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*The Development of Socialism
From Utopia to Science*

Translated from the German for *The People*, official organ of the Socialist Labor Party
of America, by DANIEL DE LEON

I.

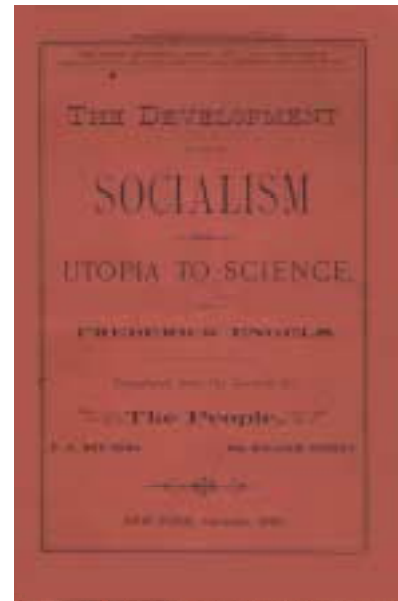
UTOPIAN SOCIALISM.

TWO ASPECTS OF MODERN SOCIALISM.

Modern socialism presents itself under two aspects. Practically, it is the result of the recognition, on the one hand, of the existing class antagonisms between the property-holders and the propertiless, between capitalists and wage-workers; on the other hand, of the existing anarchy in production. Theoretically, it first appears as a further and logical deduction from the maxims laid down by the French pioneers of thought in the eighteenth century. The same as all other new theories, theoretical socialism had to start with the intellectual elements ready at hand, however much its own roots lay in material and economic facts.

The great men who in France prepared the public mind for the oncoming revolution stood forth themselves as extreme revolutionists. They recognized no external authority of whatever sort. Religion, theories of nature, society, political institutions, all were submitted to ruthless criticism. Everything was summoned before the judgment-seat of reason, there to justify or, contrariwise, give up its existence. Reason was set up as the only standard. Those were the days when, as Hegel put it, the world was placed upon its head; first, in the sense that man's head, and the maxims evolved from thought, claimed to be the foundation for all actions and social adjustments; secondly, in the further sense that the reality which stood in contradiction to those maxims was in fact turned upside down. All former social and State institutions, all notions that had come down from ancient days, were pitched into the lumber room as being against reason. The world, it was claimed, had thitherto allowed itself to be led entirely by prejudices; all the past deserved only pity and contempt. Only then did the light of day, the Reign of Reason, break forth. Thenceforth, superstition, injustice, privilege, and oppression were to be superseded by eternal truth, eternal justice, and the nature-born equality and inalienable rights of man.

To-day we know that that Reign of Reason was nothing else than the idealized reign of the capitalist class; that that eternal justice found its realization in capitalist



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law; that that equality reduced itself to the capitalist's phrase: "equality before the statute"; that one of the essential rights of man proclaimed was—capitalist property; and that the Reign of Reason, the social contract of Rousseau, did and could only come into existence as a capitalistic, democratic republic. Like all their predecessors, the great thinkers of the eighteenth century were unable to leap the barriers with which their own age hemmed them in.

THE FORERUNNERS OF THE PROLETARIAT.

Nevertheless, along with the then contrast between feudal nobility and commonalty, there was the general contrast between exploiters and exploited, between rich idlers and poor workers. It was this very circumstance that rendered it possible to the representatives of the capitalist class to stand forth as the representatives, not of a particular class, but of the whole of suffering humanity. Nay, more. From its very inception the capitalist class was locked with its contrast. Capitalists cannot exist without wage-workers; just as the medieval guild-master developed into a modern capitalist, so did the guild journeyman and the day-laborer develop into a proletarian. And although, upon the whole, the then middle class could justly lay claim to represent also the interests of the several working classes of its day in its struggle against the nobility, yet, nevertheless, together with every great middle class movement, there were noticeable independent stirrings on the part of those classes which were the forerunners of the proletariat—as yet in a more or less undeveloped stage. For instance, at the time of the German Reformation and the Peasants' War, there was the movement of Thomas Munzer; at the time of the great English Revolution, the Levellers; at the time of the French Revolution, Babeuf.¹ Furthermore, hand in hand with those revolutionary manifestations of a class not yet fully developed, there went corresponding enunciations of theories: in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, utopian sketches of ideal social conditions; and in the eighteenth century, straightout communistic theories—Morelly and Mably.² No longer were the demands for equality limited to political rights; they began to reach out into the social condition of the individual. No longer was the cry raised against class privileges only, but also against class distinctions themselves. As a consequence, the new theory first appeared in the garb of an ascetic communism that inhibited all material enjoyment and looked back to Sparta for its precedents. Thereupon followed the three great utopians: Saint Simon, with whom the capitalist movement still preserved a certain power along with that of the proletarian; second, Fourier; and third, Owen, who, in the country where capitalist production had reached its highest development, and under the influence of the antagonisms thereby generated, developed his proposition for the removal of class

¹ And immediately upon the American Revolution, Shay's Rebellion.—Tr.

² And in America, early in this century, Thomas Skidmore.—Tr.

distinctions in a systematic form, and in direct touch with French materialism.

All the three have this in common: none stand forth as the representative of the interests of the proletariat, that, in the meantime, had been undergoing its historic development. The same as the French revolutionary philosophers, these utopians do not aim at the emancipation of a certain class first of all, but at that of the whole of the human race. Like them, they strive to introduce the reign of reason and of eternal justice. Nevertheless, their reign is as far from that of those revolutionary philosophers as heaven is from earth. The social institutions raised upon the maxims of those philosophers is considered by them equally unreasonable and unjust, and, consequently, is also consigned to the waste basket, together with feudalism and all other former social systems. According to them, real reason and justice had never yet reigned in the world simply because they never yet had been correctly understood; the man of genius had been wanting; he had finally appeared, and had recognized the truth. That he appeared then, that truth was recognized at that particular epoch, was not, in their opinion, an inevitable consequence of historic development, but a happy accident. Such a man might as well have been born five hundred years earlier, and he might then have saved mankind five hundred years of error, struggle, and suffering.

THE REIGN OF REASON AND THE REIGN OF TERROR.

We saw how the French philosophers of the eighteenth century, the preparers of the revolution, appealed to reason as the only authority. A rational State, a society founded upon reason, was to be built up; whatever ran counter to eternal reason was to be thrown aside without compunction. We saw also that that eternal reason was, in reality, naught else but the idealized intellect of the commoner, just at that epoch about to bloom into a capitalist. Accordingly, as soon as the French revolution had actually established its State and society of reason, the new institutions, however rational they were as against former conditions, did by no means prove themselves absolutely so. Indeed, the State of Reason suffered a complete collapse. The social contract of Rousseau had found its realization in the Reign of Terror, out of which the recent commoner, who had lost confidence in his own political capacity, fled, taking refuge at first in the corruption of the Directory, and finally under the wings of Napoleonic despotism. The promised eternal peace was turned into an endless war of conquest. The Society of Reason had fared no better. The contrast between rich and poor, so far from going up into a condition of general well-being, became sharper through the removal, on the one hand, of the guild and other privileges that had bridged it over, and on the other, of the religious institutions of charity. The rapid growth of industry upon the basis of capitalism raised poverty and misery among the toiling masses into a condition of life to society. Cash payment, as Carlyle expressed it, grew to be more and more the only social bond. The number of criminals increased yearly. The feudal vices, which had formerly stalked abroad boldly, by open daylight,

though not yet wholly eradicated, were for the time being crowded back to the rear; but, in their stead, there shot up into all the more luxuriant growth those vices that until then had been cultivated in secret by the commoner, now capitalist, class. Trade developed more and more into cheating. The “Fraternity” of the revolutionary device found its realization in the chicanery and envy of competition. Corruption took the place of oppression by force, and money supplanted the sword as a social lever. The right to the “first night” passed from the feudal lords to the manufacturers. Prostitution spread out into proportions hitherto unknown. And wedlock itself remained what it had been theretofore, a legally recognized form of, an official cloak for, prostitution; but was rounded out by a rich crop of adultery. In short, compared with the gala-day promises of the revolutionary pioneers of thought, both the political and social institutions born of the “Victory of Reason” proved themselves hideous abortions, conveying bitter disappointment. All that was now wanting were the men to record this disappointment; and they appeared with the turning of the century. In 1802 appeared Saint Simon’s letters from Geneva; in 1808 Fourier’s first works were published, although the outlines of his theory dated back to 1799; and on January 1, 1800, Robert Owen undertook the administration of New Lanark.

RUDIMENTAL STAGE OF CAPITALIST PRODUCTION.

