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The Evolution of Property

CHAPTER V

Bourgeois Property

I

WE have seen that landed property was originally common to the entire tribe in the shape of woodland, pasture, and even arable land; that it was converted into collective property when the clan broke up into the matriarchal or patriarchal families, and, lastly, into private property, on the disintegration of the patriarchal family and the constitution of the modern family, including the parents with their children, and a few supernumeraries, say the grandparents or an odd uncle or aunt who has failed in securing an establishment of his or her own, and whose inheritance is greedily coveted after.

The march of movable property has been a different one; though, starting from the communist form, it far more rapidly arrived at the private form; even among savages, living in community, the arms and ornaments are considered as attached to the individual, and are frequently interred with the corpses. [1]

The instruments of labour have at all times been considered as the personal property of him who wielded them; during the periods of slavery and serfdom, the tools and the soil were surrendered to the slave or serf who used them and for whom they constituted a sort of property. Individual appropriation of the instrument of labour results from its personal character, and it owes this character to the fact that it is small, of little value, and capable of being manipulated by a single individual; from this point of view the implement of the artificer may be assimilated to the field of the peasant cultivator, which is small, of little

value, and usable by a single individual, that is to say, cultivable by himself and the members of his family.

Landed property, as it evolved, prior to the bourgeois property, on the one hand ran into small peasant property and on the other into feudal property. Agriculture was the prime motor of this evolution. Commerce was the motor of the evolution of the property of the instruments of labour and industrial products, which, once it has attained a certain degree of development reacts, as Marx has demonstrated, on landed property, and accelerates its transformation into bourgeois property.

II

In the collectivist village the peasants produce all that they consume (bread, meat, flax, wool, etc.), and the artificers (smiths, weavers, tailors, etc.) are only admitted into it when their services are required. They reside, as a rule, in the outskirts of the village, and, after a certain term of sojourn there, generally that of a year and a day, they obtain the right of city; are authorised to send their cattle to graze on the common pasture, and are entitled to a share in the land. At the outset there takes place no exchange of products in these villages; the handicraftsmen are public functionaries in the service of the community, and are paid by an annual tribute of provisions. They only work to order; the raw materials are supplied them, and, wherever feasible, they work in the houses of their customers. When they ceased to be public officials, their work was paid in kind or by service, in the same way as the man-at-arms was paid for his work of defence. This primitive form of industrial labour persisted as long as the villages continued to be small and retained the collectivist form of landed property. The villages situated at the intersection of the roads, frequented by the caravans of travelling merchants, or near the mouths of rivers, or the seaside, were the first to undergo a change; a temporary market was established there for which the handicraftsmen wrought. Wherever the artificers found means to sell their products they multiplied; instead of finding themselves repulsed or received indifferently, they were sought and welcomed. The population of the villages – transformed into towns and boroughs – composed of specialised handicraftsmen practising different crafts and standing in need of one another's services, came to establish a permanent market where the inhabitants exchanged their products or sold them, during the fairs, to itinerant traders.

The character of industry then experiences a change; the artificer becomes independent of his customer. He no longer waits for the latter to supply him with the material he must work up; he buys it, and keeps a stock of it on hand; he ceases to work to order, and works only with a view to sell. To his quality of producer is superadded that of trader; he buys the

raw material, and sells his finished work; he enlarges his shop, and seeks the help of apprentices and journeymen, who work under his direction and side by side with him, lodging in his house and eating at his table. The fund he requires is of so modest a description as hardly to deserve the name of capital, in the sense in which Marx employs the word, even although this fund be capital in embryo.

The increase of the population in the mediæval villages forbids the access of newcomers to the communal lands, and precludes their sharing in the agrarian divisions. The village lands remained the exclusive property of the original inhabitants and their descendants, who constituted a sort of municipal aristocracy, while, in the country, the exigencies of defence called into life the feudal aristocracy. The urban aristocracy has survived in certain towns of democratic Switzerland. In the Alsatia of our day these urban aristocrats have become great manufacturers.

By way of resisting the despotism of the aristocrats of the towns, who monopolised the land and power, the handicraftsmen organised guilds, which, in the beginning, were open to all the artificers of the locality without distinction. These guilds not only defended the craftsmen against the municipal aristocrats, but protected them against their mutual competition. The market in which they sold their wares acquired a capital importance; as it was restricted to the inhabitants of the town and the itinerant hawkers of the fairs, the corporations were bound to see that the market was not overstocked with goods. The corporations now became close, and the number of persons admitted into them, and at liberty, consequently, to open a shop in the town, was limited, as was also the number of journeymen the masters might employ and wares they might turn out. In order to facilitate the quantity of and to render effective the supervision of the syndics of the corporations, the craftmasters were obliged to work with open doors and windows, and sometimes in the streets. Each guild possessed its speciality, to which its members were strictly bound to adhere – e.g., the bootmakers were restricted to the making of new boots; the repairing and soling of old boots was prohibited, as belonging of right to the corporation of cobblers.

The right of sale was no less jealously protected than that of production; at the fairs the seller was only allowed to accost the buyer as he passed in front of the stall; once he had stepped beyond it, the seller had forfeited the right to call him back, or to offer him goods for sale, for he now pertained to the owner of the neighbouring stall. These multiplex and minute regulations attest the importance already acquired by the market, the expansion of which was, at a later date, to transform the mode of production and the correlative social relations.

