and seeing that this is impossible in present conditions, you set about attacking the very foundations of bourgeois society. Then, suspended by the minister, you will quit schooling and join us in showing adults who are less educated than you, what is important in knowledge, what humanity should be, what it could be. You will come to work with the socialists in the complete transformation of present-day society and its redirection towards equality, solidarity and freedom.

And now for you, young artist, whether you are a sculptor, a painter, a poet or a musician! Are you not aware that the sacred fire which inspired so many of your predecessors is lacking today among you and your kind? That art is banal? That mediocrity reigns?

And could it be any different? The joy of having rediscovered the antique world, of having turned back to the forces of nature, that inspired the masterpieces of the Renaissance, no longer exists in contemporary art: the revolutionary idea has not yet inspired it, and in its absence artists today think they have found something as good in realism' which strives to represent a drop of dew on a leaf like a photograph but in colour, to imitate the muscles of a cow's rump, or to represent meticulously, in prose or verse, the suffocating mud of a sewer or the boudoir of a lady of love.

"But if this is really the situation," you ask, "what can be done?"

If the sacred fire you claim to possess is no more than a snuffed and smoking candle, then you will continue to do as you have done, and your art will soon degenerate into a craft to decorate the parlours of shopkeepers, into the scribbling of libretti for operettas and of journalistic frivolities like those of Emile de Girardin; most of you in fact are already making your way fast down the fatal slope.

But if your heart truly beats in unison with that of humanity, if, as a true poet, you have the ear to listen to life, then, confronting the sea of suffering whose tide rises around you,

Words of a Rebel

Pëtr Kropotkin

1885

their little heads the humanitarian idea he cherished when he was young?

Often, I see that you are sad and knit your brows. Today, your favourite student, who indeed is not so good in Latin but is good-natured nonetheless, told with enthusiasm the tale of William Tell. His eyes shining, he seemed to wish to kill every tyrant on the spot, as he recited with fire in his voice these passionate lines of Schiller:

Before the slave as he breaks his chains,

before the free man, do not tremble!

But when he went home, his mother, his father and his uncle reprimanded him severely for his lack of respect for the parson and the policeman. They lectured him by the hour on "prudence, respect for authority, submission," and so he put aside his Schiller to read "The Art of Making Your Way in the World."

And yesterday you learnt how badly some of your best students had turned out: one does nothing but dream of military glory, and another collaborates with his employer in embezzling the wretched pay of the workers. And you, having put so much hope in these young people, now reflect on the sad contradiction that exists between real life and the idea.

You are still reflecting on it, but I foresee that in two years, having experienced disillusion after disillusion, you will abandon your favourite authors, and you will end up saying that Tell may have been an impeccable father, but he was also a bit of a fool; that poetry is an excellent thing for reading by the fireside, particularly when one has spent a whole day teaching the rules of compound interest, but that-after all-poets always soar in the clouds and their verses have nothing to do either with life or with the next visit of the school inspector.

Alternatively, your youthful dreams develop into the firm convictions of your mature years. You would like to see a broad humanitarian education for all, in the school and outside it,

drills;[3] that the mason and the labourer are unemployed as before despite the introduction of Giffard lifts. If you discuss social problems with the independence of mind which has guided you in your technical problems, you will arrive inevitably at the conclusion that, under the regime of private property and the wages system, each new discovery, even when it augments slightly the worker's well being, also makes his servitude all the heavier, his work all the more brutalizing, unemployment more frequent and crises sharper, and that he who already possesses all the luxuries is the only one who will seriously benefit.

What will you do then, once you have reached that conclusion? Perhaps you will begin to silence your conscience with sophistries; then, one fine day, you will say goodbye to your honest dreams of youth and set out to gain for yourself the right to luxuries, and then you will find your way into the camp of the exploiters. Or perhaps, if you have a good heart, you will say to yourself: "No, this is not the time to make discoveries! Let us work first to transform the mode of production; when individual property is abolished then each new industrial progress will be made for the benefit of all humanity; and the mass of workers, who today are mere machines, will become living beings and will apply to industry and intuition sustained by study and informed by manual skill. Technical progress will take on in the next fifty years an impetus we dare not dream of today."

And what can one say to the schoolteacher-not to the one who sees his profession as a tedious trade-but to the other who, surrounded by a happy band of kids, feels at ease among their animated looks, their happy smiles, and seeks to awaken in

[3] The construction of the St. Gotthard Tunnel under the Alps was completed in 1880, shortly before Kropotkin wrote. Its eight years of construction were marred by severe epidemics of various kinds, and ankolostosis (a disease fusing the vertebrae) was one of the worst sicknesses encountered there. Trans.

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political and social. But that will mean that you are a socialist, that you have become a revolutionary.

And what about you, my young engineer, who have dreamed of bettering the lot of the workers through applying science to industry? What sad disillusion and vexation awaits you! You give the youthful energy of your intelligence to elaborating a railway project which, by clambering along the edges of precipices and penetrating the hearts of granite mountain giants, will bring together two lands divided by nature. But once you have reached the site of this work, you will see whole battalions of workers decimated by exhaustion and sickness in the building of a single tunnel, you will see thousands of others going home with a few dollars and the unmistakeable signs of consumption, you will see human corpses -the victims of a vicious avarice-marking off every metre you have pushed you line forward, and once the railway is completed you will see it becoming a highway for the cannon of invaders.

Perhaps you have devoted your youth to a discovery that will simplify production and, after many efforts and many sleepless nights, you have finally completed and confirmed this precious discovery. You set out applying it, and the result exceeds all your hopes. Ten thousand, twenty thousand workers are thrown out on the streets. Those who remain, mostly children, are reduced to the condition of machines. Three, four, perhaps ten employers will make fortunes and celebrate with brimming glasses of champagne! Is this what you have dreamed about?

Finally you make a study of recent industrial advances and you find that the dressmaker has gained nothing, absolutely nothing, through the discovery of the sewing machine; that the worker on the Gothard dies of ankolystosis in spite of diamond

blind goddess Themis.[2] Doesn't your conscience rebel against the law and against society when it sees such verdicts given from day to day?

Or, to give another example, would you demand the application of the law against that man, ill-treated and scoffed from childhood, growing up without hearing a word of sympathy, who in the end kills his neighbour to take five francs from him? Would you demand that he be guillotined or-worse, that he be shut up for twenty years in a prison when you know that he is sick rather than criminal, and that in any case society as a whole must bear the responsibility for his crime?

Would you demand that the weavers who in a moment of exasperation set fire to their factory be sent to prison? That the man who has shot at a crowned tyrant be sent to prison? That the military should fire on the insurgent populace when it plants the flag of the future on the barricades? No, a thousand times no!

If you apply your reason instead of repeating what you have been taught, if you analyze and remove the law from that fog of fictions in which it has been veiled to conceal its origins, which lie in the will of the strong, and also to mask its substance, which has always been the consecration of all the opressions bequeathed to humanity by its bloody history-you will acquire a supreme contempt for that law. You will understand that to remain the servant of the written law is to find yourself each day in opposition to the law of conscience, with which you will find yourself trying to accommodate; and as the struggle cannot continue, either you will stifle your conscience and become a mere rascal, or you will break with tradition and come to work among us for the abolition of all injustices, economic,

[2] Themis. Greek goddess of law and custom who convened the Olympian assembly of the gods. She is generally represented as blindfolded, carrying a pair of scales and a cornucopia. Trans.

soil by laying down a railway, making new local roads, draining marshes, clearing bushland; while the farmer, who has largely contributed to raising the value of the land-is ruined; having fallen into the hands of speculators and burdened himself with debt, he can no longer pay his rent. The law, always on the side of property, makes a technical decision in favour of the landlord. But what would you do, if legal fictions have not yet killed in you the sense of justice? Would you demand that the farmer be thrown out on the road-which is what the law says-or would you demand that the landlord return to the farmer all the share of surplus value that is due to his labour, which is what equity would dictate? On what side would you stand? For the law, but against justice? Or for justice, which would make you against the law?

And when workers go on strike against their employers without giving the required fortnight's notice, on what side would you be found? On the side of the law, which means on the side of the employer who, profiting from a time of crisis, made scandalous profits (as you will see from reading about recent trials), or on the side of the workers who at the same time were getting a wage of two and a half francs and watching their wives and children wasting away? Would you defend the fiction which affirms the "freedom of agreement"? Or would you uphold equity, according to which a contract concluded between a man who has dined well and one who sells his work in order to eat, between the strong and the weak, is not a contract at all?

Here is another case. One day in Paris, a man is prowling around. Suddenly he seizes a steak and runs. He is caught and questioned, and it turns out that he is an unemployed worker and that he and his family have had nothing to eat for four days. People beg the butcher to let him go, but the butcher wants to taste the triumph of "justice," he prosecutes, and the man is condemned to six months in prison. Such is the will of the

And you can be sure that then, when you have fulfilled your sense of duty and feel a true harmony between your sentiments and your acts, you will discover within yourself forces whose existence you had never even suspected. And one day-which with all due respect to your professors will not be long in coming-when the modifications you have worked for become evident, then, drawing new strengths from collective research and from the powerful co-operation of the masses of workers who will put themselves at its service, science will take on an impetus in comparison with which the slow progress of today will seem like the simple experiments of schoolboys.

Then you will be able to take joy in science, since that joy will be available to all humanity.

2.

If you have finished your studies in law and are preparing yourself for the bar, it is likely that you too have illusions about your future activity-granted that you are one of those who know the meaning of altruism. Perhaps you think like this: "To consecrate one's life without truce or surrender to bringing about the triumph of a law that is the expression of supreme justice; what vocation could be finer?" And you enter life full of confidence in yourself and in the vocation you have chosen.

Very well, let us open at a venture the chronicles of the judiciary, and see what life has to tell you.

Here is a rich landowner; he is asking for the expulsion of a tenant farmer who is not paying the rent agreed on. From the legal viewpoint, there is no question; if the farmer does not pay, he must go. But when we analyze the facts, this is what we learn. The landlord has always dissipated his rents on high living, the farmer has always worked hard. The landowner has done nothing to improve his property, yet its value has tripled in fifteen years, thanks to the surplus value given the

Introduction by George Woodcock

Paroles d'un Revolte was Kropotkin's first book, published in Paris in 1885, and this is its first complete English version. A very different work from the more familiar books of the mature Kropotkin, like *Mutual Aid*; *Fields, Factories and Workshops*; and *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, it is the product of an anarchist agitator rather than a libertarian savant. And it derives its interest as much from what it reveals about an important transitional phase in the development of anarchist doctrines as it does for what it shows us of Kropotkin himself during a transitional period for him as well, an activist interlude between his escape from Russian prisons and his long refuge in the productive exile of London suburbia.

The forcing house of early anarchism was the First International, the International Workingmen's Association that was founded in London in 1864 by a heterogenous group of rebels and reformers, including the mutualist followers of the early anarchist Proudhon, some English trade unionists, a handful of German socialists led by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and a scattering of the neo-Jacobin followers of August Blanqui and the Italian nationalist followers of Giuseppe Mazzini. The designation "anarchist" was not much used by any faction at this period (though Proudhon had proclaimed himself an "anarchist" in 1840) but an essential division existed between those, like Marx and his followers, who wished to proceed by governmental means towards the social revolution (with the State perhaps withering away, as Engels put it – in the far future), and those,

soon to be led by Michael Bakunin, who believed that the State and the revolution were incompatible entities and that the revolution should lead immediately to the libertarian society based on the federation of communes and workers' associations.

The Congresses of the International became battlegrounds between the Marxists and the Bakuninists, and very soon the dispute took on national lines, with the revolutionaries of Latin Europe – Spain and Italy, the Midi of France and the French-speaking parts of Switzerland – supporting Bakunin, and the northern Europeans in general supporting Marx, with the English trade unionists holding the middle ground. The Marxists gained control of the General Council, but at the Hague Congress in 1872 the Bakuninist influence became so strong that the Marxists moved the headquarters of the General Council to New York, where it quickly languished and died. Meanwhile the Bakuninists gained control of what remained of the International in Europe, and the Jura Federation of Switzerland, where the watchmakers were disciples of Bakunin almost to a man, became its main nerve centre. There, at Sonvillier, antigovernmental groups had held their first gathering in November 1871, even before the breakup of the Hague Congress, and it was at St. Imier that the libertarian section of the International held its first Congress in 1873.

Kropotkin had encountered the Bakuninists in the Jura in 1872 on his first trip to western Europe and he had been converted by their dedication as much as by their arguments. When he returned to Switzerland in early 1877 after his escape from Russian prisons, he quickly resumed contact with his comrades in the Jura, only to find that the libertarian International was quickly following its Marxist opposite on the way to extinction. Its last Congress would actually be held at Verviers in Belgium in 1877 and then it would die quietly away. Even in the Jura the spark that "le grand Michel" had implanted flickered out after Bakunin died in 1876.

I would add that the interests of science itself also impose this solution. Science makes real progress only when a new truth enters a situation that is ready to accept it. The theory of the mechanical origin of heat, stated in the last century in almost the same terms as Hirn and Clausius[1] enunciate it today, remained for eighty years buried in academic memoirs until our knowledge of physics was sufficiently expanded to create a milieu capable of accepting it. Three generations had to pass by until the ideas of Erasmus Darwin on the variation of species were welcomed from the mouth of his grandson and accepted, not without pressure from public opinion, by the scholarly academicians. For the scholar, like the poet or the artist, is always the product of the society in which he lives and teaches.

The more deeply you look into these ideas, the more you will realize that before anything else is done we must modify the state of affairs which today condemns the scholar to overflow with scientific truths while almost the whole of humanity remains what it was five or ten centuries ago, in the condition of virtual slaves, mere machines incapable of adapting themselves to established truths. And the day you accept that idea, which is at once broadly humanitarian and profoundly scientific, you will lose all your taste for pure science.

You will devote yourself to seeking ways to bring about that transformation, and if you do not abandon the impartiality that has guided you in your scientific investigations, you will inevitably adopt the cause of socialism; you will put an end to sophistry and find your place among us; tired of working to create enjoyment for that small group which already has so much of it, you will apply your knowledge and devotion to the immediate service of the oppressed.

[1] Rudolf Clausing (1822-1888), German mathematical physicist who enunciated the Second Law of Thermodynamics, that "Heat cannot of itself pass from a colder to a hotter body." Such simplistic statements won celebrity in the nineteenth century. Trans.

day society, science is only a kind of luxury that makes life more agreeable to a few, and remains absolutely inaccessible to almost the whole of humanity.

For example, it is more than a century since science established strong cosmological notions, but what increase has there been in the number of people who hold such notions or who have acquired a spirit of truly scientific criticism? Hardly a few thousands, lost in the midst of hundreds of millions still sharing prejudices and superstitions worthy of barbarians and destined in consequence to serve for ever as the playthings of religious imposters.

Or take a look at what science has done to elaborate the rational foundations of physical and moral hygiene. It tells you how we must live to preserve our bodily health, how we can maintain in good condition our human collectivities; it shows the way to intellectual and moral happiness. But does not all the immense work carried out in these directions remain as dead words in our books? And why is that? Because science nowadays is carried on for a handful of privileged people, because the social inequality that divides wage-earners from the owners of capital turns all our teachings about the conditions of a rational life into a mockery for nine-tenths of humanity.

I could cite you many more examples, but I will be brief: just come out of Faust's study, whose dust-blackened window panes hardly allow the daylight to reach the books, and look around you; at every step you yourself will find proofs to support my contention.

It is no longer a question at this moment of accumulating scientific truths and discoveries. It is more important to spread the truths already gained by science, to make them enter into human life, to turn them into a common domain. This must be done in such a way that the whole of humanity may become capable of assimilating and applying them, so that science will cease to be a luxury and will become the foundation for the life of all. Justice demands that it happen in this way.

In 1877 the last issue of the *Bulletin* of the Jura Federation, which had been the semi-official organ of pure anarchism, was published. Kropotkin contributed a few articles to late numbers, and then retreated to Geneva, where anarchist activity was reviving because of the presence of a number of exiles from Russia and refugees from the Paris commune, and here he and the young French doctor Paul Brousse collaborated in editing a small paper, *L'Avant Garde*, intended mainly for smuggling into southern France. By publishing articles praising terrorist attacks on European rulers, *L'Avant Garde* offended Switzerland's increasing susceptibility to the pressures from its more powerful neighbours, and it was suppressed in December 1878, Brousse being briefly imprisoned because as editor he assumed responsibility for articles with whose extremity of approach he disagreed.

Kropotkin felt that it was urgent to create a journal that would take over the role of *L'Avant Garde*, but when he sought for collaborators, he found the other leading anarchists then in Geneva, including Reclus and Malatesta, had other things to do. Eventually it was with two Geneva working men that he went to work, Franqois Dumartheray and George Herzig; Kropotkin portrayed them vividly in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, and it is worth quoting his words, since they convey a great deal about the setting in which the essays contained in *Paroles d'un Revolte* were written, first of all for publication in the new magazine, *Le Revolte*,

> Dumartheray was born in one of the poorest peasant families in Savoy. His schooling had not gone beyond the first rudiments of a primary school. Yet he was one of the most intelligent men I ever met. His appreciations of current events and men were so remarkable for their uncommon good sense that they were often prophetic. He was also one of the finest critics of the current

> socialist literature, and was never taken in by the mere display of fine words or would-be science. Herzig was a young clerk, born in Geneva; a man of suppressed emotions, shy, who would blush like a girl when he expressed an original thought, and who, after I was arrested, when he became responsible for the continuance of the journal, by sheer force of will learned to write very well…
>
> To the judgement of these two friends I could trust implicitly. If Herzig frowned, muttering, 'Yes – well – it may go,' I knew that it would not do. And when Dumartheray, who always complained of the bad state of his spectacles when he had to read a not quite legibly written manuscript, and therefore generally read proofs only, interrupted his reading by exclaiming, 'Non, ca ne va pas!' I felt at once that it was not the proper thing and tried to guess what thought or expression provoked his disapproval. I knew there was no use asking him, 'Why will it not do?' He would have answered: 'Ah,that is not my affair; that's yours. It won't do; that is all I can say.' But I felt he was right, and I simply sat down to rewrite the passage, or, taking the composing stick, set up in type a new passage instead.

Kropotkin setting up his own words in type was a development that took place after the Quixotic beginnings of *Le Revolte*. The three editor-publishers started with 15 francs left over from *L'Avant Garde* and scraped up another 10 francs between them. (The franc was then valued at about 5 to the US dollar.) Yet they decided boldly to print 2,000 copies of the first issue even though no local anarchist paper in the past sold more than 600 copies. They begged another 50 francs and the paper appeared; there were new troubles, for very soon the

work: that is where we must start. Without these things, the whole occupation of a doctor is no more than a trickery and a deception."

That day you will begin to understand what socialism means. You will want to know more about it, and if altruism is more to you than a word void of meaning, if you apply to the study of the social question the severe inductive standards of the naturalist, you will end up in our ranks, and like us you will work for the social revolution.

But perhaps you will say: "To the Devil with practice! Let us devote ourselves, like the astronomer, the physicist, and the chemist, to pure science! That will always bear its fruits, even if it is only for later generations." But before you do that, let us determine what you will be seeking in science. Will it be simply the enjoyment-which is certainly immense-that you will gain from the study of the mysteries of nature and the exercise of your intellectual faculties? If that is so, let me ask you how the scholar who cultivates science to pass his life agreeably differs from the drunkard who also seeks in life no more than immediate enjoyment and finds it in wine? It is true that the scholar makes a better choice of the source of his pleasures, since they are more intense and more durable, but that is all. Both of them, the drunkard and the scholar, have the same egotistical aim, personal enjoyment

But of course you will tell me you are not seeking such an egotistical life. In working for science, you have every intent of working for humanity, and that idea will guide you in the choice of your research.

What a beautiful illusion! And who among us, giving himself for the first time to science, has not cherished it for a moment?

But if you are really thinking of helping humanity, if that is what you aspire to in your studies, you will find yourself facing a formidable objection, for, in so far as you have any sense of justice, you will immediately observe that in present-

woman with the heartbreaking cough, earns her wretched living by ironing; that on the floor below all the children have fever, that the laundress on the ground floor will not see the spring, and that in the next door house things are even worse.

What would you prescribe for all these sicknesses? Good food, a change of air, less exhausting work? You would very much like to say that, but you dare not, and you hurry brokenheartedly out of the house with a curse on your lips.

Next day you are still thinking about those inhabitants of the slums, when your colleague tells you that a footman came to fetch him in a coach. It was for one of the inhabitants of a rich mansion, a woman, exhausted by sleepless nights, who gives all her life to her boudoir, to paying visits, to balls and to quarrels with her boorish husband. Your colleague has prescribed for her a less frivolous way of life, a less rich diet, walks in the open air, calm of mind and some exercises at home which might partly make up for the lack of productive work! One woman is dying because, all her life, she has never eaten or rested enough; the other is wilting because all her life she has never known what work is.

If you have one of those apathetic natures that can adapt itself to anything and in the face of the most revolting facts can console itself with a sigh and a glass of beer, you will harden yourself to these contrasts, and, given your nature, you will have only one idea, which is to make yourself a niche in the ranks of the pleasure-seekers so that you will never find yourself a place among the poor.

But if you are a real man, if each feeling is translated within you into an act of will, if the beast within you has not killed the intelligent being, one day you will go back to your house, saying: "No, it is all unjust! It cannot continue like this! It is not a question of curing sicknesses; they must be prevented. A little bit of well being and intellectual development would be enough to wipe from our lists half the sick people and their sicknesses. To hell with drugs! Fresh air, proper feeding, less brutalizing

printer told Kropotkin that he had been informed he would lose his lucrative government printing contracts if he continued to produce *La Revolte*, and when he visited all the other printing houses in Geneva and in the towns of the Jura, Kropotkin came away every time with the same answer.

Dumartheray immediately suggested that they should buy a plant on credit and set up their own printing establishment. In spite of Kropotkin's misgivings they did so, establishing the Imprimerie Jurasienne and very quickly working themselves out of debt.