At this period, however, capitalist production, together with its concomitant antagonism between capitalists and proletarians, was still at a very rudimental stage. Production on a large scale, just then introduced in England, was still unknown in France. And it is this very system of production on a large scale that develops, on the one hand, those conflicts whereby the method of production is perforce revolutionized and its capitalist character removed—conflicts, not alone between the classes born of capitalism, but also between the productive forces and modes of exchange which capitalism itself creates; and, on the other hand, it develops at the same time through these identical giant powers of production the means wherewith to put an end to those conflicts. If, in 1800, the conflicts that came from the new social order were themselves still taking shape, the means to their settlement were as yet still less developed. In being able to conquer power for a moment during the Reign of Terror, and in that way carrying the capitalist revolution to victory against the capitalist class itself, the propertiless masses of Paris had only revealed how impossible it was for them to maintain their own supremacy under the existing conditions. The proletariat, which then for the first time differentiated itself from these propertiless masses as the nucleus of a new class, as yet wholly unfit for independent political activity, appeared as an oppressed and suffering social order, which, in its inability to help itself, could at best only be helped from outside and from above.

THE FOUNDERS OF SOCIALISM.

The founders of Socialism, in their turn, labored under the weight of this historic condition of things. Crude theories corresponded to the crude state of capitalist production, and to the crude stage of the classes. It was thought that the solution of the social problems, which as yet lay hidden in the undeveloped economic conditions, was to be evolved out of the human brain. Society offered only abuses; the intellect was expected to remove them. The idea was that a new and more perfect system of social adjustment was to be invented and superimposed upon society through propaganda, or, wherever possible, by the example of model experiments. These new social systems were from the start condemned to utopias. The more they were developed in their details, the more completely were they bound to run into sheer phantasies.

This once established, we need dwell no longer upon that phase of the question. It now wholly belongs to the past. To literary hod-carriers may we leave the pastime of solemnly quibbling over phantasies that to-day can only awaken mirth, and to entertain themselves with contrasting the superiority of their own sober judgments with such delusions. As to ourselves, we prefer to rejoice over the ingenious thoughts and germs of thoughts which everywhere peep through the fantastic drapery, and which the Philistines are too blind to perceive.

SAINT SIMON PERCEIVES THE CLASS STRUGGLE.

Already, in his letters from Geneva, Saint Simon advances the maxim: "All men must work"; and on the same occasion he reveals a knowledge of the fact that the Reign of Terror was the reign of the propertiless masses. "Take notice," he says to them, "of what occurred in France at the time when your comrades ruled there; they produced famine." It was a flash of genius to discover, as early as 1802, that the French Revolution was a conflict between classes, and not only between nobility and commonalty, but also between nobility, commonalty, and proletariat, i.e., the propertiless. In 1816 he declares politics to be the science of production, and prophesies the ultimate absorption of the former by economics. Although the recognition of the truth that economic conditions are the basis of political institutions appears here only in embryo, nevertheless, we find at that early date a clear enunciation of the principle that substitutes, for the government of men, administration of things and direction of the process of production; in other words, the principle of the "Abolition of the State"—a principle that has latterly turned up with so much beating of drums. With equal superiority over his contemporaries, he proclaimed, in 1814, immediately upon the entry of the Allies into Paris, and again in 1815, during the Hundred Days' War, that the alliance of France with England, and that of both with Germany, was the only guarantee for the healthy development and the peace of Europe. To preach to the Frenchmen of 1815 an alliance with the victors of Waterloo required as much courage as far-sighted historic penetration.

FOURIER DISCOVERS THE VICIES OF CAPITALISM.

If, in Saint Simon, we discover that far-reaching sagacity by dint of which almost all later socialist ideas, not of strict economic import, may be seen in embryo, in Fourier, on the other hand, we find a power of criticism of existing social conditions that is genuinely French in its liveliness, without thereby losing either in depth or in keenness. Fourier scourges the capitalist class, its inspired pre-revolutionary prophets; and its interested post-revolutionary praise-singers. He uncovers with ruthless hand the material and moral miseries of the capitalist world; he contrasts it, not only with the glittering promises, made by the early revolutionary philosophers, of a society where only reason was to rule; of a civilization which was to quicken everything into happiness with its touch; of a human power of perfection, said to be boundless; but also with the rosy words of contemporaneous capitalist ideologists; he points out how everywhere the most pitiful reality corresponds to the most high-sounding phrases; and with biting sarcasm he exposes the hopeless fiasco of phrasemongering.

Fourier is not a critic only, his ever lively disposition turns him into a satirist, indeed, into one of the greatest satirists of all ages. He depicts with equal masterliness and charm both the swindling system of speculation that blossomed forth with the downfall of the revolution, and the low, petty spirit of the bargain-counter that pervaded the French commerce of that time. Still more masterly is his criticism of the relations of the sexes under capitalist institutions and the position of woman in capitalist society. He is the first to say that in a given society the degree of woman's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation. Grandest, however, is Fourier in his conception of the history of society. He divides its whole previous course into four stages of development: The savage, the barbarous, the patriarchal, and the civilized, the last of which coincides with the so-called middle-class society, i.e., with that social order which is ushered in with the sixteenth century; and he points out "that the civilized stage turns every vice that barbarism practices in a simple way, into a complex, ambiguous, equivocal and hypocritical form"; that civilization moves in a "vicious circle," in contradictions which it eternally reproduces without being able to remove them, so that it ever accomplishes the very reverse of that which it really does or pretends to aim at; for instance, that "in civilization poverty is born of plenty." As we see, Fourier manages dialectics in the same masterly manner as did his contemporary Hegel. With similar dialectics he argues, against the twaddle regarding the boundless power of perfection in man, that every historic phase has an upward, but also a downward grade, and he applies this observation to the future of the entire human race. As Kant introduced into natural science the theory of the ultimate destruction of the earth, so did Fourier introduce into the philosophy of history the theory of the ultimate destruction of mankind.

OWEN BECOMES A COMMUNIST AND IS OSTRACIZED.

While in France the tornado of the revolution swept the country clean, in England a quiet, but not, therefore, less mighty revolution was in process. Steam and machinery transformed manufacture into the modern system of production in gross, and thereby revolutionized the whole groundwork of capitalist society. From the sluggish process of development of the early days of production by hand, industry entered upon a veritable storm-and-drive period of activity. With ever-increasing swiftness the division of society was effected into large capitalists, and propertiless proletarians, in between which, in the stead of the former stable middle class, an unstable mass of handicraftsmen and small shopkeepers now led a precarious existence and constituted the most fluctuating portion of the population. As yet the new method of production was only at the beginning of its upward grade; as yet it was the normal, regular, and, under existing conditions, the only method of production possible. Yet, even at that early hour, it produced crying social abuses; the crowding of a homeless population in the worst quarters of large cities; the dissolution of all traditional bonds and patriarchal subordination, and of all family ties; overwork, especially of women and children, to a frightful degree; and the general demoralization of the working class, which was suddenly thrown into conditions wholly different from those in which it had previously moved. At that juncture, a manufacturer, twenty-nine years of age, appeared in the role of reformer; a man possessed with a simplicity of character touching on loftiness, yet, like few, a born leader of men—Robert Owen.

Robert Owen had imbued himself with the principle of the recent materialist pioneers of thought, that the character of man was the product of his innate qualities and of his surroundings, especially during the period of development. Most of the contemporaries of his class saw in the industrial revolution only disorder and chaos, troubled waters good to fish in and whereby to grow rich quickly. He, on the contrary, saw therein the opportunity to apply his favorite maxim, and thereby bring order out of chaos. Already, at Manchester, as superintendent over five hundred workingmen in a factory, he had successfully applied his maxim. From 1800 to 1829 he directed as principal partner the large cotton mill at New Lanark, in Scotland, upon the same principle, only with greater freedom of action, and with a degree of success that earned for him a European name. A population, that gradually grew to 2,500 souls, and which originally consisted mainly of the most mixed and strongly demoralized element, was by him transformed into a perfect model colony, in which drunkenness, police, criminal courts, lawsuits, poorhouses, and the need of charity were things unknown; and all this simply by surrounding the people with conditions fit for human beings, and especially by causing the rising generation to be carefully brought up. He was the inventor of infant schools, and introduced the system there for the first time. With their second year the children were brought to school, and they were so well entertained that it was hard to get them to return home. While his competitors worked their operatives from

thirteen to fourteen hours, at New Lanark the work-day was only ten and a half hours long. During a crisis in cotton, that compelled a suspension of work for four months, full wages were paid to the idle operatives. Yet the establishment more than doubled its value, and, to the end, yielded large profits to its proprietors.