In handicraft production lay this inherent contradiction: if the handicraftsman was a synthetic labourer, combining in his person the intellectual and manual functions of his handicraft, production and the instruments of production were, on the contrary, scattered

over the land. Every province, every borough and town, every seignorial domain and peasant farmstead, produced the food and other necessities of life required by its inhabitants, selling only what was superfluous, and buying only a few articles of luxury. As they imported none of the articles of consumption, the mediæval towns and provinces were economically independent, and, as a consequence, able to live in a state of isolation; they formed so many distinct petty States, habitually at war with one another.

The economic theory which corresponded to this dispersion of production tended to promote their independence. The agriculturists, who were the economic theoreticians of the feudal epoch, advised the landed proprietor to produce all on his own domain, so as to have nothing to purchase outside its limits, and we have seen that in the manors of the feudal lords there existed workshops for manufacturing all and everything, not excepting arms.

That theory remained valid long after the phenomena which had given rise to it had disappeared. When, in the 16th century, the silk industry was imported into France from Italy, the royal policy, instead of concentrating it in the locality in which it had a chance of success, disseminated it over the provinces. Attempts were made to rear the silk-worm in countries in which it was difficult if not impossible to cultivate the mulberry-tree, on the leaves of which it feeds. During the Revolution of 1789 it was sought to acclimatise the cotton-plant, to avoid having to buy it abroad; and it was the desire to shake off the tribute paid to the colonies by the purchase of the sugar-cane which led to the discovery of the saccharine properties of the beetroot.

When the warfare between castle and castle abated, owing to the disappearance of the vanquished, whose lands were engrossed by the victor, and there ensued a greater security of the highways, commercial intercourse between the different provinces became possible and great centres of handicraft production sprang up. The city of Ghent, which manufactured cloths from wool imported chiefly from England, possessed in the 14th century a population of upwards of half-a-million inhabitants. The development of commerce shook the social organisation of the feudal city.

In the towns which prospered industrially, the guildmasters of handicrafts developed into close corporations the freedom of which was obtainable only by the privilege of birth, money or royal favour, or else unless one chanced to be a son or relation of a guildmaster by serving a long term of apprenticeship; it was necessary to pay for learning the handicraft, for the right of exercising it, and again on being made free of the trade. The guildmasters excluded a number of artificers who no longer worked on their own account, but in the workshops of their masters. Heretofore the handicraftsman could hope to become a master and a shopkeeper in his turn; but in proportion as commerce and industry were developed the men lost all prospect of this; shut out from the incorporated trades, and in enmity with the masters who employed them, they formed vast associations

of journeymen which were at once national and international, whereas the guilds of the masters were essentially local. The masters, enriched by the development of production, allied themselves with the municipal aristocrats in order to cope with the apprentices and journeymen, who on several occasions were set on and supported by the feudal nobility, jealous of the growing municipal aristocracy. All the industrial towns of the Middle Ages were stained with blood by the conflicts between journeymen and craftsmasters.

The discovery of the passage of the Indies by rounding the Cape of Good Hope, and that of America, which date from the end of the 15th century, by bringing the gold of America into the European market, and by introducing transoceanic commerce, depreciated the value of landed property, gave a decisive impulse to the rising bourgeois production in the cities of the Mediterranean, the cities of the Low Countries, and the Hanseatic League, and opened the era of modern revolution. [2]

The countries newly discovered in India and America were put to plunder, and turned into markets for the industrial and agricultural products of Europe. England exported corn to America; l'Auvergne cheese, wine, etc.

The creation of the colonial market and the importation of American gold furthered the development of manufacturing industry. Private individuals were enabled to accumulate the funds required for the establishment of manufactories, which in the beginning were simply workshops of artificers, only distinguished from these by the greater number of workmen employed, and the larger quantity of commodities manufactured. As these workshops infringed all the regulations of the guilds, and encroached on the privileges of the masters, they could not be established in the towns, but had to be set up in the suburbs, the country or the maritime cities which, newly founded, possessed neither municipal aristocracy nor incorporated trades. In London and Paris, it was outside the city walls, in Westminster, Southwark, and the Faubourg St. Antoine that the manufactories were created. They were established by merchants enriched by the colonial trade, and not by the guildmasters, bound in the chains of routine, and fettered by corporative bonds. In the present day we see railways constructed and directed, not by the masters of stage-coach companies, but by financial men.

Manufacture, which struck at the corporations, and ruined the guildmasters of handicrafts, was equally prejudicial to the artificer, whom it apparently benefited by affording a greater regularity and a greater quantity of labour and a higher salary. Division of labour was introduced into the manufactories; all the operations of a trade were disjoined and isolated; the manufacture of a pin, for example, was decomposed into some twenty different operations, performed by an equal number of specialised labourers. The artificer who, heretofore, had been familiar with all the processes of his craft, and each of which he accomplished in turn, became now a detail labourer, condemned for life to execute a single operation.

The impulsion given to commerce and to production hastened the expansion of the towns, which were compelled to burst their bounds and spread over the adjoining fields. An economical difficulty then arose: it became necessary to find the means of existence for these newly-created populations.

