs,” the authoritarians say, “we must maintain magistrates, tribunals and prisons, although these institutions become a source of new evils of all kinds.”

Therefore we can only repeat what we have so often said concerning authority in general: “To avoid a possible evil you have recourse to means which in themselves are a greater evil, and become the source of those same abuses that you wish to remedy. For do not forget that it is wagedom, the impossibility of living otherwise than by selling your labour, which has created the present Capitalist system, whose vices you begin to recognize.”

Let us also remark that this authoritarian way of reasoning is but a justification of what is wrong in the present system. Wagedom was not instituted to remove the disadvantages of Communism; its origin, like that of the State and private ownership, is to be found elsewhere. It is born of slavery and serfdom imposed by force, and only wears a more modern garb. Thus the argument in favour of wagedom is as valueless as those by which they seek to apologize for private property and the State.

We are, nevertheless, going to examine the objection, and see if there is any truth in it.

To begin with, Is it not evident that if a society, founded on the principle of free work, were really menaced by loafers, it could protect itself without an authoritarian organization and without having recourse to wagedom? Let us take a group of volunteers, combining for some particular enterprise. Having its success at heart, they all work with a will, save one of the

associates, who is frequently absent from his post. Must they on his account dissolve the group, elect a president to impose fines, or maybe distribute markers for work done, as is customary in the Academy? It is evident that neither the one nor the other will be done, but that someday the comrade who imperils their enterprise will be told: "Friend, we should like to work with you; but as you are often absent from your post, and you do your work negligently, we must part. Go and find other comrades who will put up with your indifference!"

This way is so natural that it is practiced everywhere nowadays, in all industries, in competition with all possible systems of fines, docking of wages, supervision, etc.; a workman may enter the factory at the appointed time, but if he does his work badly, if he hinders his comrades by his laziness or other defects, and they quarrel with him on that account, there is an end of it; he is compelled to leave the workshop.

Authoritarians pretend that it is the almighty employer and his overseers who maintain regularity and quality of work in factories. In fact, in a somewhat complicated enterprise, in which the wares produced pass through many hands before being finished, it is the factory itself, the workmen as a unity, who see to the good quality of the work. Therefore the best factories of British private industry have few overseers, far less on an average than the French factories, and less than the British State factories.

A certain standard of public morals is maintained in the same way. Authoritarians say it is due to rural guards, judges, and policemen, whereas in reality it is maintained in spite of judges, policemen, and rural guards. "Many are the laws producing criminals!" has been said long ago.

Not only in industrial workshops do things go on in this way; it happens everywhere, every day, on a scale that only bookworms have as yet no notion of. When a railway company, federated with other companies, fails to fulfil its engagements, when its trains are late and goods lie neglected at the stations, the other companies threaten to cancel the contract, and that threat usually suffices. It is generally believed, at any rate it is taught, that commerce only keeps to its engagements from fear of lawsuits. Nothing of the sort; nine times in ten the trader who has not kept his word will not appear before a judge. There, where trade is very great, as in London, the sole fact of having driven a creditor to bring a lawsuit suffices for the immense majority of merchants to refuse for good to have any dealings with a man who has compelled one of them to go to law.

Then, why should means that are used to-day among mates in the workshop, traders, and railway companies, not be made use of in a society based on voluntary work?

Take, for example, an association stipulating that each of its members should carry out the following contract: “We undertake to give you the use of our houses, stores, streets, means of transport, schools, museums, etc., on condition that, from twenty to forty-five or fifty years of age, you consecrate four or five hours a day to some work recognized as necessary to existence. Choose yourself the producing groups which you wish to join, or organize a new group, provided that it will undertake to produce necessaries. And as for the remainder of your time, combine together with those you like for recreation, art, or science, according to the bent of your taste. “Twelve or fifteen hundred hours of work a year, in a group producing food, clothes, or houses, or employed in public health, transport, etc., is all we ask of you. For this work we guarantee to you all that these groups produce or will produce. But if not one, of the thousands of groups of our federation, will receive you, whatever be their motive; if you are absolutely incapable of producing anything useful, or if you refuse to do it, then live like an isolated man or like an invalid. If we are rich enough to give you the necessaries of life we shall be delighted to give them to you. You are a man, and you have the right to live. But as you wish to live under special conditions, and leave the ranks, it is more than probable that you will suffer for it in your daily relations with other citizens. You will be looked upon as a ghost of bourgeois society, unless some friends of yours, discovering you to be a talent, kindly free you from all moral obligation towards society by doing necessary work for you. “And lastly, if it does not please you, go and look for other conditions elsewhere in the wide world, or else seek adherents and organize with them on novel principles. We prefer our own.”

That is what could be done in a communal society in order to turn away sluggards if they became too numerous.

#### **IV**

We very much doubt that we need fear this contingency in a society really based on the entire freedom of the individual. In fact, in spite of the premium on idleness offered by private ownership of capital, the really lazy man, unless he is ill, is comparatively rare.

Among workmen it is often said that bourgeois are idlers. There are certainly enough of them, but they, too, are the exception. On the contrary, in every industrial enterprise, you are sure to find one or more bourgeois who work very hard. It is true that the majority of bourgeois profit by their privileged position to award themselves the least unpleasant tasks, and that they work under hygienic conditions of air, food, etc., which permit them to do their business without too much fatigue. But these are precisely the conditions which we claim for all workers, without exception. We must also say that if, thanks to their privileged position, rich people often make absolutely useless or even harmful work in society, nevertheless the Ministers, Heads of Departments, factory owners, traders, bankers, etc., subject themselves for a few hours a day to work which they find more or less tiresome, all preferring their hours of leisure to this obligatory work. And

if in nine cases out of ten this work is fateful, they find it none the less tiring for that. But it is precisely because the middle class put forth a great energy, even in doing harm (knowingly or not) and defending their privileged position, that they have succeeded in defeating the landed nobility, and that they continue to rule the masses. If they were idlers they would long since have ceased. To exist, and would have disappeared like the aristocrats. In a society that would expect only four or five hours a day of useful, pleasant, and hygienic work, they would perform their task perfectly, and they certainly would not put up with the horrible conditions in which men toil nowadays without reforming them. If a Huxley spent only five hours in the sewers of London, rest assured that he would have found the means of making them as sanitary as his physiological laboratory.

As to the laziness of the great majority of workers, only philistine economists and philanthropists say such nonsense. If you ask an intelligent manufacturer, he will tell you that if workmen only put it into their heads to be lazy, all factories would have to be closed, for no measure of severity, no system of spying would be of any use. You should have seen the terror caused in 1887 among British employers when a few agitators started preaching the “go-canny” theory — “for bad pay bad work”; “take it easy, do not overwork yourselves, and waste all you can.” — “They demoralize the worker, they want to kill industry!” cried those who formerly inveighed against the immorality of the worker and the bad quality of his work. But if the worker were what he is represented to be — namely, the idler whom you have continually to threaten with dismissal from the workshop — what would the word “demoralization” signify?

So when we speak of a possible idleness, we must well understand that it is a question of a small minority in society; and before legislating for that minority, would it not be wise to study its origin? Whoever observes with an intelligent eye sees well enough that the child reputed lazy at school is often the one which does not understand what he is badly taught. Very often, too, it is suffering from cerebral anæmia, caused by poverty and an anti-hygienic education. A boy who is lazy at Greek or Latin would work admirably where he taught in science, especially if taught by the medium of manual labour. A girl reputed nought at mathematics becomes the first mathematician of her class if she by chance meets somebody who can explain to her the elements of arithmetic she did not understand. And a workman, lazy in the workshop, cultivates his garden at dawn, while gazing at the rising sun, and will be at work again at nightfall, when all nature goes to its rest.

Somebody said that dirt is matter in the wrong place. The same definition applies to nine-tenths of those called lazy. They are people gone astray in a direction that does not answer to their temperament nor to their capacities. In reading the biography of great men, we are struck with the number of “idlers” among them. They were lazy as long as they had not found the right path, and afterwards laborious to excess. Darwin, Stephenson, and many others belonged to this

category of idlers. Very often the idler is but a man to whom it is repugnant to make all his life the eighteenth part of a pin, or the hundredth part of a watch, while he feels he has exuberant energy which he would like to expend elsewhere. Often, too, he is a rebel who cannot submit to being fixed all his life to a work-bench in order to procure a thousand pleasures for his employer, while knowing himself to be far the less stupid of the two, and knowing his only fault to be that of having been born in hovel instead of coming into the world in a castle.

Lastly, a good many “idlers” do not know the trade by which they are compelled to earn their living. Seeing the imperfect thing made by their own hands, striving vainly to do better, and perceiving that they never will succeed on account of the bad habits of work already acquired, they begin to hate their trade, and, not knowing any other, hate work in general. Thousands of workmen and artists who are failures suffer from this cause. On the other hand, he who since his youth has learned to play the piano well, to handle the plans well, the chisel, the brush, or the file, so that he feels that what he does is beautiful, will never give up the piano, the chisel, or the file. He will find pleasure in his work which does not tire him, as long as he is not overdriven.

Under the one name, idleness, a series of results due to different causes have been grouped, of which each one could be a source of good, instead of being a source of evil to society. Like all questions concerning criminality and related to human faculties, facts have been collected having nothing in common with one another. They say laziness or crime, without giving themselves the trouble to analyse their cause. They are in haste to punish them, without inquiring if the punishment itself does not contain a premium on “laziness” or “crime.”

This is why a free society, seeing the number of idlers increasing in its midst, would no doubt think of looking for the cause of laziness, in order to suppress it, before having recourse to punishment. When it is a case, as we have already mentioned, of simple bloodlessness, then, before stuffing the brain of a child with science, nourish his system so as to produce blood, strengthen him, and, that he shall not waste his time, take him to the country or to the seaside; there, teach him in the open air, not in books — geometry, by measuring the distance to aspire, or the height of a tree; natural sciences, while picking flowers and fishing in the sea; physical science, while building the boat he will go to fish in. But for mercy’s sake do not fill his brain with sentences and dead languages. Do not make an idler of him!... Such a child has neither order nor regular habits. Let first the children inculcate order among themselves, and later on, the laboratory, the workshop, work done in a limited space, with many tools about, will teach them method. But do not make disorderly beings out of them by your school, whose only order is the symmetry of its benches, and which — true image of the chaos in its teachings — will never inspire anybody with the love of harmony, of consistency, and method in work.

Do not you see that by your methods of teaching, framed by a Ministry for eight million scholars, who represent eight million different capacities, you only impose a system good for mediocrities, conceived by an average of mediocrities? Your school becomes a University of laziness, as your prison is a University of crime. Make the school free, abolish your University grades, appeal to the volunteers of teaching; begin that way, instead of making laws against laziness which only serve to increase it. Give the workman who is compelled to make a minute particle of some object, who is stifled at his little tapping machine, which he ends by loathing, give him the chance of tilling the soil, felling trees in the forest, sailing the seas in the teeth of a storm, dashing through space on an engine, but do not make an idler of him by forcing him all his life to attend to a small machine, to plough the head of a screw, or to drill the eye of a needle. Suppress the cause of idleness, and you may take it for granted that few individuals will really hate work, especially voluntary work, and that there will be no need to manufacture a code of laws on their account.

## Chapter 13: The Collectivist Wages System

### I

It is our opinion that collectivists commit a twofold error in their plans for the reconstruction of society. While speaking of abolishing capitalist rule, they intend nevertheless to retain two institutions which are the very basis of this rule — Representative Government and the Wages System.

As regards so-called representative government, we have often spoken about it. It is absolutely incomprehensible to us that intelligent men — and such are not wanting in the collectivist party — can remain partisans of national or municipal parliaments after all the lessons history has given them — in France, in England, in Germany, or in the United States.

While we see parliamentary rule breaking up, and from all sides criticism of this rule growing louder — not only of its results, but also of *its principles* — how is it that revolutionary socialists defend a system already condemned to die?

Built up by the middle classes to hold their own against royalty, sanctioning, and at the same time strengthening, their sway over the workers, parliamentary rule is pre-eminently a middle-class rule. The upholders of this system have never seriously affirmed that a parliament or a municipal council represent a nation or a city. The most intelligent among them know that this is impossible. The middle class has simply used the parliamentary system to raise a barrier between itself and royalty, without giving the people liberty. But gradually, as the people become conscious of their interests and the variety of their interests multiply, the system can no longer work. Therefore democrats of all countries vainly imagine (livers palliatives. The *Referendum* is tried and found to be a failure; proportional representation is spoken of, so is representation of minorities, and other parliamentary Utopias. In a word, they strive to find what

is not to be found, and they are compelled to recognize that they are in a wrong way, and confidence in a Representative Government disappears.

It is the same with the wages system; for after having proclaimed the abolition of private property, and the possession in common of all means of production, how can they uphold the wages system in any form? It is, nevertheless, what collectivists are doing when they recommend *labour-cheques*.

It is easy to understand why the early English socialists came to the system of labour-cheques. They simply tried to make Capital and Labour agree. They repudiated the idea of violently laying hands on capitalist property.

It is also easily understood why Proudhon took up the idea later on. In his Mutualist system he tried to make Capital less offensive, notwithstanding the retaining of private property, which he detested from the bottom of his heart, but which he believed to be necessary to guarantee individuals against the State.

Neither is it astonishing that certain economists, more or less bourgeois, admit labour-cheques. They care little whether the worker is paid in labour-notes or in coin stamped with the effigy of the Republic or the Empire. They only care to save from destruction individual ownership of dwelling-houses, of land, of factories; in any case that of dwelling-houses and the capital that is necessary for manufacturing. And labour-notes would just answer the purpose of upholding this private property.

As long as labour-notes can be exchanged for Jewels or carriages, the owner of the house will willingly accept them for rent. And as long as dwelling-houses, fields, and factories belong to isolated owners, men will have to pay them, in one way or another, for being allowed to work in the fields or factories, or for living in the houses. The owners will accept to be paid by the workers in gold, in paper-money, or in cheques exchangeable for all sorts of commodities. But how can we defend labour-notes, this new form of wagedom, when we admit that houses, fields, and factories will no longer be private property, and that they will belong to the commune or the nation?

## II

Let us closely examine this system of remuneration for work done, preached by French, German, English, and Italian collectivists (Spanish anarchists, who still call themselves collectivists, imply by Collectivism the possession in common of all instruments of production, and the “liberty of each group to divide the produce, as they think fit, according to communist or any other principles”). It amounts to this: Everybody works in field, factory, school, hospital, etc. The working-day is fixed by the State, which owns land, factories, roads, etc. Every work-day is paid for with a *labour-note*, which is inscribed with these words: *Eight hours work*. With this cheque the worker can procure all sorts of merchandise in the stores owned by the State or by divers corporations. The cheque is divisible, so that you can buy an hour’s-work worth of meat,

ten minutes worth of matches, or half an hour of tobacco. After the Collectivist Revolution, instead of saying “two-pence worth of soap,” we shall say “five minutes worth of soap.” Most collectivists, true to the distinction laid down by middle-class economists (and by Marx) between *qualified* work and *simple* work, tell us, moreover, that *qualified* or professional work must be paid a certain quantity more than *simple* work. Thus an hour’s work of a doctor will have to be considered as equivalent to two or three hours’ work of a hospital nurse, or to three hours’ work of a navy. “Professional, or qualified work, will be a multiple of simple work,” says the collectivist Grönlund, “because this kind of work needs a more or less long apprenticeship.”

Other collectivists, such as the French Marxists, do not make this distinction. They proclaim “Equality of Wages.” The doctor, the schoolmaster, and the professor will be paid (in labour-cheques) at the same rate as the navy. Eight hours visiting the sick in a hospital will be worth the same as eight hours spent in earth-works or else in mines or factories.

Some make a greater concession; they admit that disagreeable or unhealthy work — such as sewerage — could be paid for at a higher rate than agreeable work. One hour’s work of a sewerer would be worth, they say, two hours of a professor’s work.

Let us add that certain collectivists admit of corporations paying a lump sum for work done. Thus a corporation would say: “Here are a hundred tons of steel. A hundred workmen were required to produce them, and it took them ten days. Their work-day being an eight-hours day, it has taken them eight thousand working hours to produce a hundred tons of steel eight hours a ton.” For this the State would pay them eight thousand labour-notes of one hour each, and these eight thousand cheques would be divided among the members of the iron-works as they themselves thought proper.

On the other hand, a hundred miners having taken twenty days to extract eight thousand tons of coal, coal would be worth two hours a ton, and the sixteen thousand cheques of one hour each, received by the Guild of Miners, would be divided among their members according to their own appreciation.

If the miners protested, and said that a ton of steel should only cost six hours’ work instead of eight; if the professor wished to have his day paid twice more than the nurse, then the State would interfere and would settle their differences.

Such is, in a few words, the organization collectivists wish to see arise out of the Social Revolution. As we see, their principles are: Collective property of the instruments of production, and remuneration to each according to the time spent in producing, while taking into account the productivity of his labour. As to the political system, it would be Parliamentarianism modified by *positive instructions* given to those elected, by the *Referendum* — a vote, taken by *noes* or *ayes* by the nation.

Let us own that this system appears to us unrealizable.

Collectivists begin by proclaiming a revolutionary principle — the abolition of private property — then they deny it no sooner than proclaimed by upholding an organization of production and consumption that originated in private property.

They proclaim a revolutionary principle, and ignore the consequences that this principle will inevitably bring about. They forget that the very fact of abolishing individual property in the instruments of work — land, factories, road, capital, — must launch society into absolutely new channels; must completely overthrow the present system of production, both in its aim as well as in its means; must modify daily relations between individuals, as soon as land, machinery, and all other instruments of production are considered common property.

They say, “No private property,” and immediately after strive to maintain private property in its daily manifestations. “You shall be a Commune as far as regards production: fields, tools, machinery, all that has been invented up till now — factories, railways, harbours, mines, etc., all are yours. Not the slightest distinction will be made concerning the share of each in this collective property.

“But from to-morrow you will minutely debate the share you are going to take in the creation of new machinery, in the digging of new mines. You will carefully weigh what part of the new produce belongs to you. You will count your minutes of work, and you will take care that a minute of your neighbours cannot buy more than yours.

“And as an hour measures nothing, as in some factories a worker can see to six power-looms at a time, while in another he only tends two, you will weigh the muscular force, the brain energy, and the nervous energy you have expended. You will accurately calculate the years of apprenticeship in order to appraise the amount each will contribute to future production. And this — after having declared that you do not take into account his share in past production.”

Well, for us it is evident that a society cannot be based on two absolutely opposed principles, two principles that contradict one another continually. And a nation or a commune that would have such an organization would be compelled to revert to private property in the instruments of production, or to transform itself immediately into a communist society.

### III

We have said that certain collectivist writers desire that a distinction should be made between *qualified* or professional work and *simple* work. They pretend that an hour’s work of an engineer, an architect, or a doctor, must be considered as two or three hours’ work of a blacksmith, a mason, or a hospital nurse. And the same distinction must be made between all sorts of trades necessitating a more or less long apprenticeship and the simple toil of day labourers.

Well, to establish this distinction would be to maintain all the inequalities of present society. It would mean fixing a dividing line, from the beginning, between the workers and those who pretend to govern them. It would mean dividing society into two very distinct classes — the aristocracy of knowledge above the horny-handed lower orders — the one doomed to serve the

other; the one working with its hands to feed and clothe those who, profiting by their leisure, study how to govern their fosterers.

It would mean reviving one of the distinct peculiarities of present society and giving it the sanction of the Social Revolution. It would mean setting up as a principle an abuse already condemned in our ancient crumbling society.

We know the answer we shall get. They will speak of “Scientific Socialism”; they will quote bourgeois economists, and Marx too, to prove that a scale of wages has its *raison d’être*, as “the labour-force” of the engineer will have cost more to society than the “labour-force” of the navy. In fact, — have not economists tried to prove to us that if an engineer is paid twenty times more than a navy it is because the “necessary” outlay to make an engineer is greater than that necessary to make a navy? And has not Marx asserted that the same distinction is equally logical between two branches of manual labour? He could not conclude otherwise, having on his own account taken up Ricardo’s theory of value, and upheld that goods are exchanged in proportion to the quantity of work socially necessary for their production.

But we know what to think of this. We know that if engineers, scientists, or doctors are paid ten or a hundred times more than a labourer, and that a weaver earns three times more than an agricultural labourer, and ten times more than a girl in a match factory, it is not by reason of their “cost of production,” but by reason of a monopoly of education, or a monopoly of industry.