Still, Owen was not satisfied. The life he had afforded his workingmen was, in his eyes, still a long way off from that which became the dignity of man. “Those people were my slaves,” he would say. The comparatively favorable circumstances in which he placed them were yet far from permitting a well rounded and rational development of the character and the intellect, let alone the free play of human activity. “And yet,” he remarked, “the working portion of the 2,500 people produced as much actual wealth for society as, barely half a century before, it was possible for a population of 600,000 to produce. I asked myself the question, What becomes of the difference between the wealth consumed by these 2,500 people and that which would have been required for the consumption of those 600,000?” The answer was evident. It was applied to supplying the proprietors of the establishment with 5 per cent. interest on their investment, besides a profit of more than £300,000 (\$1,500,000). What was true of New Lanark, was in a higher degree true of all other factories in England. “Without this new wealth, produced by machinery, the wars directed to the overthrow of Napoleon and the maintenance of the aristocratic principles of society could not have been carried on; and this new power was the product of the working class.”³ To that class, accordingly, belonged also the fruits. The new, mighty powers of production, utilized until then for the enrichment of the few and the enslavement of the masses, offered to Owen the bases for a reconstruction of society, and, to his mind, were intended as the common property of all, to be operated only for the common wellbeing of all.

In such a purely business-like way, as the fruit, so to speak, of mercantile calculation, did the communism of Owen spring up; and this practical stand he preserved throughout. So, for instance, he proposed in 1823 the removal of misery in Ireland through communistic colonies, and he prepared full tables upon the investments, the yearly outlays, and the probable returns. And similarly, in his definitive scheme for the future, the technical elaboration of details—groundwork, design and birdseye view included—is carried out with such intimate technical knowledge that, the Owen method of social reform once conceded, but slight objection can be raised even from a practical standpoint.

OWEN'S INFLUENCE ON THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT.

The advance toward communism was the turning point in Owen's life. So long as

³*Revolution of Mind and Practice*. A memorial addressed to all “red republicans, communists and socialists of Europe,” and forwarded to the French provisional government of 1848, and “to Queen Victoria and her responsible councilors.”

he stood simply in the attitude of a philanthropist, he earned only wealth, applause, honor and fame. He was the most popular man in Europe. Not the people of his own rank only, but statesmen and princes listened to him approvingly. When, however, he stepped forth with his communistic theories, the leaf was turned over. Three great obstacles seemed to him above all to block the path for social reform: private property, religion, and the present form of wedlock. He knew what was in store for him if he attacked them—ostracism from “society,” the total loss of his social standing. Yet did he not allow himself to be deterred from attacking them fearlessly; and it happened as he had foreseen. Banished from “society,” ignored by the press, impoverished by unsuccessful communistic experiments in America, to which he sacrificed his whole fortune, he then turned straight to the working class, and in their midst he continued active for thirty years longer. All social movements that have sprung up in England, all genuine progress made there in the interest of labor, are connected with the name of Owen. In 1819, he pushed through, after five years of struggle, the first law limiting the labor of women and children in factories. He presided over the first congress where the trade-unions of all England joined in one large labor association. As measures leading towards a complete communistic adjustment of society, he introduced, on the one hand, the co-operative societies (associations for consumption and production), which since then have at least practically demonstrated that both the merchant and the manufacturer are utterly superfluous figures; and on the other hand, the labor bazaars, institutions for the exchange of the products of labor by means of a labor paper-money, whose unit was one hour’s work—institutions necessarily predestined to fall, but that fully anticipated the Proudhonian bank of exchange of many years later, while they distinguished themselves from the latter in the important respect that they did not pretend to be a universal panacea for all social ills, but only a first step towards a far more radical transformation of society.

EFFECT OF UTOPIAN THOUGHT.

The utopians’ way of thinking long swayed, and to a certain extent still sways, socialist thought in the nineteenth century. In England even now, in France not long since,⁴ all socialists rendered it cult, and to it also belongs the early communism of Germany, that of Weitling included. To one and all socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason, and justice; it needs but to be discovered in order to conquer the world by virtue of its own strength; and, seeing that absolute truth is independent of time, place, and the historic development of man, it is a mere accident when and where it is discovered. With the founder of every school, absolute truth, reason, and justice are, however, again different; and seeing that, with each, the special sort of absolute truth, reason, and justice is in turn predicated upon his own subjective understanding,

⁴The book was written in 1876, before modern scientific socialism had taken root in France.

his conditions of life, his store of knowledge and his intellectual training, no solution is possible in this conflict of absolute truths other than their mutual abrasion. The outcome of it all could be naught else but a sort of eclectic, average socialism, such as, in fact, still prevails in the heads of most of the working people in France and England: a mixture that allows the most manifold shades of opinion; a mixture that is made up of such critical utterances, economic theories, and notions of various sect-founders regarding future society as provoke the least opposition; finally, a mixture that is the more easily effected in proportion as, in the stream of debate, the separate ingredients wear off their sharp corners of positiveness, like round pebbles in a brook.

To make a science out of socialism, it had first to be placed upon solid ground.

II.

METAPHYSICS, DIALECTICS, THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY.

In the meantime, together with and subsequent to the French philosophy of the eighteenth century, the new German philosophy had come up, and culminated in Hegel. Its greatest merit consisted in the resumption of dialectics as the highest form of thought. The old Greek philosophers were all dialecticians by nature; and Aristotle, the most universal intellect among them, examined the essential forms of dialectic reasoning. The more recent philosophy, on the contrary, although with it also dialectics found brilliant representatives, such as Descartes and Spinoza, had, due to English influence especially, run itself faster and faster into the so-called metaphysical method of reasoning, which exercised an almost exclusive influence upon the Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, at least in their specifically philosophic efforts. Outside of philosophy proper were they likewise able to produce master works of dialectics. We need but to recall “Rameau’s Nephew” by Diderot, and the treatise on the origin of inequality among men by Rousseau. We shall here point out the essential features of both methods of reasoning.

METAPHYSICAL REASONING—BACON AND LOCKE.

When we contemplate either nature, the history of man, or our own intellectual activity, the first picture presented to us is one of an endless intertwining of mutually connected forces—a picture in which nothing remains either what, where, or as it was, but in which everything moves, changes, is in process of formation and dissolution. What first strikes our eyes is the whole picture in one; the separate parts become more or less subordinate; and our attention is fixed upon the movements, the transitions and the combinations rather than upon the things themselves that move, merge and combine. This original, naive, yet in the nature of things, correct conception of the world is that of the old Greek philosophy, and was first clearly enunciated by Heraclitus. He said, Everything is and yet is not, for everything flows, is in constant motion, is in constant process of formation and dissolution.

But this conception, however correctly it grasps the general character of the phenomena as a whole, yet is insufficient to explain the separate parts out of which that whole is composed; and so long as we do not know these, neither are we clear about the whole itself. In order to learn to know these separate parts, we must take them out of their natural or historic connections, and inquire, in each case separately,

into their qualities, their special causes, their operation, etc. This is primarily the task of the natural sciences and of historical research, both of which are methods of investigation which, for good reasons, take but secondary rank among the Greeks of the classic age: they had first to collect the requisite material thereto. Only after the natural and historical material has been collected up to a certain point, can a critical analysis, comparisons, and the needed arrangements into classes, orders, and species, be undertaken. The early beginnings in the direction of exact natural science receive, accordingly, further development, first from the Greeks of the Alexandrian period, and later, during the middle ages, from the Arabians. Nevertheless, natural science, properly speaking, dates only from the latter half of the fifteenth century, and from that time forward it has progressed with ever increasing rapidity. The dissecting of nature into its separate elements, the division of the several processes and objects of nature into fixed classes, the investigation of the internal parts of organic bodies with reference to their manifold anatomic formations, was the fundamental condition to the giant strides we have made during the last four centuries in the knowledge of nature. At the same time, this knowledge bequeathed to us the habit of observing nature's objects and processes in their isolation, apart from their connection with the whole—hence, of observing them, not in motion, but at rest; not as essentially changeable, but as fixed substances; not in their life, but in their death. While carried over from the natural sciences to philosophy, as done by Bacon and Locke, this method of study produced the specific blockishness of the last centuries—the metaphysical method of reasoning.

To the metaphysician, all things and their mental reflections are isolated, single, disconnected, fixed, stark, once for all given objects of investigation. His thoughts run in a series of irreconcilable contrasts. His communication is: Yea, yea; Nay, nay: whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. To him, a thing is or is not. Neither can it at the same time be itself and another. Positive and negative exclude each other absolutely. Likewise, cause and effect stand in rigid contrast to each other. This method seems, at first sight, extremely plausible, because it is that of so-called sound common sense. But it happens that sound common sense, however respectable a fellow it may be within the homely domain of its own four walls, experiences wonderful adventures soon as it risks itself into the wide world of research. Indeed, however broad, according to the nature of the subject, the domain may be to which the metaphysical method of reasoning is entitled or on which it may even be needful, nevertheless, sooner or later, it reaches a limit beyond which it becomes one-sided, dull, abstract, and loses itself in inextricable contradictions for the simple reason that, in the contemplation of individual objects, it loses sight of the connection that exists between them; in the contemplation of their being, it loses sight of their process of formation and dissolution; in the contemplation of their state at rest, it loses sight of their state in motion—in short, because it cannot see the wood for the trees.