The arrangement could not have been more eccentric, for the compositor in the tiny room where they edited and set up their type, which a printing house ran off clandestinely for them, was a little Russian who worked for 60 francs a month and knew no French, less of a disability than it might appear, for the worst typographical errors occur when a language is known at a functional level and the compositor-typographer inserts a familiar but wrong word or spelling, or substitutes a homonym when in doubt. With vigilant correction, Kropotkin, Dumartheray, Herzig and their White Russian managed well. But Kropotkin himself also learned to compose type and indeed, as Dumartheray remembered, played his full part in producing as well as writing *Le Revolte*.

> He never wasted a moment at the printing establishment, either working as compositor or handling a little hand-press for the printing of our small pamphlets.
>
> When the forms of the journal had to be carried to the printing house, he was the first to seize the shafts of the cart. When the printed sheets were returned to the shop, he set an example of great ability to his comrades of folding and dispatching copies.

They were hard times for Kropotkin. He took nothing out of the funds of *Le Revolte* for the two weeks each month that preparing the journal occupied, and his family were no longer able to send him money from Russia, so that he lived by his scientific journalism, which was ill-paid and laborious. As he told Malatesta at the time, he often had to work until four in the morning to earn enough money to bring out the journal. In late 1878 he had married a Russian woman student, Sophie Ananiev, and by 1880 Sophie was suffering from the cold winds of Geneva, so that the doctors suggested finding a more sheltered place to live. Elisee Reclus, then a refugee from the Commune, was working on his *Geographie Universelle* at Clarens, a village in the hills above Lac Leman, and he invited Kropotkin to join him, so Peter and Sophie moved to "a small cottage overlooking the blue waters of the lake, with the pure snow of the Dent du Midi in the background."

It was at Clarens, near enough to Geneva to maintain his contacts with the workers there, but far enough away to avoid an excess of visitors, that Kropotkin wrote his best articles for *Le Revolte*, including most of those which later became part of *Paroles d'un Revolte*. His pieces in the early issues were mainly concerned with the contemporary issues, prophesying, with the airy optimism that flourished in those days, the proximate destruction of the massive states and empires that threatened the peace of Europe. Elisee Reclus, in his preface, talks of material written and published in *Le Revolte* between 1879 and 1882, but the articles included actually run from 1880 to 1882. They were written while Kropotkin was in constant touch with Reclus, and they were also the subject of constant discussion between Peter and Sophie, "with whom I used to discuss every event and every proposed paper, and who was a severe literary critic of my writings." He was also in fairly regular touch with leading libertarian exiles like Malatesta and the old Communard Lefrancais, and of course, through his collaborators in *Le Revolte*, with working class comrades in Geneva. As a result,

You are one of those who dreamed in this way, are you not? Very well, let us see what you might do to turn your dream into a reality.

I do not know into what condition you were born. Perhaps, favoured by fortune, you have made scientific studies; you intend to become a doctor, a lawyer, a man of letters or science; a wide field of action opens up before you, and you are entering into life with broad knowledge and proven aptitudes. Or you are an honest artisan; your scientific knowledge is bounded by the little you have learnt at school, but you have had the advantage of knowing at first hand the life of harsh labour which the worker must lead in our days.

For the sake of argument, I am assuming that you have received a scientific education. Let us suppose you are about to become a doctor.

Tomorrow, a man in a worker's blouse will call you to visit a sick person. He will lead you into one of those alleys where neighbours can almost shake hands over the heads of the passers-by; you will climb in foetid air and by the shivering light of a lantern up two, three, four or five flights of stairs covered in slippery filth, and in a dark, cold room you will find the invalid, Iying on a straw pallet and covered in dirty rags. Pale, anaemic children, shivering under their tatters, look at you through great, wide-open eyes. The husband has worked all his life twelve or thirteen hours a day on any jobs he could get; now he has been out of work for three months. Unemployment is not unusual in his trade; every year it happens periodically; but normally, when the man was idle, the woman would take casual work-washing your shirts, perhaps, and earning a dollar or so a day; but now she has been bedridden for two months, destitution rears its hideous face before the family.

If you show an honest look and a good heart, and speak frankly, the family will tell you a good many things. They will tell you that the woman on the other side of the partition, the

Chapter 6: To the Young

1.

IT is to the young that I wish to speak now. Let the old-I mean of course the old in heart and spirit-put these pages aside without tiring themselves pointlessly by reading something which will tell them nothing.

I assume you are about eighteen or twenty; that you are finishing your apprenticeship or your studies; that you are about to enter into life. I imagine you have a mind detached from the superstitions people have tried to inculcate in you; you are in no fear of the Devil and you do not listen to the rantings of priests and parsons. Furthermore I am sure you are not one of those popinjays, the sad products of a society in decline, who parade in the streets with their Mexican trousers and their monkey faces and who already, at their age, are dominated by the appetite for pleasures at any price. I assume, on the contrary, that your heart is in the right place, and it is because of this that I am speaking to you.

An urgent question, I know, lies before you.

Many times you have asked yourself, "What shall I become?" In fact, when you are young you understand that, after having studied a trade or a science for several years-at the expense of society, let it be noted-you have not done so in order to make yourself an instrument of exploitation. You would have to be very depraved and vicious never to have dreamed of one day applying your intelligence, your capacities and your knowledge to help in the liberation of those who still swarm in poverty and ignorance.

the essays in *Paroles d'un Revolte* give as good a picture as one can find of the changes that were transforming the anarchist movement during the early 1880s.

To begin, the movement's distinctiveness was being more sharply defined at this time. The anarchists might still talk of themselves as socialists – and socialists of the true kind – but they also defined their own direction more boldly than ever before as *anarchist.*

The breakup of the First International had in fact created a rift between the authoritarian and the libertarian socialists that would prove impossible to bridge. A United Congress in Ghent in 1877, which Kropotkin attended under the name of Levashov, ended in total failure, and an Anarchist Congress, held in London in May 1881 and attended by Kropotkin, Malatesta, Louise Michel and many other of the well-known spokespeople for the cause did little more than define anarchist attitudes, since no lasting organization resulted from it.

In a series of Congresses in 1891,1893 and 1896 the socialist Second International refused to invite the anarchists and kept out those who arrived. The split, which was already evident when Kropotkin was editing *Le Revolte*, had by the 1890s become definitive, and only a few socialists of the maverick kind, like William Morris, continued to associate with the anarchists.

Words of a Rebel makes quite clear, in both political and economic terms, the grounds for the division between anarchists and socialists. Kropotkin rejects the ideas of parliamentary democracy put forward by the republican bourgeoisie; he also condemns the ideas of revolutionary government put forward by Marx's followers and the ideas of revolutionary dictatorship put forward by the followers and the ideas of revolutionary government of Auguste Blanqui. Like Bakunin before him he sees the revolution as a popular insurrection in the broadest of terms, with power abolished, or perhaps rather ignored out of existence, and with the general expropriation of property and its takeover by communal groups, the produc-

ers and the consumers. The public wealth, all that has been accumulated by the joint work of mankind over the centuries, would thus return to its rightful owners, the people. Anarchism in this way revealed itself as the logical extremity of populism, and one had only to read *Words of a Rebel* to realize why it became impossible for the anarchists to work any longer with authoritarian revolutionaries or with the advocates of representative government, whose democratic pretensions Kropotkin and his associates rejected with contempt as another form of tyranny. The attitude was not entirely a new one. Proudhon's tirades against universal suffrage had been monumental and seemed to be justified when the French people in the twilight of the 1848 revolution voted in Prince Louis Napoleon as their president.

Thus, while Marx also, writing the last volume of Capital at about the same time as Kropotkin wrote *Words of a Rebel*, would talk of the "expropriation of the expropriators," the two men used the term in entirely different ways, Marx to advocate a collectivist State under the "dictatorship of the proletariat," and Kropotkin to advocate a free society in which government would be abolished at the same time as private property, without an indefinite waiting period for what Engels once wistfully called "the withering away of the State." As anarchism defined itself more sharply from other kinds of socialism, two new directions emerged, one in terms of the economic organization of a revolutionary society, and the other in terms of prerevolutionary tactics. Both were adumbrated in *Paroles d'un Revolte*.

The first was the theoretical shift to anarchist communism, in which Kropotkin and his associates at the time were closely involved. Early anarchists, like their State socialist counterparts, tended to concentrate on the control of production, considering that the important achievement was to socialize the places and means of production, which in the case of the various anarchist schools meant getting them into the

we might plead to parliament for decades in vain. Then those rights will be guaranteed to us in a far more certain way than if they were merely written down on a bit of paper.

Freedoms are not given, they are taken.

personal dignity that will not let him endure an offense from anyone.

Yet it is evident that in present-day society, divided as it is between masters and serfs, true liberty cannot exist; it will not exist so long as there are exploiters and slaves, governments and governed. At the same time it does not follow that, as we await the day when the anarchist revolution will sweep away all social distinctions, we wish to see the press muzzled, as in Germany, the right of meeting annulled as in Russia, or the inviolability of the person reduced as it is in Turkey. Slaves of capital that we all are, we want to be able to write and publish whatever seems right to us, we want to be able to meet and organize as we please, precisely so that we can shake off the yoke of capital.

But it is high time we understood that we must not demand these rights through constitutional laws. We cannot go in search of our natural rights by way of a law, a scrap of paper that could be torn up at the least whim of the rulers. For it is only by transforming ourselves into a force, capable of imposing our will, that we shall succeed in making our rights respected.

Do you want to have freedom to speak and write whatever seems right to you? Do you want to have the liberty to meet and organize? It is not from a parliament that we seekers of freedom should ask permission, nor must we beg a law from the Senate. We must become an organized force, capable of showing our teeth every time anyone sets about restraining our rights of speech and meeting; we must be strong, and then we may be sure that nobody will dare dispute our right to speak, to write, to print what we write, and meet together. The day we have been able to establish enough agreement among the exploited for them to come out in their millions in the streets and take up the defense of our rights, nobody will dare to dispute those rights, nor any others that we choose to demand. Then, and only then, shall we have truly gained such rights, for which

hands of the workers. Proudhon had advocated a society of individual craftsmen and peasants who possessed – rather than actually owning – their own land and workshops. Larger enterprises in industry and transport would be controlled by associations of workers, and the whole would be cemented by a network of people's banks in which credit would be given for the full value of the work performed. Later, Bakunin and his associates moved on to a collectivist idea of the ownership of the means of production. Individual property would be abolished, everything would be owned by collective associations of workers or local communes, but still payment would be made to individual workers in proportion to the actual value of the work they had done; in one way or another, the wages system would survive.

Anarchist communism addressed the problem of consumption as well as that of production. Saint-Simon, the early Utopian socialist, is credited with inventing the phrase that would echo down through the nineteenth century: "from each according to his means, to each according to his needs." And to this question the collectivist way of doing justice to the producer was no answer. For it was, after all, as consumers that human beings lived and survived.

It began to dawn on the anarchists as early as the 1870s that the liberation of economic resources from the profit-oriented limitations of capitalism would result in increased production of necessities so that for the first time in history there would be enough for all. And this in turn would solve the difficulty of relating access to consumer goods to actual work achievement; it would also take care of the problem of those who were unable to work or too old to work or were doing more for humanity by their writing or painting than by making bread rolls or turning screws. And in all its forms, with free distribution according to need, the wages system would die away. It was not wholly a new idea. Sir Thomas More had advocated it in *Utopia* in the sixteenth century and the Digger Gerard Winstanley in

the seventeenth; it was a feature of Thomas Campanella's *City of the Sun*, and even in the work-oriented phalansteries envisaged by Charles Fourier in the early nineteenth century those who could not be persuaded to find work attractive would still have their right to receive the means of a good life from the community.

The idea of linking anarchism and communism seems to have been developed and polished in the small group of activists gathered in Geneva during the late 1870s and the early 1880s. Elisee Reclus had been a Phalansterian, a follower of Fourier, until he fell under the spell of Michael Bakunin and became a leading anarchist, and it seems likely that he brought some of Fourier's ideas with him. But the first publication advocating anarchist communism was a little pamphlet by the Francois Dumertheray who eventually assisted Kropotkin in publishing *Le Revolte*. The pamphlet, *Aux Travailleurs Manuels Partisans de L'Action Politique* was published in Geneva during 1876, which rules out any influence on the part of Kropotkin, who did not reach Geneva after his escape from Russia until February 1877, though it seems very likely that Reclus and Dumartheray had been discussing the idea. It spread quickly and G. Cherkesov, the Georgian prince who was active among the anarchists at this period, says that the idea was accepted everywhere in Swiss libertarian circles during 1877, though many were still reluctant to use the phrase, "anarchist communism." It was taken up by Italian anarchists like Malatesta and Carlo Cafiero who often found it convenient to hide out in Switzerland when police persecution at home became too intense.

It was a joint effort by Reclus, Cafiero and Kropotkin that persuaded the 1880 Congress of the Jura Federation to accept free communism as its economic doctrine. Kropotkin presented a report entitled "The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of its Practical Realization," later published in *Le Revolte* but not included in *Words of a Rebel*. The report stressed the need for a revolution, when it came, to be based on

"The privacy of correspondence? Say it everywhere, write and cry it out, that correspondence is inviolable. If the head of some village post office opens a letter out of curiosity, sack him at once and proclaim loudly that he is a monstrous criminal. Take good care that the little secrets we exchange with each other in our letters shall not be divulged. But if we get wind of some plot being hatched against our privileges, then let us not stand on ceremony; let us open everyone's letters, allocate a thousand clerks to the task if necessary, and if someone takes it on himself to protest, let us say frankly, as an English minister did recently to the applause of parliament. 'Yes, gentlemen, it is with a heavy heart and the deepest of distaste that we order letters to be opened, but it is entirely because the country (i.e. the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie) is in danger."

This is what these so-called liberties can be reduced to. Freedom of press and of meeting, inviolability of home and all the rest, are only respected if the people do not make use of them against the privileged classes. But the day the people begin to take advantage of them to undermine those privileges, the so-called liberties will be cast overboard.

This is quite natural. Humanity retains only the rights it has won by hard struggle and is ready to defend at every moment, with arms in hand.

If men and women are not whipped in the streets of Paris, as they are in Odessa, it is because on the day a government dared to attempt this people would tear its agents to pieces. If an aristocrat can no longer make way for himself through the streets with the help of blows delivered right and left by the staves of his servants, it is because any of the servants who got such ideas into their heads would immediately be overpowered. If a degree of equality exists between the worker and his employer, at least in the streets and in public establishments, it is not because the worker's rights are written into the law but because, thanks to revolutions in the past, he has a feeling of

the press among themselves, what arguments to they advance in its favour?

"Look at England, Switzerland and the United States," they say. "In all of them the press is free and yet capitalist exploitation is better established in them than in any other country; its reign is more secure among them than anywhere else." And they add, "What does it matter if dangerous doctrines are produced. Don't we have all the means of stifliling the voices of the journals that protect them without even a recourse to violence? And even if one day, at a time of agitation, the revolutionary press becomes a dangerous weapon, so what? On that day it will be time enough to destroy it with a single blow on the most convenient pretext."

As for the freedom of meeting, the same kind of reasoning holds. "Give complete freedom of meeting." Say the bourgeoisie. "It will do no harm to our privileges. What we have to fear are the secret societies, and public meetings are the best way of paralyzing them. But if, in a moment of excitement, public meeting should get out of hand, we would always have the means of suppressing them, since we hold the powers of government."

"The inviolability of the dwelling? Of Course! Write it into all the codes! Cry it from rooftops!" say the knowing ones among the bourgeoisie. "We don't want policemen coming to surprise us in our little nests." But we will institute a secret service to keep an eye on suspects; we will people the country with police spies, make lists of dangerous people, and watch them closely. And if we smell out one day that anything is afoot, then we must set to vigorously, make a jest of inviolability, arrest people in their beds, search and ransack their homes! But above all we must do this boldly and if anyone protests too loudly, we must lock them up as well, and say to the rest, 'What would you have us do, gentlemen? We must deal firmly with the situation!' And we shall be applauded."

the local communes, which would carry out all the necessary expropriations and socialise the means of production. The report did not specifically mention the communist method of distribution, but in the speech that accompanied it Kropotkin made it quite clear that he regarded communism – in the sense of free distribution of goods and the abolition of any form of wages system – as the result that should follow immediately from the collectivization of the means of production. He made *Le Revolte* the organ of the new anarchist trend and so his name would henceforward be associated with it. *Words of Rebel* contained the first essays in which he worked out the idea. A more concrete discussion of anarchist communism would appear in later works, notably in *The Conquest of Bread*, but also, developed in a different way, in *Mutual Aid* and *Fields, Factories and Workshops*.

When we come to the question of revolutionary tactics, we have to remember that Kropotkin adhered to the romantic revolutionary tradition which took its inspiration from the French Revolution of 1789-93. He virtually ignored the fact that England in the seventeenth century and the Americans in the eighteenth had experienced their own revolutions (Charles I was after all executed by his own subjects nearly a century and a half before Louis XVI), which had considerable influence in France during the pre-revolutionary period. In his somewhat narrow vision he saw, as would become evident in the pages of *Le Revolte*, the lesser revolutionary outbreaks of 1830 and 1848, and the Paris Commune of 1871. There was something of the millenarian historicist about Kropotkin; he displayed the rather schizoid attitude common to many nineteenth century revolutionaries, who wished to see men free, but regarded the process of socio-political development as historically determined; the influence of Hegel filtered far. He always believed there would be a great European war, and that there would be a great and final revolution in the not far distant future, and in the long run he was correct, for the European war came in 1914, and

revolution on a large scale came in 1917, but in Russia rather than France, and it turned out to be an operation of the partisans of revolutionary dictatorship in which Kropotkin's hopes were submerged and negated. It is against such authoritarian revolutionaries as the Bolsheviks, who combined the tactical views of Marx and of Blanqui, that Kropotkin was speaking in *Words of a Rebel*. He envisaged a different kind of revolutionary militant, who understands that true revolutions are the work of the people themselves, and perceives his own role as that of enlightening and inspiring by appropriate propaganda rather than attempting to control the revolution either in its course or in its fulfilment.

And it is in this context that he develops the idea of deeds as well as words as the media of revolutionary propaganda. Both in *Words of a Rebel*, and to a much greater extent in his major historical work, *The Great French Revolution*, so largely a study of grassroots insurrection, Kropotkin sets out to show that the real initiatives of the revolution were carried out by the people, who forced the politicians to act in ending serfdom and distributing the land, and that their action was prepared and encouraged by largely unknown militants who performed acts of symbolic defiance, sometimes involving violence against the regime and its representatives. His thinking ran parallel to that of the Italian anarchists, who had derived from mid-nineteenth century radical republicans like Carlo Pisacane the idea that the propaganda of the word was fruitless unless accompanied by revolutionary actions, even if for the moment they were futile. It was in accordance with these ideas that Italian militants like Malatesta and Cafiero led rather pointless peasant uprisings like the Benevento insurrection in 1877.

Later, long after the appearance of *Paroles d'un Revolte*, anarchists would carry the idea of the propaganda of the dead into the series of attempted and often successful assassinations and terrorist attacks, in France and Spain especially, that gave anarchism its bad name and placed Kropotkin himself in the dif-

for power, without the rivals being forces to draw their swords on each other as they did in the past. But it can be no help if it is a matter of overthrowing or even limiting power, or of abolishing domination. Since it is such an excellent instrument for resolving in a peaceful manner any quarrels among the rulers, what use can it possibly be to the ruled?

Does not the history of universal suffrage tell us this? Whenever the bourgeoisie has feared that universal suffrage might become a weapon in the hands of the people that could be turned against the privileged, it has fought it stubbornly. But the day it was proved, in 1848, that universal suffrage held nothing to fear, and that one could rule the people with an iron rod by the use of universal suffrage, it was immediately accepted. Now the bourgeoisie itself has become its defender, because it understands that here is a weapon adapted to sustain its domination, but absolutely harmless as a threat to its privileges.

It is the same with freedom of the press. What, in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, has been the most conclusive argument in favor of freedom of the press? Its powerlessness. Yes, its powerlessness. M. de Girardin[1] has written a whole book on this theme: the powerlessness of the press. "Formerly – he says – we burned witches because people had the stupidity to believe they were all-powerful; now people commit the same stupidity regarding the press, because they believe that it also is all-powerful. But it is nothing of the kind; it is as powerless as the witches of the middle ages. Hence, more persecutions of the press!" This is the contention that M. de Girardin offered in the past. And when the bourgeoisie discuss the freedom of

[1] Emile de Girardin (1806-1881), an active journalist in Paris from the 1848 Revolution down to the Third Republic; he almost singlehandedly invented the cheap popular press in France with his La Presse, as early as 1836; he was a clever feuilletonist, and the Vicar of Bray of French journalism, supporting all the timely adventurers at the right time. Trans.

them is only deceiving the people. Certain rights like, for example, the equality of the peasant and the squire in their personal relations, or the corporal inviolability of the person, have been won through great struggles, and are so dear to the people that they will rise up rather than allowing them to be violated. But there are others, like universal suffrage, freedom of the press, etc., towards which the people have always remained lukewarm, because the know perfectly well that these rights, which have served so well to defend the ruling bourgeoisie against the encroachments of royal power and of the aristocracy, are no more than an instrument in the hands of the dominant classes to maintain their power over the people. These rights are not even real political rights, since they provide no safeguard for the mass of the people; and if we still decorate them with that pompous title it is because our political language is no more than a jargon elaborated by the ruling classes for their own use and in their own interest.

What, in fact, is a political right if it is not an instrument to safeguard the independence, the dignity and the freedom of those who do not yet have the power to impose on others a respect for that right? What is its use, if it is not and instrument of liberation for those who need to be freed? The Gambetas, the Bismarcks, the Gladstones need neither the freedom of the press nor the freedom of meeting, because they can write what they want, can meet whomsoever they wish, and profess whatever ideas they please; they are already liberated. They are free. If there is any need together, it is surely to those who are not powerful enough to impose their will. Such in fact is the origin of all political rights.