Engineers, scientists, and doctors merely exploit their capital — their diplomas — as middle-class employers exploit a factory, or as nobles used to exploit their titles titles of nobility. As to the employer who pays an engineer twenty times more than a labourer, it is simply due to personal interest; if the engineer can economize £4000 a year on the cost of production, the employer pays him £800. And if the employer has a foreman who saves £400 on the work by cleverly sweating workmen, he gladly gives him £80 or £120 a year. He parts with an extra £40 when he expects to gain £400 by it; and this is the essence of the Capitalist system. The same differences obtain among divers manual trades.

Let them, therefore, not talk to us of “the cost of production” which raises the cost of skilled labour, and tell us that a student who has gaily spent his youth in a university has a *right* to a wage ten times greater than the son of a miner who has grown pale in a mine since the age of eleven; or that a weaver has a *right* to a wage three or four times greater than that of an agricultural labourer. The cost of teaching a weaver his work is not four times greater than the cost of teaching a peasant his. The weaver simply benefits by the advantages his industry reaps in Europe, in comparison with countries that have as yet no industries.

Nobody has ever calculated the *cost of production* and if a loafer costs far more to society than a worker, it remains to be seen whether a robust day-labourer does not cost more to society than a skilled artisan, when we have taken into account infant-mortality among the poor, the ravages of anæmia, and premature deaths.

Could they, for example, make us believe that the 1s. 3d. paid to a Paris workwoman, the 3d. paid to an Auvergne peasant girl who grows blind at lace-making, or the 1s. 8d. paid to the

peasant represent their “cost of production.” We know full well that people work for less, but we also know that they do so exclusively because, thanks to our wonderful organization, they would die of hunger did they not accept these mock wages.

For us the scale of remuneration is a complex result of taxes, of governmental tutelage, of Capitalist monopoly. In a word, of State and Capital. Therefore, we say that all wages theories have been invented after the event to justify injustices at present existing, and that we need not take them into consideration.

Neither will they fail to tell us that the Collectivist scale of wages would be an improvement. “It would be better,” so they say, “to see certain artisans receiving a wage two or three times higher than common labourers, than to see a minister receiving in a day what a workman cannot earn in a year. It would be a great step towards equality.”

For us this step would be the reverse of progress. To make a distinction between simple and professional work in a new society would result in the Revolution sanctioning and recognizing as a principle a brutal fact we submit to nowadays, but that we nevertheless find unjust. It would mean imitating those gentlemen of the French Assembly who proclaimed August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1789, the abolition of feudal rights, but who on August 8<sup>th</sup> sanctioned these same rights by imposing dues on the peasants to compensate the noblemen, placing these dues under the protection of the Revolution. It would mean imitating the Russian Government, which proclaimed, at the time of the emancipation of the serfs, that the land should henceforth belong to the nobility, while formerly the lands were considered belonging to the serfs.

Or else, to take a better known example, when the Commune of 1871 decided to pay members of the Commune Council 12s. 6d. a day, while the Federates on the ramparts received only 1s. 3d., this decision was hailed as an act of superior democratic equality. In reality, the Commune only ratified the former inequality between functionary and soldier, Government and governed. Coming from an Opportunist Chamber of Deputies, such a decision would have appeared admirable, but the Commune doomed her revolutionary principles because she failed to put them into practice.

Under our existing social system, when a minister gets paid £4000 a year, while a workman must content himself with £40 or less; when a foreman is paid two or three times more than a workman, and among workmen there is every gradation, from 8s. a day down to the peasant girl’s 3d.; we disapprove of the high salary of the minister as well as of the difference between the 8s. of the workman and the 3d. of the poor woman. And we say, “Down with the privileges of education, as well as with those of birth!” We are anarchists precisely because these privileges revolt us.

They revolt us already in this authoritarian society. Could we endure them in a society that began by proclaiming equality?

That is why some collectivists, understanding the impossibility of maintaining a scale of wages in a society inspired by the breath of the Revolution, hasten to proclaim equality of wage. But

they meet with new difficulties, and their equality of wages becomes the same unrealizable Utopia as the scale of wages of other collectivists.

A society having taken possession of all social wealth, having boldly proclaimed the right of all to this wealth — whatever share they may have taken in producing it will be compelled to abandon any system of wages, whether in currency or labour-notes.

#### IV

The collectivists say, “To each according to his deeds”; or, in other terms, according to his share of services rendered to society. They think it expedient to put this principle into practice as soon as the Social Revolution will have made all instruments of production common property. But we think that if the Social Revolution had the misfortune of proclaiming such a principle, it would mean its necessary failure; it would mean leaving the social problem, which past centuries have burdened us with, unsolved. In fact, in a society like ours, in which the more a man works the less he is remunerated, this principle, at first sight, may appear to be a yearning for justice. But it is really only the perpetuation of past injustice. It was by virtue of this principle that wagedom began, to end in the glaring inequalities and all the abominations of present society; because, from the moment work done was appraised in currency or in any other form of wage; the day it was agreed upon that man would only receive the wage he could secure to himself, the whole history of State-aided Capitalist Society was as good as written; it germinated in this principle. Shall we, then, return to our starting-point and go through the same evolution again? Our theorists desire it, but fortunately it is impossible. The Revolution will be communist; if not, it will be drowned in blood, and have to be begun over again.

Services rendered to society, be they work in factory or field, or mental services, *cannot be* valued in money. There can be no exact measure of value (of what has been wrongly-termed exchange value), nor of use value, with regard to production. If two individuals work for the community five hours a day, year in year out, at different work which is equally agreeable to them, we may say that on the whole their labour is equivalent. But we cannot divide their work, and say that the result of any particular day, hour, or minute of work of the one is worth the result of a minute or hour of the other.

We may roughly say that the man who during his lifetime has deprived himself of leisure during ten hours a day has given far more to society than the one who has only deprived himself of leisure during five hours a day, or who has not deprived himself at all. But we cannot take what he has done during two hours and say that the yield is worth twice as much as the yield of another individual, working only one hour, and remunerate him in proportion. It would be disregarding all that is complex in industry, in agriculture, in the whole life of present society; it would be ignoring to what extent all individual work is the result of past and present labour of society as a whole. It would mean believing ourselves to be living in the Stone Age, whereas we are living in an age of steel.

If you enter a coal-mine you will see a man in charge of a huge machine that raises and lowers a cage. In his hand he holds a lever that stops and reverses the course of the machine; he lowers it and the cage turns back in the twinkling of an eye; he raises it, he lowers it again with a giddy swiftness. All attention, he follows with his eyes fixed on the wall an indicator that shows him On a small scale, at which point of the shaft the cage is at each second of its progress; as soon as the indicator has reached a certain level he suddenly stops the course of the cage, not a yard higher nor lower than the required spot. And no sooner have the colliers unloaded their coal-wagons, and pushed empty ones instead, than he reverses the lever and again sends the cage back into space.

During eight or ten consecutive hours he must pay the closest attention. Should his brain relax for a moment, the cage would inevitably strike against the gear, break its wheels, snap the rope, crush men, and obstruct work in the mine. Should he waste three seconds at each touch of the lever, in our modern perfected mines, the extraction would be reduced from twenty to fifty tons a day.

Is it he who is of greatest use in the mine? Or, is it perhaps the boy who signals to him from below to raise the cage? Is it the miner at the bottom of the shaft, who risks his life every instant, and who will some day be killed by fire-damp? Or is it the engineer, who would lose the layer of coal, and would cause the miners to dig on rock by a simple mistake in his calculations? And lastly, is it the mine owner who has put all his capital into the mine, and who has perhaps, contrary to expert advice asserted that excellent coal would be found there?

All the miners engaged in this mine contribute to the extraction of coal in proportion to their strength, their energy, their knowledge, their intelligence, and their skill. And we may say that all have the right to live, to satisfy their needs, and even their whims, when the necessaries of life have been secured for all. But how can we appraise their work?

And, moreover, Is the coal they have extracted *their* work? Is it not also the work of men who have built the railway leading to the mine and the roads that radiate from all its stations? Is it not also the work of those that have tilled and sown the fields, extracted iron, cut wood in the forests, built the machines that burn coal, and so on?

No distinction can be drawn between the work of each man. Measuring the work by its results leads us to absurdity; dividing and measuring them by hours spent on the work also leads us to absurdity. One thing remains: put the *needs* above the *works*, and first of all recognize the right to live, and later on, to the comforts of life, for all those who take their share in production.

But take any other branch of human activity — take the manifestations of life as a whole. Which one of us can claim the higher remuneration for his work? Is it the doctor who has found out the illness, or the nurse who has brought about recovery by her hygienic care? Is it the inventor of the first steam-engine, or the boy, who, one day getting tired of pulling the rope that formerly opened the valve to let steam enter under the piston, tied the rope to the lever of the machine, without suspecting that he had invented the essential mechanical part of all modern machinery — the automatic valve.

Is it the inventor of the locomotive, or the workman of Newcastle, who suggested replacing the stones formerly laid under the rails by wooden sleepers, as the stones, for want of elasticity, caused the trains to derail? Is it the engineer on the locomotive? The signalman who can stop trains? The switchman who transfers a train from one line to another? — To whom do we owe the transatlantic cable? Is it to the engineer who obstinately affirmed that the cable would transmit messages when learned electricians declared it to be impossible? Is it to Maury, the scientist, who advised that thick cables should be set aside for others as thin as canes? Or else to those volunteers, come from nobody knows where, who spent their days and nights on deck minutely examining every yard of the cable, and removed the nails that the stockholders of steamship companies stupidly caused to be driven into the non-conducting wrapper of the cable, so as to make it unserviceable.

And in a wider sphere, the true sphere of life, with its joys, its sufferings, and its accidents, can not each one of us recall some one who has rendered him so great a service that we should be indignant if its equivalent in coin were mentioned? The service may have been but a word, nothing but a word spoken at the right time, or else it may have been months and years of devotion, and are we going to appraise these “incalculable” services in “labour-notes”?

“The works of each!” But human society would not exist for more than two consecutive generations if everyone did not give infinitely more than that for which he is paid in coin, in “cheques,” or in civic rewards. The race would soon become extinct if mothers did not sacrifice their lives to take care of their children, if men did not give all the time, without demanding an equivalent, if men did not give just to those from whom they expect no reward.

If middle-class society is decaying, if we have got into a blind alley from which we cannot emerge without attacking past institutions with torch and hatchet, it is precisely because we have calculated too much. It is because we have let ourselves be influenced into *giving* only to *receive*. It is because we have aimed at turning society into a commercial company based on *debit* and *credit*.

Collectivists know this. They vaguely understand that a society could not exist if it carried out the principle of “Each according to his deeds.” They have a notion that *necessaries* — we do not speak of whims — the needs of the individual, do not always correspond to his *works*. Thus De Paepe tells us: “The principle — the eminently Individualist principle — would, however, be tempered by social intervention, for the education of children and young persons (including maintenance and lodging), and by the social organization for assisting the infirm and the sick, for retreats for aged workers, etc.” They understand that a man of forty, father of three children, has other needs than young man of twenty. They know that the woman who suckles her infant and spends sleepless nights at its bedside, cannot do as much *work* as the man who has slept peacefully. They seem to take in that men and women, worn out maybe by dint of overwork for society, may be incapable of doing as much *work* as those who have spent their time leisurely and pocketed their “labour-notes” in the privileged career of State functionaries.

They are eager to temper their principle. They say: “Society will not fail to maintain and bring up its children; to help both aged and infirm. Without doubt *needs* will be the measure of the cost that society will burden itself with, to temper the principle of deeds.”

Charity, charity, always Christian charity, organized by the State this time. They believe in improving asylums for foundlings, in effecting old-age and sick insurances — so as to *temper* their principle. But they cannot yet throw aside the idea of “wounding first and healing afterwards!”

Thus, after having denied Communism, after having laughed at their ease at the formula — “To each according to his needs” these great economists discover that they have forgotten something, the needs of the producers, which they now admit. Only it is for the State to estimate them, for the State to verify if the needs are not disproportionate to the work.

The State will dole out charity. Thence to the English poor-law and the workhouse is but a step. There is but a degree, because even this stepmother of a society against whom we are in revolt has also been compelled to *temper* her individualist principles; she, too, has had to make concessions in a communist direction and under the same form of charity.

She, too, distributes halfpenny dinners to prevent the pillaging of her shops; builds hospital — often very bad ones, though sometimes splendid ones — to prevent the ravages of contagious diseases. She, too, after having paid the hours of labour, shelters the children of those she has wrecked. She takes their needs into consideration and doles out charity.

Poverty, we have said elsewhere, was the primary cause of wealth. It was poverty that created the first capitalist; because, before accumulating “surplus value,” of which we hear so much, men had to be sufficiently destitute to consent to sell their labour, so as not to die of hunger. It was poverty that made capitalists. And if the number of poor rapidly increased during the Middle Ages, it was due to the invasions and wars that followed the founding of States, and to the increase of riches resulting from the exploitation of the East, that tore the bonds asunder which once united agrarian and urban communities, and taught them to proclaim the principle of wages, so dear to exploiters, instead of the solidarity they formerly practised.

And it is this principle that is to spring from a revolution which men dare to call by the name of Social Revolution, a name so clear to the starved, the oppressed, and the sufferers?

It can never be. For the day on which old institutions will fall under the proletarian axe, voices will cry out: “Bread, shelter, ease for all!” And those voices will be listened to; the people will say: “Let us begin by allaying our thirst for life, for happiness, for liberty, that we have never quenched. And when we shall have tasted of this joy we will set to work to demolish the last vestiges of middle-class rule, its morality drawn from account-books, its ‘debit and credit’ philosophy, its ‘mine and yours’ institutions. ‘In demolishing we shall build,’ as Proudhon said; and we shall build in the name of Communism and Anarchy.”

## Chapter 14: Consumption And Production

### I

Looking at society and its political organization from a different standpoint than that of authoritarian schools — for we start from a free individual to reach a free society, instead of beginning by the State to come down to the individual — we follow the same method in economic questions. We study the needs of individuals, and the means by which they satisfy them, before discussing Production, Exchange, Taxation, Government, etc.

To begin with, the difference may appear trifling, but in reality it upsets official Political Economy.

If you open the works of any economist you will find that he begins with PRODUCTION, the analysis of means employed nowadays for the creation of wealth; division of labour, manufacture, machinery, accumulation of capital. From Adam Smith to Marx, all have proceeded along these lines. Only in the latter parts of their books do they treat of CONSUMPTION, that is to say, of the means necessary to satisfy the needs of individuals; and, moreover, they confine themselves to explaining how riches are divided among those who vie with one another for their possession.

Perhaps you will say this is logical. Before satisfying needs you must create the wherewithal to satisfy them. But before producing anything, must you not feel the need of it? Is it not necessity that first drove man to hunt, to raise cattle, to cultivate land, to make implements, and later on to invent machinery? Is it not the study of needs that should govern production? It would therefore be quite as logical to begin by considering needs and afterwards to discuss the means of production in order to satisfy these needs.

This is precisely what we mean to do.

But as soon as we look at it from this point of view, Political Economy entirely changes its aspect. It ceases to be a simple description of facts, and becomes a *science*. We can define it as: *The study of the needs of humanity, and the means of satisfying them with the least possible waste of human energy*. Its true name should be, *Physiology of Society*. It constitutes a parallel science to the physiology of plants and animals, which also is the study of the needs of plants and animals, and the most advantageous ways of satisfying them. In the series of social sciences, the economy of human societies takes the place, occupied in the series of biological sciences by the physiology of organic bodies.

We say, here are human beings, united in a society. All feel the need of living in healthy houses. The savage's hut no longer satisfies them; they require a more or less comfortable solid shelter. The question is, then: whether, man's capacity for production being given, every man can have a house of his own? and what is hindering him from having it?

And we are soon convinced that every family in Europe could perfectly well have a comfortable house, such as are built in England, in Belgium, or in Pullman City, or else an equivalent set of

rooms. A certain number of days' work would suffice to build a pretty little airy house, well fitted up and lighted by gas.

But nine-tenths of Europeans have never possessed a healthy house, because at all times common people have had to work day after day to satisfy the needs of their rulers, and have never had the necessary leisure or money to build, or to have built, the home of their dreams. And they can have no houses, and will inhabit hovels as long as present conditions remain unchanged.

As you see, we proceed contrary to economists, who immortalize the so-called *laws* of production, and reckoning up the number of houses built every year, demonstrate by statistics, that the new built houses not sufficing to meet all demands, nine-tenths of Europeans *must* live in hovels.

Let us pass on to food. After having enumerated the benefits accruing from the division of labour economists tell us the division of labour requires that some men should work at agriculture and others at manufacture. Farmers producing so much, factories so much, exchange being carried on in such a way, they analyze the sale, the profit the net gain or the surplus value, the wages, the taxes, banking, and so on.

But after having followed them so far, we are none the wiser, and if we ask them: "How is it that millions of human beings are in want of bread, when every family could grow sufficient wheat to feed ten, twenty, and even a hundred people annually?" they answer us by droning the same anthem — division of labour, wages, surplus value, capital, etc. — arriving at the same conclusion, that production is insufficient to satisfy all needs; a conclusion which, if true, does not answer the question: "Can or cannot man by his labour produce the bread he needs? And if he cannot, what is hindering him?"

Here are 350 million Europeans. They need so much bread, so much meat, wine, milk, eggs, and butter every year. They need so many houses, so much clothing. This is the minimum of their needs. Can they produce all this? and if they can, will there then be left sufficient leisure for art, science, and amusement? — in a word, for everything that is not comprised in the category of absolute necessities? If the answer is in the affirmative, — What hinders them going ahead? What must they do to remove obstacles? Is time needed? Let them take it! But let us not lose sight of the aim of production — the satisfaction of needs.

If the most imperious needs of man remain unsatisfied, what must he do to increase the productivity of his work? And is there no other cause? Might it not be that production, having lost sight of the *needs* of man, has strayed in an absolutely wrong direction, and that its organization is at fault? And as we can prove that such is the case, let us see how to reorganize production so as to really satisfy all needs.

This seems to us the only right way of facing things. The only way that would allow of Political Economy becoming a science — the Science of Social Physiology.

It is evident that when this science will treat of production, as it is at present carried on by civilized nations, by Hindoo communes, or by savages, it will hardly state facts otherwise than

the economists state them now; that is to say as a simple *descriptive* chapter, analogous to descriptive chapters of Zoology and Botany. But if this chapter were written to throw light on the economy of energy, necessary to satisfy human needs, the chapter would gain in precision, as well as in descriptive value. It would clearly prove the frightful waste of human energy under the present system, and would admit, as we do, that as long as this system exists, the needs of humanity will never be satisfied.

The point of view, we see, would be entirely changed. Behind the loom that weaves so many yards of cloth, behind the steel-plate perforator, and behind the safe in which dividends are hoarded, we should see man, the artisan of production, more often than not excluded from the feast he has prepared for others. We should also understand that the standpoint being wrong, so-called laws of value and exchange are but a very false explanation of events, as they happen nowadays; and that things will come to pass very differently when production is organized in such a manner as to meet all needs of society.

## II

There is not one single principle of Political Economy that does not change its aspect if you look at it from our point of view.

Take, for instance, over-production, a word which every day re-echoes in our ears. Is there a single economist, academician, or candidate for academical honours, who has not supported arguments, proving that economic crises are due to overproduction — that at a given moment more cotton, more cloth, more watches are produced than are needed! Have not men accused of “rapacity” the capitalists who are obstinately bent on producing more than can possibly be consumed! But on careful examination all these reasonings prove unsound. In fact, Is there a commodity among those in universal use which is produced in greater quantity than need be? Examine one by one all commodities sent out by countries exporting on a large scale, and you will see that nearly all are produced in *insufficient* quantities for the inhabitants of the countries exporting them.

It is not a surplus of wheat that the Russian peasant sends to Europe. The most plentiful harvests of wheat and rye in European Russia only yield *enough* for the population. And as a rule the peasant deprives himself of what he actually needs when he sells his wheat or rye to pay rent and taxes.

It is not a surplus of coal that England sends to the four corners of the globe, because only three-quarters of a ton, per head of population, annually, remain for home domestic consumption, and millions of Englishmen are deprived of fire in the winter, or have only just enough to boil a few vegetables. In fact, setting aside useless luxuries, there is in England, which exports more than any other country, but a single commodity in universal use — cottons — whose production is sufficiently great to *perhaps* exceed the needs of the community. Yet when we look upon the rags that pass for wearing apparel worn by over a third of the inhabitants of the

United Kingdom, we are led to ask ourselves whether the cottons exported would not, within a trifle, suit the *real* needs of the population?

As a rule it is not a surplus that is exported, though it may have been so originally. The fable of the barefooted shoemaker is as true of nations as it was formerly of artisans. We export the necessary commodities. And we do so, because the workmen cannot buy with their wages what they have produced, and pay besides the rent and interest to the capitalist and the banker.