In every-day life we know, for instance, and can state with certainty, whether an animal is alive or dead; upon closer examination we find, however, that this is often a highly complicated affair, as jurists know full well, who have vainly cudged their brains in order to discover a rational line beyond which the killing of a child in its mother's womb is murder; and equally impossible is it to determine the moment when death occurs, seeing that physiology teaches that death is not a single, momentary event, but a very slow, dragging process. Likewise, every organic being is every instant the same and not the same; every instant, it assimilates from the outside new, and secretes old matter; every instant there perish old, while new cells are formed in his body; after intervals of shorter or longer duration, the matter of this body is wholly renewed and restored by other atoms of matter, so that every organic body is constantly the same and still another. We also find, upon closer inquiry, that the two poles of an antithesis, such as positive and negative, are as inseparable from as they are opposed to each other, and that, despite all their antagonism, they mutually pervade each other; and in the same way we find cause and effect to be conceptions whose force exists only when applied to a single instance, but which, as soon as we consider that instance in its general connection with the cosmos, run into each other, and dissolve in the contemplation of that universal action and reaction where cause and effect constantly change places—that which is effect now and here, becoming then and yonder cause; and vice versa.

DIALECTICAL REASONING—KANT AND HEGEL.

None of these processes and methods of reasoning fit in the metaphysical framework of thought. To dialectics, however, which takes in the objects and their conceivable images above all in their connections, their sequence, their motion, their rise and their decline, processes like the above are so many attestations of its own method of procedure. Nature furnishes the test to dialectics; and this we must say for modern natural science, that it has contributed towards this test an extremely rich and daily-increasing material, whereby it has demonstrated that, in the last instance, nature proceeds upon dialectical, not upon metaphysical, methods, that it does not move in the eternal sameness of a perpetually recurring circle, but that it goes through an actual historic evolution. In connection herewith, special mention is due to Darwin, who dealt metaphysics its heaviest blow by showing that the whole organic nature now in existence, plants, animals, and consequently, man also, is the product of an evolution that has been in process through millions of years. As, however, those naturalists who have learned to think dialectically can still be counted, there has arisen between the discovered results and the inherited methods of thought a conflict that explains the endless confusion which to-day reigns in the philosophy of natural sciences, and which throws into despair both teachers and pupils, writers and readers.

An accurate conception of the universe, of its development and of that of mankind

in particular, as well as that of the reflection of this development upon the mind of man, can, accordingly, be obtained only through dialectics, with its constant observation of the mutual effects of life and death, and of the constructive and destructive metamorphoses that are perpetually in process. It was in this spirit that the new German philosophy started. Kant opened his career by explaining the stable solar system of Newton and its perpetuity—the famous first impulse being given—as a historic process, the development, namely, of the sun and all planets out of a rotating nebulous mass. Therefrom he drew the corollary that the ultimate destruction of the solar system was the inevitable sequence of such an origin. His theory was half a century later established mathematically by Laplace; and again, half a century later, the spectroscope revealed the existence in space of such incandescent nebulous masses in various stages of condensation.

This new German philosophy culminated in the system of Hegel. There for the first time—and herein consists its merit—the whole natural, historic, and intellectual world was presented as a process, i.e., engaged in perpetual motion, change, transformation and development, and the effort was put forth to trace up the law of this motion and development. Viewed from this standpoint, the history of mankind no longer appeared as a wild tangle of senseless deeds of violence, all equally to be rejected by a ripened philosophic judgment, and which it were best soon as possible to forget, but as the process of the development of mankind itself—a development whose gradual march, through all its stray paths, and whose internal law, midst all its seeming fortuitousness, it now became the task of the intellect to trace and to discover.

IDEALIST CONCEPTION OF NATURE.

That the Hegelian system did not solve the problem which it propounded is immaterial to us. Its epoch-making merit consists in having propounded the problem. The problem itself is one which no single man will ever be able to solve. Although Hegel was—together with Saint Simon—the most universal head of his day, nevertheless was he hemmed in, first, by the inevitably limited area of his own knowledge; and, secondly, by the equally limited breadth and depth of the knowledge and views of his times. A third cause was added to these. Hegel was an idealist; that is to say, to him the thoughts that sprang from his head were not the more or less abstract reflections of actual things or events, but the things and their development were the materialized reflections of an existing “Idea,” that somehow had its existence before the world. This view placed everything upon its head, and completely turned upside down the real connection of things in the world. However correctly and ingeniously many an isolated group of occurrences is thus grasped by Hegel, nevertheless, owing to the above reasons, there is much that is botched, artificial and labored, in short, erroneous in point of detail. The Hegelian system, as such, was a colossal miscarriage—but it was also the last of its sort. It suffered, namely, still of an

internal, incurable, contradiction. On the one hand, its essential starting point was the historic conception of things, according to which the history of mankind is a process of development, which, by its very nature, cannot reach its intellectual culmination through the discovery of any so-called absolute truth; while, on the other, it claimed for itself to be the essence of this very absolute truth. An all-embracing and for all times final system of the study of nature and history is repugnant to the fundamental principles of dialectic thought, while, at the same time, it by no means excludes, but, on the contrary, includes, the fact that the systematic study of the whole outer world can make giant strides from generation to generation.

MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF NATURE.

The perception of the total unsoundness of previous German idealism led necessarily to materialism, but mark, not the barely metaphysical, exclusively mechanical materialism of the eighteenth century. Over against the naively revolutionary, unthinking rejection of all previous history, modern materialism sees in history the process of human development, the laws of whose motion it is its task to discover. Over against the conception of nature—prevalent both among the Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, and even with Hegel—as a whole, that, according to Newton, moved in narrow circles and ever the same, with its eternal celestial bodies, or that, according to the teachings of Linneus, consisted of unchangeable classes, modern materialism takes in the recent discoveries of natural science, according to which nature also has its history; according to which all planetary bodies, as well as the species of all organisms with which, under favorable circumstances, the former are populated, shape themselves and dissolve; according to which the orbits described, in so far as they may still be retained, assume ever grander dimensions. In both aspects, modern materialism is essentially dialectic, and has no further use for the philosophy that may still preside over other sciences. As soon as, with any single science, the need draws near to become clear on its relation to the universal connection of things, and of the knowledge of things, every special science of that universal connection becomes superfluous. That which still survives of all previous philosophy are the principles of thought and their laws—pure logic and dialectics. Everything else goes up in the positive science of nature and history.

IDEALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY.

While, however, the change in the conception of nature could only be accomplished in proportion as research furnished the corresponding positive material, at a much earlier date certain historic facts had made themselves felt, and brought on a decided turn in the conception of history. In 1831 the first labor uprising took place at Lyon. Between 1838 and 1842, the first national movement of labor, that, namely, of the

Chartists in England, reached its height. The class struggle between proletariat and capitalist stepped to the foreground in the history of the most advanced countries of Europe, in the same measure as production on a large scale and the newly-acquired political rule of the capitalist class developed themselves in those countries. More and more strikingly the lie was given by facts to the doctrines taught by capitalist economy, of the identity of the interests of capital and labor, of universal harmony, and of universal well-being as the results of free competition. No longer could these facts be ignored any more than the socialism of France or England, which was their theoretic, although as yet extremely imperfect, expression. But the old idealistic conception of history, which was not yet dislodged, knew of no class conflicts resting upon material interests; in fact, of no material interests whatever; production, as well as all economic relations, appeared therein only incidentally, as subordinate elements in the “history of civilization.”

MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY.

The new facts compelled the subjection of all previous history to a new examination, and it was then found that all previous history, with the exception of that of primitive society, was the history of *class struggles*; that these warring classes of society are ever the issue of the conditions of production and distribution, in a word, of the economic conditions of their epoch; that, accordingly, the economic structure of society at any time prevalent constitutes the real basis, and explains, in the last instance, the whole superstructure of juridic and political institutions, as also the religious, philosophic and all other ideas of each historic period. Hegel freed history from metaphysics, he rendered it dialectic—but his own conception of history was essentially idealistic. Now idealism was driven from its last refuge, the philosophy of history; a materialistic philosophy of history was brought forth; and the path was found by which to explain the consciousness of man by his existence, instead of, as until then, his existence by his consciousness.

SOCIALISM BECOMES A SCIENCE.

Thenceforth socialism appeared no longer as an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious head, but as the necessary issue of the struggle between two classes that have developed historically—the *proletariat* and the *capitalist*. Its task was no longer to elaborate an as perfect as possible system of society, but to examine the historically economic course from which these classes, together with their antagonism, had of necessity issued, and to discover in the economic situation itself, brought on by them, the means whereby to put an end to the conflict. The socialism of former days was as incompatible with that materialistic conception as the conception of nature by French materialism was incompatible with dialectics and modern natural science. True

enough, early socialism criticised the existing capitalist mode of production and its results; nevertheless, it could explain neither and, consequently, remained in the dark as to both; all it could do was simply to reject them as bad. The stronger its denunciation of that inseparable concomitant of capitalism—the exploitation of the working class—the less was it able to point out clearly wherein that exploitation consisted, and what its genesis. The question was, on the one hand, to exhibit the capitalist mode of production in its historic evolution and its necessity at a given historic period—consequently, also the necessity of its downfall; but, on the other hand, also to lay bare its inner character, which still remained a secret. This was done by the discovery of *surplus value*. It was shown that appropriation of unpaid labor is the elementary form of capitalist production, and of the exploitation of the laborer which it accomplishes; that the capitalist, even when he buys the labor power of his workman at the full value which, as a commodity, it may have in the market, nevertheless, knocks out of it more value than he paid for; and that this surplus value constitutes, in the last instance, the sum of the values out of which is heaped up the ever increasing quantity of capital in the hands of the possessing classes. The genesis of capitalist production, as well as of the production of capital, was explained.