During the primitive collectivist period, the town had not come to exist, even as the residence of the military chief, exercising royal power. The Merovingian kings, like the Indian princes, travelled with a more or less numerous retinue of men-at-arms and retainers, followed by artificers of divers trades. The spot on which they camped became a temporary city: they subsisted on the fees and donations of the surrounding country. The absence of roads and the difficulty of communication precluded all permanent conglomeration of persons; whom there was no means of supporting. The feudal cities, dependent on the agricultural produce of the neighbouring localities for their means of subsistence, were necessarily bound to restrict themselves to a limited number of inhabitants. So long as the absence of roads or the insecurity of such as existed, rendered all commercial intercourse between the towns impossible or difficult, there was no question of guarding against the exportation of the means of subsistence. But so soon as the means of communication began to be improved, and as men began to transport grain from one province to the other, all the towns and provinces took measures for prohibiting the exportation of corn from their territories, and preventing it being monopolised. In all the European towns we meet with regulations for the sale of cereals in the markets at stated times; a maximum price was fixed, and the quantity allowed to be purchased was determined; the proprietors, under penalty of confiscation, were prohibited from garnering corn for more than two years; it was, furthermore, forbidden to buy the standing corn or that already housed. The extension of the towns, and the difficulty of procuring provisions outside their own territories, turned every bad harvest year into a year of dearth or famine. The paramount concern of the municipal authorities was to prevent famines; they ordained the storing of provisions capable of supplying the town for at least three months, and saw to it that a sufficient quantity of land was annually sown with corn. An edict of 1577, in France, restricted the planting of vineyards, which became, yearly, more important, and required that for every portion of land planted with vines a double portion be devoted to corn.

In order to meet the new requirements it was necessary that agriculture should be developed; new lands were brought under culture, woodlands were deforested and marshlands reclaimed, while the cornfields were enlarged. In years of good harvests the corn was so abundant that the price of it ceased to be remunerative; it became urgent to create fresh markets. In France the circulation of corn was permitted between the provinces, and also the exportation of it to England and the Colonies. These economic liberties were but short-lived, for no sooner had corn attained a certain price in a locality

than its exportation was prohibited. From 1669 to 1683, during a period of fourteen years, the exportation of corn was permitted on nine occasions and prohibited during six years.

These regulations were powerless to prevent local famines; nay, it happened that they intensified the same by prohibiting the exportation of corn from a province in which it was superabundant; the towns confiscated corn in its transit through their territories, whenever fearful of competition or threatened with famine. Colbert was constrained to employ force to get 2,500 sacks of corn, which the Parliament of Bordeaux sought to retain, expedited to Paris. It would happen that a town suffered from famine, whilst at a distance of some fifty miles the wheat supply was abundant. The circulation of wine, wool, etc., was subjected to similar restraint; seaports like Bordeaux and Marseilles, in order to command a better sale for their own wines, prevented the shipment of the wines of the neighbouring provinces. Prior to the Revolution of 1789, the last royal ministers endeavoured to show the danger and uselessness of these regulations; they caused them to be temporarily suspended, but were always in the last instance compelled to re-establish them. It required a revolution to abolish them and to strip the peasants of their privileges, which burdened landed property and hampered the development of modern agriculture, just as the privileges of the corporations had shackled the development of industry.

The incorporated trades that opposed the establishment of manufactures in their towns stood in fear, above all things, of innovations; in order to maintain the industrial equality of the masters of handicrafts, and to prevent the one from enjoying an advantage not shared by the other, the introduction of new processes and improvements of any kind were prohibited. Argand, the inventor of a lamp with a double air-current, which tripled the lighting capacity of the oil, was, in the 18th century, had before the Parliament of Paris, by the corporation of tinworkers, who claimed the exclusive right of manufacturing lamps. It was due to the influence of the royal courtesans, Mesdames Pompadour, Du Barry, and Marie Antoinette that printed calicoes were allowed to be sold; for the chambers of commerce of Rouen, Lyons, and Amiens had protested energetically, predicting the ruin of industry and a cataclysm in France if the manufacture of these cottons was authorised.

The feudal fetters which impeded the development of agriculture and industry once broken, bourgeois property was free to implant itself and begin its evolution.

The landlord obtained the right of enclosing his fields; the people's right of pasture after the harvest was abolished. This right of enclosure was of supreme importance, for, anterior to it, the landlord could apply no other methods of culture than those employed by the commoners in general, on pain of seeing his harvests prowled on by their cattle. This right of enclosure was, too, the right most loudly clamoured for in France in the 18th century. The common lands, wherever it was possible, were divided; were given away, that is, to the bourgeois; for the inhabitants of the community to whom they were apportioned sold them at a nominal price; this partition of the land, for which a multiplicity of

philanthropical and moral reasons has been adduced, was but a means of preventing the small peasant from possessing cattle, and of depriving him of his resources in order to turn him into a wage-labourer. The church property, which ought to have been restituted to the poor, to whom it belonged, was plundered with the utmost brutality and cynicism in England as well as in France; for everywhere the bourgeois is animated by the same thievish instincts.