Not only does the ever-growing need of comfort remain unsatisfied, but strict necessities are often wanting. "Surplus production" does, therefore, not exist, at least not in the sense which is given to it by the theorists of Political Economy.

Taking another point — all economists tell us that there is a well-proved law: "Man produces more than he consumes." After he has lived on the proceeds of his toil, there remains a surplus. Thus, a family of cultivators produces enough to feed several families, and so forth.

For us, this oft-repeated sentence has no sense. If it meant that each generation leaves something to future generations, it would be true; thus, for example, a farmer plants a tree that will live, maybe, for thirty, forty, or a hundred years, and whose fruits will still be gathered by the farmer's grandchildren. Or he clears a few acres of virgin soil, and we say that the heritage of future generations has been increased by that much. Roads, bridges, canals, his house and his furniture are so much wealth bequeathed to succeeding generations.

But this is not what is meant. We are told that the cultivator produces more than he *need* consume. Rather should they say that, the State having always taken from him a large share of his produce for taxes, the priest for tithes, and the landlord for rent, a whole class of men has been created, who formerly consumed what they produced — save what was set aside for unforeseen accidents, or expenses incurred in afforestation, roads, etc. — but who to-day are compelled to live very poorly, from hand to mouth, the remainder having been taken from them by the State, the landlord, the priest, and the usurer.

Let us also observe that if the needs of the individual are our starting-point, we cannot fail to reach Communism, an organization which enables us to satisfy all needs in the most thorough and economical way. While if we start from our present method of production, and aim at gain and surplus value, without taking into account if production corresponds to the satisfaction of needs, we necessarily arrive at Capitalism, or at most at Collectivism — both being but divers forms of our wages' system.

In fact, when we consider the needs of the individual and of society, and the means which man has resorted to in order to satisfy them during his varied phases of development, we are convinced of the necessity of systematizing our efforts, instead of producing haphazard as we do nowadays. It grows evident that the appropriation by a few of all riches not consumed, and transmitted from one generation to another, is not in the general interest. We can state as a fact that owing to these methods the needs of three-quarters of society are *not* satisfied, and that the present waste of human strength is the more useless and the more criminal.

We discover, moreover, that the most advantageous use of all commodities would be, for each of them, to go, first, for satisfying those needs which are the most pressing: that, in other words, the so-called “value in use” of a commodity does not depend on a simple whim, as has often been affirmed, but on the satisfaction it brings to *real* needs.

Communism — that is to say, an organization which would correspond to a view of Consumption, Production, and Exchange, taken as a whole — therefore becomes the logical consequence of the comprehension of things, the only one, in our opinion, that is really scientific. A society that will satisfy the needs of all, and which will know how to organize production, will also have to make a clean sweep of several prejudices concerning industry, and first of all of the theory often preached by economists — *The Division of Labour* theory — which we are going to discuss in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 15: The Division of Labour**

### **I**

Political Economy has always confined itself to stating facts occurring in society, and justifying them in the interest of the dominant class. Thus it is in favour of the division of labour created by industry. Having found it profitable to capitalists it has set it up as a principle.

Look at the village smith, said Adam Smith, the father of modern Political Economy. If he has never been accustomed to making nails he will only succeed by hard toil in forging two to three hundred a day, and even then they will be bad. But if this same smith has never done anything but nails, he will easily supply as many as two thousand three hundred in the course of a day. And Smith hastened to the conclusion — “Divide labour, specialize, go on specializing; let us have smiths who only know how to make heads or points of nails, and by this means we shall produce more. We shall grow rich.”

That a smith sentenced for life to the making of heads of nails would lose all interest in his work, would be entirely at the mercy of his employer with his limited handicraft, would be out of work four months out of twelve, and that his wages would decrease when he could be easily replaced by an apprentice, Smith did not think of it when he exclaimed — “Long live the division of labour. This is the real gold-mine that will enrich the nation!” And all joined in the cry.

And later on, when a Sismondi or a J. B. Say began to understand that the division of labour, instead of enriching the whole nation, only enriches the rich, and that the worker, who for life is doomed to making the eighteenth part of a pin, grows stupid and sinks into poverty — what did official economists propose? Nothing! They did not say to themselves that by a lifelong grind at one and the same mechanical toil the worker would lose his intelligence and his spirit of invention, and that, on the contrary, a variety of occupations would result in considerably augmenting the productivity of a nation. But this is the very issue now before us.

If, however, only economists preached the permanent and often hereditary division of labour, we might allow them to preach it as much as they pleased. But ideas taught by doctors of science

filter into men's minds and pervert them; and from repeatedly hearing the division of labour, profits, interest, credit, etc., spoken of as problems long since solved, men, and workers too, end by arguing like economists, and by venerating the same fetishes.

Thus we see a number of socialists, even those who have not feared to point out the mistakes of science, justifying the division of labour. Talk to them about the organization of work during the Revolution, and they answer that the division of labour must be maintained; that if you sharpened pins before the Revolution you must go on sharpening them after. True, you will not have to work more than five hours a day, but you will have to sharpen pins all your life, while others will make designs for machines that will enable you to sharpen hundreds of millions of pins during your lifetime; and others again will be specialists in the higher branches of literature, science, and art, etc. You were born to sharpen pins while Pasteur was born to invent the inoculation against anthrax, and the Revolution will leave you both to your respective employments. Well, it is this horrible principle, so noxious to society, so brutalizing to the individual, source of so much harm, that we propose to discuss in its divers manifestations. We know the consequences of the division of labour full well. It is evident that we are divided into two classes: on the one hand, producers who consume very little and are exempt from thinking because they only do physical work, and who work badly because their brains remain inactive; and on the other hand, the consumers, who, producing little or hardly anything, have the privilege of thinking for the others, and who think badly because the whole world of those who toil with their hands is unknown to them. The labourers of the soil know nothing of machinery those who work at machinery ignore everything about agriculture. The ideal of modern industry is a child *tending* a machine that he cannot and must not understand, and a foreman who fines him if his attention flags for a moment. The ideal of industrial agriculture is to do away with the agricultural labourer altogether and to set a man who does odd jobs to tend a steam-plough or a threshing-machine. The division of labour means labelling and stamping men for life — some to splice ropes in factories, some to be foremen in a business, others to shove huge coal-baskets in a particular part of a mine; but none of them to have any idea of machinery as a whole, nor of business, nor of mines. And thereby they destroy the love of work and the capacity for invention that, at the beginning of modern industry, created the machinery on which we pride ourselves so much.

What they have done for individuals, they also wanted to do for nations. Humanity was to be divided into national workshops, having each its speciality. Russia, we were taught, was destined by nature to grow corn; England to spin cotton; Belgium to weave cloth; while Switzerland was to train nurses and governesses. Moreover, each separate city was to establish a speciality. Lyons was to weave silk, Auvergne to make lace, and Paris fancy articles. Economists believed that specialization opened an immense field for production and consumption, and that an era of limitless wealth for mankind was at hand.

But these great hopes vanished as fast as technical knowledge spread abroad. As long as England stood alone as a weaver of cotton, and as a metal-worker on a large scale; as long as only Paris

made artistic fancy articles, etc., all went well, economists could preach so-called division of labour without being refuted.

But a new current of thought induced all civilized nations to manufacture for themselves. They found it advantageous to produce what they formerly received from other countries, or from their colonies, which in their turn aimed at emancipating themselves from the mother-country.

Scientific discoveries universalized the methods of production and henceforth it was useless to pay an exorbitant price abroad for what could easily be produced at home. Does not then this industrial revolution strike a crushing blow at the theory of the division of labour which was supposed to be so sound?

## **Chapter 16: The Decentralization of Industry**

### **I**

After the Napoleonic wars Britain all but succeeded in ruining the main industries which had sprung up in France at the end of the preceding century. She became also mistress of the seas and had no rivals of importance. She took in the situation, and knew how to turn its privileges and advantages to account. She established an industrial monopoly, and, imposing upon her neighbours her prices for the goods she alone could manufacture, accumulated riches upon riches.

But as the middle-class Revolution of the eighteenth century abolished serfdom and created a proletariat in France, industry, hampered for a time in its flight, soared again, and from the second half of the nineteenth century France ceased to be a tributary of England for manufactured goods. To-day she too has grown into a nation with an export trade. She sells far more than sixty million pounds' worth of manufactured goods, and two-thirds of these goods are fabrics. The number of Frenchmen working for export or living by their foreign trade, is estimated at three millions.

France is therefore no longer England's tributary. In her turn she has striven to monopolize certain branches of foreign industry, such as silks and ready-made clothes, and has reaped immense profits therefrom; but she is on the point of losing this monopoly for ever, as England is on the point of losing the monopoly of cotton goods.

Travelling eastwards, industry has reached Germany. Fifty years ago Germany was a tributary of England and France for most manufactured commodities in the higher branches of industry. It is no longer so. In the course of the last forty-five years, and especially since the Franco-German war, Germany has completely reorganized her industry. The new factories are stocked with the best machinery; the latest creations of industrial art in cotton goods from Manchester, or in silks from Lyons, etc., are now realized in recent German factories. It took two or three generations of workers, at Lyons and Manchester, to construct the modern machinery; but Germany adopted it in its perfected state. Technical schools, adapted to the needs of industry, supply the factories with an army of intelligent workmen — practical engineers, who can work with hand and brain.

German industry starts at the point which was only reached by Manchester and Lyons after fifty years of groping in the dark, of exertion and experiments.

It follows that as Germany manufactures as well at home, she diminishes her imports from France and England year by year. She has not only become their rival in manufactured goods in Asia and in Africa, but also in London and in Paris. Shortsighted people may cry out against the Frankfort Treaty, they may explain German competition by little differences in railway tariffs; they may linger on the petty side of questions and neglect great historical facts. But it is none the less certain that the main industries, formerly in the hands of England and France, have progressed eastward, and in Germany they found a country, young, full of energy, possessing an intelligent middle class, and eager in its turn to enrich itself by foreign trade.

While Germany freed itself from subjection to France and England, manufactured her own cotton cloth, constructed her own machines — in fact, manufactured all commodities — the main industries took also root in Russia, where the development of manufacture is the more surprising as it sprang up but yesterday.

At the time of the abolition of serfdom in 1861, Russia hardly had any factories. Everything they needed — machines, rails, railway-engines, rich materials — came from the West. Twenty years later she possessed already 85,000 factories, and the goods from these factories had increased fourfold in value.

The old machinery was superseded, and now nearly all the steel in use in Russia, three-quarters of the iron, two-thirds of the coal, all railway engines, railway-carriages, rails, nearly all steamers, are made in Russia.

Russia, destined — so wrote economists — to remain an agricultural territory, has rapidly developed into a manufacturing country. She orders hardly anything from England, and very little from Germany.

Economists hold the customs responsible for these facts, and yet cottons manufactured in Russia are sold at the same price as in London. Capital taking no cognizance of fatherland, German and English capitalists, accompanied by engineers and foremen of their own nationalities, have introduced in Russia and in Poland manufactories, the excellence of whose goods compete with the best from England. If customs were abolished to-morrow, manufacture would only gain by it. Not long ago the British manufacturers delivered another hard blow to the imports of cloth and woollens from the West. They set up in southern and middle Russia immense wool factories, stocked with the most perfect machinery from Bradford, and already now Russia hardly imports more than a few pieces of English cloth and French woollen fabrics as samples.

The main industries not only move eastward, they are spreading to the southern peninsulas. The Turin Exhibition of 1884 has already shown the progress made in Italian manufactured produce, and, let us not make any mistake about it, the mutual hatred of the French and Italian middle classes has no other origin than their industrial rivalry. Spain is also becoming an industrial country; while in the East, Bohemia has suddenly sprung up to importance as a new centre of manufactures, provided with perfected machinery and applying the best scientific methods.

We might also mention Hungary's rapid progress in the main industries, but let us rather take Brazil as an example. Economists sentenced Brazil to cultivate cotton for ever, to export it in its raw state, and to receive cotton-cloth from Europe in exchange. In fact, forty years ago Brazil had only nine wretched little cotton factories with 385 spindles. To-day there are 108 cotton-mills, possessing 715,000 spindles and 26,050 looms, which throw 234 million yards of textiles on the market annually.

Even Mexico is setting about manufacturing cotton-cloth, instead of importing it from Europe. As to the United States they have quite freed themselves from European tutelage, and have triumphally developed their manufacturing powers.

But it was India which gave the most striking proof against the specialization of national industry.

We all know the theory: the great European nations need colonies, for colonies send raw material — cotton fibre, unwashed wool, spices, etc., to the mother-land. And the mother-land, under pretence of sending them manufactured wares, gets rid of her burnt stuffs, her machine scrap-iron and every thing which she no longer has use for. It costs her little or nothing, and none the less the articles are sold at exorbitant prices.

Such was the theory — such was the practice for a long time. In London and Manchester fortunes were made while India was being ruined. In the India Museum in London unheard-of riches, collected in Calcutta and Bombay by English merchants, are to be seen.

But other English merchants and capitalists conceived the very simple idea that it would be more expedient to exploit the natives of India by making cotton-cloth in India itself, than to import from twenty to twenty-four million pounds' worth of goods annually.

At first a series of experiments ended in failure. Indian weavers — artists and experts in their own craft — could not inure themselves to factory life; the machinery sent from Liverpool was bad; the climate had to be taken into account; and merchants had to adapt themselves to new conditions, now fully observed, before British India could become the menacing rival of the Mother-land she is to-day.

She now possesses 200 cotton factories which employ about 196,400 workmen, and contain 5,231,000 spindles and 48,400 looms, and 38 jute mills, with 409,000 spindles. She exports annually to China, to the Dutch Indies, and to Africa, nearly eight million pounds' worth of the same white cotton-cloth, said to be England's speciality. And while English workmen are unemployed and in great want, Indian women weave cotton by machinery for the Far East at the rate of sixpence a day. In short, intelligent manufacturers are fully aware that the day is not far off when they will not know what to do with the "factory hands" who formerly weaved cotton-cloth exported from England. Besides which it is becoming more and more evident that India will not import a single ton of iron from England. The initial difficulties in using the coal and the iron ore obtained in India have been overcome; and foundries, rivalling those in England, have been built on the shores of the Indian Ocean.

Colonies competing with the mother-land in its production of manufactured goods, such is the factor which will regulate economy in the twentieth century.

And why should India not manufacture ? What should be the hindrance ? Capital? — But capital goes wherever there are men, poor enough to be exploited. Knowledge? — But knowledge recognizes no national barriers. Technical skill of the worker? — No. Are, then, Hindoo workmen inferior to the 237,000 boys and girls, not eighteen years old, at present working in the English textile factories?

## II

After having glanced at national industries it would be very interesting to turn to special industries.

Let us take silk, for example, an eminently French product in the first half of the nineteenth century. We all know how Lyons became the emporium of the silk trade. At first raw silk was gathered in southern France, till little by little they ordered it from Italy, from Spain, from Austria, from the Caucasus, and from Japan, for the manufacture of their silk fabrics. In 1875, out of five million kilos of raw silk converted into stuffs in the vicinity of Lyons, there were only four hundred thousand kilos of French silk. But if Lyons manufactured imported silk, why should not Switzerland, Germany, Russia, do as much? Silk weaving developed indeed in the villages round Zurich. Bâle became a great centre of the silk trade. The Caucasian Administration engaged women from Marseilles and workmen from Lyons to teach Georgians the perfected rearing of silkworms, and the art of converting silk into fabrics to the Caucasian peasants. Austria followed. Then Germany, with the help of Lyons workmen, built great silk factories. The United States did likewise in Paterson.

And to-day the silk trade is no longer a French monopoly. Silks are made in Germany, in Austria, in the United States, and in England. In winter, Caucasian peasants weave silk handkerchiefs at a wage that would mean starvation to the silkweavers of Lyons. Italy sends silks to France; and Lyons, which in 1870–4 exported 460 million francs' worth of silk fabrics, exports now only one-half of that amount. In fact, the time is not far off when Lyons will only send higher class goods and a few novelties as patterns to Germany, Russia, and Japan.

And so it is in all industries. Belgium has no longer the cloth monopoly; cloth is made in Germany, in Russia, in Austria, in the United States. Switzerland and the French Jura have no longer a clockwork monopoly: watches are made every where. Scotland no longer refines sugar for Russia: Russian sugar is imported into England. Italy, although neither possessing coal nor iron, makes its own ironclads and engines for her steamers. Chemical industry is no longer an English monopoly; sulphuric acid and soda are made even in the Urals. Steam-engines, made at Winterthur, have acquired everywhere a wide reputation, and at the present moment, Switzerland, that has neither coal nor iron — nothing but excellent technical schools — makes machinery better and cheaper than England. So ends the theory of Exchange.

The tendency of trade, as for all else, is toward decentralization.

Every nation finds it advantageous to combine agriculture with the greatest possible variety of foundries and manufactories. The specialization, of which economists spoke so highly, enriched a number of capitalists but is now of no use. On the contrary, it is to the advantage of every region, every nation, to grow their own wheat, their own vegetables, and to manufacture all produce they consume at home. This diversity is the surest pledge of the complete development of production by mutual co-operation, and the moving cause of progress, while specialization is a hindrance to progress.

Agriculture can only prosper in proximity to factories. And no sooner does a single factory appear than an infinite variety of other factories *must* spring up around, so that, mutually supporting and stimulating one another by their inventions, they increase their productivity.

### III

It is foolish indeed to export wheat and import flour, to export wool and import cloth, to export iron and import machinery; not only because transportation is a waste of time and money, but, above all, because a country with no developed industry inevitably remains behind the times in agriculture; because a country with no large factories to bring steel to a finished condition is also backward in all other industries; and lastly, because the industrial and technical capacities of the nation remain undeveloped.

In the world of production everything holds together nowadays. Cultivation of the soil is no longer possible without machinery, without great irrigation works, without railways, without manure factories. And to adapt this machinery, these railways, these irrigation engines, etc., to local conditions, a certain spirit of invention, a certain amount of technical skill, that lie dormant as long as spades and ploughshares are the only implements of cultivation, must be developed. If fields are to be properly cultivated, and are to yield the abundant harvests man has the right to expect, it is essential that workshops, foundries, and factories develop within the reach of the fields. A variety of occupations, a variety of skill arising therefrom and working together for a common aim — these are the genuine forces of progress.

And now let us imagine the inhabitants of a city or a territory — whether vast or small — stepping for the first time on to the path of the Social Revolution.

We are sometimes told that “nothing will have changed”: that the mines, the factories, etc., will be expropriated, and proclaimed national or communal property, that every man will go back to his usual work, and that the Revolution will then be accomplished.

But this is a dream: the Social Revolution cannot take place so simply.

We have already mentioned that should the Revolution break out to-morrow in Paris, Lyons, or any other city — should the workers lay hands on factories, houses, and banks, present production would be completely revolutionized by this simple fact.

International commerce will come to a standstill; so also will the importation of foreign bread-stuffs; the circulation of commodities and of provisions will be paralyzed. And then, the

city or territory in revolt will be compelled to provide for itself, and to reorganize production. If it fails to do so, it is death. If it succeeds, it will revolutionize the economic life of the country. The quantity of imported provisions having decreased, consumption having increased, one million Parisians working for exportation purposes having been thrown out of work, a great number of things imported to-day from distant or neighbouring countries not reaching their destination, fancy-trade being temporarily at a standstill, What will the inhabitants have to eat six months after the Revolution?

We think that when the stores are empty, the masses will seek to obtain their food from the land. They will be compelled to cultivate the soil, to combine agricultural production with industrial production in Paris and its environs. They will have to abandon the merely ornamental trades and consider the most urgent need — bread.

Citizens will be obliged to become agriculturists. Not in the same manner as peasants who wear themselves out, ploughing for a wage that barely provides them with sufficient food for the year' but by following the principles of market-gardeners' intensive agriculture, applied on a large scale by means of the best machinery that man has invented or can invent. They will till the land — not, how ever, like the country beast of burden a Paris jeweller would object to that. They will reorganize cultivation, not in ten years' time, but at once, during the revolutionary struggles, from fear of being worsted by the enemy.

Agriculture will have to be carried on by intelligent beings; availing themselves of their knowledge, organizing themselves in joyous gangs for pleasant work, like the men who, a hundred years ago, worked in the Champ de Mars for the Feast of the Federation — a work of delight, when not carried to excess, when scientifically organized, when man invents and improves his tools and is conscious of being a useful member of the community.