These two great discoveries: the materialist conception of history and the revelation of the secret of capitalist production through surplus value, we owe to Marx. With them socialism became a science, the further elaboration of which, in all its details and connections, was the next subject of study.

III.

SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM.

BASIS OF THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY.

The materialist conception of history proceeds upon the principle that production, and, next to production, the exchange of its products, is the groundwork of every social order; and that in every social system that has arisen historically the distribution of the products, together with the social divisions into classes and orders, depends upon that which is produced, and the manner in which it is produced, and also upon the manner in which the articles produced are exchanged. According to this, the prime causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be traced, not to the heads of men, not to their increasing perception of “eternal truth and justice,” but to the changes in the method of production and exchange; they are to be traced, not to the *philosophy*, but to the *economics* of the respective epochs. The awakening perception that existing social institutions are unreasonable and unjust, that sense has become non-sense, and right wrong, is only an evidence that, in the methods of production and forms of exchange, changes have silently taken place with which the social order, fitted to the previous economic conditions, is no longer in keeping. Hereby it is at the same time implied that the means for the removal of the discovered abuses must be latent and more or less developed in the changed conditions of production themselves. But these means are not to be *invented* by the brains, they are to be *discovered*, with the aid of the brains, in the material facts of production that are at hand.

How, now, does it stand with modern socialism?

CAPITALIST CLASS DESTROYS FEUDAL SOCIETY.

The existing social order—and this point is now pretty generally conceded—is the creation of the present ruling class, the capitalist class. The method of production peculiar to the capitalist class, which, since the time of Marx, has been designated “capitalist production,” was incompatible with the privileges appertaining to localities and estates, as well as with the mutual and personal bonds of the feudal order. The capitalist class destroyed the feudal order and erected upon its ruins the constitution of capitalist society, the empire of free competition, liberty of emigration, equality of rights among owners of commodities, and what all the other capitalist beatitudes may be. Thenceforth, capitalist production could uncoil with freedom. Since steam and modern machinery had transformed the old system of manufacture into that of production in gross, industry, nurtured under the fostering care of the capitalist class,

expanded with a rapidity and to a degree never before heard of. But the same as, in its days, manufacture and the handicraft that, under its influence, was further developed, came in conflict with the feudal trammels of the guild system, so likewise does production in gross, when it reaches fuller perfection, come in conflict with the limits within which the capitalist method of production confines it. Already the new powers of production have grown over the head of the capitalist form of their utilization. The conflict between the powers and the mode of production is not one that has sprung up from the head of man, like that between original sin and divine justice; it exists in the facts, objectively, outside of ourselves, independent of the wishes and doings of even those who have ushered it in. Modern socialism is nothing else but the intellectual reflex of this actual conflict, whose image is found first of all in the heads of that class which suffers directly by it, namely, the working class.

Wherein does this conflict consist?

Before capitalist production, i.e., in the Middle Ages, the system of small industry prevailed everywhere and rested upon the private ownership by the producers themselves of their instruments of production. Agriculture was conducted by the small, free, or dependent farmer; in the cities, handicraft.

HISTORIC ROLE OF CAPITALIST CLASS.

The instruments of labor—land, agricultural implements, work-shops, tools—were individual property, calculated only for individual use, and were, accordingly, paltry, dwarfish and poor. For that very reason, as a rule, they belonged to the producers themselves. To concentrate these scattered and limited implements of production, to enlarge them, to transform them into the present powerful lever of production—that was exactly the historic role of the capitalist method of production, and of its upholder, the capitalist class. How it historically accomplished this since the fifteenth century, through the three stages of simple co-operation, manufacture, and production in gross, Marx has explained circumstantially in the fourth part of his work on *Capital*. But the capitalist class, as it is also shown there, could not transform these limited implements into mighty powers without turning them into *social* instruments of production, available only by the *combined effort of a number of men*. In the stead of the spinning-wheel, the hand-loom, the smith's hammer, there appeared the spinning machine, the mechanical loom and the steam hammer; in the stead of the single work-shop, there appeared the factory that compelled the combined labor of hundreds and of thousands. The same as with the implements of production, production itself was transformed from a series of isolated into a series of social acts, and the products from individual into social products. The yarn, the cloth, the metal articles which now came out of the factory, were the joint product of many working people through whose hands they had to go successively before being ready. No single person could say of them: "This I have made; this is *my* work."

Where, however, the natural division of labor within a community becomes the basis of industry, it stamps the products with the form of commodities, whose mutual exchange, purchase, and sale, enables the individual producers to satisfy their manifold needs. This was the case in the Middle Ages. The farmer, for instance, sold to the artisan agricultural and bought in exchange handicraft products. It was into this society of individual producers of commodities that the new system of production pushed itself. In the midst of the natural, yet *planless* division of labor, as it then prevailed throughout, there arose the *planful* division of labor, as organized in the separate factories. Alongside of *individual*, *social* production stepped up. The products of both were sold in the same market, hence at prices at least approximately equal. But the planful organization was more powerful than the natural division of labor. The factories that worked upon the social plan turned out their wares more cheaply than did the individual producer. On one field after another individual production was thrown down, until its social competitor wholly revolutionized the old method. This notwithstanding, its revolutionary character was so little recognized that it was, on the contrary, introduced as a means for aiding and promoting the production of commodities. It arose in direct connection with certain already existing levers of production and exchange, to wit: merchants' capital, handicraft, and wage-labor. Yet, while it, itself, appeared as a new form of production the old forms of appropriation remained in full vigor.

CAPITALIST CONCENTRATION BEGINS.

In the production of commodities, such as had developed in the Middle Ages, the question could never arise, To whom do the proceeds of labor belong? The individual producer had brought them forth by his own labor, or that of his family and with his own tools, and, as a rule, out of raw materials belonging to, and often produced by, himself. There was no need of their being appropriated by, they belonged to, him as a matter of course. Property in the product rested, accordingly, upon *one's own labor*. Even there where the help of others was used, that, as a rule, was only a by-matter, and often received, besides wages, other and further remuneration. The guild apprentice and journeyman, for instance, worked, not so much for the sake of their board and wages as for the sake of fitting themselves for mastership. Thereupon came the concentration of the means of production in large workshops and factories, and thereby their conversion into means of production *de facto* social. But these social implements and products were treated as though they were, now as before, the implements and products of individuals. While, until now, the owner of the means of labor had taken the products because, as a rule, they were his own product, and foreign help was the exception, thenceforth the owner of the means of labor proceeded himself to appropriate the products, although they were no longer *his own* but the product of *the labor of others*. Accordingly, the now socially produced commodities were appropriated,

not by those who actually had set in motion the means of production and actually had produced the goods, but by the *capitalists*. The implements of production and production itself had become essentially social; yet, nevertheless, were they subjected to a form of appropriation, which presupposed the existence of private and individual production, under which everyone owned and brought his own products to market. The new mode of production remains subject to the old form of appropriation, although it does away with the conditions upon which the latter was predicated.⁵

In this contradiction, which imparts to the new system of production its capitalist character, *lurks in embryo the whole conflict of to-day*. The more the present system of production gained the upper hand on all leading fields of industry and in all economically leading countries, and thereby crowded individual production down to trifling branches, *the more sharply marked became also the incompatibility between social production and capitalist appropriation*.

WAGE SLAVERY BEGINS.

The first capitalists found, as already stated, the form of wage-labor in existence. Only, wage-labor was then the exception, it was a side occupation, a makeshift, a transitory incident. The farm laborer, who occasionally worked for wages, owned his couple of acres of land, which sufficed, at a pinch, to support him. The provisions of the guild saw to it that the journeyman of to-day became the master of to-morrow. Soon, however, as the means of production became social, and were concentrated in the hands of capitalists, this was changed. Both the means of production and the products themselves of the small individual producer became more and more valueless. There was left to him nothing but to turn wage-worker under the capitalist. Wage-labor, formerly the exception and a makeshift, became the rule and basis of the whole system of production; formerly a side occupation, now it became the exclusive pursuit of the laborer; the temporary wage-laborer became one for life. The number of these permanent wage-laborers was, moreover, immensely increased by the contemporaneous breaking down of the feudal order, the disbandment of the retainers of the feudal lords, the ejection of the farmers from their homesteads, etc. The divorce became complete between the means of production, concentrated in hands of the capitalists, on the one side, and the producers, on the other, reduced to the possession of nothing but their own labor power. *The contradiction between social*

⁵It need not here be explained that, although the form of appropriation remains the same, the character of the appropriation is revolutionized by the process above outlined no less than production itself. Whether I appropriate my own products or those of others, are two very different sorts of appropriation. In passing, be it noted that wage-labor, which contains the germ of the whole capitalist system of production, is very old; isolated and scattered it existed for centuries along with slavery. But the germ could sprout into the capitalist system of production only after the historic prerequisites had been furnished.

production and capitalist appropriation becomes visible in the contrast between the proletariat and the capitalist class.