But, looked at from this viewpoint, have the political rights we are talking of been created with an eye to those who alone need safeguards? Obviously not. Universal suffrage can sometimes and to a certain extent protect, without the need for a constant recourse to force in self-defense. It can serve to reestablish the equilibrium between two forces which struggle

ficult position of having to determine whether to approve of actions that often appeared arbitrary and inhuman. In later years he refrained from condemning anarchist terrorists, but increasingly rarely gave them his approval. Indeed, as time went on his whole attitude towards violence became ambivalent, his pacific actions and his violent words often failing to harmonize, and the romantic cult of the barricades and of popular revenge that he still nourished when he wrote *Paroles d'un Revolte* would become so fragile by the end of the century that Tolstoy could remark of him with some justice:

> His arguments in favour of violence do not seem to be the expression of his opinions, but only of his fidelity to the banner under which he has served so honestly all his life.

But Tolstoy was talking about the seer of Mutual Aid, whereas here we have the fiery young revolutionary who in fact never fired a shot in anger or stood behind a barricade, but who could contemplate with equanimity and even with a certain mild man's relish the violent deeds of the revolutionary terror of 1793 because they were perpetrated by members of the people.

In spite of the fact that he was never in the right place at the right time to take place in an actual insurrection, Kropotkin was still a genuine militant, modifying his writing to a clear simplicity that would appeal to worker readers. And there is no doubt that governments of the time in a number of countries considered him a dangerous presence.

Late in 1881 he was expelled from Switzerland because of articles in *Le Revolte*, supporting the actions of the Narodnaya Volya, which that year killed the Tsar Alexander II. He settled at Thonon, just over the border from Geneva, but spent most of the following year wandering, particularly in England, though he continued to write for *Le Revolte*. In October 1882

he returned to Thonon with the intent of remaining near his Geneva comrades. But by this time a surge of discontent and violence among the workers in the Lyon region had drawn the attention of the French authorities to him, though he seems to have been in no way directly implicated. He and many other anarchists in the Midi were arrested in a sweep at the end of December, and on the 3rd January 1883 he appeared with 53 other men before the Police Correctional Court in Lyon. Since no evidence existed of his implication in the recent acts of violence, he was charged under a law passed after the Commune of being a member of an illegal organization, and though the prosecutor was forced to admit that the International no longer existed, he was still condemned to five years in prison.

Despite protests by English writers and scientists and French liberal intellectuals and politicians, the French government yielded to pressure from the Russian authorities and kept Kropotkin at Clairvaux prison (the old monastery of St. Bernard) until January 1886, when the protests had become too great to be ignored and he was released, to start his long exile in England. Thus Kropotkin was in prison when Reclus and his other friends put together the group of articles that formed *Paroles d'un Revolte*; it was published in 1885 by Flammarion, an established liberal publisher.

Le Revolte was continued by Hertiz after Kropotkin went to prison, and by Jean Grave who went to Geneva in 1883, and who brought the journal to Paris in 1885. There it was continued until Grave changed it to *La Revolte* in 1887; Kropotkin would write for *La Revolte* the essays that became *The Conquest of Bread*.

Paroles d'un Revolte was translated into Italian, Spanish, Bulgarian, Russian, and eventually Chinese. Parts of it were published separately and spread Kropotkin's message even wider. An *Appeal to the Young*, for example, sold 80,000 copies in France alone, and was also published, openly or clandestinely, in at least fifteen other languages. Thus *Paroles* became,

Chapter 5: Political Rights

Each day, in a whole range of tones, the bourgeois press praises the value and the importance of our political liberties, of the "political rights of the citizen": universal suffrage, free elections, freedom of the press and of meeting, etc.

"Since you have these freedoms," they say to us, "what is the point of rebelling? Don't the liberties you already possess assure the possibilities of all the reforms that may be necessary, without your needing to resort to the gun?" So, let us analyze, from our point of view, what these famous "political liberties" are worth to the class that owns nothing, rules nobody, and has in fact very few rights and plenty of duties.

We are not asserting, as has sometimes been said, that political rights have no value to us. We know very well that since the days of serfdom and even since the last century, we have made a certain amount of progress; the man of the people is no longer the being deprived of all rights that he was in the past. The French peasant can no longer be flogged at the roadside, as he still is in Russia. In public places, outside his factory or workshop, the worker considers himself the equal of anyone, especially in the great cities. The French worker is no longer that being lacking in all human rights who in the past was treated by the aristocracy as a beast of burden. Thanks to the revolutions, thanks to the blood which the people shed, he has acquired certain personal rights whose value we have no desire to minimize.

But we know how to draw distinctions, and we assert that there are rights and rights. There are those that have a real value and those that do not, and whoever tries to confound

that launches itself into the turmoil, it Will be all the countries of Europe. In the past, local revolutions may have been possible, but today, when one thinks of the shaken equilibrium of all European States and the links of solidarity that have been established on the continent, a local revolution cannot succeed though it may survive over a short period. As in 1848, a disturbance in one country will inevitably spread to the others, and the revolutionary conflagration will embrace the whole of Europe.

But if in 1848 the rebellious cities might still place their confidence in changes of government or constitutional reforms, this is no longer the case today. The Parisian worker will not expect from any government- even a government like that of the Commune-the accomplishment of his wishes; he will set to work himself, saying as he does, "Then it will be done for certain!"

The people of Russia will not wait for a Constituent Assembly to grant them possession of the land they cultivate: once they have any hope of success they will try to seize it for themselves; they are already seeking to do that, as witness the continued peasant insurrections. It is the same in Italy and in Spain; and if the German worker allows himself to be lulled for a while by those who would like everything to be done by telegrams from Berlin, the example of his neighbours and the incapability of his leaders will soon teach him the true revolutionary way. Thus, the distinct character of the coming revolution will consist in international attempts at economic revolution, made by the people without waiting for the revolution to fall like manna from the heavens.

But already we see the pessimist, with a sly smile on his chops coming to us with "A few objections, just a few objections!" So be it. We will listen to him and give our answers.

as Kropotkin and Reclus intended, a book of genuine mass appeal.

Until now, *Paroles d'un Revolte* never appeared in its entirety in an English translation. Some of the chapters, like *An Appeal to the Young*, *Law and Authority* and *War* appeared as pamphlets under various auspices, the first translated by the veteran social democrat, H. M. Hyndman, and others were printed as essays in *The Commonweal*, the organ of the Socialist League which at that time was dominated by an anarchist faction.

One reason for the lack of an English version of *Paroles d'un Revolte* was that none of the English anarchist groups of the late nineteenth century had the resources, financial or organizational, to publish and distribute a full-sized book. They were all small minority groups, and even Freedom Press, which Kropotkin and a few of his associates founded in 1886 and which continues to this day, published no more in the late nineteenth century than the journal *Freedom* and a few pamphlets; the only actual book that it brought out before the Great War would be Kropotkin's *Modern Science and Anarchism* in 1912, a translation of a book originally published in Russian in 1901.

All of Kropotkin's books that have appeared in English up to the present were in fact originally published by commercial houses impressed by the quality of their scientific or historical contributions or, in the case of *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, by the sheer romantic appeal of Kropotkin's life. There were no liberal or radical publishing houses in London like Flammarion and Stock in Paris that would take a chance on a work of unashamed revolutionary propaganda by a relative unknown, as Kropotkin was when he arrived in London in 1886. Even *The Conquest of Bread*, much more constructive in its proposals than *Words of a Rebel*, did not appear under the imprint of an English house until 1906, though it was published by a French commercial house in 1892. By that time a broad interest had been created in Kropotkin through the publication of

In Russian and French Prisons, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, and *Mutual Aid*.

Paroles d'un Revolte, with its revolutionary optimism and its apocalyptic view of the revolution itself, would in fact have aroused little response in nineteenth century England, where even Chartism had not led to a full-scale insurrection and where the radical tradition out of which the Labour party and the trade union movement emerged was based on gradualism and non-violent action: even when violence emerged, as among the Luddites, it was likely to be directed against property rather than persons. And for that reason the book has remained, even for most English-speaking anarchists, something of an exotic curiosity, representing a world of romantic expectations and violent facts outside their experience.

Yet, though he does not seem to have made any great effort to get his first book published in English, Kropotkin never disowned it. Indeed, it was published in Russia after the revolution by the anarcho-syndicalist publishing house, Golos Truda, in 1921, just before the final suppression of the anarchists by the Bolsheviks, and it contained a postface by Kropotkin, written in 1919 when he had had time to digest the negative lessons of the Communist dictatorship. What he said then echoes in many ways his original words in *Paroles*; the revolution had been incomplete, and there would be yet more wars between the great powers; the only way to avoid them was by accomplishing the real social revolution, the anti-governmental revolution of the anarchists. He sums up his argument in the last sentence of that Postface, written under the shadow of Lenin's tyranny.

> It is clear that, in these conditions, we can still foresee a series of wars for the civilized countries – wars ever more bloody and more savage – if these countries do not carry out their own social revolutions and reconstruct their lives on new and more

do you think that they would not do their best to eliminate the owners of the mines if one day they could sense that the demoralized guards had become unwilling to obey their chiefs?

And consider the small craftsman, crouching in his damp cave of a workshop, his fingers frozen and his belly empty, striving from dawn to dusk to earn enough to pay the baker and feed his five little mouths, who become all the more dear to him as they grow pallid from their privations. And think of this other man, who has lain down under the first archway he came to, because he cannot pay his twopence to sleep in the common lodging house. Don't you think they would like to find in some sumptuous palace a dry and warm corner to shelter their families, which may indeed be more worthy than those of the wealthy? Don't you think they might like to see *common* stores stocked with enough bread for all those who have not learnt how to live in idleness, with enough clothing to fit the narrow shoulders of the workers' children as well as the soft bodies of well-to-do brats? Do you believe that those who live in rags are unaware that they could find in the shops of the cities more than enough to supply the essential needs of all the inhabitants, and that if all the workers could apply themselves to the production of useful objects, instead of wasting their energy on producing items of luxury, they would provide enough necessities for the whole community and for many neighbouring communities?

Finally, must we not admit that such things are becoming evident everywhere and find expression on all men's lips in moments of crisis (don't forget the siege of Paris!), and that the people will seek to put them into practice on the day they feel strong enough to act?

The wisdom of humanity has already answered these questions, and here is its reply.

The coming revolution will have a universality distinguishing it from its predecessors. It will no longer be *one* country

classes of society, can be satisfied by a simple change of government? Can we claim that the economic discontent which grows and spreads from day to day will not become manifest in public life as soon as favourable circumstances-such as the disorganization of authority-appear as the results of yet unforeseen events?

Is posing these questions a solution? Obviously not.

Can we believe that the Irish and English farm workers, if they see the possibility of seizing the land which they have coveted for so long, and driving away the landlords they hate so cordially, would not seek to profit from the first outbreak to attempt the realization of their hopes?

Can we believe, if there were a new 1848 in Europe, that France would be content merely to send Gambetta packing so as to replace him with M. Clemenceau,[3] and not make an effort to see what *The Commune* might do to ameliorate the lot of the workers? Can we imagine that the French peasant, seeing the central power in disorder, would not do his best to lay hands on the rich meadows of the holy sisters as well as the fertile lands of the great merchants who-once they have established themselves around him do not cease to enlarge their properties? That he will not take his stand beside those who offer him their support in realizing his dream of steady and well-paid work?

And can we believe that the Italian or the Spanish or the Slavic peasant will not do the same thing?

Do you think that the miners, weary of their poverty, of their suffering and of the massacres that firedamp explosions wreak among them (all of which they still endure-though murmuring-under the watchful eyes of the company guards)-

[3] Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929), French radical politician, active in the foundation of the Third Republic, and an opposition leader until finally he became Prime Minister of France from 1917-1920. It must be recorded here that when Kropotkin was imprisoned in 1883, Clemenceau led the group of deputies in the Chamber who demanded his release. Trans.

> socially oriented foundations. Everyone in Europe and the United States, except for the exploiting minority, understands this necessity.
>
> But it is impossible to accomplish such a revolution by means of dictatorship and power. Without a broad reconstruction starting from the bottom upwards and carried out by the workers and peasants themselves, the social revolution will be condemned to bankruptcy. The Russian revolution has confirmed it once again, and one hopes that the lesson will be understood, and that everywhere, in Europe and in America, serious efforts will be made to create in the heart of the working class – peasants, workers and intellectuals – the framework of the future revolution, without obeying orders from on high, but showing themselves capable of elaborating the free forms of a whole new economic life.

In sum, though in hindsight it may seem a minor work in the Kropotkin canon, *Words of a Rebel* is historically and biographically important in marking a stage in Kropotkin's development – the frontline revolutionary agitator – and a crucial time of self-definition in the anarchist movement that sees it sailing free from the main current of socialism. And though the tentativeness with which it launches major ideas may make it seem an apprentice work, *Words of a Rebel* contains an astonishing number of sketched-out ideas, about the organization of a free society, about the transformation of agriculture and industry, about revolutionary traditions and methods, that would be filled out in his major works.

Certainly late twentieth century readers, and especially the late twentieth century anarchists, will find features in the book disturbing, not merely the revolutionary euphoria, but also the evident puritanism, the artistic philistinism, and the

acceptance of violence as inevitable – and praiseworthy so long as it is revolutionary.

Like many anarchists of his time Kropotkin took a poor view of what he regarded as sexual libertinism, which he identified in *Words of a Rebel* as a fault peculiar to the idle rich. In later years he would be critical of Emma Goldman's sexual revolutionism and he refused to speak up for his fellow anarchist Oscar Wilde when the latter was imprisoned for homosexual actions in 1896. All art he distrusted, even though Camille Pissaro was his friend, unless it served a propaganda end or praised the heroes of revolution.

And though in *Mutual Aid* Kropotkin would implicitly offer an alternative way to violent overthrow when he revealed the structure of mutual aid institutions already at work in society, in *Words of a Rebel* no attention is paid to the virtues of non-violent direct action, which in recent years and especially in 1989 has toppled authoritarian systems that for half a century seemed immoveable. Like everything else, the revolution evolves and changes, and in recent decades it has been evolving away from violence.

It is not the overexcited imagination of a crowd of hotheads that reveals it, but calm and scientific observation, to such an extent that even those who excuse their guilty indifference by saying: "Stay calm! There is no danger yet!" will admit that the situation becomes steadily more inflamed and that they no longer have any idea where we are going; having relieved themselves by such an admission, they return to their thoughtless ruminations.

"But it has been announced so often, that revolution of yours," the pessimist sighs in our ears: "Even I believed in it for a while, but it has not happened." It will be all the more mature when it does. "On two occasions' the revolution was on the point of breaking out, in 1754 and 1771," a historian tells us in speaking of the 18th century.[1] (I had almost written: in 1848 and 1871). But since it has not even yet broken out, it can only be all the more powerful and productive when it happens at the end of the century.

But let the thoughtless people continue their slumber and the pessimists grumble; we have other things to do. We must ask what will be the nature of that revolution which so many people expect and for which they prepare, and what should be our attitude in the presence of that eventuality.

We are not making historical prophecies: neither the embryonic condition of sociology, nor the present state of history which, according to Augustin Thierry,[2] "merely stifles the truth under conventional formulae," give us the authority to do so. Let us then confine ourselves to posing a few quite simple questions.

Can we admit, even for a moment, that the immense intellectual work of revision and reformation that goes on in all

[1] Felix Rocquin. LEsprit revolutionnaire avant la Revolution. Peter Kropotkin.

[2] Augustin Thierry (1795-1856), French historian of the Middle Ages who wrote what was long thought the classic history of the Norman Conquest of England, in his youth a disciple of the socialist Saint-Simon. Trans.

of new philosophic and scientific systems destined to provide the foundations for societies in the future. It is not merely a matter of the gloomy reformer, wornout by a task beyond his strength and by a poverty he can no longer endure, who condemns the shameful institutions that bear down on him and who dreams of a better future.

It is also a matter of the scholar, who may have been raised with antiquated prejudices, but gradually finds them being shaken, and who gives ear to the currents of ideas that are moving through the minds of the people and one day emerges as their spokesman and proclaims them to the world. "The critic's pickaxe," cry the defenders of the past, "is undercutting with great blows the whole of the heritage that has been transmitted to us as revealed truth; philosophy, the natural sciences, morality, history, art, nothing is spared in this work of demolition." Nothing indeed is spared, down to the very foundations of our social institutions- property and power-attacked with equal strength by the slave in the factory and by the intellectual worker, by the man who has an urgent interest in change as much as by the man who will recoil with fright on the day he sees his ideas take on flesh, shake free of the dust of the libraries, and become manifest in the tumult of popular realization.

The decay and decomposition of accepted forms and the general discontent with them; the arduous elaboration of new forms of social organization and the impatient longing for change; the rejuvenating impulse of the critic in the domain of the sciences, of philosophy, of ethics, and the general ferment of public opinion. And on the other side the sluggish indifference or criminal resistance of those who hold on to power and who still have the strength, and sporadically the courage, to oppose themselves to the development of new ideas.

Such was always the condition of societies on the eve of great revolutions; such is the condition of society again today.

Introduction to the First French Edition by Elisie Reclus

For the last two and a half years, Peter Kropotkin has been in prison, cut off from the society of his fellows. His punishment is harsh, but the silence that has been imposed on him relating to the subjects nearest his heart is painful in another way: his captivity would weigh less heavily if he were not gagged. Months and years will doubtless flow by before the power of communicating is restored to him and he will be able to resume his interrupted conversation with his comrades.

The period of forced meditation which our friend is suffering will certainly not be to him time lost, but to us it seems very long! Life runs quickly, and we sadly watch the weeks and months flow by while that proud and honest voice remains unheard. Instead, what banalities will be dinned into us! What lying words will insult our minds! What mercenary half-truths will echo in our ears! We wait to hear again that sincere and unrestrained voice which so boldly proclaimed what is right.

But if the prisoner of Clairvaux no longer has the freedom to communicate with his comrades from the depths of his cell, at least they can remember their friend and put together his past writings. It is a duty I am able to fulfil and to which I gladly devote myself. The articles Kropotkin wrote between 1879 and 1882 in the anarchist paper, *Le Revolte*, seem to be suitable for publication as a collection; they are not dominated by the chance succession of daily events, but follow each other

in a logical thematic order, while the vehemence of thought they project gives them the necessary unity of a book.

Faithful to his scientific method, the author exposes first the general situation of society, its schemes and vices, its elements of discord and war; he studies the symptoms of decay that the states display to us, and reveals the cracks that are opening in their structures and turning them to ruins. Then he shows what the clues offered by the experience of contemporary history have to offer us in our search for an anarchist evolution of society; he reveals their precise meaning and draws out the lessons they convey. Finally, in the chapter entitled "Expropriation," he sums up his ideas, drawn as they are from observation and experience, and calls on people of good will not to be content with knowledge only, but to bring themselves to action.

There is no need for me to sing the author's praises on this occasion. He is my friend, and if I said everything good that I know of him, I might be suspected of blindness or accused of partiality. It is enough to evoke the opinions of his judges and even of his jailers. Among those who have observed his life from near or far, there is nobody who does not respect him, who does not bear witness to his great intelligence and his heart overflowing with goodwill; there is nobody who will not acknowledge his nobility and purity of nature. And indeed, is it not for these very qualities that he has become forcibly acquainted with exile and captivity? His crime has been to love the poor and the powerless; his offense has been to plead their cause. Public opinion is unanimous in respecting this man, and yet it is not surprised to see the prison door close firmly upon him, so natural does it seem that superiority should be ill repaid and that devotion should be accompanied by suffering. It is impossible to see Kropotkin in the grip of the prison system and to offer a greeting to him, without asking oneself: "And why am I free? Why am I not also in prison? Is it perhaps because I am not worthy of it?"

Chapter 4: The Coming Revolution

IN the preceding chapters we came to the conclusion that Europe is proceeding down a steep slope towards a revolutionary outbreak.

In considering the methods of production and exchange, as they have been organized by the bourgeoisie, we found a situation of irremediable decay. We see the complete absence of any kind of scientific or humanitarian basis for public actions, the unreasoning dissipation of social capital, the thirst for gain that led men to an absolute contempt for all the laws of social behaviour, and industrial war without an end in sight: in all, chaos. And we hailed the approach of the day on which the call, "An end to the bourgeoisie!" would echo from all lips with the same unanimity as hitherto characterised the call for an end to the dynasties.

In studying the development of the State, its historic role, and the decomposition that is attacking it today, we saw that this type of organization had accomplished in its history everything of which it was capable, and today is collapsing under the weight of its own presumptions; that it must give way to new forms of organization based on new principles and more in line with the modern tendencies of humanity.

At this very time, those who watch attentively the development of ideas in the heart of present-day society are fully aware of the ardour with which human thinking these days is working towards the complete revision of the assumptions we have inherited from past centuries and towards the elaboration

roots, for as long as the causes of the gangrene from which they suffer remain, there can be no cure.

As long as we have a caste of idlers, sustained by our work under the presence that they are necessary to govern us, these very idlers will remain a pestilential influence on public morality. The besotted playboy who spends his life in the pursuit of new pleasures, in whom the feeling of solidarity for other people is destroyed by the very manner of his existence, and in whom the most vilely egotistical feelings are nourished by the very manner of his life; such a man will always lean towards the grossest kind of sensuality, and he will degrade everything he touches. With his moneybags and his brutal instincts, he will prostitute women and children, he will prostitute art, the stage, the press-he has already done so! He will sell his country and those who defend it, and, though he is too cowardly to do the deed himself, he will arrange the slaughter of the best people of his fatherland on the day he has reason to fear the loss of his wealth, the sole source of his pleasure.

All this is inevitable, and the writings of the moralists will do nothing to change it. The plague is already on our doorsteps; we must destroy its causes, and even if we have to proceed by fire and iron, we must not hesitate. It is a question of the salvation of humanity.

Yet the readers of this book have less reason to concern themselves with the author as a person than with the value of the ideas he offers. I submit these ideas with confidence, to the kind of fair-minded people who do not pass judgement on a book until they have read it, or form an opinion about it before they have understood it. Put aside your prejudices, learn to disengage yourself from your interests, and read these pages simply in search of the truth without immediately becoming concerned with its application. The author asks only one thing of you, to share for a brief while his ideal, the welfare of all, not that of a privileged few. If this willingness, however fleeting it may be, is truly sincere and not a mere caprice of fantasy, an image that does no more than pass before your eyes, it is likely that you will soon find yourselves in agreement with the writer. And if you come to share his hopes, you will understand his words. But you will also know in advance that these ideas will not load you with honours; they will never make you the recipient of a position with great perquisites; more likely they will draw down on you at best the distrust of your old friends, and at worst some more brutal blow from on high. If you go in search of justice, be prepared to suffer iniquities.