Leopold Delisle, in the preface of his history of the agricultural classes of the Middle Ages, observes:

“A significant fact is the stationary condition of our agriculture for the last five centuries, from the 10th to the 15th. Almost all of the practices described in our old records hold good to this day among our labourers; to such an extent that a 13th century peasant who should visit one of our small farms, would experience but little surprise.”

But this same 13th century peasant would feel lost in one of the great modern farms on which the methods of mechanical agriculture are applied.

The most improved methods of culture have transformed agricultural products and increased the produce. Modern agriculture is ruinous; it exhausts the soil, alike by the abundance of the crops and their exportation abroad. Their consumption in the towns interferes with the circulation of matter which formerly went on between the soil and animals and man, in the form of meat, grain, and fruit, etc., consumed by him and back from man and beast to the soil, in the shape of excrements. So long as the consumption of the harvest took place upon the spot the circulation was complete; to remedy the present defective circulation it has become necessary to restore the fertility of the soil by artificial means – by gorging it with manures brought from afar, from South America and the Napoleonic battlefields, and with artificial and chemical manures.

Modern agriculture demands a vast expenditure of labour; but in proportion as more labour was required, in the same proportion the industrial towns drew off the labourers and depopulated the country. “There is a lack of agricultural hands,” has been the general cry for the last eighty years; and it is this dearth of agricultural labourers which has furnished the necessary incitement for the procurement of the means of labour in abundance. The application of machinery to agricultural labour became an imperative necessity; but machinery can only be applied on great farms; wherefore the concentration of land was a pre-requisite for the application of machinery and the introduction of scientific agriculture.

In 1857 M. Leonce de Lavergne cited, by way of example, a farm of the Department of l’Oise on which 1,250 acres of beetroot were cultivated, and 8,250 bushels of wheat were gathered. “There is nothing more colossal to be met with in England,” he exclaimed exultingly. [3]

But how insignificant do these colossal farms appear when compared with the *Bonanza* farms of the New World.

Since 1874 an American cultivator, Mr. Dalrymple, whose name has obtained a world-wide celebrity, has directed the operations of six farms, of an area of 75,000 acres, belonging to a financial company. He divided these farms into sections of 2,000 acres, sub-divided into three lots of 650 acres. These 75,000 acres are cultivated by a regiment of 600 labourers, under a military discipline. At harvest time the central administration engages from 500 to 600 supplementary labourers, and distributes them among the different sections. As soon as the autumn operations are ended the men are discharged, with the exception of the foreman and 110 men per section. In certain farms of Dakota and Minnesota the mules and horses do not winter on the field of operation; once the ground is broken they are sent southward and return only in the following spring. Mounted mechanics accompany the ploughs, sowing machines, etc., ready at a moment's notice to repair the machinery out of order. The grain is conveyed to the threshing machines, which are in operation night and day; it is threshed and winnowed and sacked automatically, and despatched to the railroads which adjoin the farms, and from thence to Duluth or Buffalo. Every year Mr. Dalrymple increases the acreage under culture by 5,000 acres; in 1880 it amounted to 25,000 acres.

At the same time that the bourgeoisie of Europe stripped the peasants of the communal lands and feudal privileges, it imposed upon them tributes of blood and money; it left them at the mercy of the usurers, who converted them into nominal proprietors, exposed to the competition of the great land owners and farmers of America and India. These and other causes combined to accelerate the expropriation of the peasant and his conversion into a proletarian. In America, where financial agriculture is carried to the highest pitch of perfection, we meet also with the most highly developed agricultural proletariat.

The cultivators of the corn-growing States of the Union may be classed under four great categories: 1. the day labourers or agricultural proletarians; 2. the small farmers (peasant proprietors and *métayers*); 3. proprietors who direct the cultivation of their land; 4. great financial farmers of whom, in Europe, the only counterparts are to be found in different parts of Roumania and in the south of Russia.

The great majority of the cultivators is composed of proletarians, who do not possess an inch of land or a hut of mud; they do not own the bed on which they lie or the spoon they eat with; they realise the ideal of men stripped of all private property save that which they directly appropriate in the shape of food or clothing. They have no fixed abode in the fields they cultivate, and which they abandon as soon as the work is done. The managers of the financial farms recruit the labourers everywhere; in the villages and large towns the latter are hired by the day, week or month. The men are engaged for the agricultural campaign, placed under the direction of overlookers and foremen and conveyed to the farms; they are

lodged and fed and supplied with medicine and paid a wage. They are drilled and formed into regular agricultural regiments, and subjected to a military discipline. They rise, feed, and go to bed at prescribed hours; throughout the week spirits are prohibited; on Sundays the men are free to go and drink at the neighbouring ale-houses. When the work is performed in autumn they are discharged; during the winter months only a small number of men is kept on at the farms to tend the cattle and to take care of the farm implements. The rest return to the towns and villages to practise whatever trade they can put themselves to.

The transformation of landed property and of its mode of culture was necessitated by the transformation undergone by industrial and financial property. The country, in order to supply the men and money required by industry for its workshops and colossal enterprises (railways, tunnels, etc.), unparalleled since the giant achievements of the period of primitive communism, was drained of its population, and the hiding-places in which the peasants had deposited their savings were cleared out.