We saw that the capitalist mode of production pushed itself into a society of individual producers of commodities whose social connection was established by means of the mutual exchange of their goods. But every society based upon the production of commodities possesses the peculiar quality that the producing members have lost control over their own social interrelations. Each produces for himself with whatever implement he may happen to possess, and for the necessary personal exchange only. No one knows how much of his article comes to market or how much of it is at all needed; no one knows whether his own products will find a demand, whether he will be able to recover his outlays, or at all to effect a sale. Anarchy reigns in production. Nevertheless, the production of commodities, like all other forms of industry, has its peculiar and inherent laws; laws that are inseparable from it and that enforce themselves in and through it despite of {in spite of?} anarchy. These laws crop up in the only permanent form of social interrelation—in exchange; and they impose themselves upon the individual producers as compulsory laws of competition. At first, they are unknown to the producers themselves and are to be discovered only after long experience and by degrees. They, accordingly, enforce themselves without the aid of and despite the producers, as blind laws, natural to their own form of production. The product rules its producers.

In medieval society, i.e., during the early centuries, production was essentially for self-use. It satisfied mainly the wants of the producer himself and of his family. Wherever, as in the country, relations of personal dependence existed, it also contributed to the satisfaction of the wants of the feudal lord. No exchange took place, hence the products did not assume the character of commodities. The family of the peasant produced almost everything it needed—furniture and clothes no less than food. Only after it had reached the point of producing a surplus over its own wants and over the tribute in kind due to the feudal lord, only then did it produce commodities. It was this surplus, thrown into social exchange, and offered for sale, that became “commodity.” The artificers in cities were forced, it is true, to produce for exchange from the start; but they also provided mainly {for} themselves for the largest part of their own wants. They had gardens and small patches of land; they turned their cattle upon the commons, which furthermore supplied them with timber and kindling wood; the women spun flax, wool, etc. Production for the purpose of exchange, the production of commodities, was only at its inception. Hence a restricted exchange, a restricted market, a stable method of production, local exclusiveness, without, local union within: in the country the mark, in the city the guild.

CAPITALIST PRODUCTION REVOLUTIONIZES INDUSTRY.

With the extension, however, of the production of commodities, especially with the

introduction of the capitalist mode of production, the hitherto slumbering laws that underlie the latter became more visibly and powerfully effective. The old fetters were loosened, the old bonds of exclusiveness were broken through, and the producers were more and more transformed into independent and isolated producers of commodities. Anarchy arose in production and grew apace. Yet, the instrument wherewith capitalist production increased this anarchy was the very reverse of anarchy: it was the increasing organization of production upon a social basis in every industrial establishment. With this lever it put an end to the former peaceful stability of things. In whatever branch of industry it was introduced, it tolerated no older method of production. Wherever it took possession of handicraft, it destroyed the old system of handicraft itself. The field of labor became a field of war. The great geographical discoveries and the colonization that followed thereupon multiplied the markets and hastened the complete transformation of handicraft into manufacture. Not only did the struggle break out between the individual local producers, but it grew into national dimensions and into the mercantile wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, until finally industry on a large scale and the establishment of the world market made the struggle universal, and at the same time imparted to it unwonted virulence. Between individual capitalists, as between whole branches of industry and whole nations, the natural or artificial advantages in the conditions of production decide over their very existence. He who succumbs is ruthlessly thrown aside. It is the Darwinian struggle of the individual for life carried over from brute nature with intensified fierceness into society. The standpoint natural to animals appears as the acme of human development. The contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation now presents itself as a *contrast between the organization of production in the single factory and the anarchy of production in society at large.*

EFFECT OF MACHINERY ON THE WORKING CLASS.

In these two manifestations of the contradiction that from its very origin is inherent to it, does capitalist production move, describing interminably those “vicious circles” which already Fourier had discovered. What, indeed, Fourier could not yet see at his time was that these circles gradually grow narrower, that the orbit rather represents a spiral, and must touch its end, like that of the planets, by colliding with its center. It is the moving spring of social anarchy in production that more and more transforms the large majority of people into proletarians; and again, it is this very mass of the proletarians that will finally put an end to the anarchy of production. It is the moving spring of social anarchy in production that turns the ever higher perfectibility of machinery operated by large industries into an imperious command that compels every individual capitalist engaged in industry to perfect his machinery more and more under penalty of ruin. But the perfection of machinery is tantamount to the rendering of human labor superfluous. If, however, the introduction and increase of

machinery means the displacement of millions of hand{s} by a few machine laborers, the improvement of machinery, in its turn, means the displacement of more and more of the latter, and the final formation of a body of available wage-workers in excess of the average need of capital, the formation, in fact, of a complete industrial reserve army, as I styled it in 1845,⁶ an army that is available at such times when industry is carried on under high pressure, that is thrown on the pavement by the crash that must inevitably follow, that at all times is a leaden weight to the feet of the working class in its struggle for life with capital, and that serves as a regulator to keep wages down at the low level suitable to capitalist interests. Thus it happens that machinery, to use Marx's language, becomes the most powerful weapon of capital against the working class, that the means of labor constantly strike the means of livelihood from the hands of the workmen, and that the product of the workman himself is transformed into an instrument for his enslavement. Thus it happens that economy in the means of labor becomes from the start a reckless waste of labor power, and also the spoliation of those conditions that are otherwise normal to the functions of labor; that machinery, the mightiest means for the shortening of the hours of work, is reversed into the most certain means whereby to convert the whole lifetime of the workman and his family into available labor-time for the profit of capital; that excessive work on the part of some becomes the condition for the idleness of others; and that industry on a large scale, which hunts the globe over after new consumers, has at its own home reduced the consumption of the masses to the minimum of starvation, and thereby undermined its own domestic market. "The law that preserves the equilibrium between the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, on the one hand, and the extent and energy of capitalist accumulation, on the other, rivets the laborer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It predicates an accumulation of misery corresponding to the accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole, is, accordingly, co-existing accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, beastialization, and moral degradation at the opposite pole of production, i.e., on the side of that class which *turns out its own product in the form of capital.*"⁷ To expect from the capitalist mode of production any other distribution of the products would be like asking that the electrodes of a battery leave the water unaffected as long as they remain in connection with the battery, and that they fail to develop oxygen at the positive and hydrogen at the negative pole.

EFFECT OF MACHINERY ON THE CAPITALIST CLASS.

We have seen how the perfectibility of machinery carried to its highest point, by the stimulus of anarchy in production, converts itself into an imperious command that

⁶*Condition of the Working Class in England.*

⁷ Marx's *Capital.*

compels the capitalist engaged in industry ever to improve his machinery and ever to increase its productive capacity. The bare possibility that exists to extend the field of his production also converts itself into a command that drives him on with equal imperiousness. The enormous power of expansion of industry on a large scale, in comparison to which that of the gases is but child's play, now stands out as a qualitative and quantitative necessity for expansion that mocks all resistance. The resistance is offered by consumption, by the sales, by the markets for the products that are turned out by the industry in gross. But the power of expansion, extensive as well as intensive, which exists in the markets, is primarily governed by quite another set of laws that operate with much less vigor. The expansion of the markets cannot keep step with the expansion of production. A crash becomes inevitable, and, seeing it can lead to no solution, so long as it does not burst the capitalist mode of production itself, it must be of periodic recurrence. Capitalist production generates another "vicious circle."

INDUSTRIAL CRISES BECOME PERMANENT.

Indeed, since 1825, when the first general crisis broke out, the whole industrial and commercial world—production and exchange among all civilized nations, together with their more or less barbarous appendices—is thrown out of joint about every ten years. Commerce is blocked; the markets are overstocked; the products lie there as plentiful as undisposable; cash becomes invisible; credit disappears; factories stand still; the working masses are in want of food, because they have produced too much of it; failure follows upon failure, and sheriff's sale upon sheriff's sale. The paralysis lasts years; production and powers of production are wasted and destroyed wholesale, until the heaped up mass of commodities finally runs out at more or less depreciated values, and until production and exchange are again gradually set in motion. By degrees the pace is accelerated, it breaks into a trot, the industrial trot becomes a gallop, and this, in its turn, increases to the headlong run of a complete steeple-chase of industry, commerce, credit and speculation, finally to land again, after breakneck jumps, in the ditch of the crash. And so again and again. This we have experienced fully five times since 1825, and are experiencing it now (1877) for the sixth time. Furthermore, the character of these crises is so sharply stamped upon them, that Fourier struck them all off by designating the first one as a "crise plethorique"—a crisis of abundance.