At the moment when this book is being published, France is in the midst of an electoral crisis. I am not simple enough to recommend that the candidates should read this book – they have other "duties" to fulfil – but I do invite the voters to pick up *Words of a Rebel,* and I especially recommend to them the chapter entitled "Representative Government." There they will learn how much their confidence is justified in these men who appear from all sides to court the honour of representing in parliament their fellow citizens. Just at present everything is made to look well. The candidates are of course omniscient and infallible, but what will they become once they have received their mandates? When they have eventually achieved their fragments of kingly power, will they not inevitably be seized by the exaltation of office and, like real monarchs, see

themselves as exempt from the need to show either wisdom or virtue? Even if they had any intent of keeping the promises which they lavished before being elected, how could they hope to sustain their integrity once they were surrounded by the mob of patronage seekers and interested advisers? Even if one can imagine a man being unspoilt on the day he entered the Chamber of Deputies, how can one hope that he would emerge uncorrupted? In this setting dominated by intrigue we see such men turning to right and left as if they were drawn by some dominating machine. At best they become time-servers who put on a good face and make a quick impression, only to turn their backs soon afterwards and pitifully allow themselves to be pushed to the wall.

Our salvation does not lie in the choice of new masters. As anarchists and enemies of Christianity, we must remind a whole society that pretends to be Christian of these words spoken by a man they made into a God: "Say unto no man, Master, Master." Let everyone remain his own master. Do not turn towards those who sit in office, or to the noisy demagogues in your search for a true message of freedom. Listen rather to the voices that come from below, even if they have to pass through the bars of a prison cell.

Elisee Reclus
Clarens, Switzerland
1st October, 1885

stuff their minds with this literary rubbish, cobbled together by and for the bourgeoisie at a penny or two a line, and they will end up, like the young Lemaitre, slashing open the bellies and cutting the throats of children in the hope of becoming "celebrated murderers." Others will give themselves up to execrable vices. Only the mediocrities, those who have neither passion nor impulse nor any sense of independence will get through it all without trouble. This minority will provide society with its contingent of good citizens with niggardly mentalities who admittedly do not steal handkerchiefs in the street, but "honestly" rob their customers; who have no passion but secretly visit the brothel to get rid of the gravy from the stewpot, who stagnate in their marshes and curse whoever tried to stir up their muck.

This is how it is for boys! As for the girls, the bourgeoisie corrupt them at an early age. Absurd children's books, dolls done up like whores, the mother's dresses and her example, the chatter of the boudoir-nothing is lacking to turn the child into a woman who will sell herself to the highest bidder. And that child already spreads the infection around her: do not working-class children look with envy on this over-dressed girl, with her elegant demeanour, a courtesan at twelve years old? But if the mother is "virtuous"—in the way a good middle-class woman understands the term-then the situation is even worse. If the child is intelligent and passionate, she will take at its true value this double morality which consists in saying: "Love your neighbour, but plunder him when you can! Be virtuous, but only up to a certain point, etc." and, stifling in that atmosphere of Tartuffian morality, finding in her life nothing of the beautiful, sublime, inspiring, nothing that breathes of true passion, she will throw herself headfirst into the arms of the first comer, provided he can satisfy her appetite for a life of luxury.

Consider these facts, think about their causes, and admit that we are right to declare that a terrible revolution is inevitable if we are finally to cleanse our societies down to the

I could bring a thousand examples to support my argument, but let us limit ourselves now to a single one-the most terrible of all-that of our children. What can we do for them in modern society?

Respect for childhood is one of the finest qualities that developed in humanity as it accomplished its painful march from the state of savagery to its present condition. How often has one not seen the most depraved of men disarmed by the smile of a child? But such respect is vanishing, and among us today the child has become a machine of flesh-and-blood, if it has not been turned into a plaything for bestial passions.

We have been shown recently how the bourgeoisie massacre our children by making them work long hours in the factories.[1] There, they are physically ruined. But that is not everything. Corrupt to the core as it is, society also kills our children morally.

It reduces education to a routine apprenticeship which gives no expression to young and noble passions and no release to that need for idealism which emerges at a certain age in most children, and so it insures that children who are naturally so varied become less independent, proud and poetic, that they hate their schools and either turn in on themselves or seek elsewhere an outlet for their passions. Some will search in novels for the poetry that is lacking in their lives; they will

[1] These lines were written as the result of a report by Mrs. Emma Brown on child workers in the Massachusetts factories; it appeared in The Atlantic Monthly. After having visited most of the factories in the company of a well-known economist, Mrs. Brown reached the conclusion that nowhere were the laws on child labour being observed. In each establishment, she would see whole gangs of children, and the appearance of these poor creatures left no doubt that they already carried in their frail bodies the germs of chronic sicknesses: anaemia, physical deformities, tuberculosis, etc. 44% – nearly half the workers employed in the factories of Massachusetts – are children below 15 years of age. And why this preference for children among the employers? Because they are paid only a quarter (24%) of what is paid to an adult worker.

Chapter 1: The Situation Today

It is evident that we are advancing rapidly towards revolution, towards an upheaval that will begin in one country and spread, as in 1848, into all the neighbouring lands, and, as it rocks existing society to its foundations, will also reopen the springs of life.

To confirm our view, we do not even have to invoke the testimony of a celebrated German historian,[1] or a well-known Italian philosopher,[2] both of whom, having deeply studied the history of our times, have reached the conclusion that a great revolution was inevitable towards the end of this century. We need only watch the panorama that has unrolled before us over the past twenty years; we need only observe what goes on around us.

When we do so, we perceive two major facts emerging from the murky depths of the canvas: the awakening of the peoples, in contrast to the moral, intellectual and economic failure of the ruling classes; and the agitated yet powerless efforts of people of wealth to hinder that awakening.

Yes, the awakening of the peoples!

In the suffocating atmosphere of the factory as much as in the darkness of the cookshop kitchen, under the roof of the granary as much as in the streaming galleries of the mine, a new world is taking shape these days. Among those shadowy

[1] Gervinus. Introduction a l'histoire du dix-neuvieme stiecle. Peter Kropotkin.

[2] Giuseppe Ferrari. La Raison d'Etat. Peter Kropotkin

masses, whom the bourgeois despise as much as they fear them, yet from whose midst has always stirred the breath that inspired the great reformers, the most difficult problems of social economy and political organization are posed one after another, discussed, and given new solutions dictated by the sense of justice. These discussions cut to the heart of society's sickness. New hopes are awakened, new ideas emerge.

Opinions mingle and vary to the point of infinity, but two streams of ideas already sound more and more distinctly in this din of voices: the abolition of individual property and communism; and the abolition of the State, its replacement by the free commune, and the international union of working men. The two ways converge in a single aim: *Equality.* Not that hypocritical formula of equality, inscribed by the bourgeoisie on its banners and in its codes for the easier enslavement of the producer, but true equality: land, capital and work shared by all.

It is in vain that the ruling classes seek to stifle these aspirations by imprisoning men and suppressing their writings. The new ideas penetrate people's minds, take possession of their hearts in the same way as in the past the myth of the rich and free lands of the East possessed the hearts of the serfs when they rushed into the ranks of the crusaders. The idea may sleep for a while; if its appearance on the surface is prevented, it may burrow beneath the soil, but that will lead only to its resurging stronger than ever before. You have only to look at the present reawakening of socialism in France, the second revival in the short space of fifteen years. When the wave breaks it rises even higher an instant afterwards. And as soon as a first attempt is made to put the new ideas into practice, they will stand up before everyone in all their simplicity, in all their splendour. Let one attempt be successful, and the awareness of their own strength will give the peoples a heroic impulse.

This moment cannot be long delayed. Everything brings us near the point when poverty itself, which forces the unfortunate to take thought, reaches the point of forced unemploy-

Thus we see that the primitive morality, based on the identification of *the individual with his fellows,* is replaced by the hypocritical morality of various religions, which search through sophistry to give legitimacy to exploitation and domination, and confine themselves to condemning only the most brutal manifestations of these phenomena. They relieve the individual of his moral obligations towards his fellows and impose them on him only in relation to a Supreme Being-an invisible abstraction, whose wrath you can avert and whose good will you can purchase, provided you pay his so-called servitors well.

But the more and more frequent contacts that occur these days between individuals, groups, nations and continents, impose new moral obligations on humanity. And as religious beliefs begin to vanish, we realize that if we want to be happy we must assume duties, not towards some unknown being, but towards all those with whom we enter into relationships. We understand more and more clearly that the individual's welfare is no longer possible in isolation; it can only be sought in the welfare of all-the happiness of the human race. The negative principles of religious morality: "Thou shalt not steal! Thou shalt not kill!" are being replaced by the positive principles of a humane morality, infinitely broader and growing from day to day. The sanctions of a deity, which one could always violate at the price of appeasing him later on with offerings, are being replaced by a sentiment of solidarity with one and all which tells human beings, "If you want to be happy, do to others as you would like others to do to you." That simple affirmation, that scientific induction which has nothing to do with religious prescriptions, opens in an instant a whole immense horizon of perfectibility, of betterment for the human race.

The need to recreate our relations on this principle, so sublime and so simple, becomes more evident from day to day. But nothing can or will be done in that direction while exploitation and domination, hypocrisy and sophistry, remain the bases of our social organization.

a whole new atmosphere' instinct with life, with youth, with honesty. It is not merely the question of bread that is posed in such epochs; it becomes a question of progress against immobility, of human development against brutalization, of life against the foetid stagnation of the marsh.

History has retained for us the memory of such an epoch: that of the decadence of the Roman Empire; humanity today is passing through another such decadence.

Like the Romans of the decadence, we find ourselves facing a fundamental transformation which is affecting the minds of men and which only waits for favourable circumstances to become transposed into actuality. If the revolution imposes itself in the economic domain, if it has become an imperious necessity in the political domain, it assumes even more urgency in the field of morality.

Without moral links, without certain obligations which each member of society develops in his relations with others, no kind of society is possible. Thus we encounter these moral links, these sociable customs, in all human groups; we see them well-developed and rigorously put into practice among primitive peoples, who are the living remnants of what all humanity was in its beginnings.

But the inequality of fortunes and conditions, the exploitation of man by man, the domination of the masses by a few, have undermined and destroyed through the ages these precious products of the pristine stages of our societies. Large industry based on exploitation, commerce based on fraud, domination by those who call themselves "the Government," can no longer tolerate co-existence with those principles of morality, based on the solidarity of all, which we still encounter among the tribes who have been driven back to the verges of the policed world. What solidarity can exist between the capitalist and the worker he exploits? Between the head of an army and the soldier? Between the governing and the governed?

ment, when the man who has already started to think is torn from the narrow setting of his workshop and thrown into the streets, where he quickly comes to know both the viciousness and the powerlessness of the ruling classes.

And, in the meantime, what are these ruling classes achieving?

While natural sciences are assuming a vigour that reminds one of the last century when the great French revolution was approaching and while bold inventors open up new horizons each day to the struggle of humanity against the hostile forces of nature, social science – a bourgeois creation – remains silent and is content to work over its outdated theories.

But perhaps these ruling classes are making progress in practical matters? Far from it. They remain obstinately intent on waving their ragged banners, on defending egotistic individualism, competition between man and man and nation and nation, and the omnipotence of the centralizing State.

They change from protectionism to free trade, and from free trade back to protectionism; from reaction to liberalism and from liberalism back to reaction; from atheism to superstition and from superstition back to atheism; always fearful, always looking towards the past, ever less capable of realizing anything that lasts. Everything these ruling classes have achieved has in fact been a contradiction of whatever they have promised. They promised to guarantee us freedom to work-and they have made us slaves to the factory, to the owner, to the overseer. They took the responsibility for organizing industry, for guaranteeing our well being, and they have given us endless crises and resultant poverty; they promised us education-and we are reduced to the impossible task of teaching ourselves; they promised us political freedom, and have led us on from one reaction to the next; they promised us peace, and have given us wars without end. They have failed in all their promises.

But the people are weary of it all; they are beginning to ask each other where they have ended up, after letting themselves be gulfed and governed for so long by the bourgeoisie. The answer to that question can be seen in the economic situation that now afflicts Europe. The crises that hitherto were passing calamities have become chronic. The crisis in cotton, the crisis in the metal industry, the crisis in watchmaking, all of these crises now occur simultaneously and take on permanence.

At the present moment one can count several millions of people out of work in Europe; tens of thousands prowl from town to town, begging for their living or rioting and with threats demanding *work or bread!* As the peasants of 1787 wandered by thousands over the roads without finding in the rich soil of their country, appropriated by the aristocrats, a plot of land to cultivate or a hoe to till it, so today the workers wait with idle hands for lack of access to the materials and me tools needed for production because they are in the hands of a few idlers.

Great industries are allowed to die, great cities like Sheffield are turned into deserts. There is poverty in England, above all in England, for it is there that the "economists" have most thoroughly applied their principles, but there is poverty also in Alsace and hunger in Spain and Italy. Unemployment exists everywhere, and with unemployment, mere lack becomes real poverty; anaemic children and women ageing five years in a single winter; sickness moving with great sweeps through the ranks of the workers! This is what we have attained under the rule of the capitalists.

And they talk to us of over-production! Over-production? When the miner who piles up mountains of coal has no money to pay for a fire in the depth of winter? When the weaver who produces miles of cloth cannot afford shirts for his ragged children? When the mason who builds a palace lives in a hovel, and the seamstress who creates masterpieces for the fashion-

Chapter 3: The Inevitability of Revolution

THERE are periods in human existence when the inevitability of a great upheaval, of a cataclysm that shakes society to its very roots, imposes itself on every area of our relationships. At such epochs, all men of good will begin to realise that things cannot go on as they are; that we need me great events that roughly break the thread of history, shake humanity out of the ruts in which it is stuck, and propel it towards new ways, towards the unknown, towards the search for the ideal. One feels the inevitability of a revolution, vast, implacable, whose role will be not merely to overthrow an economic machine based on cold exploitation, on speculation and fraud, not merely to throw down the political ladder that sustains the rule of the few through cunning, intrigue and lies, but also to stir up the intellectual and moral life of society, shake it out of its torpor, reshape our moral life, and set blowing in the midst of the low and paltry passions that occupy us now the livening wind of noble passions, great impulses and generous dedications.

In those eras when prideful mediocrity stifles all intelligence that does not kowtow to authority, when the niggardly morality of compromise creates the law, and servility reigns supreme; in such eras revolution becomes a need. Honest men of all classes call down me tempest, so that it can burn up with its breath of flame the pestilence that afflicts us, blow away the miasmas that stifle us, and sweep up in its furious progress all that debris of the past which weighs down on us, stifles us, deprives us of air and light, so that in the end it can give us

a law or administrative decree; it is only the demands of the struggle against the people for the preservation of privilege.

This struggle alone would be enough to shake the strongest of political organizations. But when it takes place within States that for historical reasons are declining; when these States are rolling at full speed towards catastrophe and are harming each other on the way; when, in the end, the all-powerful State becomes repugnant even to those it protects: then all these causes can only unite in a single effort: and the outcome of the struggle cannot remain in doubt. The people, who have the strength, will prevail over their oppressors; the collapse of the States will become no more than a question of time, and the most peaceful of philosophers will see in the distance the dawning light by which the great revolution manifests itself.

able dress shops has only one ragged shawl to protect her in all weathers?

Is this what they call the organization of industry? One might rather call it a secret alliance of the capitalists to tame the workers by hunger.

We are told that capital, that product of work of all humankind which has been accumulated in the hands of the few, is fleeing from agriculture and industry for lack of confidence. But where will it find its perch, once it has left the strongboxes?

In fact, it has many advantageous destinations. It can go to furnish the harems of the Sultan; it can supply the wars, sustaining the Russian against the Turk and, at the same time, the Turk against the Russian. Or, alternatively, it can be used to found a joint stock company, not to produce anything, but simply to lead in a couple of years to a scandalous failure as soon as the financial bigshots have withdrawn, taking millions with them as the reward for their ”idea.” Or, again, capital can be used to construct useless railways, over the Gothard, in Japan, across the Sahara if need be-provided that the Rothschilds who underwrite them, the engineers in charge and the contractors can make a few million each.

But above all, capital can plunge into speculation, the great game of the stock exchange. The capitalist gambles on artificially induced increases in the price of wheat or cotton; he gambles on politics, on the rising prices induced by some rumour of reform or some leaked diplomatic note; and very often-we see it every day-the government officials themselves dabble in these speculations.

Speculation killing industry-that is what they call the intelligent management of business! It is for that the capitalists tell us that we should support them!

In brief, economic chaos is at its height. However, this chaos cannot last for long. The people are tired of crises provoked by the greed of the ruling classes; they want to live by work-

ing and not to suffer years of poverty, seasoned by humiliating charity, for the sake of perhaps two or three years of exhausting work, sometimes more or less assured, but always badly remunerated.

The worker is becoming aware of the incapacity of the governing classes; their incapacity to understand his own new aspirations; their incapacity to manage industry; their incapacity to organize production and exchange.

The people will soon declare the deposition of the bourgeoisie. They will take matters into their own hands as soon as the propitious moment offers itself.

That moment cannot be far off, since the very difficulties that are gnawing away at industry will precipitate it, and its advent will be hastened by the breakdown of the State, a breakdown that in our day has entered its final precipitate phase.

the rich against the exploited, of the employer against the proletarian.

Of what use in fact is this great machine that we call the State? Is it to hinder the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist, of the peasant by the landlord? Is it to assure us work? To protect us from the loan-shark? To give us sustenance when the woman has only water to pacify the child who weeps at her dried-out breast?

No, a thousand times no! The State is there to protect exploitation, speculation and private property; it is itself the by-product of the-rapine of the people. The proletarian must rely on his own hands; he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organization devised to hinder emancipation at all costs.

Everything in the State is loaded in favour of the idle proprietor, everything against the working proletarian: bourgeois education, which from an early age corrupts the child by inculcating anti-egalitarian principles; the Church which disturbs women's minds; the law which hinders the exchange of ideas of solidarity and equality; money, which can be used when needed to corrupt whoever seeks to be an apostle of the solidarity of the workers; prison-and grapeshot as a last resort-to shut the mouths of those who will not be corrupted. Such is the State.

Can it last? Will it last? Obviously not. A whole class of humanity, the class that produces everything, cannot sustain for ever an organization that has been created specifically in opposition to its interests. Everywhere, under Russian brutality as much as under the hypocrisy of the followers of Gambettas, the discontented people are in revolt. The history of our times is the history of the struggle of the privileged rulers against the egalitarian aspiration of the peoples. This struggle has become the principal occupation of the ruling class; it dominates their actions. Today it is neither principles nor considerations of the public good that determine the appearance of such-and-such

declare the failure of State governments and send the bankers to dig the soil if they are hungry.

Say "State" and you say "war." The State strives and must strive to be strong, and stronger than its neighbours; if it is not so, it will become a plaything in their hands. Of necessity it seeks to weaken and impoverish other States so that it can impose on them its laws, its policies, its commercial treaties, and grow rich at their expense. The struggle for preponderance, which is the basis of economic bourgeois organization, is also the basis of political organization. This is why war has now become the normal condition of Europe. Prusso-Danish, Prusso-Austrian, FrancoPrussian wars, war in the East, war in Afghanistan follow each other without a pause. New wars are in preparation; Russia, Prussia, England, Denmark, all are ready to unleash their armies. And at any moment they will be at each other's throats. There are enough excuses for wars to keep the world busy for another thirty years.

But war means unemployment, economic crisis, growing taxes, accumulating debts. More than that, war deals a mortal blow to the State itself. After each war, the peoples realize that the States involved have shown their incompetence, even in the tasks by which they justify their existence; they are hardly capable of organizing the defence of their own territory, and even victory threatens their survival. Only look at the fermentation of ideas that emerged from the war of 1871, as much in Germany as in France; only observe the discontent aroused in Russia by the war in the Far East.

Wars and armaments are the death of the State; they accelerate its moral and economic failure. Just one or two great waft will give the final blow to these decrepit machines.

But parallel to war outside is war within.

Accepted originally by the people as a means of defending all men and women, and above all of protecting the weak against the strong, the State today has become the fortress of

Chapter 2: The Breakdown of the State

If the economic situation of Europe can be summed up in these words-industrial and commercial chaos and the failure of capitalist production-the situation in politics can be defined as the rapid breakdown of the State and its entire failure, which will take place very soon.

Consider all the various States, from the police autocracy of Russia to the bourgeois oligarchy of Switzerland, and you will not find a single example today (with the *possible* exception of Sweden and Norway)[1] of a State that is not set on an accelerating course towards disintegration and eventually, revolution.

Like wornout old men, their skin shrivelled and their feet stumbling, gnawed at by mortal sicknesses, incapable of embarking on the tide of new ideas, the States of Europe squander what strength remains to them, and while living on credit of their past, they merely hasten their ends by squabbling like aged gossips.

Having reached a high point in the eighteenth century, the old States of Europe have now entered into their decline; they are falling into decrepitude. The peoples-and especially those of Latin race-are already looking forward to the destruction of that power which merely hinders their free development.

[1] It is difficult to know what Kropotkin had in mind with this statement. Norway had been ceded by Denmark to Sweden in 1814. In the 1880s it was still a disaffected part of the Swedish kingdom, and nationalist feeling was becoming so strong that in 1905 it would split away and assume its independence. Clearly the state of Sweden and Norway was well on its way to disintegration when he wrote. Trans.

They desire autonomy for provinces, for communes, for groups of workers drawn together, no longer by a power imposed on them, but by the links of mutual agreement, by free consent.

This is the phase of history on which we are entering, and nothing can hinder its realization. If the ruling classes could understand the situation they would hasten to put themselves in the van of such a movement and its aspirations. But, having grown old in their traditions and having no other object of worship than their money bags, they oppose the new current of ideas with all their strength. And, inevitably, they are leading us towards a violent outburst. The hopes of men and women will see the light of day-but the dawn will be accompanied by the rumbling of cannon and the rattle of machine-gun fire and it will be illuminated by conflagrations.