At previous epochs the citizens, with the exception of an infinitesimal minority of noblemen, priests, and artificers, satisfied all their wants by cultivating the land; in the bourgeois world an ever-increasing mass of citizens is divorced from agricultural labour, and engaged in industrial and commercial pursuits, and dependent for their means of subsistence on the population employed in tilling the soil.

III

A mediæval village was an economic unit, because within its limits all the handicrafts were practised which the villagers required. Capitalist production begins by destroying this economic unit; it dissociates the handicrafts and isolates them, assigning to special centres the exercise of distinct crafts. A town or province no longer produces all the articles required by its inhabitants; it relies upon other towns or provinces for the manufacture of special goods. The silk manufactures that it had been sought to disperse over France were, by the end of the last century, almost wholly concentrated in Lyons and its environs. The textile manufactures of wool, flax, and cotton are centralised in certain districts, whilst the production of iron, beetroot-sugar, etc., is confined to others.

The ancient communal and provincial units have been destroyed, and in their place units of a different sort have been constituted. The ancient units were complex; they were formed by the conglomeration, in a township or province, of all the industries required by it; whereas the modern economic units are simple. They are constituted each by a single industry – iron or sugar here, cotton or leather yonder. A capitalistic nation, like France, is

not subdivided into provinces or departments in harmony with its geographical configuration and historical traditions, but is divided into simple economic units: into cotton districts or wine districts, corn-growing or sugar-growing regions, carboniferous or silk producing centres. All of these industrial units are interdependent from their reciprocal wants, no one industrial centre being capable, like the mediæval cities, of subsisting a month or even a week without the support of other centres. If, for example, the town of Rouen supplies the whole of France with cotton goods, she imports her corn from La Beauce, her cattle from the north, her coals from the Loire, her oil from Marseilles, and so forth. A capitalistic nation is a gigantic workshop, and every speciality of social production is executed in special centres, situated at great distances from one another but narrowly knit together by reciprocal wants. The political autonomy of the mediæval townships has become an impossibility; the correlation of economic wants serves as a basis for the political unity of the nation. Capitalist production, which has destroyed the local and provincial unity of handicraft production, is about to destroy the national unity of its own creation and to replace it by a vaster, an international unity.

England, that was the first nation to apply machinery, had manifested the pretension of constraining the rest of the nations to become exclusively agricultural countries, reserving for herself the industrial role. Lancashire was to weave all the cotton produced by the Indies and the United States. This premature attempt at an international industrial monopolisation has miscarried. America, at the present day, manufactures cotton goods in excess of her requirements, and India, whose cotton industry had been ruined by England, has taken to weaving by machinery. Sixteen years ago the consumption of cotton by the manufactories of India amounted to 87,000 bales; in 1885 the consumption of cotton amounted to 585,000 bales. [4]

India was the cradle of the cotton industry; calicoes first came from Calcutta, and muslin from Mosul; ere long the Indian cottons, manufactured in the proximity of the cottonfields, will once again invade the European markets and, in their turn, ruin the industry of Manchester and the cotton centres of the Continent. The cotton goods of India and the United States will supplant those of Rouen and Manchester. A Yankee merchant, impressed by the impending fate of the Lancashire manufacturers, charitably advised them to transport their machinery to Louisiana, where they would have the raw material close at hand, and so save the expense of its conveyance. The international displacement of an industry goes on under our eyes; the manufactories are drawn into the sphere of the agricultural centres which produce the raw material. But before they had become industrial centres India and the United States had held Europe in subjection, thanks to their agricultural production. The War of Secession of the United States, from 1861 to 1865, threw out of work the weavers of France and England; and exaggerated the cultivation of cotton, “the golden plant,” in Egypt, whilst it ruined the *fellahs* and delivered up Egyptian finance into the hands of Rothschild and other cosmopolitan bankers.

The wheat production is in the act of being centralised in certain parts of the world. England, that in the 17th century produced corn sufficient for her home consumption, with a surplus for exportation, at the present moment imports from America, Australia, and India more than one half of the wheat she consumes. The nations of Europe to-day are in a state of economic dependence on one another, and on the half-civilised countries. This international economic interdependence is on the increase, and will, in times to come, form the basis of the political unity of human kind, a unity which will be founded on the ruins of the existing national unities.

IV

Capitalist production has advanced from the local and provincial political units to the national political units by creating industrial organisms which could not have been constituted but for the local concentration of production and the decomposition of the process of production. Thus, while manufacturing production agglomerated the labourers and the means of production in its workshops, it introduced the division of labour which decomposed the instrument of labour and condemned the labourer to the lifelong execution of a single operation. The implements of the artificer were few and simple, whereas those of the industrial manufacturer are complex and multifarious. In proportion as the fractional labourer became unfit for all save a single operation, the instrument of labour – developing on the same lines – was differentiated and became specialised. In certain manufactories from four to five hundred hammers of different shapes and weights were employed, each hammer serving exclusively to execute a special operation. The great mechanical industry has undone the work of manufacture; it has torn the instruments of labour out of the hands of the detail labourer, and has annexed them to a framework of steel and iron, which is, so to say, the skeleton of the machine tool, while the instruments annexed to it are its organs. The machine tool is a mechanical synthesis.