MODE OF PRODUCTION REBELS AGAINST MODE OF EXCHANGE.

In the crises, the contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation breaks out forcibly. The circulation of commodities is for the time destroyed; money, the medium of circulation, becomes a hindrance to circulation; all the laws of the production and circulation of commodities stand upon their heads; the

economic collision has reached its height: *The mode of production rebels against the mode of exchange.*

The fact that the social organization of production within the factory has developed to the point where it has become incompatible with the anarchy of production which exists along side of and above it in society—this fact is made palpable to capitalists themselves by that forcible concentration of capital that is accomplished in the course of the crises through the ruin of many large and still more small capitalists. The whole mechanism of the capitalist mode of production breaks down under the weight of the productive powers which it, itself, has brought into existence. It no longer can convert this mass of means of production into capital; these lie fallow, and for that very reason the industrial reserve army must also lie fallow. Means of production, means of sustenance, available workmen, all the elements of production and of general wealth are there in abundance. But “abundance becomes the source of want and distress,”⁸ because it is the very thing that hinders the conversion of the means of production and of sustenance into capital: in capitalist society the means of production cannot come into activity unless they have first been converted into capital—into the means for the exploitation of human labor. The inevitable quality of capitalist ownership in the means of production and sustenance stands as a spectre between these and the workmen. It alone prevents the coalition of the material and personal levers of production; it alone keeps the means of production from fulfilling their functions, and the workman from working and living. Accordingly, on the one hand, the capitalist mode of production convicts itself of incapacity further to direct these productive powers. On the other hand, these productive powers themselves urge with increasing vehemence the removal of the existing contradiction, they urge to be freed from their quality of capital, they urge the *practical recognition of their character as social powers of production.*

It is this resistance, offered by the prodigiously growing powers of production against the capitalist quality, this increasing demand for the recognition of their social nature, that constrains the capitalist class itself to use them more and more, and to the extent that it be possible within the area of capitalism, as social powers of production. The industrial period of high pressure with its unlimited inflation of credit, as well as the crash itself that comes with the collapse of large capitalist establishments, drives on to that form of socialization of large masses of means of production which we encounter in the several sorts of stock companies. Many of these means of production and of communication and transportation are from the start so colossal, that, like the railroad, they exclude all other forms of capitalist exploitation. At a certain stage of development, even this form ceases to be adequate, and the official representative of capitalist society, the State, must assume their direction.⁹

⁸Fourier.

⁹I say must. Only when the means of production or communication and transportation have actually

This necessity for the conversion into State property is first felt in connection with the large means of communication and transportation; the post-office, the telegraph and the railroad.

STOCK COMPANIES PROVE THAT THE CAPITALIST CLASS IS SUPERFLUOUS.

If, on the one side, the crises reveal the incapacity of the capitalist class any longer to direct the modern powers of production, the transformation of the large establishments of production and of communication and transportation into stock companies or State property proves, on the other, the superfluosity of that class. All social functions of the capitalist class are now filled by hired employees. The capitalist no longer exercises any social activity excepting the pocketing of revenues, punching of coupons, and speculating in stocks—an operation by which the several capitalists mutually take away one another's capital. After first displacing workmen, the capitalist mode of production subsequently displaces capitalists themselves, and throws them, the same as it did the workmen, into the superfluous portion of the population, although not immediately into the industrial reserve army.

GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP IS NOT SOCIALISM.

But neither conversion into stock companies nor State ownership removes the nature of capital from the powers of production. With the stock companies, this fact remains obvious. On the other hand, the modern State is but the organization which capitalist society gives itself in order to maintain the external conditions of capitalist production against the attacks both of the workmen and of individual capitalists. The modern State, whatever its form, is essentially a capitalist machine; it is the State of the capitalist; the ideal total capitalist. The more numerous the productive powers are which it takes in hand, the nearer it is to that ideal total capitalist: all the more citizens does it exploit. The workmen remain wage-workers, proletarians. The

outgrown the form of direction by stock companies, i.e., when their ownership by the State has become an economic necessity, only then—and even though it be the present State itself that accomplishes the result—does it indicate economic progress, the moving of a further step toward the seizure of all powers of production by society itself. Latterly, however, since Bismarck took to the plan of State ownership, a certain false Socialism has arisen, and even degenerated here and there into a certain degree of sycophancy, which declares off-hand all State ownership, the Bismarckian variety included, to be Socialist. Indeed, were State ownership of the tobacco industry socialistic, Napoleon and Metternich would be counted among the founders of Socialism. When the Belgian State, from purely common political and financial reasons, built its own main railroads; when Bismarck, without any economic necessity, took possession for the State of the principal railroad lines of Prussia, simply with the view the better to organize and utilize them against a war, to rear the railroad employees into voting cattle for the Government, and, above all, to furnish himself with a new source of revenue that should be independent from Parliamentary enactments—neither was in any way a Socialist measure, directly or indirectly, conscious or unconscious. Else, were the Crown's Royal Maritime Company, the crown's porcelain factory, and even the regimental tailor likewise Socialist institutions.

capitalist quality remains in force; it is even carried up higher. But at the top, it topples over. State ownership of the powers of production is not the solution of the conflict; nevertheless, it carries within it the technical means, the handle to the solution.

This solution can consist only in the recognition de facto of the social nature of the modern powers of production; accordingly, in harmonizing the mode of production, of appropriation and of exchange with the social character of the means of production. This can be done only by society taking in hand, openly and without evasion, the powers of production that have outgrown all control other than its own. Thereby, the social character of products and means of production, which to-day turns against the producers themselves, which periodically interrupts production and exchange, and which enforces itself violently and destructively as a blind force of nature, would be put in force by the producers with a full consciousness of the act, and would be converted, from a source of disturbance and of periodical collapses, into the most powerful lever of production.

THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION.

Social forces operate the same as natural ones: blindly, violently, destructively, so long as we do not know them and do not count with them. Once known, however, their operation, their tendencies, their effects once understood, it only depends upon ourselves to subject them more and more to our will, and with their aid to reach our ends. This holds good especially of the modern prodigious powers of production. So long as we stubbornly refuse to understand their nature and character—and it is against this understanding that capitalist production and its defenders are vainly struggling—just so long do these powers work themselves out despite and against us, and just so long do they keep the mastery over us, as we have circumstantially shown. But once their nature is understood, they can be converted in the hands of the co-operating producers from demoniacal masters into obedient servants. It is the difference that exists between the destructive force of electricity, in the lightning, and the tamed electricity in the telegraph and the electric lamp; it is the difference between conflagration and that fire that is employed in the service of man. With the treatment of the present productive powers agreeable to their finally discovered nature, anarchy in production is supplanted by a social and planful administration of production looking to the need both of the collectivity and of the individual; the capitalist mode of appropriation, whereby the product enslaves first its producer, and next the appropriator himself, is replaced by a mode of appropriation that is founded in the very nature of the modern means of production—direct social appropriation on the one hand as a means to preserve and extend production, and, on the other, direct individual appropriation of the products as a means to life and enjoyment.

THE “STATE” DIES A NATURAL DEATH.

By converting the large majority of the population more and more into proletarians, the capitalist mode of production creates the power, that, under penalty of its own destruction, is forced to accomplish this revolution. By urging more and more the conversion of the large, already socialized means of production into State property, it points the path for the accomplishment of this revolution. *The proletariat seizes the machinery of the State and converts the means of production first into State property.* But, by so doing, it extinguishes itself as proletariat; by so doing it extinguishes all class distinctions and class contrasts; and along with them, the State as such. The society that existed until then, and that moved in class contrasts, needed the State, i.e., an organization of whatever class happened at the time to be the exploiting one, for the purpose of preserving the external conditions under which it carried on production; in other words, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited class down in that condition of subjection—slavery, bondage or vassalage, or wage-labor, which the corresponding mode of production predicated. The State was the official representative of the whole society; it was the constitution of the latter into a visible body; but it was so only in so far as it was the State of that class which itself, at its time, represented the whole society; in antiquity, the State of slave-holding citizens; in the middle ages, the State of the feudal nobility; in our own days, the State of the capitalist class. By at last becoming actually the representative of the whole social body, it renders itself superfluous. As soon as there is no longer any social class to be kept down; as soon as, together with class rule and the individual struggle for life, founded in the previous anarchy of production, the conflicts and excesses that issued therefrom have been removed, there is nothing more to be repressed, and the State or Government, as a special power of repression, is no longer necessary. The first act, wherein the State appears as the real representative of the whole body social—the seizure of the means of production in the name of society—is also its last independent act as State. The interference of the State in social relations becomes superfluous in one domain after another, and falls of itself into desuetude. The place of a government over persons is taken by the administration of things and the conduct of the processes of production. The State is not “abolished”—*it dies out*. This is all there is in the phrase about a “Free State,” both with regard to the just uses to which it is put by agitators, and its scientific insufficiency; this also is all there is in the demand made by so-called anarchists that the State be abolished out of hand.