Of course, they will not only cultivate, they will also produce those things which they formerly used to order from foreign parts. And let us not forget that for the inhabitants of a revolted territory, "foreign parts" may include all districts that have not joined in the revolutionary movement. During the Revolutions of 1793 and 1871 Paris was made to feel that "foreign parts" meant even the country district at her very gates. The speculator in grains at Troyes starved the sansculottes of Paris more effectually than the German armies brought on French soil by the Versailles conspirators. The revolted city will be compelled to do without "foreigners," and why not? France invented beetroot sugar when sugar-cane ran short during the continental blockade. Parisians discovered salt petre in their cellars when they no longer received any from abroad. Shall we be inferior to our grandfathers, who with difficulty lisped the first words of science? A revolution is more than the destruction of a political system. It implies the awakening of human intelligence, the increasing of the inventive spirit tenfold, a hundredfold; it is the dawn of a new, science — the science of men like Laplace, Lamarck, Lavoisier. It is a revolution in the minds of men, more than in their institutions.

And economists tell us to return to our workshops, as if passing through a revolution were going home after a walk in the Epping forest!

To begin with, the sole fact of having laid hands on middle-class property implies the necessity of completely reorganizing the whole of economic life in workshops, in dockyards, and in factories.

And the revolution will not fail to act in this direction. Should Paris, during the social revolution, be cut off from the world for a year or two by the supporters of middle-class rule, its millions of intellects, not yet depressed by factory life — that City of little trades which stimulate the spirit of invention — will show the world what man's brain can accomplish without asking any help from without, but the motor force of the sun that gives light, the power of the wind that sweeps away impurities, and the silent life-forces at work in the earth we tread on.

We shall see then what a variety of trades, mutually co-operating on a spot of the globe and animated by the social revolution, can do to feed, clothe, house, and supply with all manner of luxuries millions of intelligent men.

We need write no fiction to prove this. What we are sure of, what has already been experimented upon, and recognized as practical, would suffice to carry it into effect, if the attempt were fertilized, vivified by the daring inspiration of the Revolution and the spontaneous impulse of the masses.



# Anarchy Works

Peter Gelderloos

2010

## Introduction

### Anarchy Would Never Work

Anarchism is the boldest of revolutionary social movements to emerge from the struggle against capitalism — it aims for a world free from all forms of domination and exploitation. But at its heart is a simple and convincing proposition: people know how to live their own lives and organize themselves better than any expert could. Others cynically claim that people do not know what is in their best interests, that they need a government to protect them, that the ascension of some political party could somehow secure the interests of all members of society. Anarchists counter that decision-making should not be centralized in the hands of any government, but instead power should be decentralized: that is to say, each person should be the center of society, and all should be free to build the networks and associations they need to meet their needs in common with others.

The education we receive in state-run schools teaches us to doubt our ability to organize ourselves. This leads many to conclude anarchy is impractical and utopian: *it would never work*. On the contrary, anarchist practice already has a long record, and has often worked quite well. The official history books tell a selective story, glossing over the fact that all the components of an anarchist society have existed at various times, and innumerable stateless societies have thrived for millennia.

How would an anarchist society compare to statist and capitalist societies? It is apparent that hierarchical societies work well according to certain criteria. They tend to be extremely effective at conquering their neighbors and securing vast fortunes for their rulers. On the other hand, as climate change, food and water shortages, market instability, and other global crises intensify, hierarchical models are not proving to be particularly sustainable. The histories in this book show that an anarchist society can do much better at enabling *all* its members to meet their needs and desires.

The many stories, past and present, that demonstrate how anarchy works have been suppressed and distorted because of the revolutionary conclusions we might draw from them. We can live in a society with no bosses, masters, politicians, or bureaucrats; a society with no judges, no police, and no criminals, no rich or poor; a society free of sexism, homophobia, and transphobia; a society in which the wounds from centuries of enslavement, colonialism, and genocide are finally allowed to heal. The only things stopping us are the prisons, programming, and paychecks of the powerful, as well as our own lack of faith in ourselves.

Of course, anarchists do not *have* to be practical to a fault. If we ever win the freedom to run our own lives, we'll probably come up with entirely new approaches to organization that improve on these tried and true forms. So let these stories be a starting point, and a challenge.

## **What exactly is anarchism?**

Volumes have been written in answer to this question, and millions of people have dedicated their lives to creating, expanding, defining, and fighting for anarchy. There are countless paths to anarchism and countless beginnings: workers in 19th century Europe fighting against capitalism and believing in themselves instead of the ideologies of authoritarian political parties; indigenous peoples fighting colonization and reclaiming their traditional, horizontal cultures; high school students waking up to the depth of their alienation and unhappiness; mystics from China one thousand years ago or from Europe five hundred years ago, Daoists or Anabaptists, fighting against government and organized religion; women rebelling against the authoritarianism and sexism of the Left. There is no Central Committee giving out membership cards, and no standard doctrine. Anarchy means different things to different people. However, here are some basic principles most anarchists agree on.

**Autonomy and Horizontality:** All people deserve the freedom to define and organize themselves on their own terms. Decision-making structures should be horizontal rather than vertical, so no one dominates anyone else; they should foster *power to* act freely rather than *power over* others. Anarchism opposes all coercive hierarchies, including capitalism, the state, white supremacy, and patriarchy.

**Mutual Aid:** People should help one another voluntarily; bonds of solidarity and generosity form a stronger social glue than the fear inspired by laws, borders, prisons, and armies. Mutual aid is neither a form of charity nor of zero-sum exchange; both giver and receiver are equal and interchangeable. Since neither holds power over the other, they increase their collective power by creating opportunities to work together.

**Voluntary Association:** People should be free to cooperate with whomever they want, however they see fit; likewise, they should be free to refuse any relationship or arrangement they do not judge to be in their interest. Everyone should be able to move freely, both physically and socially. Anarchists oppose borders of all kinds and involuntary categorization by citizenship, gender, or race.

**Direct Action:** It is more empowering and effective to accomplish goals directly than to rely on authorities or representatives. Free people do not request the changes they want to see in the world; they make those changes.

**Revolution:** Today's entrenched systems of repression cannot be reformed away. Those who hold power in a hierarchical system are the ones who institute reforms, and they generally do so in ways that preserve or even amplify their power. Systems like capitalism and white supremacy are forms of warfare waged by elites; anarchist revolution means fighting to overthrow these elites in order to create a free society.

**Self-Liberation:** “The liberation of the workers is the duty of the workers themselves,” as the old slogan goes. This applies to other groups as well: people must be at the forefront of their own liberation. Freedom cannot be given; it must be taken.

## **A note on inspiration**

Pluralism and freedom are not compatible with orthodox ideologies. The historical examples of anarchy do not have to be explicitly anarchist. Most of the societies and organizations that have successfully lived free of government have not called themselves “anarchist”; that term originated in Europe in the 19th century, and anarchism as a self-conscious social movement is not nearly as universal as the desire for freedom.

It is presumptuous to assign the label “anarchist” to people who have not chosen it; instead, we can use a range of other terms to describe examples of anarchy in practice. “Anarchy” is a social situation free of government and coercive hierarchies held together by self-organized horizontal relationships; “anarchists” are people who identify themselves with the social movement or philosophy of anarchism. Anti-authoritarians are people who expressly want to live in a society without coercive hierarchies, but do not, to the best of our knowledge, identify as anarchists — either because the term was not available to them or because they do not see the specifically anarchist movement as relevant to their world. After all, the anarchist movement as such emerged from Europe and it inherited a worldview in accordance with this background; meanwhile there are many other struggles against authority that spring from different worldviews and have no need to call themselves “anarchist.” A society that exists without a state, but does not identify itself as anarchist, is “stateless”; if that society is not stateless by chance, but consciously works to prevent the emergence of hierarchies and identifies with its egalitarian characteristics, one might describe it as “anarchistic.”

The examples in this book have been selected from a wide range of times and places — about ninety altogether. Thirty are explicitly anarchist; the rest are all stateless, autonomous, or consciously anti-authoritarian. More than half of the examples are from present-day Western society, a third are drawn from stateless societies that provide a view of the breadth of human possibility outside of Western civilization, and the remaining few are classical historical examples. Some of these, such as the Spanish Civil War, are cited multiple times because they are well documented and offer a wealth of information. The number of examples included makes it impossible to explore each one in the detail it deserves. Ideally the reader will be inspired to pursue these questions herself, distilling further practical lessons from the attempts of those who came before.

It will become apparent throughout this book that anarchy exists in conflict with the state and capitalism. Many of the examples given here were ultimately crushed by police or conquering armies, and it is in large part due to this systematic repression of alternatives that there have not been more examples of anarchy working. This bloody history implies that, to be thoroughgoing and successful, an anarchist revolution would have to be global. Capitalism is a global system, constantly expanding and colonizing every autonomous society it encounters. In the long run, no one community or country can remain anarchist while the rest of the world is capitalist. An anti-capitalist revolution must destroy capitalism totally, or else be destroyed. This does not

mean that anarchism must be a single global system. Many different forms of anarchist society could coexist, and these in turn could coexist with societies that were not anarchist, so long as the latter were not confrontationally authoritarian or oppressive. The following pages will show the great diversity of forms anarchy and autonomy can take.

The examples in this book show anarchy working for a period of time, or succeeding in a specific way. Until capitalism is abolished, all such examples will necessarily be partial. These examples are instructive in their weaknesses as well as their strengths. In addition to providing a picture of people creating communities and meeting their needs without bosses, they raise the question of what went wrong and how we could do better next time.

To this end, here are some recurring themes that may be beneficial to reflect on in the course of reading this book:

**Isolation:** Many anarchist projects work quite well, but only make an impact in the lives of a tiny number of people. What engenders this isolation? What tends to contribute to it, and what can offset it?

**Alliances:** In a number of examples, anarchists and other anti-authoritarians were betrayed by supposed allies who sabotaged the possibility of liberation in order to gain power for themselves. Why did anarchists choose these alliances, and what can we learn about what kind of alliances to make today?

**Repression:** Autonomous communities and revolutionary activities have been stopped cold by police repression or military invasion time after time. People are intimidated, arrested, tortured, and killed, and the survivors must go into hiding or drop out of the struggle; communities that had once provided support withdraw in order to protect themselves. What actions, strategies, and forms of organization best equip people to survive repression? How can those on the outside provide effective solidarity?

**Collaboration:** Some social movements or radical projects choose to participate in or accommodate themselves to aspects of the present system in order to overcome isolation, be accessible to a greater range of people, or avoid repression. What are the advantages and pitfalls of this approach? Are there ways to overcome isolation or avoid repression without it?

**Temporary gain:** Many of the examples in this book no longer exist. Of course, anarchists are not trying to create permanent institutions that take on lives of their own; specific organizations should come to an end when they are no longer helpful. Realizing that, how can we make the most of bubbles of autonomy while they last, and how can they continue to inform us after they have ceased to be? How can a series of temporary spaces and events be linked to create a continuity of struggle and community?

## **The tricky topic of representation**

In as many cases as was possible, we sought direct feedback from people with personal experience in the struggles and communities described in this book. With some examples this was impossible, due to unnavigable chasms of distance or time. In these cases we had to rely

exclusively on written representations, generally recorded by outside observers. But representation is not at all a neutral process, and outside observers project their own values and experiences onto what they are observing. Of course, representation is an inevitable activity in human discourse, and moreover outside observers can contribute new and useful perspectives.

However, our world is not that simple. As European civilization spread and dominated the rest of the planet, the observers it sent out were generally the surveyors, missionaries, writers, and scientists of the ruling order. On a world scale, this civilization is the only one with the right to interpret itself and all other cultures. Western systems of thought were forcibly spread around the world. Colonized societies were cut up and exploited as slave labor, economic resources, and ideological capital. Non-Western peoples were represented back to the West in ways that would confirm the Western worldview and sense of superiority, and justify the ongoing imperial project as necessary for the good of the peoples being forcibly civilized.

As anarchists trying to abolish the power structure responsible for colonialism and many other wrongs, we want to approach these other cultures in good faith, in order to learn from them, but if we're not careful we could easily fall into the accustomed eurocentric pattern of manipulating and exploiting these other cultures for our own ideological capital. In cases where we could find no one from the community in question to review and criticize our own interpretations, we have tried to situate the storyteller in the telling, to subvert his or her objectivity and invisibility, to deliberately challenge the validity of our own information, and to propose representations that are flexible and humble. We don't know exactly how to accomplish this balancing act, but our hope is to learn while trying.

Some indigenous people whom we consider comrades in the struggle against authority feel that white people have no right to represent indigenous cultures, and this position is especially justified given that for five hundred years, Euro/American representations of indigenous peoples have been self-serving, exploitative, and connected to ongoing processes of genocide and colonization. On the other hand, part of our goal in publishing this book has been to challenge the historical eurocentrism of the anarchist movement and encourage ourselves to be open to other cultures. We could not do this by only presenting stories of statelessness from our own culture. The author and most of the people working on this book in an editorial capacity are white, and it is no surprise that what we write reflects our backgrounds. In fact, the central question this book seeks to address, whether anarchy could work, seems itself to be eurocentric. Only a people who have obliterated the memory of their own stateless past could ask themselves whether they need the state. We recognize that not everyone shares this historical blindspot and that what we publish here may not be useful for people from other backgrounds. But we hope that by telling stories of the cultures and struggles of other societies, we can help correct the eurocentrism endemic to some of our communities and become better allies, and better listeners, whenever people from other cultures choose to tell us their own stories.

Someone who read over this text pointed out to us that reciprocity is a fundamental value of indigenous worldviews. The question he posed to us was, if anarchists who are mostly Euro/American are going to take lessons from indigenous or other communities, cultures, and nations, what will we offer in return? I hope that wherever possible, we offer solidarity — widening the struggle and supporting other peoples who struggle against authority without

calling themselves anarchists. After all, if we are inspired by certain other societies, shouldn't we do more to recognize and aid their ongoing struggles?

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999) offers an important perspective on some of these themes.

## Recommended Reading

Errico Malatesta, *At the Cafe: Conversations on Anarchism*. London: Freedom Press, 2005.

The Dark Star Collective, *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader*. Oakland: AK Press, 2002.

CrimethInc., *Days of War, Nights of Love*. CrimethInc. 2002.

Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*. New York: Monthly Review, 1996.

bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black women and feminism*. Boston: South End Press, 1981.

Mitchell Verter and Chaz Bufe, eds. *Dreams of Freedom: A Ricardo Flores Magon Reader*. Oakland: AK Press, 2005.

Derrick Jensen, *A Culture of Make Believe*. White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green, 2004.

Vine Deloria, Jr. *Custer Died for Your Sins: an Indian Manifesto*. New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Ward Churchill, *From a Native Son: Selected Essays on Indigenism 1985–1995*, Cambridge: South End Press, 1999; or his interview on Indigenism and Anarchism in the journal *Upping the Anti*.

# 1. Human Nature

Anarchism challenges the typical Western conception of human nature by envisioning societies built on cooperation, mutual aid, and solidarity between people, rather than competition and survival of the fittest.

## **Aren't people naturally selfish?**

Everybody has a sense of self-interest, and the capability to act in a selfish way at other people's expense. But everyone also has a sense of the needs of those around them, and we are all capable of generous and selfless actions. Human survival depends on generosity. The next time someone tells you a communal, anarchistic society could not work because people are naturally selfish, tell him he should withhold food from his children pending payment, do nothing to help his parents have a dignified retirement, never donate to charities, and never help his neighbors or be kind to strangers unless he receives compensation. Would he be able to lead a fulfilling existence, taking the capitalist philosophy to its logical conclusions? Of course not. Even after hundreds of years of being suppressed, sharing and generosity remain vital to human existence. You don't have to look to radical social movements to find examples of this. The United States may be, on a structural level, the most selfish nation in the world — it is the richest of “developed” countries, but has among the lowest life expectancies because the political culture would sooner let poor people die than give them healthcare and welfare. But even in the US it's easy to find institutional examples of sharing that form an important part of the society. Libraries offer an interconnected network of millions of free books. PTA potlucks and neighborhood barbecues bring people together to share food and enjoy each other's company. What examples of sharing might develop outside the restrictive bounds of state and capital?

Currency-based economies have only existed a few thousand years, and capitalism has only been around a few hundred years. The latter has proven to work quite miserably, leading to the greatest inequalities of wealth, the largest mass starvations, and the worst distribution systems in world history — though hats off, it's produced a lot of wonderful gadgets. It might surprise people to learn how common other types of economies have been in earlier times, and how much they differed from capitalism.

One economy developed over and over by humans on every continent has been the gift economy. In this system, if people have more than they need of anything, they give it away. They don't assign value, they don't count debts. Everything you don't use personally can be given as a gift to someone else, and by giving more gifts you inspire more generosity and strengthen the friendships that keep you swimming in gifts too. Many gift economies lasted for thousands of years, and proved much more effective at enabling all of the participants to meet their needs. Capitalism may have drastically increased productivity, but to what end? On one side of your typical capitalist city someone is starving to death while on the other side someone is eating caviar.

Western economists and political scientists initially assumed that many of these gift economies were actually barter economies: proto-capitalist exchange systems lacking an efficient currency: “I’ll give you one sheep for twenty loaves of bread.” In general, this is not how these societies described themselves. Later, anthropologists who went to live in such societies and were able to shed their cultural biases showed people in Europe that many of these were indeed gift economies, in which people intentionally kept no tally of who owed what to whom so as to foster a society of generosity and sharing.

What these anthropologists may not have known is that gift economies have never been totally suppressed in the West; in fact they surfaced frequently within rebellious movements. Anarchists in the US today also exemplify the desire for relationships based on generosity and the guarantee that everyone’s needs will be met. In a number of towns and cities, anarchists hold Really Really Free Markets — essentially, flea markets without prices. People bring goods they have made or things they don’t need anymore and give them away for free to passersby or other participants. Or, they share useful skills with one another. In one free market in North Carolina, every month:

Two hundred or more people from all walks of life gather at the commons in the center of our town. They bring everything from jewelry to firewood to give away, and take whatever they want. There are booths offering bicycle repair, hairstyling, even tarot readings. People leave with full-size bed frames and old computers; if they don’t have a vehicle to transport them, volunteer drivers are available. No money changes hands, no one haggles over the comparative worth of items or services, nobody is ashamed about being in need. Contrary to government ordinances, no fee is paid for the use of this public space, nor is anyone “in charge.” Sometimes a marching band appears; sometimes a puppetry troupe performs, or people line up to take a swing at a piñata. Games and conversations take place around the periphery, and everyone has a plate of warm food and a bag of free groceries. Banners hang from branches and rafters proclaiming “FOR THE COMMONS, NOT LANDLORDS OR BUREAUCRACY” and “NI JEFES, NI FRONTERAS” and a king-size blanket is spread with radical reading material, but these aren’t essential to the event — this is a social institution, not a demonstration.

Thanks to our monthly ‘Free Markets, everyone in our town has a working reference point for anarchist economics. Life is a little easier for those of us with low or no income, and relationships develop in a space in which social class and financial means are at least temporarily irrelevant.

The traditional society of the Semai, in Malaya, is based on gift-giving rather than bartering. We could not find any accounts of their society recorded by the Semai themselves, but they explained how it worked to Robert Dentan, a Western anthropologist who lived with them for a time. Dentan writes that the “system by which the Semai distribute food and services is one of the most significant ways in which members of a community are knit together... Semai economic exchanges are more like Christmas exchanges than like commercial exchanges.” It was considered “punan,” or taboo, for members of Semai society to calculate the value of gifts given or received. Other commonly held rules of etiquette included the duty to share whatever they had that they did not immediately need, and the duty to share with guests and anyone who asked. It was punan not to share or to refuse a request, but also to ask for more than someone could give.

Many other societies have also distributed and exchanged surpluses as gifts. Aside from the social cohesion and joy that is gained from sharing with your community without greedily keeping accounts, a gift economy can also be justified in terms of personal interests. Often, a person cannot consume what they produce all by themselves. The meat from a day’s hunt will go

bad before you can eat it all. A tool, like a saw, will lay unused most of the time if it is the property of a single person. It makes more sense to give away most of the meat or share your saw with your neighbors, because you are ensuring that in the future they will give extra food to you and share their tools with you — thus ensuring that you have access to more food and a wider range of tools, and you and your neighbors become richer without having to exploit anybody.

From what we know, however, members of gift economies would probably not justify their actions with arguments of calculated self-interest, but with moral reasoning, explaining sharing as the right thing to do. After all, an economic surplus is the result of a certain way of looking at the world: it is a social choice and not a material certainty. Societies must choose, over time, to work more than they need to, to quantify value, or to only consume the minimum required for their survival and to surrender all the rest of their produce to a common storehouse controlled by a class of leaders. Even if a hunting party or a group of gatherers gets lucky and brings home a huge amount of food, there is no surplus if they consider it normal to share it with everyone else, glut themselves with a big feast, or invite a neighboring community to party until all the food is eaten. It's certainly more fun that way than measuring out pounds of food and calculating what percentage we earned.