But capitalist production has produced yet another synthesis.

In domestic industry there is an economic unit; the same family transforms the raw material (wool, flax, etc.) which it has produced; this unit has been decomposed. Already in the most primitive communities we see certain industries fall to the lot of certain individuals, who are professional wheelwrights, smiths weavers, or tailors, etc.; later on, in order to obtain an economic unit, we have no longer to consider an isolated family but the entire village or burgh. With the development of commerce and the progress of industry, these distinctive industries were multiplied and became specialities devolving upon certain artificers, grouped in corporations.

It is on the basis of the specialisation of industries in the cities that capitalist production was built up. It commenced by establishing weavers', dyers', wheelwrights', and cabinet makers' workshops, in the interior of which the division of labour and the machine accomplished their revolutions. But these manufactures, which subsequently were converted into colossal factories, remained, like the small artificer's workshop, restricted to a special industrial process, or to the production of a commodity and its varieties; weavers did nothing but weave and spinners did nothing but spin. But these specialised manufactories cease to be isolated; a number of them come to be agglomerated and are attached to a factory. Dyeworks, printworks, etc., establish themselves in the neighbourhood of mechanical weaving and spinning industries, so that under one and the same capitalistic administration the raw material goes through the entire series of its industrial transformations. And this conglomeration has not been confined to complementary industries, but has taken place in quite independent industries. This centralisation does not necessarily occur in one and the same spot; frequently the different factories are set up in different localities, situated at a considerable distance from one another, but under the control of the same administration.

The National Banks, such as the Banks of England and France, are types of these complex industrial organisations which spread all over the land. A national bank possesses paper mills for the manufacture of the paper for its banknotes; printing presses and engravers' workshops for printing and engraving the same; and photographic apparatus for the detecting of forgeries; it founds hundreds of branch offices in commercial and industrial centres; enters into connection with town and country bankers at home, as well as the national bankers of foreign countries. The central bank becomes, so to say, the heart of the financial system of the country; and so ingeniously organised is the system that the pulsations of the national bank – the rise or fall of its rate of discount – find an echo in the remotest villages of the country, and even react on the money markets of foreign nations.

Another striking type is the **Times** newspaper. This industrial organism employs a legion of correspondents, scattered over the four quarters of the globe; telegraph wires connect it with the great capitals of Europe; it manufactures its own paper, founds its own type, and employs a set of mechanics to superintend and repair its machinery; it composes, stereotypes, and publishes its sixteen large pages of printed matter, and possesses horses and carts for distributing the papers to other retail vendors. All that it still wants are alfalfa-fields in Africa to supply the raw material for the paper, and these it will, in good time, no doubt, contrive to acquire. There will come a day when American and Indian manufacturers will adjoin to their factories fields for the cultivation of the cotton plant and workshops for the working up of their calicoes into articles of clothing. Scotch woollen manufacturers have already opened establishments in London in which they sell in the shape of ready-made garments the woollen goods they have manufactured. Capitalistic industry is in the act of reconstituting the economic unit of domestic

production; heretofore the same peasant family produced the raw material which it wrought up into industrial products; one and the same capitalistic administration will by-and-by undertake to produce the raw material, transform it into industrial products, and sell these to the customer.

By means of the division of labour, capitalist production began by destroying the unit of labour represented by the handicraftsman; thereupon it proceeded to reconstitute that unit of labour, no longer represented by the labourer, but by “the iron man,” the machine. At present it tends to constitute giant organisms of production, composed of industries the most diverse and opposite; the special industries which are, so to say, the organs of these monsters, may exist apart, at enormous distances from one another, and be divided by political frontiers and geographical obstacles (mountains, rivers, or seas). These international ogres of labour consume heat, light, electricity, and other natural forces, as well as the brain power and muscular power of man.

Such is the economic mould in which the human material of the nineteenth century is run.

V

Simultaneously with the extension of the manufacturing system and the factories, property, under the form of gold and silver, underwent a change. At the outset, these two metals, even when stamped and converted into money, were property of an essentially private character; their owner hoarded them or used them for personal ornament. In India and the countries of the East the latter is still one of the uses they are chiefly put to. They but rarely served as a means of exchange, the products themselves being ordinarily bartered. The feudal kings could utter false coin, or debase the coin, without very materially injuring the commercial transactions of their subjects. But when, with the advent of the commercial period, gold and silver became the representative signs of value, the standard measure of all commodities, these metals acquired the right to breed legitimately, to bear legal interest; till then lending on interest had been considered dishonourable; a practice defensible only towards the stranger – “who is the enemy,” says the unlovely God of the Jews. Lending money for profit was condemned by the Pope and Councils. Such as were addicted to the practice were hated and contemned. Exposed to danger of every sort, they jeopardised their lives and fortunes. The Jews of the Middle Ages, those accumulators of gold and silver, alive to the risks incurred by their beloved gold, put their faith in the promises neither of king nor nobles, and only advanced moneys on the deposits of precious stones, or on equally good security.