After the decline of the institutional life of the Middle Ages, the nascent States made their appearance in Europe, consolidating themselves and growing by conquest, by intrigue, by assassination, but as yet they interfered only in a small sphere of human affairs.

Today the State takes upon itself to meddle in all the areas of our lives. From the cradle to the grave, it hugs us in its arms. Sometimes as the central government, sometimes as the provincial or cantonal government, and sometimes even as the communal or municipal government, it follows our every step, it appears at every turning of the road, it taxes, harasses and restrains us.

It legislates on all our actions. It accumulates mountains of laws and ordinances among which even the shrewdest of lawyers can no longer find his way. Every day it devises new cogwheels to be fitted into the wornout old engine, and it ends up having created a machine so complicated, so misbegotten and so obstructive that it repels even those who attempt to keep it going.

The State creates an army of employees like light-fingered spiders, who know the world only through the murky windows

of their offices or through their documents written in absurd jargons; it is a black band with only one religion, that of money, only one care, that of attaching oneself to any party, black, purple, or white, so long as it guarantees a maximum of appointments with a minimum of work.

The results we know only too well. Is there a single branch of the State's activity that does not arouse revolution in those unfortunate enough to have dealings with it? Is there a single direction in which the State, after centuries of existence and of patchy renovation, has not shown its complete incompetence?

The vast and ever growing sums of money which the States appropriate from the people are never sufficient.. The State always exists at the expense of future generations; it accumulates debt and everywhere it approaches bankruptcy. The public debts of the European States have already reached the vast, almost incredible figure of more than five milliards, i.e. five hundred million francs![2] If *all* the receipts of the various States were employed to the last penny just to pay off these debts, it could hardly be done in fifteen years. But, far from diminishing, the debts grow from day to day, for it is in the nature of things that the needs of States are always in excess of their means. Inevitably the State seeks to extend its jurisdiction; every party in power is obliged to create new employment for its supporters. It is an irrevocable process.

Thus the deficits and public debts continue and will continue, always growing, even in times of peace. But as soon as a war begins, however small, the debts of the States increase at an alarming rate. There is no ending; it is impossible to find our way out of this labyrinth.

The States of the world are heading full steam for ruin and bankruptcy; and the day is not distant when the people, tired of paying four milliards of interest each year to the bankers, will

[2] During the 1880s the French franc stood at roughly 4.8 to the US dollar and 24 to the pound sterling. Trans.

and lawyers who foment the process; the en- gineers and the gangs of functionaries of all kinds who dip deeply into the funds of the State and the communes, especially when the latter, egged on by interested parties, run into debt to embellish the village around the mayor's house: this kind of gentry, the vermin that considers the countryside a rich land of savages ready for exploitation, have also no reason to complain. Try and move their hearts about anything, and they will resist your appeals with all their strength. Peasants ruining themsel- ves by signing promissory notes, farmers impoverishing themselves with litigation, illiterate countrymen letting themselves be sucked dry by the spiders who surround them, all this is the order of the day for the usurers. And communes that let themselves be bullied by the mayor, plus a State that squanders public funds, are equally on the order of the day for the functionaries. When they have ruined the peasants in France, they will go on to do the same thing in Hungary, in Turkey if they must, in China if they need. Usury has no fatherland.

Obviously this group will not complain of their lot. But how many of them are there? Five hundred thousand? Perhaps a million, including their families? More than enough to ruin our villages in a few years, but hardly enough to resist when the peasants turn against them with all their force.

Next we come to the small landowners who possess between 50 and 100 hectares. Most of them in fact do not know where the shoe pinches and when one talks to them of changing something, their first thought will be to ask if they will not lose what they actually possess. Some of them, who may be temporarily unlucky, will hope to "succeed" one day: a lucky speculation, a lucrative job in addition to their calling as farmer, a rich relative who commits suicide one fine morning, and good fortune will return. Generally speaking, real need is unknown to them, and work also. It is not they who till their lands; for that they have farm labourers whom they pay 250 to 300 francs

the peoples dying of hunger, the corpses piled in the mines and Iying mutilated in heaps at the feet of the barricades, the convoys of exiles who will be buried in the snows of Siberia and on the beaches of tropical islands; confronting that supreme struggle which is now going on, echoing with the sorrowful cries of the defeated and the orgies of the victors, with heroism at grips with cowardice, enthusiasm fighting against baseness-you can no longer stay neutral! You will come to stand beside the oppressed, because you know that the beautiful, the sublime and life itself are on the side of those who fight for light, for humanity, for justice!

But now you interrupt me. "If the abstract science is a luxury," you ask, "and the practice of medicine a sham, if law is injustice and technical advances are instruments of exploitation; if education is defeated by the self-interest of the educators and if art, lacking a revolutionary ideal, can only degenerate, what is there left for me to do?"

And my answer is this. "An immense task awaits which can only attract you, a task in which action will accord completely with conscience, a task that can win over the most noble natures and the most vigorous characters."

"What is this task," you ask. I propose to tell you.

3.

Either you compromise constantly with your conscience and end up one fine day saying: "To Hell with humanity, so long as I can gain and profit from all the advantages, and the people are stupid enough to let me do so!" Or you take your place on the side of the socialists and work with them for the complete transformation of society. Such is the inevitable conclusion of the analysis we have made; and such will be the logical decision which all intelligent people will inevitably reach if only they reason wisely and resist the sophisms whispered in

their ears by their bourgeois education and the self-interested views of those around them. And once that conclusion has been reached, the question, "What to do?" naturally offers itself.

The answer is easy.

Merely shake yourself free of your world in which it is customary to say that the people are no more than a heap of brutes, go out to meet those very people, and the answer will emerge of its own accord.

You will see that everywhere, in France as in Germany, in Italy as in the United States, and in all places where there are privileged and oppressed, a gigantic development is taking place in the heart of the working class, whose aim is to break for ever the servitudes imposed by capitalist feudalism and lay the foundations of a society based on justice and equality. It is no longer enough today for the people to express their woes in those laments sung by the seventeenth century serfs and still by Russian peasants, whose melody breaks one's heart. They work now, with full consciousness of what they are doing, and fight against all obstacles to their liberation.

Their thought is constantly engaged in divining what needs to be done so that life, instead of being a curse for three quarters of humanity, shall be a joy for all. They approach the most challenging problems of sociology, and seek to resolve them with their own good sense, their powers of observation, their hard experience. To make common cause with other unfortunate people, they group together and organize. They form societies sustained with difficulty by tiny contributions; they seek to make contact over the frontiers and, more effectively than the philanthropical rhetoricians, they prepare for the day when wars between peoples will become impossible. To know what their brothers are doing, and to become better acquainted with them, as well as to elaborate and propagate ideas, they maintain at great cost in sacrifice and effort their working class press. Finally, when the time comes, they rise up and, staining the paving stones of the barricades with their blood, they

said in these books that al- most all the French peasants were well-off and contented with their lot; that they have enough land, enough cattle, and that the land brings them plenty of money so that they have no difficulty in paying their taxes which in any case are light, while the cost of cultivating the land has not gone up; that each year they are making new economies and continuing to grow rich.

The peasants will answer, I suspect, that these commentators are idiots, and they will be right to do so.

Let us examine the elements of which the twenty-three or twenty- four million people who live in the French countryside are composed, and see how many among them are content with their lots and have no desire to change them.

First, we have the eight thousand great landowners (round about 40,000 persons if one counts their families) who possess, particularly in Picardy, Normandy and Anjou, properties that bring them from ten thousand to two hundred thousand francs a year, and sometimes even more than that.

These certainly have no reason to complain. After spending the sum- mer months in their domains and turning into cash the value of whatever is produced by the hard work of wage-earners, small tenant farmers and share-croppers, they depart to spend their money in the cities. There they drink champagne by the glassful with women on whom they lavish their money freely, and in their palaces they spend as much in a day as would feed a family for half a year. Those fellows indeed have no reason to la- ment; if they complain it is because the peasant becomes each day less tractable and nowadays refuses to work for nothing.

Of such people, let us speak no more. We shall have a word to say to them on the day of the revolution.

The moneylenders, the cattle merchants, the higglers, those vultures who nowadays batten on the villages, and, coming from the towns with a small purseful as their entire fortune, turn themselves into landowners and bankers; the notaries

means of strikes, but now it also is demanding the dispossession of the landlords.

Finally, the Irish Land League[6] is beginning to extend its ramifica- tions into Scotland and England, and everywhere it is arousing sym- pathy. But we know how the League operates. It will begin by declaring that the rents to be paid to the great landlords are henceforward reduced by a quarter, according to the League's decree. By all kinds of petty means and in the last resort by force it will prevent the eviction of those who pay only three quarters of their rent. Later, when its forces are organized, it will declare that nothing at all must be paid to the landlord, and it will arm the farm population to put its will into operation. When the right moment comes it will do as the French peasants did between 1789 and 1793; it will force the landlords, by iron and fire, to abdicate their rights to the land.

What will be the new kind of property arrangement as a result of the revolution in England? It would be difficult to foretell that at the present moment, for the outcome of the revolution will depend on the length of the revolutionary period, and especially on the strength of the opposition which revolutionary ideas will encounter on the part of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. One thing is certain, that England is proceeding in the direction of the abolition of individual property in land, and that the opposition encountered by that idea on the part of the landowners will prevent the transformation from taking place in a peaceful manner; to make its wishes prevail, the people of England will have to resort to force.

3.

My readers in the French countryside may well laugh when they hear what is said of them in those fine books that the politicians and the economists are publishing in the big cities. It is

[6] Irish Land League. See note 37. Trans.

leap forward to the conquest of those liberties which later on the rich and the powerful will corrupt into privileges and turn against the workers who won them.

What continual efforts are demanded, what unceasing struggles! What tasks begun again and again, sometimes to fill the gaps created by weariness, by corruption, by persecution; sometimes to resume the studies that were rudely interrupted by mass exterminations!

Their journals are created by men who have been forced to steal their scraps of education by depriving themselves of sleep and food; the agitation is sustained by pennies wrung out of scanty necessities, sometimes out of dry bread; and all that goes on in the continual fear of seeing one's family reduced to the starkest poverty as soon as the employer realizes that "his worker, his slave, is playing with socialism!"

This is what you will see, if you go among the people.

And in that endless struggle, how often the worker, as he sinks under the weight of obstacles, has said to himself in vain: "Where are these young people who have been educated at our expense, whom we have fed and clothed while they studied, and for whom, our backs bent under burdens and our bellies empty, we have built these mansions, these colleges and museums, and for whom, with our wan faces, we have printed their fine books which we cannot even read? Where are they, these professors who claim to possess humanitarian knowledge and for whom humanity is not worth as much as a rare species of caterpillar? These men who talk of freedom and never defend ours which day by day is trampled under foot? These writers, these poets, these painters, this whole gang of hypocrites, who speak of the people with tears in their eyes yet are never to be found among us, helping in our endeavours!"

Occasionally a young man does turn up who has been dreaming of drums and barricades and who is on the lookout for sensational scenes; he will desert the cause of the people as soon as he sees that the way of the barricades is long, that

the work to be done on the way is onerous, and that the laurel crowns he may win are mingled with thorns. More often they are individuals of unfulfilled ambition who, having failed in their first ventures, attempt to capture the voice of the people, but later will be the first to thunder against them as soon as the people wish to apply the principles they themselves have professed; it may be they who will have the cannon aimed at the "vile multitude," should it dare to step beyond the point which they, the leaders, have indicated.

Add the stupid insults, the haughty contempt, the cowardly calumnies expressed by the greater number, and you will see what the people can expect from bourgeois youth to help them in their social revolution.

Lover of pure science, if you have opened your minds to the principles of socialism and understand the full significance of the approaching revolution, do you not recognize that the whole of science must be reorganized to suit the new principles; that we will have to carry out in this domain a revolution whose importance will vastly surpass that accomplished in the sciences during the eighteenth century? Do you not understand that history, today a convenient mythology regarding the greatness of kings, of notable personalities, of parliaments-must be entirely recast from the popular point of view, from the viewpoint of the work accomplished by the masses in the phases of human revolution? That social economics-hitherto concentrated on capitalist exploitation-must be entirely re-elaborated, both in its fundamental principles and in its innumerable applications? That anthropology, sociology and ethics must be completely revised and that the natural sciences themselves, seen from a new point of view, must undergo a profound modification both in their concepts of natural phenomena and in their methods of exposition? If you do understand these things, why don't you start making these changes and devote your insights to a good cause? But above all come to our aid with your rigorous logic in combatting

diminishing. In 1869, England sowed 1,600,000 hectares with wheat; no more than 1,200,000 hectares are sown today.[4] Fifteen years ago it produced 26 hectolitres per hectare, but today it produces only 22 hectolitres per hectare.[5]

Even those farmers who cultivate areas of 50 or 100 hectares or more, middle class men seeking to become gentlemen in their turn and enjoy the good life through the toil of others, are now being ruined. Crushed with rents by the landlords' greed, they can no longer improve their farming and hold their heads up against American and Australian competition; the newspapers in fact are loaded with notices of farm auctions.

Thus the agrarian situation presents itself. The great mass of the people are driven from the land and into the large cities and the manufac- turing centres, where these starving folk compete frantically with each other. The land is held by a handful of noblemen who enjoy fabulous revenues and spend them at will on lives of extravagant and unproduc- tive luxury. The people in between, the farmers who have been hoping to transform themselves into lesser gentlemen, are ruined by the excessive rents, are ready to make common cause with the people so as to take the land out of the hands of the great proprietors. The whole country feels the effects of this abnormal situation regarding landed property.

Is it surprising that "nationalization of the land" should have be- come today the rallying cry of all the malcontents? Already in 1869 the great Land and Work League demanded that all the estates of the great nobles should be confiscated by the whole nation, and each day that idea gains more support. The League of Landworkers, with its 150,000 members, had but a single aim twenty years ago, which was to raise wages by

[4] Written in 1880. Peter Kropotkin.

[5] See the figures given by the Times of 13th October 1880. Peter Kropotkin.

hectares, are the property of 2,340 great land- owners; 710 lords own the third of England; one marquess makes jour- neys of thirty leagues without quitting his lands, and one earl owns a whole county. The rest of the landowners, a half-million families, must be content with less than a third of a hectare each, enough for a house and a smalljjarden.

2,340 families receive fabulous revenues, from 100,000 to 10,000,000 francs per annum; the Marquess of Westminster and the Duke of Bedford get 15,000 francs a day – more than 1,000 francs an hour! – more than a worker in a whole year, while hundreds of thousands of farm labouring families earn from their hard labours only between 300 and 1,000 francs a year. The labourer who makes the land produce, thinks himself lucky if, after 14 and 15 hour working days, he manages to earn 12 to 15 francs a week – just enough not to die of hunger.

Writers of books indeed tell us that thanks to this concentration of property in a few hands, England has become the land of the most inten- sive and productive agriculture. The great lords, not wishing to cultivate the land themselves, lease it in large lots to tenant farmers, and these tenants, we are told, have made their farms into models of rational agriculture.

Once this was true. It is no longer true today.

First of all, immense areas of land remain absolutely uncultivated or are transformed into parks, so that, when autumn comes, the lord can stage monstrous hunts with his guests. Thousands of people could gain their nourishment from such lands! The landlord pays no heed to that fact; he does not know how to spend his fortune, so he gives himself the pleasure of having a park of several square leagues and he takes that area out of cultivation.

Thousands and thousands of farmers have been evicted, chased away by the landlords, and their fields, which nourish the people, have been transformed into pastures which nowadays serve to raise beef cattle – in other words, meat, the food of the rich. The area of land devoted to crops is constantly

secular prejudices and elaborating through synthesis the foundations of a better organization; above all, teach us to apply to our reasoning the boldness of true scientific investigation, and, teaching by example, show us how one must sacrifice one's life for the triumph of truth!

And you, physician, whom hard experience has led to understand socialism, do not tire of telling us-today, tomorrow, every day in every occasion-that humanity is doomed to degenerate if it remains in the present condition of living and work; that your drugs will remain powerless against sickness while 99 per cent of humanity vegetate in conditions absolutely opposed to those that science teaches; that it is the causes of sickness which must be eliminated-and how are we to eliminate those causes? Come then with your scalpel to dissect with a meticulous hand this society on its way to collapse, tell us what a rational way of life could and should be, and, as a true doctor, repeat to us untiringly that one does not hesitate to amputate a gangrenous limb when it might infect the whole body.

And you who have worked on the applications of science to industry, tell us frankly what has been the result of your discoveries; reveal to those who dare not yet stride boldly into the future what possibilities of new inventions are carried within the knowledge we have already acquired, what industry could be under the best conditions, what humanity could produce if it produced always in such a way as to augment its productivity. Offer the people the support of your intuitions, or your practical spirit, of your talents of organization, instead of putting them at the service of the exploiters.

And you, poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, if you have understood your true missions and the interests of your art as well, come and put your pen, your brush, your chisel at the service of the revolution. Retell, in your prose rich with images or on your gripping canvases, the titanic struggles of the peoples against their oppressors; inflame the hearts of the young with the marvellous revolutionary breath which inspired our ances-

tors; tell the woman how splendid her husband's actions will be if he gives his life to the great cause of social emancipation. Show the people what is ugly in present-day life, and put your finger on the causes of that ugliness; tell us what a rational life might be if it did not have to stumble at every pace because of the ineptitude and the ignominies of the present social order.

All of you who possess knowledge and talents and good heart as well, come with your companions to put them at the service of those who have the greatest need of them. And be confident that if you come, not as masters, but as comrades in the struggle; not to govern but to seek your inspiration in a new setting; less to teach than to understand and formulate the aspirations of the masses and then work unslackeningly and with all the energy of youth to introduce them into daily life: be confident that then, but then only, you yourselves will be living complete and rational lives. You will see that every one of your efforts made in this direction will bear fruit amply; and this feeling of accord established between your acts and the commands of your conscience will give you energies which you would not suspect existed if you were working for yourself alone.

To struggle in the midst of the people for truth, justice, equality- what could you find more splendid in the whole of life?

4.

I have taken up three long chapters demonstrating to well-to-do young people that when they face the dilemma that life offers them, they will be forced, if they are brave and honest, to take their places in the ranks of the socialists and embrace with them the cause of the social revolution. This might appear to be a simple truth. Yet in speaking to those who have been subjected to the influence of their middle class environment,

a new element which is already provoking cries of alarm in England, the production of wheat on a large industrial scale in America and Australia; when finally we glance over the new ideas invading the minds of peasants in the countries which consider themselves the strongholds of civilization, we shall see that the agrarian question emerges in various forms before the whole of Europe, in England as much as in Russia and in France as much as in Italy. We shall see that the present situation is becoming untenable and cannot last for long; that the day is not far off when society will be changed down to its very foundations and give place to a new order of things: an order in which the systems of property and culture will undergo deep modifica- tions and the cultivator of the soil will no longer be, as he is today, the pariah of society; when he will come to his place at the banquet of life and intellectual development beside the rest of us, when the village will cease to be a den of ignorance and will become a centre from which life and well-being will radiate over the land.

2.

In the preceding pages we saw the deplorable and indeed horrifying situation to which the cultivators of the soil, the peasants, have been con- demned in Ireland, Spain, Italy, and Russia. There can no longer be any doubt on this question; agrarian revolt is on the order of the day in such countries. But in the nations that flatter themselves in their civilization, like England, Germany, France, or even Switzerland, the situation of the farmers also becomes more and more untenable.

Take England as an example. Two centuries ago it was still a country where the farmer, working on land that belonged to him, enjoyed a cer- tain well-being. Today it is a land of great, fabulously rich proprietors, and a rural proletariat reduced to destitution. Four-fifths of all the arable land, some 23,976,000

But the peasant does not suffer this situation without a murmur. New ideas and aspirations for a better future are germinating in the rural areas that have been brought into contact with the great centres by the net- work of railways. From one day to another the peasant waits for the day when some event will abolish both rent and redemption, and leave him in possession of all the lands that he considers his by right. If an Arthur Young were to travel today in Russia, as he travelled in France on the eve of 1789, he would hear the same vows and the same words of hope he noted in his Travels.[3] In certain provinces an underground agitation has developed into a kind of guerilla warfare against the landlords. If political events were to expose the disorganization of the State and to excite popular passions, the starving villagers – helped and perhaps provoked by the rural middle class which is rapidly emerging – would embark on a whole series of agrarian revolts. Such revolts, breaking out without plan or organization over a large territory, but emerging and interconnecting on all sides, harassing armies and the government, and carrying on for years, might inaugurate and give strength to an immense revolution, with all its consequences for Europe as a whole.

But if the agrarian question is posed on such a grandiose scale in the countries we have just considered, if one day old Europe finds itself sur- rounded, as if in a circle of fire, by these peasant revolts, and the ex- propriation of the owners goes on widely in such countries, will not the centre of the continent and the so-called civilized countries feel the ef- fect? The answer cannot be in doubt. And when we have analyzed later on the agrarian situation in England, France, Germany, and Switzerland, when we have studied the powerful influence of

[3] Arthur Young (1741-1820) was an agricultural writer who travelled extensively in the rural areas of England, Wales, Ireland and France and described them in his published journals. His Travels during the Years 1787,1788,1789 is an extremely valuable document on peasant France immediately before the Revolution. Trans.

what sophistries one has to counteract, what prejudices one must try to overcome, what mercenary motives one must seek to push aside!

But I can be more direct in speaking to you, the young people who yourselves come out of the populace. The very force of circumstances makes you willing to become socialists, so long as you have the courage to reason and to act according to your conclusions. In fact, modern socialism has emerged out of the depths of the people's consciousness. If a few thinkers emerging from the bourgeoisie have given it the approval of science and the support of philosophy, the basis of the idea which they have given their own expression has nonetheless been the product of the collective spirit of the working people. The rational socialism of the International is still today our greatest strength, and it was elaborated in working class organization, under the first influence of the masses. The few writers who offered their help in the work of elaborating socialist ideas have merely been giving form to the aspirations that saw their first light among the workers.

To have emerged from the ranks of the working people and not to dedicate oneself to the triumph of socialism, is to misunderstand your own true interests, to deny your own cause and your historic mission at the same time.