As for loafers, even if people do not calculate the value of gifts and keep a balance sheet, they will notice if someone consistently refuses to share or contribute to the group, violating the customs of the society and the sense of mutual aid. Gradually, such people will damage their relationships, and miss out on some of the nicer benefits of living in a society. It seems that in all known gift economies, even the laziest of people were never refused food — in stark contrast to capitalism — but feeding a few loafers is an insignificant drain on a society's resources, especially when compared to pampering the voracious elite of our society. And losing this tiny amount of resources is far preferable to losing our compassion and letting people starve to death. In more extreme cases, if members of such a society were more aggressively parasitic, attempting to monopolize resources or force other people to work for them — in other words, acting like capitalists — they could be ostracized and even expelled from the society.

Some stateless societies have chiefs who play ritual roles, often related to giving gifts and spreading resources. In fact, the term “chief” can be deceptive because there have been so many different human societies that have had what the West classifies as “chiefs,” and in each society the role entailed something a little different. In many societies chiefs held no coercive power: their responsibility was to mediate disputes or conduct rituals, and they were expected to be more generous than anyone else. Ultimately they worked harder and had less personal wealth than others. One study found that a common reason for the people to depose or expel a chief was if the chief was not considered generous enough.

## **Aren't people naturally competitive?**

In Western society, competition is so normalized it's no wonder we consider it the natural mode of human relations. From youth, we're taught that we have to be better than everyone else to be worth anything ourselves. Corporations justify firing workers, depriving them of sustenance and healthcare, so the company can “stay competitive.” Fortunately, it does not have to be this way. Industrial capitalism is only one of thousands of forms of social organization humans have

developed, and with any luck it won't be the last. Obviously, humans are capable of competitive behavior, but it's not hard to see how much our society encourages this and suppresses cooperative behavior. Countless societies throughout the world have developed cooperative forms of living that contrast greatly with the norms at work under capitalism. By now, nearly all of these societies have been integrated into the capitalist system through colonialism, slavery, warfare, or habitat destruction, but a number of accounts remain to document the great diversity of societies that have existed.

The Mbuti hunter-gatherers of the Ituri Forest in central Africa have traditionally lived without government. Accounts by ancient historians suggest the forest-dwellers have lived as stateless hunter-gatherers during the time of the Egyptian pharaohs, and according to the Mbuti themselves they have always lived that way. Contrary to common portrayals by outsiders, groups like the Mbuti are not isolated or primordial. In fact they have frequent interactions with the sedentary Bantu peoples surrounding the forest, and they have had plenty of opportunities to see what supposedly advanced societies are like. Going back at least hundreds of years, Mbuti have developed relationships of exchange and gift-giving with neighboring farmers, while retaining their identity as “the children of the forest.”

Today several thousand Mbuti still live in the Ituri Forest and negotiate dynamic relationships with the changing world of the villagers, while fighting to preserve their traditional way of life. Many other Mbuti live in settlements along the new roads. Coltan mining for cell phones is a chief financial incentive for the civil war and the habitat destruction that is ravaging the region and killing hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. The governments of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda all want to control this billion dollar industry, that produces primarily for the US and Europe, while miners seeking employment come from all over Africa to set up camp in the region. The deforestation, population boom, and increase in hunting to provide bush meat for the soldiers and miners have depleted local wildlife. Lacking food and competing for territorial control, soldiers and miners have taken to carrying out atrocities, including cannibalism, against the Mbuti. Some Mbuti are currently demanding an international tribunal against cannibalism and other violations.

Europeans travelling through central Africa during their colonization of that continent imposed their own moral framework on the Mbuti. Because they only encountered the Mbuti in the villages of the Bantu farmers surrounding the Ituri forest, they assumed the Mbuti were a primitive servant class. In the 1950s, the Mbuti invited Western anthropologist Colin Turnbull to live with them in the forest. They tolerated his rude and ignorant questions, and took the time to teach him about their culture. The stories he recounts describe a society far outside of what a Western worldview considers possible. Around the time that anthropologists, and subsequently, Western anarchists, began to argue about what the Mbuti “meant” for their respective theories, global economic institutions were elaborating a process of genocide that threatens to destroy the Mbuti as a people. Notwithstanding, various Western writers have already idealized or degraded the Mbuti to produce arguments for or against primitivism, veganism, feminism, and other political agendas.

Therefore, perhaps the most important lesson to take from the story of the Mbuti is not that anarchy — a cooperative, free, and relatively healthy society — is possible, but that free societies are not possible so long as governments try to crush any pocket of independence,

corporations fund genocide in order to manufacture cell phones, and supposedly sympathetic people are more interested in writing ethnographies than fighting back.

In Turnbull's perspective, the Mbuti were resolutely egalitarian, and many of the ways they organized their society reduced competition and promoted cooperation between members. Gathering food was a community affair, and when they hunted often the whole band turned out. One half would beat the bush in the direction of the other half, who waited with nets to snare any animals that had been flushed out. A successful hunt was the result of everyone working together effectively, and the whole community shared in the catch.

Mbuti children were given a high degree of autonomy, and spent much of their days in a wing of the camp that was off-limits to adults. One game they frequently played involved a group of small children climbing up a young tree until their combined weight bent the tree towards the earth. Ideally, the children would let go all at once, and the supple tree would shoot upright. But if one child was not in synch and let go too late, the child would be launched through the trees and given a good scare. Such games teach group harmony over individual performance, and provide an early form of socialization into a culture of voluntary cooperation. The war games and individualized competition that characterize play in Western society provide a notably different form of socialization.

The Mbuti also discouraged competition or even excessive distinction between genders. They did not use gendered pronouns or familial words — e.g., instead of “son” they say “child,” “sibling” instead of “sister” — except in the case of parents, in which there is a functional difference between one who gives birth or provides milk and one who provides other forms of care. An important ritual game played by adult Mbuti worked to undermine gender competition. As Turnbull describes it, the game began like a tug-of-war match, with the women pulling one end of a long rope or vine and the men pulling the other. But as soon as one side started to win, someone from that team would run to the other side, also symbolically changing their gender and becoming a member of the other group. By the end, the participants collapsed in a heap laughing, all having changed their genders multiple times. Neither side “won,” but that seemed to be the point. Group harmony was restored.

The Mbuti traditionally viewed conflict or “noise” as a common problem and a threat to the harmony of the group. If the disputants could not resolve things on their own or with the help of friends, the entire band would hold an important ritual that often lasted all night long. Everyone gathered together to discuss, and if the problem still could not be solved, the youth, who often played the role of justice-seekers within their society, would sneak into the night and begin rampaging around the camp, blowing a horn that made a sound like an elephant, symbolizing how the problem threatened the existence of the whole band. For a particularly serious dispute that had disrupted the group's harmony, the youth might give extra expression to their frustration by crashing through camp itself, kicking out fires and knocking down houses. Meanwhile, the adults would sing a two-part harmony, building up a sense of cooperation and togetherness.

The Mbuti also underwent a sort of fission and fusion throughout the year. Often motivated by interpersonal conflicts, the band would break up into smaller, more intimate groups. People had the option to take space from one another rather than being forced by the larger community to suppress their problems. After travelling and living separately for a time, the smaller groups

joined together again, once there had been time for conflicts to cool down. Eventually the whole band was reunited, and the process started over. It seems the Mbuti synchronized this social fluctuation with their economic activities, so their period of living together as an entire band coincided with the season in which the specific forms of gathering and hunting require the cooperation of a larger group. The period of small, disparate groups coincided with the time of the year when the foods were in season that were best harvested by small groups spread throughout the whole forest, and the period when the whole band came together corresponded with the season in which hunting and gathering activities were better accomplished by big groups working together.

Unfortunately for us, neither the economic, political, or social structures of Western society are conducive to cooperation. When our jobs and social status depend on outperforming our peers, with the “losers” being fired or ostracized without regard to how it hurts their dignity or their ability to feed themselves, it’s not surprising that competitive behaviors come to outnumber cooperative behaviors. But the ability to live cooperatively is not lost to people who live under the destructive influences of state and capitalism. Social cooperation is not restricted to societies like the Mbuti who inhabit one of the few remaining pockets of autonomy in the world. Living cooperatively is a possibility for all of us right now.

Earlier this decade, in one of the most individualistic and competitive societies in human history, state authority collapsed for a time in one city. Yet in this period of catastrophe, with hundreds of people dying and resources necessary for survival sorely limited, strangers came together to assist one another in a spirit of mutual aid. The city in question is New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005. Initially, the corporate media spread racist stories of savagery committed by the mostly black survivors, and police and national guard troops performing heroic rescues while fighting off roving bands of looters. It was later admitted that these stories were false. In fact, the vast majority of rescues were carried out not by police and professionals, but by common New Orleans residents, often in defiance of the orders of authorities. The police, meanwhile, were murdering people who were salvaging drinking water, diapers, and other living supplies from abandoned grocery stores, supplies that would otherwise have been ultimately thrown away because contamination from floodwaters had made them unsalable.

New Orleans is not atypical: everyone can learn cooperative behaviors when they have the need or desire to do so. Sociological studies have found that in nearly all natural disasters, cooperation and solidarity among people increase, and it is common people, not governments, who voluntarily do most of the work carrying out rescues and protecting one another throughout the crisis.

## **Haven’t humans always been patriarchal?**

One of the most ancient forms of oppression and hierarchy is patriarchy: the division of humans into two rigid gender roles and the domination of men over women. But patriarchy is not natural or universal. Many societies have had more than two gender categories, and have allowed their members to change gender. Some even created respected spiritual roles for those who did not fit into either of the primary genders. The majority of prehistoric art depicts people who are either of no determinate gender or people with ambiguous, exaggerated combinations of masculine and

feminine traits. In such societies, gender was fluid. It was something of a historic coup to enforce the notion of two fixed, idealized genders that we now consider natural. Speaking in strictly physical terms, many perfectly healthy people are born intersexed, with male and female physiological characteristics, showing that these categories exist on a fluid continuum. It makes no sense to make people who do not fit easily into one category feel as though they are unnatural.

Even in our patriarchal society, in which everyone is conditioned to believe that patriarchy is natural, there has always been resistance. Much current resistance by queer people and transgender people takes a horizontal form. One organization in New York City, called FIERCE!, includes a wide spectrum of people excluded and oppressed by patriarchy: transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit (an honored category in many Native American societies for people who are not identified as strictly men or women), queer, and questioning (people who have not made up their minds about their sexuality or gender identity, or who do not feel comfortable in any category). FIERCE! was founded in 2000, mostly by youth of color, and with anarchist participation. They uphold a horizontal ethic of “organizing by us, for us,” and they actively link resistance to patriarchy, transphobia, and homophobia with resistance to capitalism and racism. Their actions have included protesting police brutality against transgender and queer youth; education through documentary films, zines, and the internet; and organizing for fair healthcare and against gentrification, particularly where the latter threatens to destroy important cultural and social spaces for queer youth.

At the time of this writing they are particularly active in a campaign to stop the gentrification of the Christopher Street Pier, which has been one of the only safe public spaces for homeless and low-income queer youth of color to meet and build community. Since 2001, the city has been trying to develop the Pier, and police harassment and arrests have multiplied. The FIERCE! campaign has helped provide a rallying point for those who want to save the space, and changed the public debate so that other voices are heard besides those of the government and business owners. Our society’s attitudes about gender and sexuality have changed radically in the past centuries, largely because of groups like this taking direct action to create what is said to be impossible.

Resistance to patriarchy goes back as far as we care to look. In the “good old days” when these gender roles were supposedly unchallenged and accepted as natural, we can find stories of utopia, that upset the assumption that patriarchy is natural, and the notion that civilized progress is bringing us steadily from our brutal origins towards more enlightened sensibilities. In fact the idea of total freedom has always played a role in human history.

In the 1600s, Europeans were streaming to North America for a variety of reasons, building new colonies that exhibited a wide range of characteristics. They included plantation economies based on slave labor, penal colonies, trading networks that sought to compel the indigenous inhabitants to produce large quantities of animal skins, and fundamentalist religious utopias based on the total genocide of the native population. But just as the plantation colonies had their slave rebellions, the religious colonies had their heretics. One noteworthy heretic was Anne Hutchinson. An anabaptist who came to New England to escape religious persecution in the old world, she began to hold women’s meetings in her house, discussion groups based on free interpretation of the Bible. As the popularity of these meetings spread, men began to participate

as well. Anne won popular support for her well argued ideas, which opposed the slavery of Africans and Native Americans, criticized the church, and insisted that being born a woman was a blessing and not a curse.

The religious leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony put her on trial for blasphemy, but at trial she stood by her ideas. She was heckled and called an instrument of the devil, and one minister said, “You have stepped out of your place, you have rather been a husband than a wife, a preacher than a hearer, and a magistrate than a subject.” Upon her expulsion Anne Hutchinson organized a group, in 1637, to form a settlement named Pocasset. They intentionally settled near to where Roger Williams, a progressive theologian, had founded Providence Plantations, a settlement based on the idea of total equality and freedom of conscience for all inhabitants, and friendly relations with the indigenous neighbors. These settlements were to become, respectively, Portsmouth and Providence, Rhode Island. Early on they joined to form the Rhode Island Colony. Both settlements allegedly maintained friendly relations with the neighboring indigenous nation, the Narragansett; Roger Williams’ settlement was gifted the land they built on, whereas Hutchinson’s group negotiated an exchange to buy land.

Initially, Pocasset was organized through elected councils and the people refused to have a governor. The settlement recognized equality between the sexes and trial by jury; abolished capital punishment, witchtrials, imprisonment for debt, and slavery; and granted total religious freedom. The second synagogue in North America was built in the Rhode Island colony. In 1651 one member of Hutchinson’s group seized power and got the government of England to bestow him governorship over the colony, but after two years the other people in the settlement kicked him out in a mini-revolution. After this incident, Anne Hutchinson realized that her religious beliefs opposed “magistracy,” or governmental authority, and in her later years she was said to have developed a political-religious philosophy very similar to individualist anarchism. One might say that Hutchinson and her colleagues were ahead of their times, but in every period of history there have been stories of people creating utopias, women asserting their equality, laypeople negating the religious leaders’ monopoly on truth.

Outside of Western civilization we can find many examples of non-patriarchal societies. Some stateless societies intentionally preserve gender fluidity, like the Mbuti described previously. Many societies accept fixed genders and division of roles between men and women, but seek to preserve equality between these roles. Several of these societies allow transgender expressions — individuals changing their gender or adopting a unique gender identity. In hunter-gatherer societies “a sharp and hard division of labor between the sexes is not universal... [and in the case of one particular society] virtually every subsistence activity can be, and often is, performed by either men or women”.

The Igbo of western Africa had separate spheres of activity for men and women. Women were responsible for certain economic tasks and men for others, and each group held power autonomously over their sphere. These spheres designated who produced which goods, domesticated which animals, and took which responsibilities in the garden and market. If a man interfered in the women’s sphere of activity or abused his wife, the women had a ritual of collective solidarity that preserved the balance and punished the offender, called “sitting on a man.” All the women would assemble outside the man’s house, yelling at him and insulting him in order to cause him shame. If he did not come out to apologize the mob of women might

destroy the fence around his house and his outlying storage buildings. If his offense were grievous enough, the women might even storm into his house, drag him out, and beat him up. When the British colonized the Igbo, they recognized men's institutions and economic roles, but ignored or were blind to the corresponding women's sphere of social life. When Igbo women responded to British indecency with the traditional practice of "sitting on a man," the British, possibly mistaking it for a women's insurrection, opened fire, putting an end to the gender-balancing ritual and cementing the institution of patriarchy in the society they had colonized.

The Haudennosaunne, called the Iroquois by Europeans, are a matrilineal egalitarian society of eastern North America. They traditionally use several means to balance gender relations. Whereas European civilization utilizes gender division to socialize people into rigid roles and to oppress women, queer, and transgendered people, the gendered division of labor and social roles among the Haudennosaunne functions to preserve a balance, assigning each group autonomous niches and powers, and allowing a greater degree of movement between genders than is considered possible in Western society. For hundreds of years the Haudennosaunne have coordinated between multiple nations using a federative structure, and at each level of organization there were women's councils and men's councils. At what might be called the national level, which concerned itself with matters of war and peace, the men's council made the decisions, though the women held a veto power. At the local level, women held more influence. The basic socio-economic unit, the longhouse, was considered to belong to the women, and men had no council at this level. When a man married a woman, he moved into her house. Any man who did not behave could ultimately be kicked out of the longhouse by the women.

Western society typically sees the "higher" levels of organization as being more important and powerful — even the language we use reflects this; but because the Haudennosaunne were egalitarian and decentralized, the lower or local levels of organization where the women had more influence were more important to daily life. In fact when there was no feud between the different nations the highest council might go a long time without meeting at all. However, their's was not a "matriarchal" society: men were not exploited or devalued the way women are in patriarchal societies. Rather, each group had a measure of autonomy and means for preserving a balance. Despite centuries of colonization by a patriarchal culture, many groups of Haudennosaunne retain their traditional gender relations and still stand out in sharp contrast to the gender-oppressive culture of Canada and the United States.

## **Aren't people naturally warlike?**

Political philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and psychologists like Sigmund Freud assumed that civilization and government have a moderating effect on what they saw as people's warlike and brutal instincts. Pop-culture representations of human origins, like the first scenes of the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* or the illustrations in children's books of hyper-masculine cavemen battling mammoths and sabertooth tigers, provide a picture that can be as convincing as memory: early humans had to fight one another and even battle nature to survive. But if early human life had been as bloody and warlike as our mythology has depicted it, humans would simply have died out. Any species with a reproductive cycle of 15–20 years that usually only produce one

offspring at a time simply cannot survive if their chance for dying in any given year is more than a couple percent. It would have been mathematically impossible for *Homo sapiens* to have survived that imaginary battle against nature and against one another.

Anarchists have long alleged that war is a product of the state. Some anthropological research has produced accounts of peaceful stateless societies, and of warfare among other stateless societies that was little more than a rough sport with few casualties. Naturally, the state has found its defenders, who have set out to prove that war is indeed inevitable and thus not the fault of specific oppressive social structures. In one monumental study, *War Before Civilization*, Lawrence Keeley showed that of an extensive sample of stateless societies, a large number had engaged in aggressive warfare, and a great majority had engaged at the very least in defensive warfare. Only a tiny minority had never encountered war, and a few fled their homelands to avoid war. Keeley was endeavoring to show that people are warlike, even though his results demonstrated that people could choose from a wide range of behaviors including being warlike, avoiding war but still defending against aggression, not knowing war at all, and disliking war so much they would flee their homeland rather than fight. Contrary to his title, Keeley was documenting war *after* civilization, not “before.” A major part of his data on non-Western societies came from the explorers, missionaries, soldiers, traders, and anthropologists who rode the waves of colonization around the world, bringing land conflicts and ethnic rivalries to previously unimaginable scales through mass enslavement, genocide, invasion, evangelism, and the introduction of new weapons, diseases, and addictive substances. Needless to say, the civilizing influence of the colonizers generated warfare at the margins.

Keeley’s study characterizes as warlike societies that had been peaceful for a hundred years but were chased off their land and, given the options of starving to death or invading their neighbors’ territory for space to live, chose the latter. The fact that under these conditions of global colonialism, genocide, and enslavement any societies remained peaceful at all proves that if people really want to, they can be peaceful even in the worst of circumstances. Not to say that in such circumstances there is anything wrong with fighting back against aggression!

War may be the result of natural human behavior, but so is peace. Violence certainly existed before the state, but the state developed warfare and domination to unprecedented levels. As one of its great proponents pointed out, “war is the health of the state.” It is no mistake that the institutions of power in our civilization — media, academia, government, religions — have exaggerated the prevalence of war and understated the possibility for peace. These institutions are invested in ongoing wars and occupations; they profit from them, and attempts to create a more peaceful society threaten their existence.

One such attempt is the Faslane Peace Camp, a land occupation outside Scotland’s Faslane Naval Base, which houses Trident nuclear missiles. The Peace Camp is a popular expression of the desire for a peaceful society, organized on anarchist and socialist lines. Faslane Peace Camp has been continuously occupied since June 1982 and is now well established, with hot water and bathroom facilities, a communal kitchen and living room, and 12 caravans housing permanent residents and space for visitors. The Peace Camp serves as a base area for protests in which people block the roads, shut down the gates, and even penetrate the base itself to carry out sabotage. Galvanized by the Peace Camp, there is widespread popular opposition to the naval base, and some of Scotland’s political parties have called for the base to be closed down. In

September 1981, a group of Welsh women formed a similar camp, the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, outside an RAF base housing cruise missiles in Berkshire, England. The women were forcibly evicted in 1984 but immediately reoccupied the site, and in 1991 the last missiles were removed. The camp remained until 2000, when the women won permission to set up a commemorative memorial.