The bourgeois rehabilitated usury, and exalted the business of the money-lender into one of the most lucrative and honourable of civilised functions; to live on one's income as a fund-holder is the bourgeois' ideal life. In the 16th century, while Calvin, the authorised representative of the religious manifestation of the bourgeois economic revolution, was legitimating the lending on interest in the name of all the theological virtues, the Chancellor Duprat laid the foundations, in France, of the public debt by creating in 1522 perpetual annuities at a rate of interest of 8 per cent, called *rentes de l'hôtel de ville*. The public debt became the savings-bank of the bourgeoisie, where they deposited the money they could find no employment for in business. In earlier ages, the temple of Jerusalem, the house of Jehovah, filled that office; it served as a bank for deposits, and the Jews, from every part of the world stored their precious metals there; but those deposits bore no interest.

The public debt is a bourgeois improvement. The kings of France, prior to 1789, still imbued with the feudal ideas on usury, were wont, on an emergency, to lower the rate of interest by a fourth or one-half, and at times even to suspend payment. Other European sovereigns acted quite as unceremoniously by their fund-holders. This aristocratic fashion of treating their creditors has been made a constant reproach to the feudal government by the bourgeoisie: one of the first acts of the Bourgeois Revolution of 1789 was to proclaim the inviolability of the public debt and to place it above all political revolutions and all contingent changes of government. The public debt was thenceforward solidly constituted.

“The public debt,” says Marx, “becomes one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation. As with the stroke of an enchanter's wand, it endows barren money with the power of breeding, and thus turns it into capital without the necessity of its exposing itself to the troubles and risks inseparable from the employment in industry or even in usury. The State creditors actually give away nothing, for the sum lent is transformed into public bonds, easily negotiable, which go on functioning in their hands just as so much hard cash would.” [5]

It is just as if the bank-notes bore interest.

The establishment of the public credit, while it afforded a hitherto unparalleled security to the individual capitalist, enhanced the influence of the financiers to whom the Government were obliged to apply for money, a fact, however, which in no wise prevented the kings of the old regime from treating them like the Jews of the Middle Ages; dragging them before the courts of justice, despoiling and hanging them. Howbeit, a century before the Revolution of 1789 their influence in society had become so considerable that the highest nobility solicited the favour of giving their daughters in marriage to the upstarts of finance, in order to acquire the right of sharing their millions.

The social ascendancy gained by finance, and which keeps on growing, is an economical necessity at a time when great commercial, industrial, and agricultural enterprises, banks, railways, canals, high furnaces, etc., have outgrown the means of private capitalists to carry them out, and require associated capital for their execution; the function of the financier is first to accumulate capital and afterwards to distribute it according to the requirements of industry and commerce. In a society based on mechanical industry, the importance of the capital sunk in the instruments of labour (the *constant capital* of Marx); the quantity of circulating capital (*variable capital*); the rapidity and abundance of production; the distance from the markets, the time required for the sale of the goods and realisation of the payments, all make of finance the pivot of the economic system.

But finance, mechanical industry, and modern methods of cultivation could not develop without essentially modifying the character of property, by converting it from a personal thing into an impersonal thing; biding the time when it shall resume its primitive form and once again become common.

In the system of small landed property and petty industry, property was an appendage of the proprietor, as his implement was an appendage of the artificer. An industrial enterprise depended upon the personal character of the proprietor: his thrift, activity, and intelligence, just as the perfection of his work depended upon the skill of the artificer who handled the implement. It was impossible for the proprietor to sicken, age, or retire without endangering the success of the industrial undertaking of which he was the soul. He fulfilled a social function that had its pains and penalties, its profits and rewards. Property, at that epoch, was truly personal, whence the popular saying: "*La propriété est le fruit du travail.*" But modern production has reversed the terms; the capitalist is no longer an appendage of his property whose prosperity no longer depends upon his individual worth. The *eye of the master* has lost its occupation. All great financial, agricultural, and industrial undertakings are directed by administrations more or less successfully organised and highly paid. The function of the modern proprietor consists in pocketing his income and squandering it on wine and women; not a social function is, in our day, assigned to the proprietor in the technical organisation of producers who are all wage-labourers. After having filled a useful part in production, the proprietor has become useless and even a nuisance, as a bourgeois economist remarks. [6]

Political economists, who are but the overpaid apologists of bourgeois society, have sought to justify the tax levied by capital on the produce of labour in the shape of interest, ground rent, profits, &c., by pretending that the capitalist renders useful service by his abstinence, his administrative ability, and so forth. If it was possible for Adam Smith to defend this specious proposition with some show of reason, the Griffens, Roschers, Leroy-Beaulieus, and other such small fry of political economy, ought really, if they would continue to draw their salaries from the middle-class for their interested special pleadings,

to set their wits to work to devise something less palpably absurd than the pretended usefulness of the capitalist in the modern system of great mechanical production.