Have you forgotten the times when you were still a child and would go on a winter's day to play in your dark alley? The cold bit into your shoulders through your thin clothes and the mud filled your broken down shoes. Sometimes you would see passing by at a distance plump and richly clothed children who looked haughtily down on you, but you knew perfectly well that these spoilt brats, so spick and span, were not worth as much as you and your comrades, either in intelligence, or good sense, or energy. But later, when you let yourself be shut up in a dirty workshop from five to six in the morning, and for twelve hours had to stand beside a noisy machine, and became a machine yourself in following day by day and years on

end the pitiless cadence of its movements, during all this time they-the others-were going happily to their lessons in colleges, in fine schools, in universities And now these same children, less intelligent but more educated than you, have become your bosses, and enjoy all the pleasures of life, all the benefits of civilization. And you-what expectations do you have?

You go home to a tiny apartment, dark and damp, where five or six human beings swarm in a few square metres, where your mother, exhausted by life and grown old from cares rather than from age, offers you as your meal some bread, potatoes and a blackish liquid which ironically passes as coffee; for your only distraction you have always the same question on the order of the day, that of knowing how you will pay the baker and the landlord tomorrow!

But must you really follow the same wretched way of life that your father and your mother have endured for the past thirty or forty years? Must you work all your life to obtain for a few the pleasures of wellbeing, of knowledge and of art, and keep for yourself the continual anxiety over that scrap of bread? Must you renounce for ever everything that makes life good so that you can devote yourself to providing all the advantages that are enjoyed by a handful of idlers? Must you wear yourself out, and know only poverty and starvation when unemployment comes close? Is that what you expect from life?

Maybe you will resign yourself. Seeing no way out of the situation, perhaps you will say to yourself: "Whole generations have suffered the same fate, and since nothing can be changed, I must endure it too! So let us work and try to live as best we can."

So be it! But if you do this, life itself will take on the task of enlightening you.

One day the crash will come, a crisis that is no longer temporary like those in the past, but one that will kill off whole industries, that will reduce to poverty thousands of workers and decimate their families. You will struggle, like the rest, against

the State and put up for sale without finding buyers. The population of the countryside is completely ruined in more than one province, and under the pressure of famine bands of peasants assemble and rebel against the taxes.

The situation is the same in Italy. In many provinces the farmers are completely ruined. Reduced to poverty by the State, the small peasant proprietor no longer pays his taxes and the State pitilessly seizes his plot of land. During a single year, some 6,644 small properties, with an average value of 99 francs, have been seized. Is it astonishing that in these provinces rebellion has become a permanent condition? Some- times it is a fanatic preaching religious communism who is followed by thousands of peasants, and these sectarians only disperse under the soldier's bullets; sometimes it is a village that goes en masse to seize the uncultivated lands of some proprietor and cultivate them on its own ac- count; sometimes it is the bands of hungry villagers who present them- selves before the town halls and demand bread and work under the threat of revolt.

Let nobody make much of the fact that these incidents are isolated! Were the revolts of the French peasants up to May 1789 any more numerous? Few in the beginning, and hardly conscious of their own na- ture, they sketched out the basis of the later revolution in the great cities.

Finally, at the eastern extremity of Europe, in Russia, the agrarian question appears under an aspect that in many ways reminds us of the situation in France before 1789. Personal serfdom is abolished there, and each agrarian commune now possesses some lands; but for the most part they are so poor or so scanty in area, the rates the commune pays the landlord in redemption or rent are so disproportionate to the value of the land, and the taxes which the State imposes are so heavy that now three- quarters at least of the peasants are reduced to the most frightful poverty. There is not enough bread to go round, and a single bad crop is enough for famine to rage over vast regions and to decimate their populations.

invited by the secret societies, upheld by the village merchants who would very much like to create for their profit a new 1793, will at last emerge from his hovel to do what so many agitators advise him to do today; he will take his torch to the mansions, gather for himself the lords' wheat, and, expelling their agents and demolishing their boun- daries, seize on the lands he has coveted so many years.

If we transport ourselves to the other extremity of the continent, to Spain, we find an analogous situation. In some areas, like Andalusia and the province of Valencia, where landed property is concentrated in a few hands, legions of hungry peasants have formed leagues and carry on an unceasing guerilla war against the owners. At night the mansions of the landlords are destroyed, the plantations are incinerated over hundreds of acres at a time, the crops burn, and whoever denounces the perpetrators of such acts to the authorities, as well as the alcalde who dares to pursue them, falls under the knives of the League.[2]

In the province of Andalusia there is a permanent strike among small farmers who refuse to pay their rents; let anyone look out who dares break this mutual agreement! A strong secret organization whose proclamations are fixed at night to the trees, constantly reminds those who have taken their oaths that if they betray the general cause they will be heavily punished by the destruction of their crops and herds and often also by death.

In regions where property is more broken up, it is the Spanish State itself that sets about provoking discontent. It crushes the small proprietor with taxes – national, provincial, municipal, ordinary and extraordinary – to such an extent that one can count in tens of thousands the small farms confiscated by

[2] Presumably Kropotkin is talking here of the terrorist group known as Los Desheredados (The Disinherited). The majority of the anarchists in Spain expressed disapproval of their methods. Trans.

that calamity. But you will soon see for yourself how your wife, your child, your friend, are succumbing gradually to their privations, weakening before your eyes, and, for want of food and care, dying on some wretched pallet, while life, careless of those who perish, rolls on in its joyous multitudes down the streets of the great city, brilliant with sunshine. Then you will understand how repulsive this society is, you will think about the causes of the crisis, and you will plumb me depths of that inequity which exposes thousands of men to a handful of idlers; you will realise that the socialists are right when they say that society could and should be transformed from top to bottom.

Another day, when your employer makes yet another reduction in wages, to rob you of a few pence to augment his fortune even farther, you will protest, but he will answer arrogantly: "Go and eat grass if you do not want to work for that rate." You will then understand that your employer is not only seeking to shear you like a sheep, but that he also thinks of you as belonging to an inferior race; not content with holding you in his claws through the wages system, he seeks to make you a slave in every other respect. Then you will either bend your back, renouncing any feeling of human dignity and end up suffering all kinds of humiliation; or the blood will rise to your head, you will see with horror the slope down which you are sliding, you will resist and, thrown out on the street, you will understand when the socialists say: "Revolt! Revolt against economic slavery, for that is the cause of all slaveries!" Then you will come to take your place in the ranks of the socialists, and will work with them for the abolition of all slaveries: economic, political and social.

One day you may hear the story of the young girl whom you once liked so much for her open gaze, her slender figure and her animated conversation. Having struggled year after year against poverty, she left her village for the city. She knew life there would be hard, but at least she hoped to earn her bread honestly. But by now you can guess the fate that

overtook her. Courted by a young bourgeois, she let herself be trapped by his fine words, and gave herself to him with the passion of youth, to find herself abandoned at the end of a year, with a baby in her arms. Ever brave, she did not cease struggle, but she succumbed in the unequal fight against hunger and cold and ended up dying in some hospital or other. What can you do about it? Perhaps you will push aside your painful memories with a few stupid words: "She isn't the first or the last!" you will say, and one evening we will hear you in some cafe, seated among other brutes of your kind, soiling the young woman's name with filthy slanders. Or perhaps your memories will move your heart; you will seek out the contemptible seducer to throw his crime in his face. You will think about the causes of these incidents of which you hear every day, and you will understand that they cannot cease while mankind is divided into two camps; the poor on one side and on the other the idlers and the playboys with their fine words and brutal appetites. You will understand that it is time to level out this gulf of separation, and you will hasten to range yourself among the socialists.

And you, women of the people, has this story left your cold? As you caress the blonde head of that child which crouches beside you, do you never think of the fate that awaits it if the present social order does not change? Do you never give a thought to the future that is in store for your young sister, for your children? Do you want your son to vegetate as your father vegetated, with no care but the need for bread, no pleasures but those of the tavern? Do you want your husband and your boy to be for ever at the mercy of the first comer who may chance to have inherited from his father an interest to exploit? Would you like to see them always remaining the slaves of the employer, the cannon fodder of the powerful, the dung that serves to fatten the fields of the rich?

No, a thousand times no! I know very well that your blood boiled when you heard that your husband, after loudly pro-

tle will have been ex- terminated, his crops burnt, and he himself condemned to death by the League[1] or some other secret society. The situation becomes untenable for the landowners themselves; in certain districts the value of land has fallen by two-thirds; in others the landowners are proprietors only in name; they can only live on their own land under the protection of a squad of police camped at their doors in iron pillboxes. The soil lies fal- low; during 1879 alone the area of cultivated lands diminished by 33,000 hectares; the reduction in income for the proprietors, according to the Financial Reformer, was not less than 250 million francs.

The situation is so grave that Mr. Gladstone, after coming to power, made a formal agreement with the Irish M.R's to present a bill, according to which the great landowners would be expropriated in the public inter- est, and the land, after being declared national property, would be sold to the people in parcels that might be paid for in twenty-five years in annual instalments. But it is evident that such a bill will never be voted by the British Parliament, since it would at the same time deal a mortal blow to landed property in England itself. Thus there is no reason for us to as- sume that the conflict can peacefully be brought to an end. It is certainly possible that a general uprising of the peasants might be launched once again as in 1846; even if the situation merely remains the same, or, rather, steadily grows worse, we can foresee that the day is not far distant when the people of Ireland will finally reach the end of their patience after so many sufferings and so many broken promises. Let a propitious occasion appear, such as a momentary disorganization of power in England, and the Irish peasant,

[1] The Land League was founded by Michael Davitt in October 1879 with aims of fair rent, fixity of tenure and free sale of the right to occupancy. When Charles Stewart Parnell was arrested for inflammatory nationalist speeches, the League called on tenants to refuse payment of rents. Thereupon the British government suppressed it as a legal organization in October 1881, but it continued as a powerful secret society. Trans.

We must grant that, thirty or forty years ago, this objection had at least an appearance of validity in certain countries. A degree of well- being in some regions, and a good deal of resigned apathy in others, resulted in the peasants making little or no manifestation of discontent. But today this is no longer the case. The concentration of property in the hands of the wealthiest individuals, and the steady growth of a proletariat of the fields, the heavy taxation with which the States bear down on agriculture; the introduction into farming of widescale machine production on an industrial scale; the competition from America and Australia; and finally the rapid exchange of ideas that today penetrate even the most isolated hamlets; all these circumstances have meant that the conditions of farming have changed for all to see over the past thirty years. At this moment Europe finds itself in the presence of a vast agrarian movement that will soon embrace it entirely and give the grow- ing revolution a greater and quite different significance than if it had been limited solely to the towns.

Who does not read the news from Ireland, always the same? Half the country is in revolt against the landlords. The peasants no longer pay their rents to the owners of the land; even those who wish to do so dare not, for fear of being targeted by the Land League, a powerful secret or- ganization that extends its ramifications through the villages and punishes those who fail to obey its dictate: "Refusal of Rents." The land- owners are powerless to continue demanding rent. If they wanted to recover the rents owed to them at this moment, they would have to mobi- lize a hundred thousand policemen, and this would provoke a revolt. If some landowner decides to evict a nonpaying tenant, he has to hurl into the fray at least a hundred policemen, for it will become a matter or resis- tance, sometimes passive and sometimes armed, by several thousand neighbouring peasants. And if he succeeds, he will not find a farmer willing to take the risk of occupying the property. Even if he should find one, the latter will soon be forced to decamp, for his cat-

claiming a strike, ended up accepting—cap in hand-the conditions contemptuously dictated in a haughty tone by the big business men! I know that you admired those Spanish women who went into the first ranks to present their breasts to the soldiers' bayonets during a popular uprising!

I know that you repeat with respect the name of the woman who lodged a bullet in a satrap's breast when he chose one day to outrage a socialist held in prison. And I know also that your hearts beat when you read how the women among the people of Paris gathered together under a rain of shells to encourage "their men" in heroism.

I know all this, and that is why I do not doubt that you also will end by coming to join those who work for the conquest of the future.

All of you, sincere young people, men and women, peasants, workers, clerks and soldiers, will understand your rights and come to us; you will come to work with your brothers in preparing the revolution which, abolishing every kind of slavery, shattering all chains, breaking with the old traditions and opening new horizons to all humanity, will finally succeed in establishing in human societies the true Equality, the true Liberty, work for all, and for all the full enjoyment of the fruits of their labour, the full enjoyment of all their faculties; a **life** that is rational, humane and happy!

Do not let anyone tell you that we are only a tiny handful, too weak ever to attain the grand objective at which we aim. Let us count ourselves and see how many of us there are who suffer from injustice. We peasants who work for another and eat oats to leave the wheat for the master-we are millions of men; we are so numerous that we alone form the mass of the people. We workers who wear rags and weave silks and velours, we too are multitudes, and when the factory whistles allow us our brief period of rest we flood the streets and squares like a roaring sea. We soldiers who follow the beat of the drum and receive bullets so that our of officers can win medals and ranks,

we poor fools who up to now have known nothing better than to shoot our brothers, it would be enough for us to turn our rifles for the faces of those decorated personages who command us to turn pale. All we who suffer and who are outraged, we are an immense crowd; we are an ocean in which all could be submerged. As soon as we have the will, a moment would be enough for justice to be done.

Chapter 12: The Agrarian Question

1.

A vast question presents itself at this moment to the European continent. It is the agrarian question, the question of knowing what new form of possession and cultivation of the soil the near future reserves for us. To whom will the land belong? Who will cultivate it and how will it be cultivated? Nobody fails to understand the gravity of the problem. Even less does he fail to understand, if he has been follow- ing attentively what has been going on in Ireland, in England, in Spain, in Italy, in some parts of Germany and in Russia, and this question indeed stands forward at this moment in all its magnitude. In the wretched villages, in the midst of that class of landworkers so despised up to the present, an immense revolution is under way.

The strongest objection that up to now has been made to socialism consists of the argument that if the social question interests the city workers, it does not have the same attraction for country dwellers; that if the town workers willingly accept the ideas of the abolition of individual property and become stirred up about the expropriation of the manufac- turers and factory owners, it is not the same with the peasants; the latter, we are told, distrust the socialists and if – one day – the city workers try to realize their plans, the peasants will soon make them see reason.

name. Need one dwell at length on the perils that result from this? The emancipation of the proletariat will not even be possible while the revolutionary movement fails to embrace the countryside. The insurgent communes will be unable to maintain themselves for a single day, if the insurrection does not spread at the same time among the villages. When taxes, mortgages and rents are abolished, when the institutions that protect them are scattered to the four winds, it is certain that the villages will understand the advantages of that revolution. At the same time it would be imprudent to count on the diffusion of revolutionary ideas in the villages without advance preparation. We must first find out what the peasant needs, how the revolution is understood in the villages, and how they think of resolving the thorny question of landed property. We must let the peasant know in advance what the workers of the towns-their natural allies- are thinking, and we must assure them that there is nothing to fear in the way of measures that may be harmful to agriculture. As for the workers in the cities, they must accustom themselves to respecting the peasant and marching in a common accord with him.

But for that to happen the worker must accept *the obligation to help the propaganda in the villages.* In each town there must appear a small but special organization, a branch of the Agrarian League, to carry on propaganda among the peasants. This kind of propaganda must be considered a duty, in the same way as propaganda in the industrial centres.

The beginnings will be hard, but therein lies the success of the revolution. It will be victorious only on the day when the workers in the factories and the cultivators in the fields march hand in hand to the conquest of equality for all, carrying happiness into the cottage as well as into the buildings of the great industrial agglomerations.

Chapter 7: War!

The spectacle offered by Europe at the present moment is very sad to see, but it is also very edifying. On the one side, there is a coming and going of diplomats and statesmen which increases visibly whenever the air of the old continent begins to smell of gunpowder. Alliances are made and dismantled; human beings are traded and sold like cattle to make sure of alliances. "So many millions of heads guaranteed by our house to yours; so many acres to feed them, so many ports to export their wool," and he who can best dupe the others in such trafficking comes out the winner. This is what in political jargon is called diplomacy.

On the other side there is no ending the flow of armaments. Every day brings us new inventions for the better extermination of our fellows, new expenditures, new borrowings, new taxes. Crying up patriotism, promoting chauvinism, fanning the hatreds between nations, become the most lucrative lines in politics and journalism alike. Childhood has not been spared; children are enrolled in battalions, and taught to hate the Prussians, the English, the Italians; they are trained in blind obedience to the governments of the moment, whether they be blue, white or black. And when the age of twenty-one had sounded for them, they will be loaded down like mules with ammunition, rations and tools, guns will be thrust into their hands, and they will be told to march to the sound of the trumpet, and to fight like savage beasts without ever asking why or for what purpose. Whether they face Germans or Italians who are starving to death-or their own brothers who have rebelled against need-the trumpet sounds, and men must be killed!

This is the conclusion of all the wisdom of our governments and our teachers! This is all they have been able to offer us as an ideal, in an age when the poor of all countries stretch out their hands to each other across the frontiers!

"Ah! you did not want socialism? Very well, you shall have war, war for thirty years, war for fifty years!" said Alexander Herzen[1] after 1848. And you have it! If the cannon ceases to thunder for a while in the world, it is just to take breath, to start again somewhere else with renewed vigour, while the European war-the grand tournament of the peoples -has been a threat for the past ten years, without anyone knowing why we shall be fighting, or beside whom, or against whom, or in the name of what principles, or to safeguard what interests!

In the old days, if there was a war, at least one knew why people were killing each other. "Another king has insulted ours; let us overwhelm his subjects." "Some emperor wants to take away one of our provinces! Let us die to keep it for His Most Christian Majesty!" People fought to sustain the rivalries of kings. It was stupid, but at least in such cases the kings could enrol only a few thousand men. But these days whole peoples throw themselves upon each other, and why the Devil do they do it?

Kings no longer count in matters of war. Victoria does not take offense at the insults that are showered on her in France; the English would not stir to avenge her. But can you guarantee that within two years French and English soldiers will not be at each other's throats over supremacy in Egypt?[2] It is the same

[1] The Russian liberal thinker, Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) went into voluntary exile from his country in 1847, and so he saw the revolutions of 1848 at close hand and was disillusioned by their outcome. Nevertheless, he devised a "Russian Socialism," a populist doctrine he felt suited to his country, and became a great influence on movements of rebellion in Russia through his expatriate periodicals, The Northern Star and The Bell. Trans.

[2] Ever since 1798 when Napoleon led an expedition to Egypt and was expelled by the British, there was rivalry between the two powers which was exacerbated when the Suez Canal was built between 1865 and 1869 by a

horizons opening out before it. Men who hold power will hinder that impulse, without producing anything on their own of which they might be capable if they remained in the heart of the people, working beside them in elaborating a new organization instead of closing themselves up in offices and exhausting their energies in idle debate. That will be a hindrance and a peril; powerless to do good but formidable in its possibilities of evil; thus, it has no reason to exist."

No matter how just and natural this reasoning may be, it still clashes with secular prejudices, accumulated and approved by those who have an interest in maintaining the religion of government alongside the religion of property and godly religion.

This prejudice, the last of the series: God, Property, Government, still exists and it is a danger to the forthcoming revolution. But one can already see it crumbling away. "We will see to our own affairs," the workers are saying, "without awaiting the orders of a government, and we will go over the heads of those who seek to impose themselves in the guise of priest, proprietor or ruler. And for this reason we must hope that the anarchist party will continue to fight vigorously against the religion of governmentalism, and that it will not be diverted from its own path by letting itself be dragged into power struggles; in our view, we can all hope that in the few years left before the revolution, the prejudice in favour of government will be aufficiently broken down and will no longer have the power of leading the working masses in the wrong direction.

At the same time there has been one regrettable deficiency in the recent popular gatherings. Nothing, or almost nothing, has been done in the countryside. Activity has been restricted to the towns. The country does not seem to exist for the urban workers. Even the orators who speak of the character of the coming revolution avoid mentioning the rural areas and the land. They are familiar neither with the peasant nor with his desires, and so they take no chances of speaking in his

stride. In the shops of our cities there are enough garments to clothe everybody, Iying there unsold in the midst of general poverty. There are even enough objects of luxury for everyone to pick and choose according to his taste."

That is how the working mass envisages the revolution: The immediate introduction of anarchist communism and the free organization of production. These are two established points, and in this respect the Communes of the revolution that growls at our doors will not repeat the errors of their predecessors who, by shedding their blood so generously, have cleared the path to the future.

The same kind of agreement has not yet been established-though that agreement is not far off-on another, no less important point: the question of government.

We know that the two schools are facing each other, completely divided on this question. "On the very day of the revolution," says one group, "we must constitute a government to assume power. Strong and resolute, this government will *make* the revolution by decreeing this and that and coercing people to obey its decrees."

"What a sad illusion!" say the others. "Any central government, setting out to rule a nation, will inevitably be formed of disparate elements, conservative in its essence, and nothing more than a hindrance to the revolution. It will merely hobble the Communes which are ready to march forward, without being able to inspire the backward Communes with a revolutionary urge. The same will happen in the heart of an insurgent Commune. Either the communal government will do no more than sanction what has already been done, and it will then be a useless and potentially dangerous mechanism; or it will attempt to act with prudence and regulate what should be elaborated freely by the people themselves if it is to be viable; it will apply theories where society should be elaborating new forms of communal life with the creative force that rises up in the social organism when it breaks its chains and sees new and broad

in the East. However autocratic and ill-natured a monarch he may be, Alexander-of-all-the Russias will swallow all the insolences of Andrassy and Salisbury without budging from his den in Gatchina,[3] so long as the bankers of Petersburg and the industrialists of Moscow-who these days call themselves "patriots"-have not given him the order to set his armies in motion.

In Russia, as in England, in Germany as in France, men no longer fight for the good pleasure of kings; they fight for the integrity of revenueS and for the growing wealth of the Three Powerful Ones, Rothschild, Schneider, Anzin;[4] for the benefit of the barons of high finance and industry. The rivalries between kings have been superseded by the rivalries between bourgeois societies.

Indeed, people do still speak of "political preponderance," but try to translate that metaphysical entity into material facts; examine how the political preponderance of Germany, for example, makes itself manifest at this moment, and you will see that it is quite simply a matter of economic preponderance in international markets. What Germany, France, Russia, Eng-

French combine led by De Lesseps. However, the British took over the canal in 1875 and from 1883 gained control over Egypt as a necessary link on the great route to India. Trans.