These peace camps bear some similarity to the Life and Labor Commune, the largest of the Tolstoyan communes. It was an agricultural commune established near Moscow in 1921 by people following the pacifist and anarchist teachings of Leo Tolstoy. Its members, nearly one thousand at their peak, were at odds with the Soviet government on account of refusing to perform military service. For this reason, the commune was finally shut down by the authorities in 1930; but during its existence, the participants created a large self-organized community in peace and resistance.

The Catholic Worker movement began in the United States in 1933 as a response to the Great Depression, but today many of the 185 Catholic Worker communities throughout North America and Europe focus on opposing the militarism of the government and creating the foundations of a peaceful society. Inseparable from their opposition to war is their commitment to social justice, which manifests in the soup kitchens, shelters, and other service projects to help the poor that form a part of every Catholic Worker house. Although Christian, the Catholic Workers generally criticize church hierarchy and promote tolerance of other religions. They are also anti-capitalist, preaching voluntary poverty and "distributist communitarianism; self-sufficien[cy] through farming, crafting, and appropriate technology; a radically new society where people will rely on the fruits of their own toil and labor; associations of mutuality, and a sense of fairness to resolve conflicts." Some Catholic Workers even call themselves Christian Anarchists. Catholic Worker communities, which function as communes or aid centers for the poor, often provide a base for protests and direct actions against the military. Catholic Workers have entered military bases to sabotage weaponry, though they waited for the police afterwards, intentionally going to jail as a further act of protest. Some of their communities also shelter victims of war, such as torture survivors fleeing the results of US imperialism in other countries.

How peaceful a society could we create if we overcame the belligerence of governments and fostered new norms in our culture? The Semai, agriculturalists in Malaya, offer one indication. Their murder rate is only 0.56/100,000 per year, compared with 0.86 in Norway, 6.26 in the US, and 20.20 in Russia. This may be related to their childrearing strategy: traditionally the Semai do not hit their children, and respect for their children's autonomy is a normalized value in their society. One of the few occasions in which Semai adults will typically intervene is when children lose their tempers or fight one another, in which case nearby adults will snatch up the children and take them to their respective houses. The major forces that uphold Semai peacefulness seem to be an emphasis on learning self-control and the great importance accorded to public opinion in a cooperative society.

According to Robert Dentan, a Western anthropologist who lived with them, "little violence occurs within Semai society. Violence, in fact, seems to terrify the Semai. A Semai does not meet force with force, but with passivity or flight. Yet, he has no institutionalized way of preventing violence — no social controls, no police or courts. Somehow a Semai learns automatically always to keep tight rein over his aggressive impulses." The first time the Semai

participated in a war was when the British conscripted them to fight against the Communist insurgency in the early 1950s. Clearly, warfare is not an inevitability and certainly not a human need: rather, it is a consequence of political, social, and economic arrangements, and these arrangements are ours to shape.

## **Aren't domination and authority natural?**

Nowadays, it is harder to make ideological justifications for the state. A massive body of research demonstrates that many human societies have been staunchly egalitarian, and that even within capitalism many people continue to form egalitarian networks and communities. In order to reconcile this with their view that evolution is a matter of fierce competition, some scientists have postulated a “human egalitarian syndrome,” theorizing that humans evolved to live in close-knit, homogenous groups, in which the passing on of members’ genes was not assured by the survival of the individual but by the survival of the group.

According to this theory, cooperation and egalitarianism prevailed within these groups because it was in everyone’s genetic self-interest that the group survived. Genetic competition occurred between different groups, and the groups that did the best job of taking care of their members were the ones to pass on their genes. Direct genetic competition between individuals was superseded by competition between different groups employing different social strategies, and humans evolved a whole host of social skills that allowed for greater cooperation. This would explain why, for most of human existence, we have lived in societies with little or no hierarchy, until certain technological developments allowed some societies to stratify and dominate their neighbors.

This is not to say that domination and authority were unnatural, and that technology was a forbidden fruit that corrupted an otherwise innocent humanity. In fact, some hunter-gatherer societies were so patriarchal they used gang rape as a form of punishment against women, and some societies with agriculture and metal tools have been fiercely egalitarian. Some of the peoples in North America’s Pacific Northwest were sedentary hunter-gatherers and they had a heavily stratified society with a slave class. And at the far end of the technological spectrum, nomadic hunter-gatherer groups in Australia were dominated by male elders. Older men could have multiple wives, younger men had none, and women were evidently doled out like social property.

Humans are capable of both authoritarian and anti-authoritarian behavior. Horizontal societies that were not intentionally anti-authoritarian could easily have developed coercive hierarchies when new technologies made that possible, and even without a lot of technology they could make life hell for groups considered inferior. It seems that the most common forms of inequality among otherwise egalitarian societies were gender and age discrimination, which could accustom a society to inequality and create the prototype for a power structure — rule by male elders. This structure could become more powerful over time with the development of metal tools and weapons, surpluses, cities, and the like.

The point, though, is that these forms of inequality were not inevitable. Societies that frowned on authoritarian behaviors consciously avoided the rise of hierarchy. In fact, many societies have

given up centralized organization or technologies that allow for domination. This shows that history is not a one-way track. For example, the Moroccan Imazighen, or Berbers, did not form centralized political systems over the past several centuries, even while other societies around them did. “Establishing a dynasty is next to impossible,” wrote one commentator, “due to the fact that the chief is faced with constant revolt which ultimately becomes successful and returns the system to the old decentralized anarchic order.”

What is the factor that allows societies to avoid domination and coercive authority? A study by Christopher Boehm, surveying dozens of egalitarian societies on all continents, including peoples who lived as foragers, horticulturalists, agriculturalists, and pastoralists, found that the common factor is a conscious desire to remain egalitarian: an anti-authoritarian culture. “The primary and most immediate cause of egalitarian behavior is a moralistic determination on the part of a local group’s main political actors that no one of its members should be allowed to dominate the others.” Rather than culture being determined by material conditions, it seems that culture shapes the social structures that reproduce a people’s material conditions.

In certain situations some form of leadership is inevitable, as some people have more skills or a more charismatic personality. Consciously egalitarian societies respond to these situations by not institutionalizing the position of leader, by not affording a leader any special privileges, or by fostering a culture that makes it shameful for that person to flaunt his or her leadership or try to gain power over others. Furthermore, leadership positions change from one situation to another, depending on the skills needed for the task at hand. The leaders during a hunt are different from the leaders during house-building or ceremonies. If a person in a leadership role tries to gain more power or dominate his or her peers, the rest of the group employs “intentional leveling mechanisms”: behaviors intended to bring the leader back down to earth. For example, among many anti-authoritarian hunter-gatherer societies, the most skillful hunter in a band faces criticism and ridicule if he is seen to brag and use his talents to boost his ego rather than for the benefit of the whole group.

If these social pressures do not work, the sanctions escalate, and in many egalitarian societies in the final instance they will kick out or kill a leader who is incurably authoritarian, long before that leader is able to assume coercive powers. These “reverse dominance hierarchies,” in which the leaders must obey popular will because they are powerless to maintain their positions of leadership without support, have appeared in many different societies and functioned over long periods of time. Some of the egalitarian societies documented in Boehm’s survey have a chief or a shaman who plays a ritual role or acts as an impartial mediator in disputes; others appoint a leader in times of trouble, or have a peace chief and a war chief. But these positions of leadership are not coercive, and over hundreds of years have not developed into authoritarian roles. Often the people who fill these roles see them as a temporary social responsibility, which they wish to hand off swiftly because of the higher level of criticism and responsibility they face while occupying them.

European civilization has historically demonstrated a much higher tolerance for authoritarianism than the egalitarian societies described in the survey. Yet as the political and economic systems that would become the modern state and capitalism were developing in Europe, there were a number of rebellions that demonstrate that even here authority was an imposition. One of the greatest of these rebellions was the Peasants War. In 1524 and 1525, as many as 300,000 peasant

insurgents, joined by townsfolk and some lesser nobility, rose up against the property owners and church hierarchy in a war that left about 100,000 people dead throughout Bavaria, Saxony, Thüringen, Schwaben, Alsace, as well as parts of what are now Switzerland and Austria. The princes and clergy of the Holy Roman Empire had been steadily increasing taxes to pay for rising administrative and military costs, as government became more top-heavy. The artesans and workers of the towns were affected by these taxes, but the peasants received the heaviest burden. To increase their power and their revenue, princes forced free peasants into serfdom, and resurrected Roman Civil law, which instituted private ownership of land, something of a step backwards from the feudal system in which the land was a trust between peasant and lord that involved rights and obligations.

Meanwhile, elements of the old feudal hierarchy, such as the knighthood and the clergy, were becoming obsolete, and conflicted with other elements of the ruling class. The new burgher mercantile class, as well as many progressive princes, opposed the privileges of the clergy and the conservative structure of the Catholic church. A new, less centralized structure that could base power in councils in the towns and cities, such as the system proposed by Martin Luther, would allow the new political class to ascend.

In the years immediately prior to the War, a number of Anabaptist prophets began travelling around the region espousing revolutionary ideas against political authority, church doctrine, and even against the reforms of Martin Luther. These people included Thomas Dreschel, Nicolas Storch, Mark Thomas Stübner, and most famously, Thomas Müntzer. Some of them argued for total religious freedom, the end of non-voluntary baptism, and the abolition of government on earth. Needless to say they were persecuted by Catholic authorities and by supporters of Luther and banned from many cities, but they continued to travel around Bohemia, Bavaria, and Switzerland, winning supporters and stoking peasant rebelliousness.

In 1524, peasants and urban workers met in the Schwarzwald region of Germany and drafted the 12 Articles of the Black Forest, and the movement they created quickly spread. The articles, with Biblical references used as justification, called for the abolition of serfdom and the freedom of all people; the municipal power for people to elect and remove preachers; the abolition of taxes on cattle and inheritance; a prohibition on the privilege of the nobility to arbitrarily raise taxes; free access to water, hunting, fishing, and the forests; and the restoration of communal lands expropriated by the nobility. Another text printed and circulated in massive quantity by the insurgents was the Bundesordnung, the federal order, which expounded a model social order based on federated municipalities. Less literate elements of the movement were even more radical, as judged by their actions and the folklore they left behind; their goal was to wipe the nobility off the face of the earth and institute a mysticist utopia then and there.

Social tension increased throughout the year, as authorities tried to prevent outright rebellion by suppressing rural gatherings such as popular festivals and weddings. In August 1524, the situation finally erupted at Stühlingen in the Black Forest region. A countess demanded that the peasants render her a special harvest on a church holiday. Instead the peasants refused to pay all taxes and formed an army of 1200 people, under the leadership of a former mercenary, Hans Müller. They marched to the town of Waldshut and were joined by the townspeople, and then marched on the castle at Stühlingen and besieged it. Realizing they needed some kind of military structure, they decided to elect their own captains, sergeants, and corporals. In September they

defended themselves from a Hapsburg army in an indecisive battle, and subsequently refused to lay down their arms and beg pardon when entreated to do so. That autumn peasant strikes, refusals to pay tithes, and rebellions broke out throughout the region, as peasants extended their politics from individual complaints to a unified rejection of the feudal system as a whole.

With the spring thaw of 1525, fighting resumed with a ferocity. The peasant armies seized cities and executed large numbers of clergy and nobility. But in February the Schwabian League, an alliance of nobility and clergy in the region, achieved a victory in Italy, where they had been fighting on behalf of Charles V, and were able to bring their troops home and devote them to crushing the peasants. Meanwhile Martin Luther, the burghers, and the progressive princes withdrew all their support and called for the annihilation of the revolutionary peasants; they wanted to reform the system, not to destroy it, and the uprising had already sufficiently destabilized the power structure. Finally on May 15, 1525, the main peasant army was decisively defeated at Frankenhausen; Müntzer and other influential leaders were seized and executed, and the rebellion was put down. However, over the following years the Anabaptist movement spread throughout Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, and peasant revolts continued to break out, in the hopes that one day the church and the state would be destroyed for good.

Capitalism and modern democratic states succeeded in establishing themselves over the following centuries, but they have been forever haunted by the specter of rebellion from below. Within statist societies, the ability to organize without hierarchies still exists today, and the possibility remains to create anti-authoritarian cultures that can bring any would-be leaders back down to earth. Appropriately, much of the resistance against global authority is organized horizontally. The worldwide anti-globalization movement arose largely from the resistance of the Zapatistas in Mexico, autonomists and anarchists in Europe, farmers and workers in Korea, and popular rebellions against financial institutions like the IMF, occurring across the world from South Africa to India. The Zapatistas and autonomists especially are marked by their anti-authoritarian cultures, a marked break from the hierarchy of Marxist-Leninists who had dominated international struggles in previous generations.

The anti-globalization movement proved itself to be a global force in June, 1999, when hundreds of thousands of people in cities from London, England to Port Harcourt, Nigeria took the streets for the J18 Carnival Against Capitalism; in November later that year, participants in the same movement shocked the world by shutting down the summit of the World Trade Organization in Seattle.

The most remarkable thing about this global resistance is that it was created horizontally, by diverse organizations and affinity groups pioneering new forms of consensus. This movement had no leaders and fomented constant opposition to all forms of authority that developed within its ranks. Those who attempted to put themselves permanently in the role of chief or spokesperson were ostracized — or even treated to a pie in the face, as high profile organizer Medea Benjamin was at the US Social Forum in 2007.

Lacking leadership, short on formal organization, and constantly critiquing internal power dynamics and studying more egalitarian ways of organizing, anti-globalization activists went on to achieve further tactical victories. In Prague in September 2000, 15,000 protestors overcame the massive police presence and broke up the last day of the summit of the International

Monetary Fund. In Quebec City in April, 2001, protestors breached the security fence around a summit planning the Free Trade Area of the Americas; police responded by filling the city with so much teargas that it even entered the building where the talks were taking place. Consequently many city residents came to favor the protestors. Police had to step up repression to contain the growing anti-globalization movement; they arrested 600 protestors and injured three with gunfire at the European Union summit in Sweden in 2001, and a month later they murdered anarchist Carlo Giuliani at the G8 summit in Genoa, where 150,000 people had gathered to protest the conference of the eight most powerful world governments.

The Dissent! Network arose out of the European anti-globalization movement to organize major protests against the G8 summit in Scotland in 2005. The Network also organized major protest camps and blockade actions against the G8 summit in Germany in 2007, and helped with the mobilizations against the G8 summit in Japan in 2008. Without a central leadership or hierarchy, the network facilitated communication between groups located in different cities and countries, and organized major meetings to discuss and decide on strategies for upcoming actions against the G8. The strategies were intended to enable diverse approaches, so many affinity groups could organize mutually supportive actions within a common framework rather than carrying out the orders of a central organization. For example, a blockade plan might designate one road leading to the summit site as a zone for people who prefer peaceful or theatrical tactics, while another entrance might be designated for people who wish to construct barricades and are willing to defend themselves against the police. These strategy meetings drew people from a dozen countries and included translations in multiple languages. Afterwards, fliers, announcements, position papers, and critiques were translated and uploaded to a website. The anarchist forms of coordination used by the protestors repeatedly proved effective at countering and sometimes even outmaneuvering the police and corporate media, which enjoyed teams of thousands of paid professionals, advanced communications and surveillance infrastructure, and resources far beyond what was available to the movement.

The anti-globalization movement can be contrasted with the anti-war movement that arose in response to the so-called War on Terror. After September 11, 2001, world leaders sought to undercut the growing anti-capitalist movement by identifying terrorism as enemy number one, thus reframing the narrative of global conflict. Following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the end of the Cold War, they needed a new war and a new opposition. People had to view their options as a choice between hierarchical powers — statist democracy or fundamentalist terrorists — rather than between domination and freedom. In the conservative environment that followed September 11, the anti-war movement quickly came to be dominated by reformist and hierarchically-organized groups. Although the movement kicked off with the most widely attended day of protest in human history on February 15, 2003, the organizers deliberately channeled the energy of the participants into rigidly controlled rituals that did not challenge the war machine. Within two years, the anti-war movement had completely squandered the momentum built up during the anti-globalization era.

The anti-war movement could not stop the occupation of Iraq, or even sustain itself, because people are neither empowered nor fulfilled by passively participating in symbolic spectacles. In contrast, the effectiveness of decentralized networks can be seen in the many victories of the anti-globalization movement: the summits shut down, the collapse of the WTO and FTAA, the

dramatic scaling back of the IMF and World Bank. This non-hierarchical movement demonstrated that people desire to free themselves from domination, and that they have the ability to cooperate in an anti-authoritarian manner even in large groups of strangers from different nations and cultures.

So from scientific studies of human history to protesters making history today, the evidence overwhelmingly contradicts the statist account of human nature. Rather than coming from a brutally authoritarian ancestry and later subsuming these instincts into a competitive system based on obedience to authority, humankind has not had one single trajectory. Our beginnings seem to have been characterized by a range between strict egalitarianism and small-scale hierarchy with a relatively equal distribution of wealth. When coercive hierarchies did appear, they did not spread everywhere immediately, and often provoked significant resistance. Even where societies are ruled by authoritarian structures, resistance is every much a part of the social reality as domination and obedience. Furthermore, the state and authoritarian civilization are not the last stops on the line. Even though a global revolution has yet to succeed, we have many examples of post-state societies, in which we can make out hints of a stateless future.

Half a century ago, anthropologist Pierre Clastres concluded that the stateless and anti-authoritarian societies he studied in South America were not holdouts from a primordial era, as other Westerners had assumed. He argued that, on the contrary, they were well aware of the possible emergence of the state, and they were organizing themselves to prevent this. It turns out that many of them were in fact post-state societies founded by refugees and rebels who had fled from or overthrown earlier states. Similarly, anarchist Peter Lamborn Wilson hypothesized that anti-authoritarian societies in eastern North America formed in resistance to the hierarchical Hopewell mound-building societies, and recent research seems to be confirming this. What others had interpreted as ahistorical ethnicities were the end results of political movements.

The Cossacks who inhabited the Russian frontiers provide another example of this phenomenon. Their societies were founded by people fleeing serfdom and other inconveniences of government oppression. They learned horsemanship and developed impressive martial skills to survive in the frontier environment and defend themselves against neighboring states. Eventually, they came to be viewed as a distinct ethnicity with a privileged autonomy, and the tsar whom their ancestors renounced sought them out as military allies.

According to Yale political scientist James C. Scott, everything about such societies — from the crops they grow to their kinship systems — can be read as anti-authoritarian social strategies. Scott documents the Hill People of Southeast Asia, an agglomeration of societies existing in rugged terrain where fragile state structures face a severe disadvantage. For hundreds of years, these people have resisted state domination, including frequent wars of conquest or extermination by the Chinese empire and periods of continuous attacks by slavers. Cultural and linguistic diversity is exponentially greater in the hills than in the state-controlled rice paddies of the valleys, where a monoculture holds sway. Hill People frequently speak multiple languages and belong to multiple ethnicities. Their social organization is suited for quick and easy dispersal and reunification, allowing them to escape assaults and wage guerrilla warfare. Their kinship systems are based on overlapping and redundant relationships that create a strong social network and limit the formalization of power. Their oral cultures are more decentralized and flexible than

nearby literate cultures, in which reliance on the written word encourages orthodoxy and gives extra power to those with the resources to keep records.

The Hill People have an interesting relationship with the surrounding states. The people of the valleys view them as “living ancestors,” even though they have formed as a response to the valley civilizations. They are post-state, not pre-state, but the ideology of the state refuses to recognize such a category as “post-state” because the state supposes itself to be the pinnacle of progress. Subjects of the valley civilizations frequently “headed for the hills” to live more freely; however the narratives and mythologies of the Chinese, Vietnamese, Burmese, and other authoritarian civilizations in the centuries leading up to World War II seemed to be designed to prevent their members from “going back” to those they perceived as barbarians. According to some scholars, the Great Wall of China was built as much to keep the Chinese in as the barbarians out; yet in the valley civilizations of China and Southeast Asia, myths, language, and rituals that might explain such cultural defections were suspiciously lacking. Culture was used as another Great Wall to hold these fragile civilizations together. No wonder the “barbarians” gave up written language in favor of a more decentralized oral culture: without written records and a specialized class of scribes, history became common property, rather than a tool for indoctrination.