The seizure of all means of production by society has, since the historic appearance of capitalist production, often floated more or less vaguely as an ideal future aim before the minds of individuals as well as of whole sects. But it could become possible and a historic necessity only when the material conditions for its application were ready to hand. Its execution, like that of all other progressive social measures, becomes possible, not by reason of the understanding that the existence of

classes is repugnant to justice, equality, etc., not by simply willing the abolition of these classes, but by reason of certain new economic conditions. The division of society into an exploiting and an exploited, a ruling and an oppressed class, was the necessary result of the former slight development of production. So long as the aggregate labor of society yields a stock but slightly in excess of the requirements for the bare existence of all, so long as labor engages the whole or almost the whole time of the large majority in society, just so long does that society necessarily divide itself into classes. Along with the large majority, held exclusively to labor, a class, freed from directly productive labor, shapes itself, and takes charge of the common concerns of society: the direction of labor, State matters, administration of justice, science, arts, etc. Accordingly, it is the law of the division of labor that lies at the bottom of the division into classes. But that does not prevent the division into classes from being put through by force, robbery, trickery and deception; nor does it prevent the ruling class, once in the saddle, from strengthening its supremacy at the expense of the working class, and from turning the direction of society into an intensified exploitation of the masses.

THE "CLASSES" ARE ABOLISHED.

But although, according hereto, class divisions have a certain justification in history, yet is this the case only for a given epoch and for given social conditions. They arose from the insufficiency of production, and will be swept away by the full development of modern productive forces. Indeed, the abolition of classes in society presupposes a historic stage of development at which the existence, not of this or that particular ruling class only, but of any ruling class whatever, and, accordingly, the existence of class distinction itself, has become an anachronism and is obsolete. It presupposes a range of development in production at which the appropriation of the means of production and of their products, and, along with them, of the political power, of the monopoly of culture and of intellectual leadership by a particular class in society, has become, not only superfluous, but also economically, politically and intellectually a clog to progress. This stage has now been reached. On the one hand, the political and intellectual bankruptcy of the capitalist class is hardly any longer a secret to itself; on the other, its economic bankruptcy recurs regularly every ten years. At every crisis, society, unable to utilize them, is suffocated under the load of her own products and productive powers, and stands helpless before the absurd contradiction that the producers have nothing to consume because there is a dearth of consumers. The power of expansion in the means of production snaps the bonds which capitalist production lays upon them. Their emancipation from these bonds is the only prerequisite for an uninterrupted, ever more rapidly advancing development of productive forces, and, thereby, for a practically boundless increase of production itself. But this is not all. The appropriation by society of the means of production does away, not only with the present artificial restriction of production, but also with that positive

waste and havoc, both of products and productive forces, that to-day are the unavoidable companions of production, and reach their height at the crises. Furthermore, by doing away with the insane extravagance of the ruling classes of to-day and of their political representatives, it sets free for the use of the whole people a mass of products and means of production. The possibility, with the aid of socialized production, to secure to every member of society an existence, not only materially sufficient and richer from day to day, but which also guarantees to him the free development and activity of his physical and intellectual gifts, this possibility now exists for the first time, and it exists indeed.¹⁰

THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC APPEARS.

With the seizure of the means of production by society, the production of “commodities” is done away with, and along with them the domination exercised by the product over its own producers. Anarchy within social production would be supplanted by planful and deliberate organization. The struggle for individual existence would be at end. Thereby for the first time man would, in a certain sense, step finally out of the animal kingdom, out of the brute conditions of existence, into those that are truly human. The conditions for life, which had previously dominated him, would then be placed under his dominion; and only then would man become consciously and in fact the lord of nature: he would become master of his own social organization. The laws of his social acts, which until then appeared to him as strange and overpowering laws of nature, would then be used by man with a full understanding of their qualities, and, accordingly, would be ruled by himself. Even the social organization of mankind, which until then appeared to man as an act of compulsion, superimposed upon him by nature and history, would then become the act of his own free will. The objective, strange powers, which until then swayed history, would come under the control of man himself. Only thence forward would man make his own history, fully conscious of his own actions; only thence forward would the social causes, set in motion by himself, produce mainly and in an ever-increasing measure, the intended results. It is the leap of mankind out of the reign of necessity into that of freedom.

¹⁰A few figures may convey an approximate conception of the enormous power of expansion in modern means of production, even under the weight of capitalism. According to the latest estimates by Giffen, the total wealth of Great Britain and Ireland amounted, in round numbers, to:

| | | | |
|------|----------------|-------|------------------|
| 1814 | £2,200,000,000 | | \$11,000,000,000 |
| 1865 | 6,100,000,000 | | 30,500,000,000 |
| 1875 | 8,500,000,000 | | 42,500,000,000 |

As to the ravage done to products and means of production in the crisis, the total loss suffered by the German iron industry alone during the previous crash was calculated at the Second Industrial Congress of Germany, Berlin, February 21, 1878, to amount to 455,000,000 marks.

IV.

RECAPITULATION.

NATURE OF MEDIEVAL SOCIETY.

Let us now recapitulate our historic sketch in a few words:

I. *Medieval Society*.—Small individual production. Means of production adapted to individual use; thence primitively inefficient and paltry, and dwarfish in their results. Production for the immediate consumption, either of the producer himself or of his feudal lord. Only there where an excess of production over consumption takes place, is that excess offered for sale and falls into exchange. The production of “commodity” is in its incipency; but already it contains in embryo *the anarchy of production in society at large*.

NATURE OF CAPITALIST REVOLUTION.

II. *Capitalist Revolution*.—Transformation of industry, first through simple co-operation and manufacture. Concentration of the thitherto scattered means of production in large workshops, and, thereby, their transformation from individual into social means of production—a transformation, that, on the whole does not affect the form of exchange. The old forms of appropriation remain in force. The *Capitalist* makes his appearance. In his capacity of owner of the means of production, he appropriates the products also, and turns them into “commodities.” Production has become a social act. Exchange, and, together with it, appropriation remain individual acts, acts of the individual. *The Social products are appropriated by the individual capitalist*. This is the fundamental contradiction from which arise all the contradictions in which present society moves, and which production in gross brings to light.

A.—Severance of the producers from the means of production. Condemnation of the worker to lifelong wage-labor. *Contrast between proletariat and capitalist class*.

B.—Growing predominance and increasing effectiveness of the laws that govern the production of commodities. Unbridled competitive struggle. Contradiction between social organization in the separate factories, and social anarchy in production at large.

C.—On the one hand, perfection of machinery made by competition compulsory upon every individual manufacturer, and equivalent with ever increasing displacement of labor—the industrial *reserve army*. On the other hand, boundless expansion of production, equally a compulsory law of competition to every manufacturer. On both

hands, unheard of development of productive forces, excess of supply over demand, overproduction, glutting of the markets, decennial crises, the vicious circle: here, a superabundance of products and means of production; yonder a superabundance of workingmen without employment and without means of existence. But these two forces of production and social wellbeing cannot combine because the capitalist form of production prevents the productive powers from operating and the products from circulating unless they first convert themselves into capital—a thing that their very superabundance prevents from being done. The contradiction has become an absurdity; *the mode of production rebels against the form of exchange*. The capitalist class is convicted of incapacity further to direct its own social powers of production.

D.—Partial recognition of the social character of the powers of production forced upon the capitalists themselves. Appropriation of the large organisms of production and of communication and transportation, first by *stock companies*, next by the *State*. The capitalist class shows itself to be superfluous; all its social functions are filled by hired employees.

NATURE OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION.

III. *Proletarian Revolution*.—Solution of the contradictions. The proletariat seizes the public power and, with its aid, turns the powers of production, that have been slipping from the hands of the capitalist class, into public property. By this act it frees the means of production from their previous capitalist quality, and gives their social character full freedom to assert itself. Thenceforth, social production upon a predetermined plan becomes possible. The development of production makes the continuance of several social classes an anachronism. In proportion as anarchy in the production of society at large disappears, the political authority of the State becomes dormant. Man, finally master of his own form of social organization, becomes, at the same time lord over nature, lord over himself—in short, free. To accomplish this work of universal emancipation is the historic mission of the modern proletariat. To investigate its historic conditions, thereby its nature itself, and thus to impart a consciousness of its own motion to that class that, oppressed to-day, is called upon to do the act—that is the task of the theoretic expression of the movement of the proletariat, i.e., of *scientific socialism*.

THE END.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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