[3] Count Gyula Andrassy, prime minister of Austro-Hungary, and The Earl of Salisbury, British foreign secretary, were both thorns in sides of the Russian autocrats. It was Andrassy who with Bismarck created in 1879 the Austro-German alliance that would be turned against Russia in 1914, while Salisbury exerted pressure on Russia in order to avert war in the Balkans between that country and Turkey in 1878. Gatchina had been the situation of the tsar's summer place since the days of Catherine the Great Trans.

[4] The great capitalist dynasties of 19th century continental Europe. The Rothschilds were merchant bankers on a large scale, operating in the major European capitals and wielding power through their loans to governments; the Schneiders were French manufacturers who began by building the first French locomotive in 1838 and the first river steamboat in 1840, and eventually branched out into armaments, dominating that industry, as a French equivalent to Krupp, by World War I. Trans.

land, and Austria are all trying to win at this moment is not military preponderance; it is economic domination. It is the right to impose their goods and their customs tariffs on their neighbours; the right to exploit industrially backward peoples; the privilege of building railways in countries that do not have them and in this way becoming masters of the frontiers; the right, in the last resort, to appropriate from a neighbour either a port that will activate commerce, or a province where surplus merchandise can be unloaded.

When we fight today, it is to guarantee our great industrialists a profit of 30%, to assure the financial barons their domination at the Bourse, and to provide the shareholders of mines and railways with their incomes of tens of millions of dollars. This is so evident that if we were just a little more consistent, we would replace the birds of prey on our flags by golden calves and other ancient emblems by bags of gold, and change the names of our regiments, hitherto borrowed from the princes of the blood, to those of the princes of industry and finance; a Third Schneider regiment, a Tenth Anzin, a Twentieth Rothschild. We would know at least for whom we were doing the slaughtering.

Opening new markets, imposing one's own merchandise, whether good or bad, is the basis of all present-day politics-European and continental-and the true cause of nineteenth century wars.

In the last century England was the first to inaugurate the system of large industry for export. It piled its workers into the cities, yoked them to rationalised work patterns, multiplied production and began to accumulate mountains of products in its warehouses. But these goods were not intended for the ragged folk who made the cotton and woollen fabrics and were paid just enough to survive and multiply. The ships of England ploughed their way through the oceans, seeking buyers on the European continent, in Asia, in Oceania, in America, certain of not finding competitors. A black poverty reigned in the towns,

and the land itself, were distinguished as one type, while housing, manufactured products, clothing, provisions were distinguished as another. One class should become collective property; the other was destined, according to the learned representatives of that school, to remain private property.

They have tried to establish that distinction. But the good sense of the people has quickly seen through it all, understanding that the distinction is illusory and impossible to establish. Defective theoretically, it falls down before the practice of life. The workers have realized that the houses they inhabit, the coal and gas they burn, the food which the human body burns to sustain its life, the clothes with which people cover themselves to sustain their existence, the books they read to instruct themselves, not to speak of the pleasure they gain from living, are all of them integral parts of life, as necessary for the success of production and the progressive development of humanity, as the machines, manufacturers, raw materials and other factors in production. They have understood that to sustain property for the sake of its riches would be to maintain inequality, oppression, exploitation, and to paralyse in advance the results of partial expropriation. Clambering over the obstacles put in their way by the collectivism of the theoreticians, they proceed directly towards the more simple and more practical pattern of anti-authoritarian communism.

In fact, in their gatherings, the revolutionary workers have clearly affirmed their right to the whole of social wealth and the need to abolish individual property, as much to defend the values of consumption as those of production. "On the day of the revolution, let us seize hold of *all* wealth, of *all* the resources accumulated in the towns and cities, and we will hold them in common"-so say the spokesmen of the working mass, and the hearers confirm it by their unanimous assent.

"Let everyone take from the heap what he needs, and be sure that in the storehouses of our cities there will be enough provisions to feed everyone until free production gets into its

They will abolish individual property by themselves taking possession, in the name of the whole people and by violent expropriation of the whole of social wealth which had been accumulated by the work of past generations. They will not stop short at expropriating the owners of social capital by a decree that will remain a dead letter; they will take possession and establish their rights of usufruct immediately. They will organize the workshops so that they continue production. They will exchange their hovels for healthy habitations in the houses of the well-todo; they will immediately find ways of utilising the riches accumulated in the cities; they will take possession of it as if all this wealth had never been stolen from them by the bourgeoisie. Once the industrial baron who seized his booty from the worker has been evicted, production will continue, shaking off the fetters that hinder it, abolishing the speculations that kill it, getting rid of the muck that hinders its development, and changing it according to the needs of the moment under the impetus provided by freedom of work. "Never did people work in France as in 1793, after the land was torn out of the hands of the lords," said Michelet.[2] Never have people worked as they will work on the day work becomes free, the day on which every kind of progress achieved by the worker will contribute to the well-being of the whole Commune.

On the subject of social wealth a distinction has been made that has divided the socialist party. The school that nowadays calls itself *collectivist,* substituting a kind of doctrinaire collectivism for the collectivism of the former International (which was nothing more than antiauthoritarian communism), tried to establish a distinction between the capital used in production and the wealth that sustained the necessities of living. Machines, factories, means of transport and communication,

[2] Jules Michelet (1798-1874) was the greatest of French romantic historians. His monumental Histoire de la France and his Histoire de la Revolution frangais are patriotic epics which more than any other works created the great French national myths, of Joan of Arc and of the Revolution. Trans.

but the manufacturer and the merchant grew visibly rich; the wealth drawn from abroad accumulated in the hands of a few, and the economists applauded and urged their compatriots to follow suit.

Already, at the end of the last century, France was beginning on the same evolution. By transferring power, by attracting the bare-footed peasants to the towns and by enriching the bourgeoisie, the revolution gave a new impulse to economic evolution. At this point the English bourgeoisie became alarmed, even more than they had been by the republican declarations and the blood spilt in Paris; supported by the aristocracy, they declared a war to the death on the French bourgeoisie who threatened to close the European markets to English products.

We know the outcome of that war. France was defeated, but it had won its place in the markets. The two bourgeoisies-English and French -even at one time made a touching alliance; they recognized each other as brothers.

But France, on her side, soon went beyond the limit. Through production for export, she tried to monopolize the markets, without taking into account the industrial progress that was moving slowly from the West into the East and dominating new countries. The French.bourgeoisie sought to broaden the circle of its profits. For eighteen years it placed itself under the heel of the Third Napoleon, always hoping that the usurper would impose economic rule over the whole of Europe; it only abandoned him when he showed himself incapable of this.

Now it was a new nation, Germany, that introduced into its territory the same economic regime. She also depopulated her fields and piled the hungry people into the towns, which doubled their population in a few years. She also began mass production. A formidable industry, armed with the latest equipment, supported by technical and scientific education lavishly provided, in its turn piled up products destined not for those

who made them, but for export and the enrichment of the masters. Capital accumulates and seeks advantageous places of investment in Asia, Africa, Turkey, Russia; the stock exchange in Berlin rivals that in Paris and seeks to dominate it.

At this point a common cry burst out from the heart of the German bourgeoisie let us unify under no matter what flag, even that of Prussia, and profit from that power to impose our products and our tariffs on our neighbours, end lay hold of a good port on the Baltic and on the Adriatic as Soon as possible! They wished to break the military power of France which had been threatening for twenty years to lay down the economic law of Europe and to dictate its commercial treaties.

The war of 1870 was the consequence of these developments. France no longer dominates the markets; it is Germany that seeks to dominate them, and she also, through the thirst for gain, seeks always to extend her exploitation, without regard for the crises and crashes, the insecurity and poverty that eat away at her economic structure. The coasts of Africa, the paddies of Korea, the plains of Poland, the steppes of Russia, the pusztas of Hungary, the Bulgarian valleys filled with roses-all excite the greed of German speculators. And every time such a speculator travels over these sparsely cultivated plains, and through their towns which have so little industry, and beside their quiet rivers, his heart bleeds at the spectacle. His imagination tells him how he might extract whole sacks of gold from these untouched riches, how he would bend these uncultivated people under the yoke of his capital. He swears that one day he will carry ”civilization,” which is what he calls exploitation, into the East. While he waits for this, he will try to impose his merchandise and his railways on Italy, on Austria and on Russia.

- But these countries in their turn are freeing themselves from the economic tutelage of their neighbours. They also are slowly entering the orbit of the ”industrial” countries, and their newly born bourgeoisies ask nothing better than

pression of the feelings that animate the socialists of the two worlds. Our numbers can better be counted in this way than by any kind of bulletin, for they show aspirations that have developed in full freedom without the influence of electoral tactics.

In fact, the workers, when they gather on this day, do not limit themselves in their meetings to praising the heroism of the Parisian proletariat or to demanding vengeance for the May massacres. While they reinvigorate themselves by memories of the heroic struggle in Paris, they are already forging an alliance that extends into the future. They discuss the lessons that must be drawn for the forthcoming revolution from the Commune of 1871; they ask each other what were the mistakes of the Commune, not to criticise individual men, but to emphasize how the presumptions about property and authority among the workingclass organizations of the time hindered the revolutionary idea from opening out, developing, and illuminating the whole world with its vivifying light.

The lessons of 1871 have profited the workers of the whole world so that, breaking with old prejudices, they have been able to state clearly and simply how they understand their revolution. From now onwards it is certain that the next uprising of the Communes will not be a simple *communalist* movement. Those who still think that an independent Commune must be elected to try out economic reforms are lagging behind the development of the popular mind. It is by revolutionary socialist actions, by abolishing individual property, that the Communes of the next revolution will affirm and constitute their independence.

The day on which, in consequence of the development of the revolutionary situation, the governments are swept out by the people and disorganization is created in the ranks of the bourgeoisie who can only survive through the protection of the State, the insurgent people will not wait for any old government in its marvellous wisdom to decree economic reforms.

But, thanks to its eminently popular character, it started off a new era in the series of revolutions, and through its ideas was the precursor of the great social revolution. The unprecedented massacres, cowardly and ferocious at the same time, by which the bourgeoisie celebrated its fall, the ignoble vengeance which the executioners have exercised for the past nine years on their prisoners, these cannibalistic orgies have driven an abyss between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat that can never be closed. When the next revolution comes, the people will know what they have to do; they will know what awaits them if they do not carry off a decisive victory, and they will act accordingly.

In fact, we know now that the day when France bristles with insurgent Communes the people will no longer feel the need to give themselves a government and expect revolutionary initiatives from that government. After having swept out the parasites that feed upon them, they will seize hold of all social wealth to own it together according to the principles of anarchist communism. And when they have completely abolished property, the government and the State, they will freely constitute themselves according to the necessities dictated by life itself. Breaking its chains, and overthrowing its idols, humanity will then march towards a better future, no longer recognizing either masters or slaves, and holding in veneration only the noble martyrs who paid with their blood and sufferings for those first attempts at emancipation that have lightened us on our path towards the conquest of liberty.

3.

The *fetes* and public meetings organized on the 18th of March in all the towns where there are organized socialist groups, deserve our attention, not merely as a demonstration by the army of the working class, but even more as an ex-

to enrich themselves through export. In only a few years Russia and Italy have made a prodigious leap forward in the extension of their industries, and since the peasants, reduced to the blackest of poverty, can buy nothing, it is for export that the Russian, Italian and Austrian industrialists are striving. They need markets now, and as those of Europe are already taken up, it is on Asia and Africa that they are forced to concentrate their efforts, condemned inevitably to come to blows because they have failed to agree on sharing out the spoil.

What alliances could stand firm in such a situation, created by the very character given to industry by those who direct it? The alliance of Germany and Russia is a matter of pure formality; Alexander and William may embrace as much as they choose, but the bourgeoisie emerging in Russia cordially detests the German bourgeoisie, which repays it in the same coin. We remember the general outcry raised in the German press when the Russian government augmented the tariffs by a third. "A war against Russia-say the German bourgeoisie and the workers who follow them-would be even more popular than the war of 1870."

So what? Is not the famous alliance between Germany and Austria also written in sand, and are these two powers-which means their respective bourgeoisies-very far off a serious dispute over tariffs? And those twin siblings, Austria and Hungary, are they not also on the point of declaring a tariff war-their interests being diametrically opposed on the matter of exploiting the southern Slavs? And even France, is it not itself divided on matters of tariffs?

Indeed, you did not want socialism, and you shall have war! You are in for thirty years of war, if the revolution does not put an end to this situation which is as absurd as it is ignoble. But this you must also know. Arbitration, equilibrium, the suppression of permanent armies, disarmament, all are beautiful dreams with no practical meaning. Only the revolution,

having put instruments and machines, raw materials and the whole wealth of society in the hands of the worker and reorganized the whole of production so as to satisfy the needs of those who produce everything, can put an end to wars over markets.

Each working for all, and all for each-that is the only condition which can lead to peace among nations, who demand it loudly but are frustrated by those who hold the monopoly of social wealth.

It was the same with the governmental principle. In proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle; but as this principle had only feebly penetrated people's minds at this time, they stopped in midcourse, and in the heart of the Commune the people continued to declare themselves in favour of the old governmental principle by giving themselves a Communal Council copied from the old municipal councils.

If we admit, in fact, that a central government is absolutely useless to regulate the relations of Communes between each other, why do we grant the necessity to regulate the mutual relations of the groups that constitute the Commune? And if we concede to the free initiative of the communes the task of coming to an understanding between themselves on enterprises that concern several cities at once, how can we refuse this same initiative to the groups of which a Commune is composed? A government within the Commune has no more right to exist than a government over the Commune.

But in 1871 the people of Paris, which had overthrown so many governments, was only involved in its first attempt at revolt against the governmental system itself: it submitted to governmental fetichism and gave itself a government. We know the consequence. It sent its devoted sons to the Hotel-de-Ville. Indeed, immobilised there by fetters of red tape, forced to discuss when action was needed, and losing the sensitivity that comes from continued contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to impotence. Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre-the people-they themselves paralysed the popular initiative.

Brought into being during a transitory period when the ideas of socialism and authority were suffering a profound modification;; born at the end of a war, in an isolated situation and under the threat of Prussian cannon, the Paris Commune was doomed to succumb.

ways takes a certain time to develop, to permeate the masses and to be translated into action, and this time was lacking for me Paris Commune.

It was lacking all the more because, for the last ten years, the idea of modern socialism has been going through a transition period. The Commune was born, indeed, between two epochs in the development of modern socialism. In 1871 the authoritarian, governmental, and more or less religious socialism of 1848 no longer retained its influence over the more practical and libertarian minds of our own epoch. Where will you find today a Parisian who would agree to shut himself up in a phalansterian barracks? On the other hand, collectivism, which wanted to harness to the same chariot both the wage system and collective property, remained incomprehensible, unattractive and beset with practical difficulties of application. And free communism, anarchist communism, had barely seen the light of day and hardly dared confront the attacks of the worshippers of government.

Indecision reigned in people's minds, and the socialists themselves did not feel audacious enough to hasten to the destruction of individual property, since they did not have a well defined objective in view. So everyone let themselves be lulled by the reasoning that the somnolent have been repeating for centuries: "Let us make sure of victory first! Then we will see what can be done."

Make sure of victory first! As if there was any way of transforming society into a free commune without laying a hand on property! As if there could be any real way of defeating the enemy so long as the great mass of the people was not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, in witnessing the arrival of material, moral and intellectual well-being for all! They sought to consolidate the Commune first of all while postponing the social revolution for later on, while the only effective way of proceeding was *to consolidate the Commune by the social revolution!*

Chapter 8: Revolutionary Minorities

"ALL that you say is very true," our critics often say to us. "Your ideal of anarchist communism is **excellent,** and its realization would in fact lead to well-being and peace on earth; **but so few** want it, and so few understand it, and so **few** have the devotion that is needed to work for its achievement! You are only a tiny minority, your feeble groups scattered here and there, lost in the middle of an indifferent mass, and you face a terrible enemy, well-organized and in control of armies, of capital, of education. The struggle you have undertaken is beyond your powers." This is the objection we hear constantly from many of our critics and often even from our friends. Let us see what truth there is in it.

That our anarchist groups are only a small minority in comparison with the tens of millions who populate France, Spain, Italy and Germany -nothing could be more true. Groups who represent a new idea have always begun by being no more than a minority. But is that really against us? Just now, it is the opportunists who are the majority: must we then, by chance, become opportunists? Up to 1790 it was the royalists, the constitutionalists, who formed the majority in France; should the republicans, then, have renounced their republican ideas and joined the royalists, when France was making great strides towards the abolition of royalty?

It is not important that numerically we are a minority; that is not the real question. What is important is to know whether the ideas of anarchist communism are in harmony with the

evolution which is taking place in human consciousness, especially among peoples of the Latin race. But on this subject it is clear that revolution is not taking the direction of authoritarianism; it is taking the direction of the most complete freedom of the individual, of the producing and consuming group, of the commune, of the collective, of free federation. Evolution is being produced, not in the direction of proprietary individualism, but in the direction of production and consumption arranged in common. In the large cities communism scares no one, of course, so long as it is a question of anarchist communism. In the villages the same inclination prevails, and apart from a few areas of France where special circumstances exist, the peasant is now progressing in many ways towards the common use of the implements of work. That is why, each time we expose our ideas to the great masses, each time we speak to them of the revolution as we understand it in simple and comprehensible terms, giving practical examples, we are always greeted by their applause, in the industrial centres as well as in the villages.

And could it be otherwise? If anarchy and communism had been the product of philosophic speculations, created by savants in the dim lights of their studies, these two principles would have found no echo. They are the statements of those who understand what the workers and peasants are saying when they are released for a day or so from the daily routine and set themselves thinking about a better future. They are statements of the slow evolution that has occurred in people's minds during the course of this century. They project the popular conception of the transformation that must soon begin to carry justice, solidarity and brotherhood into our towns and our countryside. Born of the people, these ideas are acclaimed by the people every time they are exposed to them in a comprehensible manner.

There in fact lies the true power of the ideas of anarchism and communism, and not in the number of active adherents,

conscious, but nonetheless very pronounced and penetrating all its actions, is the idea of the social revolution, seeking to establish at last, after so many centuries of struggle, true liberty and true equality for all.

It was the revolution of the "rabble" marching to conquer its rights.

It is true that people have sought and still seek to distort the true meaning of that revolution, and to represent it as a simple attempt to conquer independence for Paris and turn it into a petty State within France. Yet nothing is less true. Paris did not seek to isolate itself from France, just as it did not seek to conquer it by arms; it made no attempt to enclose itself within its walls like a Benedictine within his cloister; it was not inspired by a narrow parochial outlook. If it demanded its independence, and sought to prevent the intrusion into its affairs of any kind of central power, it was because it saw in that independence a means of quietly elaborating the bases of future organisation and of developing within itself a social revolution that would completely transform the system of production and exchange by basing it on justice; would completely modify human relations by establishing them on a foundation of equality; and reform our social morality by giving it as a basis, the principles of equity and solidarity.

Thus, communal independence was only a means for the people of Paris, and the social revolution was its end.

This end would certainly have been accomplished if the revolution on the 18th of March had been able to follow its free course, and if the people of Paris had not been mowed down, sabred, shot and disembowelled by the assassins of Versailles. To find a simple idea comprehensible to everyone and expressing in a few words what must be done to accomplish the revolution was, in fact, the preoccupation of the people of Paris from the first days of their independence. But a great idea is not developed in a day, no matter how rapid may be the elaboration and propagation of ideas during a revolutionary period. It al-

evening, hundreds of thousands of workers' hearts will beat in unison' fraternising across frontiers and oceans, in Europe, in the United States, in South America, in memory of the revolt of the Paris proletariat.

This is because the idea for which the French proletariat shed its blood in Paris, and for which it suffered on the beaches of New Caledonia, is one of those ideas which embraces within itself a whole revolution, a broad idea which can gather under the folds of its banner all the revolutionary tendencies of the people marching towards their liberation.

It is true that if we limit ourselves merely to observing the actual and palpable deeds accomplished by the Paris Commune, we have to admit that this idea was not vast enough, that it embraced only a minute part of the revolutionary programme. But if, on the other hand, we observe the spirit that inspired the masses of the people after the action of the 18th of March, the tendencies that tried to emerge and did not have the time to reach the domain of reality because, before flowering, they were already stifled under the mounds of corpses, we will then understand the scope of the movement and the sympathies that it inspired in the hearts of the working masses of the two worlds. The Commune gladdens our hearts, not for what it achieved, but for what it has promised one day to achieve.

Whence comes this irresistible fascination which draws towards the movement of 1871 the sympathies of all the oppressed masses? What idea does the Paris Commune represent? And why is that idea so attractive to the proletarians of all countries, of all nationalities?

The answer is an easy one. The revolution of 1871 was a strikingly popular movement. Made by the people itself, born spontaneously in the heart of the masses, it is within the great mass of the people that it found its defenders, its heroes, its martyrs, and it was above all because of this "rabble" character that the bourgeoisie never forgave it. At the same time, the basic idea of that revolution, certainly vague, perhaps even un-

organized in groups, who are courageous enough to incur the danger of the struggle, the consequences to which one exposes oneself in fighting for the popular revolution. Their number grows from day to day and it continues to grow, but it will only be on the very eve of the uprising that it will become a majority in place of the minority it now is.

History is there to tell us that those who have been a minority on the eve of the revolution, become the predominant force on the day of the revolution, if they truly express popular aspirations and if-the other essential condition-the revolution lasts long enough to allow the revolutionary idea to spread, to germinate and to bear its fruit. For we must not forget that it is not by a revolution lasting a couple of days that we shall come to transform society in the direction posed by anarchist communism. An uprising of short duration can overthrow a government to put another in its place; it can replace a Napoleon by a Jules Favre[1] but it changes nothing in the basic institutions of society.

It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organization. It took five years of continual insurrection, from 1788 to 1793, to batter down the feudal landholding system and the omnipotence of the crown in France; it would take three or four to batter down bourgeois feudalism and the omnipotence of me plutocracy.