Far from being a necessary social advancement that people readily accept, the state is an imposition that many people try to flee. A proverb from the Burmese encapsulates this: “It is easy for a subject to find a lord, but hard for a lord to find a subject.” In Southeast Asia, until recently, the primary goal of warfare was not to capture territory but to capture subjects, as people frequently ran for the hills to create egalitarian societies. It is ironic that so many of us are convinced we have an essential need for the state, when in fact it is the state that needs us.

## **A broader sense of self**

A hundred years ago, Peter Kropotkin, the Russian geographer and anarchist theorist, published his revolutionary book, *Mutual Aid*, which argues that the tendency of people to help one another reciprocally, in a spirit of solidarity, was a greater factor in human evolution than competition. We can see cooperative behaviors similarly playing a role in the survival of many species of mammals, birds, fish, and insects. Still, the belief persists that humans are naturally selfish, competitive, warlike, and male-dominated. This belief is founded upon a misrepresentation of so-called primitive peoples as brutal, and of the state as a necessary, pacifying force.

Westerners who see themselves as the pinnacle of human evolution typically view hunter-gatherers and other stateless peoples as relics of the past, even if they are alive in the present. In doing so, they are presuming that history is an inevitable progression from less to more complex, and that Western civilization is more complex than other cultures. If history is organized into the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Industrial Age, Information Age, and so on, someone who does not use metal tools must still be living in the Stone Age, right? But it is eurocentric, to say the least, to assume that a hunter-gatherer who knows the uses of a thousand different plants is less sophisticated than an operator at a nuclear power plant who knows how to push a thousand different buttons but doesn’t know where his food comes from.

Capitalism may be capable of feats of production and distribution that have never been possible before, but at the same time this society is tragically unable to keep everyone fed and healthy, and has never existed without gross inequalities, oppression, and environmental devastation. One might argue that members of our society are socially stunted, if not outright primitive, when it comes to being able to cooperate and organize ourselves without authoritarian control.

A nuanced view of stateless societies shows them to have their own developed forms of social organization and their own complex histories, both of which contradict Western notions about “natural” human characteristics. The great diversity of human behaviors that are considered normal in different societies calls into question the very idea of human nature.

Our understanding of human nature directly influences what we expect of people. If humans are naturally selfish and competitive, we cannot expect to live in a cooperative society. When we see how differently other cultures have characterized human nature, we can recognize human nature as a cultural value, an idealized and normative mythology that justifies the way a society is organized. Western civilization devotes an immense amount of resources to social control, policing, and cultural production reinforcing capitalist values. The Western idea of human nature functions as a part of this social control, discouraging rebellion against authority. We are taught from childhood that without authority human life would descend into chaos.

This view of human nature was advanced by Hobbes and other European philosophers to explain the origins and purpose of the State; this marked a shift to scientific arguments at a time when divine arguments no longer sufficed. Hobbes and his contemporaries lacked the psychological, historical, archaeological, and ethnographic data that we have today, and their thinking was still heavily influenced by a legacy of Christian teachings. Even now that we have access to an abundance of information contradicting Christian cosmology and statist political science, the popular conception of human nature has not changed dramatically. Why are we still so miseducated? A second question answers the first: who controls education in our society? Nonetheless, anyone who counters the authoritarian dogma faces an uphill battle against the charge of “romanticism.”

But if human nature is not fixed, if it can encompass a wide range of possibilities, couldn't we use a romantic dose of imagination in envisioning new possibilities? The acts of rebellion occurring within our society right now, from the Faslane Peace Camp to the Really Really Free Markets, contain the seeds of a peaceful and openhanded society. Popular responses to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans show that everyone has the potential to cooperate when the dominant social order is disrupted. These examples point the way to a broader sense of self — an understanding of human beings as creatures capable of a wide range of behaviors.

One might say selfishness is natural, in that people inevitably live according to their own desires and experiences. But egoism need not be competitive or dismissive of others. Our relationships extend far beyond our bodies and our minds — we live in communities, depend on ecosystems for food and water, and need friends, families, and lovers for our emotional health. Without institutionalized competition and exploitation, a person's self-interest overlaps with the interests of her community and her environment. Seeing our relationships with our friends and nature as fundamental parts of ourselves expands our sense of connection with the world and our

responsibility for it. It is not in our self-interest to be dominated by authorities, or to dominate others; in developing a broader sense of self, we can structure our lives and communities accordingly.

## **Recommended Reading**

Robert K. Dentan, *The Semai: A Nonviolent People of Malaya*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979.

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Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.

David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004.

Colin M. Turnbull, *The Forest People*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961.

James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Bob Black, "The Abolition of Work," 1985. \*

## 2. Decisions

Anarchy is the absence of rulers. Free people do not follow orders; they make their own decisions and come to agreements within their communities, and develop shared means for putting these decisions into practice.

### How will decisions be made?

There should be no doubt that human beings can make decisions in non-hierarchical, egalitarian ways. The majority of human societies have been stateless, and many stateless societies have not been governed by the dictates of some “Big Man,” but by common assemblies using some form of consensus. Numerous consensus-based societies have survived thousands of years, even through European colonialism into the present day, in Africa, Australia, Asia, the Americas, and on the peripheries of Europe.

People from societies in which decision-making power has been monopolized by the state and corporations may initially find it difficult to make decisions in an egalitarian way, but it gets easier with practice. Fortunately, we all have some experience with horizontal decision-making. Most of the decisions we make in daily life, with friends and hopefully with colleagues and family as well, we make on the basis of cooperation rather than authority. Friendship is precious because it is a space in which we interact as equals, where our opinions are valued regardless of our social status. Groups of friends typically use informal consensus to decide how to spend time together, organize activities, assist one another, and respond to challenges in their daily lives. So most of us already understand consensus intuitively; it takes more practice to learn how to come to consensus with people who are significantly different from us, especially in large groups or when it is necessary to coordinate complex activities, but it is possible.

Consensus is not the only empowering way to make decisions. In certain contingencies, groups that are truly voluntary associations can still be empowering for their members when they use majority decision-making. Or one person making her own decisions and acting alone can inspire dozens more people to take similar actions, or to support what she has started, thus avoiding the sometimes stifling weight of meetings. In creative or inspiring circumstances people often succeed in coordinating themselves spontaneously and chaotically, producing unprecedented results. The specific decision-making form is just a tool, and with consensus or individual action as with majority decision-making people can take an active part in using that tool as they see fit.

Korean anarchists won an opportunity to demonstrate people’s ability to make their own decisions in 1929. The Korean Anarchist Communist Federation (KACF) was a huge organization at that time, with enough support that it could declare an autonomous zone in the Shinmin province. Shinmin was outside of Korea, in Manchuria, but two million Korean immigrants lived there. Using assemblies and a decentralized federative structure that grew out of the KACF, they created village councils, district councils, and area councils to deal with matters of cooperative agriculture, education, and finance. They also formed an army spearheaded by the anarchist Kim Jwa-Jin, which used guerrilla tactics against Soviet and Japanese forces. KACF sections in China, Korea, and Japan organized international support efforts. Caught between the Stalinists and the Japanese imperial army, the autonomous province

was ultimately crushed in 1931. But for two years, large populations had freed themselves from the authority of landlords and governors and reasserted their power to come to collective decisions, to organize their day-to-day life, pursue their dreams, and defend those dreams from invading armies.

One of the most well known anarchist histories is that of the Spanish Civil War. In July 1936, General Franco launched a fascist coup in Spain. From the standpoint of the elite, it was a necessary act; the nation's military officers, landowners, and religious hierarchy were terrified by growing anarchist and socialist movements. The monarchy had already been abolished, but the workers and peasants were not content with representative democracy. The coup did not go smoothly. While in many areas Spain's Republican government rolled over easily and resigned itself to fascism, the anarchist labor union (CNT) and other anarchists working autonomously formed militias, seized arsenals, stormed barracks, and defeated trained troops. Anarchists were especially strong in Catalunya, Aragon, Asturias, and much of Andalucia. Workers also defeated the coup in Madrid and Valencia, where the socialists were strong, and in much of the Basque country. In the anarchist areas, the government effectively ceased to function.

In these stateless areas of the Spanish countryside in 1936, peasants organized themselves according to principles of communism, collectivism, or mutualism according to their preferences and local conditions. They formed thousands of collectives, especially in Aragon, Catalunya, and Valencia. Some abolished all money and private property; some organized quota systems to ensure that everyone's needs were met. The diversity of forms they developed is a testament to the freedom they created themselves. Where once all these villages were mired in the same stifling context of feudalism and developing capitalism, within months of overthrowing government authority and coming together in village assemblies, they gave birth to hundreds of different systems, united by common values like solidarity and self-organization. And they developed these different forms by holding open assemblies and making decisions about their future in common.

The town of Magdalena de Pulpis, for example, abolished money completely. One inhabitant reported, "Everyone works and everyone has the right to what he needs free of charge. He simply goes to the store where provisions and all other necessities are supplied. Everything is distributed free with only a notation of what he took." Recording what everyone took allowed the community to distribute resources equally in times of scarcity, and generally ensured accountability.

Other collectives worked out their own systems of exchange. They issued local money in the form of vouchers, tokens, rationing booklets, certificates, and coupons which carried no interest and were not negotiable outside of the issuing collective. Communities that had suppressed money paid workers in coupons according to the size of the family — a "family wage" based on the needs of the family rather than the productivity of its working members. Abundant local goods like bread, wine, and olive oil were distributed freely, while other items "could be obtained by means of coupons at the communal depot. Surplus goods were exchanged with other anarchist towns and villages." There was much experimentation with new monetary systems. In Aragon, there were hundreds of different kinds of coupon and money systems, so the Aragon Federation of Peasant Collectives unanimously decided to replace local currencies with a

standard ration booklet — though each collective retained the power to decide how goods would be distributed and the amount of coupons workers would receive.

All the collectives, once they had taken control of their villages, organized open mass assemblies to discuss problems and plan how to organize themselves. Decisions were made via voting or consensus. Village assemblies generally met between once a week and once a month; foreign observers surveying them remarked that participation was broad and enthusiastic. Many of the collectivized villages joined with other collectives in order to pool resources, aid one another, and arrange trade. The collectives in Aragon donated hundreds of tons of food to the volunteer militias who were holding back the fascists on the front, and also took in large numbers of refugees who had fled the fascists. The town of Graus, for example, with a population of 2,600, took in and supported 224 refugees, only 20 of whom could work.

At assemblies, collectives discussed problems and proposals. Many collectives elected administrative committees, generally consisting of half a dozen people, to manage affairs until the next meeting. The open assemblies:

allowed the inhabitants to know, to so understand, and to feel so mentally integrated in society, to so participate in the management of public affairs, in the responsibilities, that the recriminations, the tensions which always occur when the power of decision is entrusted to a few individuals... did not happen there. The assemblies were public, the objections, the proposals publicly discussed, everybody being free, as in the syndical assemblies, to participate in the discussions, to criticize, propose, etc. Democracy extended to the whole of social life. In most cases even the individualists [locals who had not joined the collective] could take part in the deliberations. They were given the same hearing as the collectivists.

If not every village inhabitant was a member of the collective, there might be a municipal council in addition to the collective assembly, so that no one would be excluded from decision-making.

In many collectives they agreed that if a member violated a collective rule once, he was reprimanded. If it happened a second time, he was referred to the general assembly. Only the general assembly could expel a member from the collective; delegates and administrators were denied punitive power. The power of the general assembly to respond to transgressions was also used to prevent people who had been delegated tasks from being irresponsible or authoritarian; delegates or elected administrators who failed to abide by collective decisions or usurped authority were suspended or removed by a general vote. In some villages that were split between anarchists and socialists, the peasants formed two collectives side by side, to allow for different ways of making and enforcing decisions rather than imposing one method on everybody.

Gaston Leval described a general assembly in the village of Tamarite de Litera, in Huesca province, which the non-collective peasants were also allowed to attend. One problem brought up at the meeting was that several peasants who had not joined the collective left their elderly parents in the care of the collective while taking their parents' land to farm as their own. The entire group discussed the matter, and eventually decided to adopt a specific proposal: they would not kick the elderly parents out of the collective, but they wanted to hold those peasants accountable, so they decided that the latter had to take care of their parents or else receive neither solidarity nor land from the collective. In the end, a resolution agreed to by an entire community

will carry more legitimacy, and is more likely to be followed, than one handed down by a specialist or a government official.

Important decisions also took place at work in the fields every day:

The work of the collectives was conducted by teams of workers, headed by a delegate chosen by each team. The land was divided into cultivated zones. Team delegates worked like the others. There were no special privileges. After the day's work, delegates from all the work teams met on the job and made necessary technical arrangements for the next day's work... The assembly made final decisions on all important questions and issued instructions to both the team delegates and the administrative commission."

Many areas also had District Committees that pooled the resources of all the collectives in a district, basically acting as a clearinghouse to circulate surplus from the collectives that had it to other collectives that needed it. Hundreds of collectives joined federations organized through the CNT or UGT (the socialist labor union). The federations provided economic coordination, pooling resources to allow peasants to build their own fruit and vegetable canneries, gathering information about which items were in abundance and which were in short supply, and organizing uniform exchange systems. This collective form of decision-making proved effective for the approximately seven to eight million peasants involved in this movement. Half the land in anti-fascist Spain — three-quarters of the land in Aragon — was collectivized and self-organized.

In August 1937, just over a year after anarchist and socialist peasants started forming collectives, the Republican government, under control of the Stalinists, had consolidated enough to move against the lawless zones of Aragon. The Karl Marx Brigade, units of the International Brigades, and other units disarmed and dissolved the collectives in Aragon, crushing any resistance and spiriting off numerous anarchists and libertarian socialists to the prisons and torture chambers the Stalinists had set up to use against their revolutionary allies.

Brazil today bears a similarity with Spain in 1936, in that a tiny percentage of the population owns nearly half of all the land while millions of people are without land or sustenance. A major social movement has sprung up in response. The *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST), or Landless Workers' Movement, is made up of 1.5 million impoverished laborers who occupy unused land to set up farming collectives. Since its founding in 1984, the MST has won land titles for 350,000 families living in 2,000 different settlements. The basic unit of organization consists of a group of families living together in a settlement on occupied land. These groups retain autonomy and self-organize matters of day-to-day living. To participate in regional meetings they appoint two or three representatives, which in principle include a man and a woman though in practice this is not always the case. The MST has a federative structure; there are also State and National Coordinating Bodies. While most of the decision-making takes place at the grassroots level with land occupations, farming, and the establishment of settlements, the MST also organizes at higher levels to coordinate massive protests and highway blockades to pressure the government to give land titles to the settlements. The MST has shown a great deal of innovation and strength, organizing schools and protecting themselves against frequent police repression. They have developed practices of sustainable agriculture, including setting up seed banks for native seeds, and they have invaded and destroyed environmentally harmful eucalyptus forestry plantations and test grounds for genetically modified crops.

Within the logic of democracy, 1.5 million people is considered simply too large a group for everyone to be allowed to participate directly in decision-making; the majority should entrust that power to politicians. But the MST holds an ideal in which all possible decision-making remains on the local level. In practice, however, they often do not meet this ideal. As a massive organization that does not seek to abolish capitalism or overthrow the state but rather to pressure it, the MST has been brought into the game of politics, in which all principles are for sale. Furthermore, a huge portion of their members come from extremely poor and oppressed communities that for generations had been controlled by a combination of religion, patriotism, crime, drug addiction, and patriarchy. These dynamics do not disappear when people enter into the movement, and they cause significant problems within the MST.

Throughout the 80s and the 90s, new MST settlements were created by activists from the organization who would seek landless people in rural areas or especially in the favelas, the urban slums, who wanted to form a group and occupy land. They would go through a base-building period of two months, in which they would hold meetings and debates to try to build a sense of community, affinity, and political common ground. Then they would occupy a piece of unused land owned by a major landlord, choose representatives to federate with the larger organization, and begin farming. Activists working with the MST local would pass through periodically to see if the settlement needed help acquiring tools and materials, resolving internal disputes, or protecting themselves from police, paramilitaries, or major landlords, all of whom frequently conspired to threaten and assassinate MST members.

In part due to the autonomy of each settlement, they have met with a variety of outcomes. Leftists from other countries typically romanticize the MST while the Brazilian capitalist media portray them all as violent thugs who steal land and then sell it. In fact, the capitalist media portrayal is accurate in some cases, though by no means in a majority of cases. It is not unheard of for people in a new settlement to divide up the land and later fight over the allotments. Some might sell their allotment to a local landlord, or open a liquor store on their allotment and fuel alcoholism, or encroach on their neighbor's allotment, and such boundary disputes are sometimes resolved with violence. The majority of settlements divide into completely individualized, separate homesteads rather than working the land collectively or communally. Another common weakness reflects the society from which these landless workers come — many of the settlements are dominated by a Christian, patriotic, and patriarchal culture.

Though its weaknesses need to be addressed, the MST has achieved a long list of victories. The movement has won land and self-sufficiency for a huge number of extremely poor people. Many of the settlements they create enjoy a much higher standard of living than the slums they left behind, and are bound by a sense of solidarity and community. By any measure their accomplishment is a triumph for direct action: by disregarding legality or petitioning the powerful for change, over a million people have won themselves land and control over their lives by going out and doing it themselves. Brazilian society has not collapsed due to this wave of anarchy; on the contrary it has become healthier, although many problems remain, in the society at large and in the settlements. It largely comes down to circumstance whether a particular settlement is empowering and liberated or competitive and oppressive.

According to an MST member who worked for several years in one of the most dangerous regions of Brazil, two months was simply not enough time in most cases to overcome people's

anti-social training and create a real sense of community, but it was much better than the prevalent pattern in the subsequent period. As the organization experienced a rush to grow, many activists began slapping together settlements by recruiting groups of strangers, promising them land, and sending them off into the regions with the poorest soil or most violent landlords, often contributing to deforestation in the process. Naturally, this emphasis on quantitative results amplified the worst characteristics of the organization and in many ways weakened it, even as its political power increased.

The context for this watershed in the MST was the election of President Lula of the Workers Party (PT) in 2003. Previously, the MST had been autonomous: they did not cooperate with political parties or allow politicians into the organization, although many organizers used the MST to launch political careers. But with the unprecedented victory of the progressive, socialist Workers Party, the leadership of the MST tried to forbid anyone in the organization from publicly speaking out against the government's new agrarian policy. At the same time, the MST began receiving huge amounts of money from the government. Lula had promised to give land to a certain number of families and the MST leadership rushed to fill this quota and engorge their own organization, abandoning their base and their principles. Many influential MST organizers and leaders, backed by the more radical settlements, criticized this collaboration with the government and pushed for a more anti-authoritarian stance, and in fact by 2005, when the PT's agrarian program proved to be a disappointment, the MST began fiercely challenging the government again.

In the eyes of anti-authoritarians the organization had lost its credibility and proven once again the predictable results of collaboration with the government. But within the movement there are still many causes for inspiration. Many of the settlements continue to demonstrate the ability of people to overcome their capitalist and authoritarian socialization, if they take it upon themselves to do so. Perhaps the best example are the Comunas da Terra, a network of settlements that make up a minority within the MST, that farm the land communally, nurture a spirit of solidarity, challenge sexism and capitalist mindsets internally, and create working examples of anarchy. It is notable that the people in the Comunas da Terra enjoy a higher standard of life than those who live in the individualized settlements.

There are contemporary examples of non-hierarchical organizing in North America as well. Throughout the United States today, there exist dozens of anarchist projects that are run on a consensus basis. Consensus decision-making may be used on an ad hoc basis to plan an event or campaign, or more permanently to run an infoshop: an anarchist social center that can serve as a radical bookshop, library, café, meeting space, concert hall, or free store. A typical meeting might begin with volunteers filling the positions of facilitator and note-taker. Many groups also use a "vibes-watcher," someone who volunteers to pay special attention to emotions and interactions within the group, recognizing that the personal is political and that the tradition of suppressing emotions in political spaces derives from the separation of public and private, a separation on which patriarchy and the state are based.

Next, the participants create an agenda in which they list all the topics they want to talk about. For each topic, they start by sharing information. If a decision needs to be made, they talk it over until they find a point where everyone's needs and desires converge. Someone states a proposal that synthesizes everyone's input, and they vote on it: approve, abstain, or block. If one person is

opposed, the group looks for another solution. The decisions may not always be everyone's first choice, but everyone must feel comfortable with every decision the group adopts. Throughout this process, the facilitator encourages full participation from everyone and makes sure no one is silenced.