Mechanical production has robbed the artisan of his technical skill and turned the wage-labourer into a servant of the machine; the capitalistic organisation of industry has made a parasite of the capitalist. The parasitical nature of his role is recognised and proclaimed by the creation of anonymous companies whose shares and obligations the bourgeois' titles of property pass from hand to hand, without exerting any influence on production, and on the Stock Exchange change hands a dozen times a day. The Rothschilds, Grants, Goulds, and other financiers of that stamp, practically demonstrate to the capitalists that they are useless, by cheating them out of their shares and bonds by Stock Exchange swindling, and other financial hanky-panky, and by accumulating in their strong boxes the profits derived from the great organisms of production. In the days when the feudal baron dwelt in his fortified castle, in the midst of his vassals, administering justice to them in time of peace, and donning his armour and putting himself at the head of his men to defend them in cases of invasion, the feudal nobility was a class essentially useful and which it was impossible to suppress; but so soon as a relative tranquillity had been established in the country, and as the towns and boroughs, converted into strongholds, became capable of defending themselves, the nobles ceased to be wanted; they abandoned their castles and betook themselves to the ducal, episcopal, royal, and imperial courts, in which they ended by becoming a body estranged from the nation, and living on it parasitically: that very moment their doom was sealed. If the nobility have not in all European nations been as brutally mowed down as they were during the French Revolution in 1789, they have yet everywhere forfeited their feudal privileges, and become merged in the ranks of the bourgeois, from whom, at present, they only distinguish themselves by the absurdity of their aristocratic pretensions. In capitalistic nations the nobility have disappeared as a ruling class. The same fate awaits the capitalist class. The day that the capitalist ceased to have a function to perform in social production, the death-warrant of his class was signed; it remains but to execute the sentence pronounced by the economic phenomena, and the capitalists who may survive the ruin of their order will lack even the grotesque privileges of the pedigreed nobility to console them for the lost grandeur of their class. Machinery which has killed the artificer will kill the capitalist.

VI

Civilisation, after having destroyed the rude and simple communism of the beginnings of humanity, elaborates the elements of a complex and scientific communism. Just as in primitive times, labour is to-day performed in common, and the producer owns neither the instruments of labour nor the products of his labour. The produce of labour is not, as

yet, shared in common, as was the case with the savage and barbarian tribes; it is monopolised by idle capitalists whose suppression is now but a question of time and opportunity. Let the parasites of property have been swept away, and communistic property will affirm itself and implant itself in society. In primitive society property was common only among members of the same tribe, connected by the ties of blood; every human being not included in the narrow circle of kinship was a stranger, an enemy; but in the society of the future, property will be held in common by all the members of the great human family, without distinction of nationality, race, or colour; for the workers, bowed under the same capitalistic yoke, have recognised that brothers in misery, brothers in revolt, they must remain brothers in victory. This final communist and international revolution of property is inevitable; already, in the midst of bourgeois civilisation, do the institutions and communistic customs of primitive times revive.

Universal suffrage, the mode of election employed by savages and barbarians in electing their military chiefs and sachems, is re-established, after having been set aside by the bourgeois governments who had proclaimed it the basis of political power.

In primitive ages, habitations were common, repasts were common, and education was common. In our municipal schools children are taught gratuitously and in common; in some cities they are beginning to receive gratuitous repasts. In our restaurants civilised folk are being poisoned and cheated in common, and in the many-storied houses of our large cities they are cooped up in common like rabbits in a hutch.

If universal suffrage is a juggle; if our town houses are unwholesome; if the rest of our institutions, affecting a mock communistic character, are a bane to those whom they profess to benefit, it is because they evolve in a bourgeois society and are established for the sole behoof of the capitalist. None the less are they of capital importance; they destroy individualistic instincts and form and fashion men for the communistic habits of the society to come.

Communism exists in a latent form in bourgeois society; circumstances, not to be foreseen, will cause it to burst forth openly, and will re-instate it as the only possible form of future society.

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Footnote

1. Immortality, that dreary idea, says Frederick Engels, so long the torment of humanity, is an invention of the savages; just as they bestow a soul upon their bodies, or rather a double, who leaves them during sleep and at death, so they attribute to animals, vegetables, and even to inanimate objects, a soul capable of living outside of them; thus, on the burial of a warrior, they destroyed his arms, and killed the animals that were to follow him into the other world.

2. It is the habit to describe as revolutionary political events of a tumultuous and explosive character, while vastly less importance is attached to economic events of far greater revolutionary influence upon the march of society and the conditions of human existence. The manners and customs of the peasant have subsisted unmodified throughout many centuries in despite of wars, changes of frontiers, and social and political vicissitudes. An English anthropologist Mr. Farrer, has remarked that the superstitions of the peasant singularly resemble those of the savage. Country people have only of quite recent years been roused by the establishment of railways. In our day economic phenomena exert such preponderating influence that in France changes of government occur, to effect which there is no need to make the cannon speak; it is enough if the Deputies to the Chambers speak.

3. Leonce de Lavergne, *L'Agriculture et la Population*, Paris 1857.

4. Thomas Ellison, *The Cotton Trade of Great Britain*, 1886.

5. Karl Marx, *Capital*, chap.xxxi.

6. “In an enterprise carried on by a company the body of directors may possess but a small fraction of capital; they might, conceivably, possess none at all, and, contrary to the generally received opinion, such a state of things would be the most satisfactory one as regards a proper administration of the company; a body of directors who should be shareholders having no right to administer themselves. It is enough if they possess the requisite capacity, competency, and morality for their functions, all of which qualities are to be found more readily, and at less cost, apart from capital than associated with it.” (G. De Molinari, *L'évolution économique du XIX^e siècle*, 1880, p.38)

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