Sometimes, the group is unable to solve a particular problem, but the option of not coming to any decision demonstrates that within consensus, the health of the group is more important than efficiency. Such groups form on the principle of voluntary association — anyone is free to leave if she wishes, in contrast to authoritarian structures that may deny people the right to leave or exempt themselves from an arrangement they do not agree to. According to this principle, it is better to respect the differing views of the members of a group than to enforce a decision that leaves some people excluded or silenced. This might seem impractical to those who have not participated in such a process, but consensus has served many infoshops and similar projects in the US for years. Using consensus, these groups have made the decisions necessary to organize spaces and events, reach out to the surrounding communities, bring in new participants, raise money, and resist attempts by local government and business leaders to shut them down. What's more, it seems like the number of projects using consensus in the US is only growing. Granted, consensus works best for people who know one another and have a common interest in working together, whether they are volunteers who want to run an infoshop, neighbors who want to resist gentrification, or members of an affinity group planning attacks against the system — but it does work.

A common complaint is that consensus meetings take longer, but are they really less efficient? Authoritarian models of decision-making, including majority voting in which the minority is forced to conform to the decision of the majority, hide or externalize their true costs. Communities that use authoritarian means to make their decisions cannot exist without police or some other structure to enforce these decisions. Consensus precludes the need for enforcement and punishment by making sure that everyone is satisfied beforehand. When we take into account all the work hours a community loses maintaining a police force, which is a huge drain on resources, the hours spent in consensus meetings seem like a good usage of time after all.

The rebellion in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca offer another example of popular decision-making. In 2006, people took over Oaxaca City and much of the state. The population of Oaxaca is over half indigenous, and the struggles there against colonialism and capitalism go back five hundred years. In June 2006, 70,000 striking teachers gathered in Oaxaca de Juarez, the capital, to press their demands for a living wage and better facilities for the students. On June 14, the police attacked the teacher's encampment, but the teachers fought back, forcing the police out of the center of the city, taking over government buildings and evicting politicians, and setting up barricades to keep them out. Oaxaca City was self-organized and autonomous for five months, until federal troops were sent in.

After they forced the police out of the capital city, the striking teachers were joined by students and other workers, and together they formed the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca). The APPO became a coordinating body for the social movements of Oaxaca, effectively organizing social life and popular resistance for several months in the vacuum created by the collapse of state control. It brought together delegates from unions, non-governmental organizations, social organizations, and cooperatives across the state,

seeking to make decisions in the spirit of indigenous practices of consensus — although most assemblies made decisions with a majority vote. APPO founders rejected electoral politics and called for people throughout the state to organize their own assemblies at every level. Recognizing the role of political parties in co-opting popular movements, the APPO banned them from participating.

According to one activist who helped to found the APPO:

So the APPO was formed to address the abuses and create an alternative. It was to be a space for discussion, reflection, analysis, and action. We recognized that it shouldn't be just one organization, but rather a blanket coordinating body for many different groups. That is, not one ideology would prevail; we would focus on finding the common ground among diverse social actors. Students, teachers, anarchists, Marxists, churchgoers — everyone was invited.

The APPO was born without a formal structure, but soon developed impressive organizational capacity. Decisions in the APPO are made by consensus within the general assembly, which was privileged as a decision-making body. In the first few weeks of our existence we created the APPO State Council. The council was originally composed of 260 people — approximately ten representatives from each of Oaxaca's seven regions and representatives from Oaxaca's urban neighborhoods and municipalities.

The Provisional Coordination was created to facilitate the operation of the APPO through different commissions. A variety of commissions were established: judicial, finance, communications, human rights, gender equity, defense of natural resources, and many more. Proposals are generated in smaller assemblies of each sector of the APPO and then brought to the general assembly where they are debated further or ratified.

Time and again, spontaneous popular assemblies such as the one created in Oaxaca have proved capable of making sound decisions and coordinating the activities of an entire population. Naturally, they also attract people who want to take over social movements and people who consider themselves natural leaders. In many revolutions, what begins as a horizontal, libertarian rebellion becomes authoritarian as political parties or self-appointed leaders co-opt and shut down popular decision-making structures. Highly visible participants in popular assemblies can also be pushed towards conservatism by government repression, since they are the most visible targets.

This is one way to interpret dynamics that developed in the APPO after the federal invasion of Oaxaca in late October, 2006. As the repression intensified, some of the more vocal participants in the assembly began calling for moderation, to the dismay of the segments of the movement that were still in the streets. Many APPO members and movement participants complain that the group was taken over by Stalinists and other parasites who use popular movements as tools for their political ambitions. And though the APPO had always taken a stand against political parties, the self-appointed leadership took advantage of the difficult situation to call for participation in the upcoming elections as the only pragmatic course of action.

Many people felt betrayed. Support for collaboration was far from universal within APPO; it was controversial even within the APPO Council, the provisional decision-making group that was emerging as a leadership body. Some people within the APPO created other formations to disseminate anarchist, indigenist, or other anti-authoritarian perspectives, and many just went on with their work and ignored the calls to flock to the voting booths. In the end, the

anti-authoritarian ethic that constituted the backbone of the movement and the basis of its formal structures proved stronger. The vast majority of Oaxacans boycotted the elections, and the PRI, the conservative party that already held power, dominated among the few people who came out to cast ballots. The attempt to transform the powerful, liberatory social movements of Oaxaca into a bid for political power was an absolute failure.

A smaller Oaxacan city, Zaachila (pop. 25,000), can provide a closer look at horizontal decision-making. For years, groups had been working together against local forms of exploitation; among other efforts, they had managed to defeat the plan to construct a Coca Cola plant which would have consumed much of the available drinking water. When the rebellion erupted in Oaxaca City, a majority of the residents decided to take action. They convoked Zaachila's first popular assembly with the ringing of the bells, calling everyone together, to share the news of the police attack in Oaxaca City and to decide what to do in their own town. More meetings and actions followed:

Men, women, children, and city council members joined together to take over the municipal building. A lot of the building was locked and we only used the hallways and the offices that were open. We stayed in the municipal building night and day, taking care of everything. And that's how the neighborhood assemblies were born. We'd say, "It's the neighborhood of La Soledad's turn and tomorrow it's up to San Jacinto." That's how the neighborhood assemblies were first used, and then later they turned into decision-making bodies, which is where we are now.

The seizing of the municipal building was totally spontaneous. The activists from before played a role and initially directed things, but the popular assembly structure was developed little by little...

Neighborhood assemblies, comprised of a rotating body of five people, were also formed in each section of town and together they would form the permanent popular assembly, the People's Council of Zaachila. The people from neighborhood assemblies may not be activists at all, but little by little, as they follow their obligation to bring information back and forth from the Council, they develop their capacity for leadership. All the agreements made in the Council are studied by these five people and then brought back to the neighborhoods for review. These assemblies are completely open; anyone can attend and have their voice heard. Decisions always go to a general vote, and all the adults present can vote. For example, if some people think a bridge needs to be built, and others think we need to focus on improving electricity, we vote on what the priority should be. The simple majority wins, fifty-percent plus one.

The townsfolk kicked out the mayor while maintaining public services, and also established a community radio station. The city served as a model for dozens of other municipalities throughout the state that soon proclaimed their autonomy.

Years before these events in Zaachila, another group was organizing autonomous villages in the state of Oaxaca. As many as twenty-six rural communities affiliated with the CIPO-RFM (Council of Indigenous Peoples of Oaxaca — Ricardo Flores Magon), an organization that identifies with southern Mexico's tradition of indigenous and anarchist resistance; the name references an indigenous anarchist influential in the Mexican Revolution. Insofar as they can, living under an oppressive regime, the CIPO communities assert their autonomy and help one another to meet their needs, ending private property and working the land communally. Typically, when a village expressed interest in joining the group, someone from the CIPO would come and explain how they worked, and let the villagers decide whether or not they wanted to join. The government frequently denied resources to CIPO villages, hoping to starve them out,

but it is no surprise that many people thought they could live more richly as masters of their own lives, even if it meant greater material poverty.

## **How will decisions be enforced?**

The state has so thoroughly obscured the fact that people are capable of implementing their own decisions that those raised in this society are hard-pressed to imagine how this could be done without giving a small minority the authority to coerce people into following orders. On the contrary, the power to enforce decisions should be every bit as universal and decentralized as the power to make those decisions. There have been stateless societies on every continent that used diffuse sanctions rather than specialized enforcers. Only through a long and violent process do states steal this ability from people and monopolize it as their own.

This is how diffuse sanctions work: in an ongoing process, a society decides how it wants to organize and what behaviors it considers unacceptable. This may occur over time or in formal, immediate settings. The participation of everybody in making these decisions is complemented by the participation of everybody in upholding them. If somebody breaks these common standards, everyone is accustomed to reacting. They don't call the police, file a grievance, or wait for someone else to do something; they approach the person they think is in the wrong and tell him, or take another appropriate action.

For example, the people in a neighborhood may decide that each different household will take turns cleaning the street. If one household fails to uphold this decision, everybody else on the block has the ability to ask them to fulfill their responsibility. Depending on how serious the transgression is, other people in the neighborhood might react with criticism, ridicule, or ostracism. If the household has a good excuse for being slack, perhaps someone living there is very sick and the others are busy taking care of her, the neighbors can choose to have sympathy and forgive the lapse. This flexibility and sensitivity are typically lacking in a law-based system. On the other hand, if the negligent household has no excuse, and not only do they never clean the streets, they throw their trash in it, their neighbors might hold a general meeting demanding a change in their behavior, or they might take some action like piling all the trash in front of their door. Meanwhile, in their day-to-day interactions individual neighbors might share their criticisms with members of the offending household, or ridicule them, not invite them to joint activities, or glare at them in the streets. If someone is incorrigibly antisocial, always blocking or contradicting the desires of the rest of the group and refusing to respond to people's concerns, the ultimate response is to kick that person out of the group.

This method is much more flexible, and more liberating, than legalitarian, coercive approaches. Rather than being bound to the blind letter of the law, which cannot take into account specific circumstances or people's needs, and depending on a powerful minority for enforcement, the method of diffuse sanctions allows everyone to weigh for herself how serious the transgression is. It also allows transgressors the opportunity to convince others that their actions were justified, thus providing constant challenges to the dominant morality. By contrast, in a statist system, the authorities don't have to show that something is right or wrong before condemning someone's

home or confiscating a drug deemed illegal. All they have to do is cite a statute in a law book that their victims had no hand in writing.

In a horizontal society, people enforce decisions according to how enthusiastic they are about those decisions. If almost everybody strongly supports a decision, it will be upheld vigorously, whereas if a decision leaves most people feeling neutral or unenthusiastic, it will only be partially enforced, leaving open more room for creative transgression and exploring other solutions. On the other hand a lack of enthusiasm in implementing decisions might mean that in practice organization falls on the shoulders of informal powerholders — people who are delegated an unofficial position of leadership by the rest of the group, whether they want it or not. This means that members of horizontal groups, from collective houses to entire societies, must confront the problem of self-discipline. They must hold themselves accountable to the standards they have agreed upon and the criticism of their peers, and risk being unpopular or confronting conflict by criticizing those who do not uphold common standards — calling out the housemate who does not do dishes or the community that does not contribute to road maintenance. It's a difficult process, often lacking in many current anarchist projects, but without it group decision-making is a façade and responsibility is vague and unequally shared. Going through this process, people become more empowered and more connected with those around them.

Groups always contain the possibility for conformity and conflict. Authoritarian groups typically avoid conflict by enforcing greater levels of conformity. Pressures to conform also exist in anarchist groups, but without restrictions on human movement, it is easier for people to leave and join other groups or to act or live on their own. Thus, people can choose the levels of conformity and conflict they want to tolerate, and in the process of finding and leaving groups, people change and challenge social norms.

In the newly created state of Israel, Jews who had participated in socialist movements in Europe took the opportunity to create hundreds of kibbutzim, utopian communal farms. In these farms, the members created a strong example of communal living and decision-making. At a typical kibbutz, most decisions were made at a general town meeting, held twice weekly. The frequency and length of meetings stemmed from the fact that so many aspects of social life were open to debate, and the common belief that proper decisions “can only be made after intensive group discussion.” There were about a dozen elected positions in the kibbutz, related to managing the commune's financial affairs and coordinating production and trade, but the general policy had to be decided in general meetings. Official positions were limited to terms of a few years, and the members encouraged a culture of “office-hating,” a reluctance to take office and a disdain for those who appeared to be power hungry.

No one in the kibbutz had coercive authority. Neither were there police in the kibbutz, though it was common for everyone to leave their doors unlocked. Public opinion was the most important factor ensuring social cohesion. If there was a problem with a member of the commune, it was discussed at the general meeting, but most of the time even the threat of it being brought up at the general meeting motivated people to work out their differences. In the worst case scenario, if a member refused to accept group decisions, the rest of the collective could vote to kick her out. But this ultimate sanction differs from the coercive tactics used by the state in a key respect: voluntary groups only exist because everyone involved wants to work with everyone else. A

person who is excluded is not deprived of the ability to survive or maintain relationships, as there are many other groups she can join. More importantly, she is not forced to abide by collective decisions. In a society based on this principle, people would enjoy a social mobility that is denied to people in statist contexts, in which laws are enforced upon an individual whether she approves of them or not. In any case, expulsion was not common in the kibbutzim, because public opinion and group discussion were sufficient to solve most conflicts.

But the kibbutzim had other problems, which can teach us important lessons about creating collectives. After about a decade, the kibbutzim began to succumb to the pressures of the capitalist world that surrounded them. Although internally the kibbutzim were strikingly communal, they were never properly anti-capitalist; from the beginning, they attempted to exist as competitive producers within a capitalist economy. The need to compete in the economy, and thus to industrialize, encouraged a greater reliance on experts, while influence from the rest of society fostered consumerism.

At the same time, there was a negative reaction to the lack of privacy intentionally structured into the kibbutz — common showers, for example. The purpose of this lack of privacy was to engineer a more communal spirit. But because the designers of the kibbutz did not realize that privacy is as important to people's well-being as social connectedness, kibbutz members began to feel stifled over time, and withdrew from the public life of the kibbutz, including their participation in decision-making.

Another vital lesson of the kibbutzim is that building utopian collectives must involve tireless struggle against contemporary authoritarian structures, or they will become part of those structures. The kibbutzim were founded on land seized by the Israeli state from Palestinians, against whom genocidal policies are still continuing today. The racism of the European founders allowed them to ignore the abuse inflicted on the previous inhabitants of what they saw as a promised land, much the same way religious pilgrims in North America plundered the indigenous to construct their new society. The Israeli state gained incredibly from the fact that nearly all their potential dissidents — including socialists and veterans of armed struggle against Nazism and colonialism — voluntarily sequestered themselves in escapist communes that contributed to the capitalist economy. If these utopians had used the kibbutz as a base to struggle against capitalism and colonialism in solidarity with the Palestinians while constructing the foundations of a communal society, history in the Middle East might have turned out differently.

## **Who will settle disputes?**

Anarchist methods of settling disputes open up a much healthier range of options than are available within a capitalist and statist system. Stateless societies throughout history have come up with numerous methods for settling disputes that seek compromise, allow for reconciliation, and keep power in the hands of the disputants and their community.

The Nubians are a society of sedentary farmers in Egypt. They were traditionally stateless, and even according to recent accounts they consider it highly immoral to bring in the government to solve disputes. In contrast to the individualistic and legalistic ways of viewing disputes in authoritarian societies, the norm in Nubian culture is to consider one person's problem

everyone's problem; when there is a dispute, strangers, friends, relatives, or other third parties intercede to help the disputants find a mutually satisfying resolution. According to anthropologist Robert Fernea, Nubian culture regards quarrels between members of a kinship group as dangerous, in that they threaten the supportive social net on which all depend.

This culture of cooperation and mutual responsibility is backed up by economic and social structures as well. Among the Nubians, property such as waterwheels, cattle, and palm trees have traditionally been communally owned, so in the daily work of feeding themselves people are immersed in cooperative social bonds that teach solidarity and the importance of getting along. Additionally, the kinship groups which comprise Nubian society, called "nogs," are interwoven, not atomized like the isolated nuclear families of Western society: "This means that a person's nogs are overlapping and involve diverse, dispersed membership. This feature is very important, for the Nubian community does not easily split into opposing factions." Most disputes are resolved quickly by a third relative. Larger disputes that embroil more people are solved in a family council with all the members of the nog, including women and children. The council is presided over by an elder kinsman, but the goal is to reach consensus and get the disputants to reconcile.

The Hopi of southwestern North America used to be more warlike than in recent times. Factions still exist within Hopi villages, but they overcome conflict through cooperation in rituals, and they use shame and leveling mechanisms with people who are boastful or domineering. When disputes get out of hand, they use ritual clown skits at *kachina* dances to mock the people involved. The Hopi offer an example of a society that gave up feuding and developed rituals to cultivate a more peaceful disposition. The image of clowns and dances being used to solve disputes gives a tantalizing glimpse of humor and art as means for responding to common problems. There is a world of possibilities more interesting than general assemblies or mediation processes! Artistic conflict resolution encourages new ways of looking at problems, and subverts the possibility of permanent mediators or meeting facilitators gaining power by monopolizing the role of arbiter.

## **Meeting in the streets**

Politicians and technocrats are clearly not capable of making responsible decisions for millions of people. They have learned enough from their many past mistakes that governments usually do not collapse under the weight of their own incompetence, but they have hardly created the best of all possible worlds. If they can manage to keep their absurd bureaucracies functioning, it's not a wild jump of logic to think that we could organize our communities at least as well ourselves. The hypothesis of authoritarian society, that a large, diverse population needs specialized institutions to control decision-making, can be disproven many times over. The MST of Brazil shows that in a huge group of people, most decision-making power can reside at the grassroots level, with individual communities that take care of their own needs. The people of Oaxaca showed that an entire modern society can organize itself and coordinate resistance against constant assault by police and paramilitaries, with open assemblies. Anarchist infoshops and Israeli kibbutzim show that groups running complex operations that have to pay rent or meet production schedules while accomplishing social and cultural objectives capitalist enterprises

never even attempt, can make decisions in a timely fashion and uphold these decisions without a class of enforcers. The Nuer show that horizontal decision-making can thrive for generations, even after colonization, and that with a shared culture of restorative conflict resolution there is no need for a specialized institution to solve disputes.

For most of human history, our societies have been egalitarian and self-organizing, and we have not lost the capability to make and uphold the decisions that affect our lives, or to imagine new and better forms of organizing. Whenever people overcome alienation and come together with their neighbors, they develop exciting new ways of coordinating and making decisions. Once they liberated themselves from landlords, priests, and mayors, the uneducated and downtrodden peasants of Aragon proved themselves equal to the task of making not just a whole new world, but hundreds of them.

New decision-making methods are usually influenced by pre-existing institutions and cultural values. When people recapture decision-making authority over some aspect of their lives, they should ask themselves what reference points and precedents already exist in their culture, and what ingrained disadvantages they will have to overcome. For example, there might be a tradition of town meetings that can be expanded from symbolic window dressing to real self-organization; on the other hand, people might be starting from a macho culture, in which case they will have to learn how to listen, compromise, and ask questions. Alternately, if a group develops a decision-making method that is totally original and alien to their society, they may face challenges including newcomers and explaining their method to outsiders — this is sometimes a weakness of infoshops in the US, which employ a well thought-out, idealized form of decision-making complex enough to seem foreign even to many participants.

An anti-authoritarian group may use some form of consensus, or of majoritarian voting. Large groups may find voting quicker and more efficient, but it can also silence a minority. Perhaps the most important part of the process is the discussion that happens before the decision; voting does not diminish the importance of methods that allow everyone to communicate and arrive at good compromises. Many autonomous villages in Oaxaca ultimately used voting to make decisions, and they provided an inspiring example of self-organization to radicals who otherwise abhor voting. Though a group's structure doubtlessly influences its culture and outcomes, the formality of voting may be an acceptable expedient if all the discussion that takes place before it is steeped in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation.

In a self-organizing society, not everyone will participate equally in meetings or other formal spaces. A decision-making body can eventually become dominated by certain people, and the assembly itself can become a bureaucratic institution with coercive powers. For this reason, it may be necessary to develop decentralized and overlapping forms of organization and decision-making, and to preserve space for spontaneous organization to occur outside of all pre-existing structures. If there is only one structure in which all decisions are made, an internal culture can develop that is not inclusive to everyone in the society; then experienced insiders can rise to positions of leadership, and human activity external to the structure can be delegitimized. Soon enough, you have a government. The kibbutzim and APPO both evidence the creeping development of bureaucracy and specialization.

But if there are multiple decision-making structures for different spheres of life, and if they can arise or fade out according to need, none of them can monopolize authority. In this regard, power needs to stay in the streets, in the homes, in the hands of the people who exercise it, in the meeting of people who come together to solve problems.

## **Recommended Reading**

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