It is above all in that period of excitement, when people's minds work with accelerated vitality, when everyone, in the sumptuous city home as in the darkest cabin, takes an interest in communal things, discusses, talks and seeks to convert others, that the anarchist idea, now being spread slowly by the existing groups, will germinate, bear its fruit and plant itself in

[1] Jules Favre (1809-1880) was a resolute republican opponent of Napoleon III during the Second Empire, but lost credit and influence when his negotiations for ending the Franco-Prussian War ended in 1871 with the surrender of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany. Trans.

the broad mass of human minds. It is then that the indifferent ones of today will become partisans of the new idea. Such has always been the progress of ideas, and the great French Revolution can serve as an example.

Of course, that revolution never went so deeply as the one of which we dream. It did no more than overthrow the aristocracy, to replace it by the bourgeoisie. It did not touch the system of individual property; on the contrary, it strengthened it by introducing bourgeois exploitation. But it achieved an immense result of its own through the final abolition of serfdom, and it abolished that serfdom by force, which is far more effective than the abolition of anything by means of laws. It opened the era of revolutions, which since then have followed at short intervals, drawing nearer and nearer to the true social revolution. It gave the French the revolutionary impulse without which peoples can stagnate for centuries under the most abject oppression. It bequeathed to the world a stream of fertile ideas for the future; it awakened the spirit of revolt; and it gave a revolutionary education to the French people. If in 1871 France created the Commune, if today it willingly accepts the idea of anarchist communism while other nations are still in the authoritarian or cnstitutionalist phase (which France traversed before 1848, or even before 1789), it is because, at the end of the eighteenth century, she passed through four years of great revolution.

Yet remember what a sad picture France offered only a few years before that revolution, and what a feeble minority were those who dreamed of the abolition of royalty and feudalism!

The peasants were plunged in a poverty and an ignorance of which today it is hard even to form an idea. Lost in their villages, without regular communications, not knowing what was happening fifty miles away, these beings yoked to the plough and living in pest-ridden hovels seemed doomed to eternal servitude. Any common action was impossible, and at the least sign of insurrection the soldiers were there to cut

eyes they will drag the wounded from the ambulances to slash them with sword bayonets and bludgeon them with rifle butts. They will drag them, still alive, by their broken legs or bleeding arms, and throw them into the river like bags of ordure that scream and suffer.

Death! Death! Death!

And after this frantic orgy upon a pile of corpses, after the mass exterminations, a vengeance both mean and atrocious was to continue-floggings, thumbscrews, unendurable fetters, blows of prison guards, insults, hunger, all the refinements of cruelty.

Are the people likely to forget these great deeds?

"Down, but not out," the Commune is being reborn today. This is not merely a dream of the conquered caressing in their imagination a beautiful mirage of hope. No! The Commune today becomes the precise and visible aim of the revolution that already rumbles near us. The idea penetrates the masses, gives them a flag to march behind, and we firmly count on the present generation to accomplish *the social revolution of the Commune,* and in this way put an end to the ignoble exploitation by the bourgeoisie, rid the people of the tutelage of the new State, and inaugurate in the evolution of the human species a new era of liberty, equality and solidarity.

2.

Ten years separate us already from the day on which the people of Paris, overthrowing the government of traitors which had seized power on the fall of the Empire, constituted itself a Commune and proclaimed its absolute independence. Yet it is still towards that date of the 18th of March, 1871 that we turn our glance, and from which we retain our best memories; it is the anniversary of that memorable day which the proletariat of the two worlds proposed to celebrate solemnly, and tomorrow

But it is certain that if the Commune of Paris had lived a few months longer, the strength of events would have forced it towards these two revolutions. We should not forget that [in the French Revolution] the bourgeoisie devoted four years of the revolutionary period to proceed from a moderate monarchy to a bourgeois republic; it should not surprise us that the people of Paris could not overleap in a single day the gulf that separated the anarchist Commune from the rule of bandits. But we must also realize that the revolution, which in France and certainly also in Spain, will be communalist. It will take up the work of the Paris Commune where it was halted by the assassinations perpetrated by the men of Versailles.

The Commune succumbed, and the bourgeoisie took its revenge in the way we know, because of the fear the people had created among their rulers by shaking off the yoke of government. Events proved that there were indeed two classes in modern society: on the one hand, the man who works, who gives to the owner more than half of what he produces, and who in the meantime accepts too easily the crimes of his masters; on the other hand the idler, the glutton, animated by the instincts of the wild beast, hating his slaves and ready to massacre them like wild beasts.

After having surrounded the people of Paris and cut off all their exits, the rulers released on them soldiers brutalized by barrack life and wine, and said to them openly in the Assembly: "Kill the wolves, the she-wolves, and the cubs!" And to the people they said:

Whatever you do, you will perish! If you are taken with arms in your hands-death! If you beg for mercy-death! To whatever side you turn your eyes, left, right, before, behind, above, below-death! You are not only outside the law; you are outside humanity. Neither age nor sex will be able to save you, either you or yours. You will die, but before that you will savour the agony of your wife, of your sister, of your mother, of your daughter, of your son, even down to the cradle! Before your

down the insurgents and hang the leaders above the village fountain on a gibbet eighteen feet high. At most a few inspired propagandists wandered through the villages, fanning the hatred against the oppressors and reawakening hope among a few individuals who dared to listen. At most a peasant risked himself to ask for bread or a little reduction in taxes. We only have to read through the village records to become aware of this.

As for the bourgeoisie, its leading characteristic was cowardice. A few isolated individuals occasionally took the risk of attacking the government and reawakening the spirit of revolt by some audacious act. But the great mass of the bourgeoisie bowed down shamefully before the king and his court, before the noblemen and even before the nobleman's lackey. Only read the municipal records of the period, and you will be aware of the vile servility that impregnated the words of the bourgeoisie in the years before 1789. Their words ooze with the most ignoble servitude, with all due deference to M. Louis Blanc[2] and other adulators of that prerevolutionary bourgeoisie. A deep despair inspired the few real revolutionaries of the period when they cast an eye around them, and Camille Desmoulins was justified in making his famous remark: "We republicans were hardly a dozen in number before 1789."[3]

But what a transformation three or four years later! As soon as the power of royalty was even slightly eroded by the current

[2] Louis Blanc (1811-82) was an early socialist who advocated "social Workshops" operated by the workers as the beginning of a socialist society. He was a member of the provisional government during the 1848 revolution, but fled to England when the revolution turned sour, and there he wrote the massive 12-volume History of the French Revolution to which Kropotkin refers. Trans.

[3] Camille Desmoulins (1760-1794) was one of the great orators of the French Revolution, celebrated for his speech in the gardens of the Palais Royal calling on the Parisians to take up arms (July 12,1789). A moderate Jacobin, he was guillotined in company with Danton on April 5,1794, when Robespierre purged the ruling party of his rivals. Trans.

of events, the people began to rebel. During the whole year of 1788 there were only half-hearted riots among the peasantry. Like the small and hesitant strikes today, they broke out here and there across France, but gradually they spread, became more broad and bitter, more difficult to suppress.

A year earlier people hardly dared to demand a reduction of taxes (as nowadays one hardly dares demand an increase in wages). A year later, in 1789, the peasants were already going far ahead. A great idea rose to the surface: that of shaking off completely the yoke of the nobleman, of the priest, of the landowning bourgeois. As soon as the peasant saw that the government no longer had the strength to resist a rebellion, he rose l up against his enemies. A few brave men set fire to the first chateaux, while the mass of people, still full of fear, waited until the flames from the conflagration of the great houses rose over the hills towards the clouds to illuminate the fate of those tax farmers who had placidly witnessed the torturing of the precursors of the peasant revolt. This time the soldiers did not come to suppress the insurrections, for they were otherwise occupied, and the revolt spread from village to village, and overnight half of France was on fire.

While the future revolutionaries of the middle class were still falling over themselves before the king, while the great personages of the coming revolution sought to take control of the uprising through bribes and concessions, villages and towns rebelled, long before the gathering of the States General and the speeches of Mirabeau[4]. Hundreds of riots (Taine[5] knew

[4] Mirabeau. Honore Gabriel Riquetti (1749-1791) abandoned his title of Comte de Mirabeau when he entered the States-General in 1789, becoming the spokesman of the third estate and working for a constitutional monarchy in which he hoped to be prime minister. He entered into secret talks with Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette; they failed to listen to his advice, and Mirabeau died before his dealings with them were discovered. Trans.

[5] Hippolyte Adolphe Taine (1828-93), a French determinist historian whose principal work was The Origins of Contemporary France (1876-93). Trans.

support of a reliable and clearly formulated idea which serves, so to speak, as a springboard from which to take off. And this takeoff point, life itself will indicate.

For five months while it was isolated by the siege, Paris had lived its own life and it had come to understand the vast economic, intellectual and moral powers at its disposal; it had glimpsed and understood the strength of its initiatives. At the same time, it had seen that the band of l brigands who had seized power did not know how to organize anything -either the defence of France or the development of the interior. It had seen how this central government had set itself against all that the intelligence of a great city might bring to fruition. It had seen more than that: the powerlessness of any government to ward off great disasters or to assist positive evolution when it is ripe for fulfilment.. During the siege it had suffered frightful poverty, the poverty of the workers and defenders of the town, beside the indolent luxury of the idlers. And it had seen the failure, thanks to the central power, of all its attempts to put an end to this scandalous regime. Each time the people wished to take a free initiative, the government doubled its fetters, and the idea was born quite naturally that Paris should turn itself into an independent Commune, able to realize within its wails the will of the people.

Suddenly, the word Commune, began to emerge from every mouth.

The Commune of 1871 could not be any more than a first sketch. Born at the end of a war, surrounded by two armies ready to give a hand in crushing the people, it dared not declare itself openly socialist, and proceeded neither to the expropriation of capital nor to the organization of work, nor even to a general inventory of the city's resources. Nor did it break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not attempt to achieve within the Commune that organization from the simple to the complex it adumbrated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of Communes.

question: the Popular State on the one hand, and Anarchy on the other.

According to the German socialists, the State should take possession of all accumulated wealth and give it to workers' associations; it should organize production and exchange, and keep watch over public life, over the functioning of society.

To this the majority of socialists of Latin race, replied that such a State -even admitting that by some impossible chance it could exist-would be the worst of tyrannies, and they opposed this ideal with a new ideal copied from the past; *an-archy,* that is to say, the complete abolition of States, and reorganization from the simple to the complex through the free federation of the popular forces of producers and consumers.

It was soon admitted, even by "Statists" less imbued with government prejudices, that Anarchy indeed represented a greatly superior form of organization than that envisaged in the popular State; but, they declared, the anarchist ideal is so far beyond us that we cannot concern ourselves with it at the present time. At the same time, anarchist theory lacked a concrete and simple formula with which to define its point of departure, to give body to its aims, and to show that they were based on a conception that had a real existence among the people. The federation of workers' corporations and groups of consumers across the frontiers and apart from the existing States, still seemed too vague a concept; and at the same time, it was easy to perceive that they could not comprehend the whole diversity of human manifestations. A clearer formula, one that was easier to comprehend, and which had its basic elements in the reality of things, was needed.

If it had been merely a matter of elaborating a theory, we might well ask how important theories are. But until a new idea has found a form of expression that is clear, precise and derived from actual existence, it will not seize on people's minds or inspire them to the point of embarking on a decisive struggle. The people do not plunge into the unknown without gaining the

of at least three hundred) broke out in the villages, before the Parisians, armed with their pikes and a few unreliable cannon, stormed the Bastille.

From this point, it became impossible to control the revolution. If it had broken out only in Paris, if it had been just a parliamentary revolution, it would have been drowned in blood, and the hordes of the counter-revolution would have carried the white flag from village to village, from town to town, massacring the peasants and the poor. But fortunately from the beginning the revolution had taken on another shape. It had broken out almost simultaneously in a thousand places; in each village, in each town, in each city of the insurgent provinces, the revolutionary minorities, strong in their audacity and in the unspoken support they recognized in the aspirations of the people, marched to the conquest of the castles, of the town halls and finally of the Bastille, terrorizing the aristocracy and the upper middle class, abolishing privileges. The minority started the revolution and carried the people with it.

It will be just the same with the revolution whose approach we foresee. The idea of anarchist communism, today represented by feeble minorities' but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people. Spreading everywhere, the anarchist groups , however slight they may be, will take strength from the support they find among the people, and will raise the red flag[6] of the revolution. And this kind of revolution, breaking out simultaneously in a thousand places, will prevent the establishment of any government that might hinder the unfolding of events, and the revolution will burn on until it has accomplished its mission: the abolition of individual propertyowning and of the State.

[6] The black flag was not universally accepted by anarchists at this time. Many, like Kropotkin, still thought of themselves as socialists and of the red flag as theirs also. Trans.

On that day, what is now the minority will become the People, the great mass, and that mass rising up against property and the State, will march forward towards anarchist communism.

those who helped to realize it and who even gave their lives for it, did not imagine the event as we conceive it today; they did pot fully understand the revolution they were inaugurating& nor the fecundity of the new principle which they were seeking to put into execution. It was only with practical application that one began to perceive its future importance; it was only in the working out of the thought from this time onwards that the new principle became more and more specific and clear, and appeared in all its lucidity, all its beauty, its justice and the importance of its results.

As soon as socialism had taken a new impetus in the five or six years preceding the Commune,[1] one question above all preoccupied the elaborators of the coming social revolution: the question of knowing what form of political grouping among societies would be the most propitious for that great economic revolution which current industrial development imposes on our generations, and which must lead to the abolition of individual property and the communalizing of all the capital accumulated by preceding generations.

The International Workingmen's Association gave that response. Association, it said, should not be restricted to one nation; it should extend beyond all the artificial frontiers. And soon that great idea would penetrate the hearts of the people and capture their minds. Hounded since then by an alliance of all the reactionaries, it has nonetheless survived, and as soon as the obstacles raised to its development are destroyed to the cheers of the insurgent people, it will be reborn stronger than ever.

But it remained to be seen what would be the integral parts of that vast Association. At that time two great currents of ideas confronted each other with their solutions to that great

[1] Kropotkin is presumably referring to the International Working Men's Association, which was founded on the 28th September 1864; its presence stimulated socialist propaganda and organization in most European countries. Trans.

Chapter 11: The Paris Commune

1.

ON the 18th of March, 1871, the people of Paris rose against a rule that was generally detested and despised, and proclaimed the city of Paris independent, free, and belonging only to itself.

This overthrow of central power was made without the usual scenes of a revolutionary uprising: on that day there were neither volleys of shot nor floods of blood shed behind the barricades. The rulers were eclipsed by an armed people going out into the streets; the soldiers evacuated the city, the bureaucrats hastened towards Versailles, taking with them everything they could carry. The government evaporated like a puddle of stinking water under the breath of a spring wind, and by the 19th, having shed hardly a drop of its children's blood, Paris found itself free of the past that had contaminated the great city.

At the same time, the revolution that had been accomplished in this way opened up a new era in the series of revolutions, by which the people march forward from slavery to freedom. Under the name of The Paris Commune a new idea was born, destined to become the point of departure for future revolutions.

As is always the case with great ideas, it was not a product of the conceptions of an individual philosopher. It was born of the collective intelligence; it sprang from the heart of an entire people. But it was vague in the beginning, and many among

Chapter 9: Order

We are often reproached with having taken as our slogan word *anarchy* which stirs up fear in so many minds. "Your ideas are excellent – we are told – but you must admit that you have made an unfortunate choice in naming your party. Anarchy, in current speech, is the synonym for disorder, for chaos; that word awakens in the mind the idea of colliding interests, of individuals at war with each other, who cannot succeed in establishing harmony."

Let us begin by observing that an activist party, a party which represents a new tendency, rarely has the chance of itself choosing its name. It was not the Beggars of Brabant[1] who invented that name which later became so popular. But, from being a nickname – and an almost inspired one – it was taken up by the movement, generally accepted, and soon became its glorious title. In the end the word seemed to contain a whole idea.

And the *sans-culottes* of 1793[2] It was the enemies of the popular revolution who invented that name; but did it not condense a whole idea, that of the revolt of the people, ragged and tired of poverty, against all these royalists, self-styled patriots and Jacobins, well-dressed and spick-and-span, who in spite

[1] The true beginnings of the resistance to Austrian rule in Belgium, which ended in its independence in 1830, was the rebellion of 1789 to 1790, inspired by the French Revolution, which was defeated at the time but left a lasting heritage of resistance to Hapsburg rule. Trans.

[2] The word "sans-culotte" was actually first used in 1789. It did not mean bare-bottomed, but referred to those more radical – and usually lower middle class – revolutionaries who chose to wear pantalons (trousers) in preference to the culottes (knee breeches) favoured by the aristocrats. Trans.

of their pompous speeches and the incense burnt before them by middle-class historians, were the true enemies of the people, because they despised the populace deeply for its poverty, for its libertarian and egalitarian spirit, for its revolutionary ardour?

It was the same with the word *nihilists*,[3] which has so intrigued the journalists, and which led to such games with words, in both the good and the bad sense, until it was finally understood that here was not a question of a baroque and almost religious sect but of a true revolutionary force. Launched by Turgenev in his novel, *Fathers and Sons*, it was taken up by the "fathers" who used the nickname to take revenge for the disobedience of the "sons". The sons accepted it, and when later they found that it led to misunderstandings and tried to shed it, it had become impossible. The press and the people in Russia did not want to describe the Russian revolutionaries by any other name. Besides, the name was not entirely inappropriate, since it embraced an idea: it expressed a negation of all the features of present-day civilization that are based on the oppression of one class by another; the negation of the existing economic system, the negation of governmentalism and power, of bourgeois politics, of routine science, of bourgeois morality, or art put at the service of exploiters, of customs and habits made grotesque and detestable by hypocrisy which past centuries have bequeathed to present day society – in brief, the negation of all that bourgeois society now loads with veneration.

It was the same with the anarchists. When in the heart of the International there rose up a party that fought against authority in all its forms, that party first took on the name

[3] The word "nihilists" was certainly not "launched" by Turgenev, though he popularized it in Fathers and Sons. (1861). The Oxford English Dictionary cites a use in 1817 by an American theologian, and the concept of nihilism cropped up in the religious word battles of the Reformation period. Trans.

free societies. This is the tendency, the distinctive trait of the second half of the 19th century.

Taking free flight, and finding an immense new field of application, that tendency will serve as the basis for the society of the future. It is by free groupings that the social Commune will be organized, and these groupings will overthrow walls and frontiers. There will be millions of communes, no longer territorial, but extending their hands across rivers, mountain chains and oceans, uniting individuals and peoples in the four corners of the earth into the same single family of equals.[4]

[4] A good modern study of American nineteenth century communities is Mark Holloway's Heavens on Earth, 1951. Trans.

cording to natural needs. Overthrow the State, and the federal society will surge out of its ruins, truly *one,* truly *indivisible,* but free and growing in solidarity because of its freedom.

But there is another thing to be considered. For the burgesses of the middle ages the Commune was an isolated State, clearly separated from others by its frontiers. For us, "Commune" no longer means a territorial agglomeration; it is rather a generic name, a synonym for the grouping of equals which knows neither frontiers nor walls. The social Commune will soon cease to be a clearly defined entity. Each group in the Commune will necessarily be drawn towards similar groups in other communes; they will come together and the links that federate them will be as solid as those that attach them to their fellow citizens, and in this way there will emerge a Commune of interests whose members are scattered in a thousand towns and villages. Each individual will find the full satisfaction of his needs only by grouping with other individuals who have the same tastes but inhabit a hundred other communes.

Today already free societies are beginning to open up an immense field of human activity. It is no longer merely to satisfy scientific, literary or artistic interests that humanity constitutes its societies. It is no longer merely to pursue the class struggle that men enter into leagues.

One would have difficulty nowadays finding one of the multiple and varied manifestations of human activity that is not already represented by freely constituted societies, and their number keeps on growing unceasingly, each day invading new fields of action, even among those that were once considered the preserve of the State. Literature, arts, sciences, education, commerce, industries, transport, amusements, public health, museums, far off enterprises, polar expeditions, even territorial defence against aggressors, care for the wounded, and the very courts of law: everywhere we see personal initiative emerging and assuming the form of

of the federalist party, then called itself *anti-statist* or *anti-authoritarian*. At that epoch it even avoided assuming the name of anarchist. The word *an-archy* (as it was written then) might have attached the party too closely to the Proudhonians,[4] whose ideas of economic reform the International then combated. But it was precisely to create confusion that the adversaries of the anti-authoritarians took pleasure in using the name; besides, it enabled them to say that the very name of the anarchists proved that their sole ambition was to create disorder and chaos, without thinking of the result.

The anarchist party hastened to accept the name that was given to it. It insisted first of all on the hyphen uniting *an* and *archy*, explaining that under that form, the word *an-archy*, of Greek origin, signified *no power*, and not "disorder"; but soon it accepted the word as it was, without giving a useless task to proof-readers or a lesson in Greek to its readers.

The word was thus returned to its primitive, ordinary and common meaning, expressed in 1816 in these words by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham.[5] "The philosopher who wants to reform a bad law does not preach insurrection against it.... The character of the anarchist is quite different. He denies the existence of the law, he rejects its validity, he incites men to ignore it as a law and to rise up against its implementation." The meaning of the word has become even broader today: the anarchist denies not only existing laws, but all established power, all authority; yet the essence remains the same; the anarchist

[4] The word anarchist was first used in a positive way by Proudhon himself, in What is Property? (1840), but it had already been used in a derogatory way against the Levellers during the English Civil War of the 17th century (they were called "Switzerising anarchists") and by the Girondins against the enragis during the French Revolution.

[5] Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was the founder of Utilitarianism and famous for his declaration that the only true criterion of political action was that it should promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. He was an influential penal and legislative reformer. Trans.

rebels – and this is where he begins – against power, authority, under whatever form it may appear.

But this word, we are told, awakens in the mind the negation of order, and hence the idea of disorder, of chaos!

Let us try to understand each other. What kind of order are you talking about? Is it the harmony of which we dream, we anarchists? The harmony that will establish itself freely in human relations once humanity ceases to be divided into two classes, one sacrificed to the other? The harmony that will arise spontaneously from the solidarity of interests, when all men will form the same single family, when each will work for the well-being of all and all for the well-being of each? Evidently not! Those who reproach anarchism for being the negation of *order* are not speaking of that future harmony; they speak of order as it is conceived in our present society. So let us take a look at this order which anarchy wishes to destroy.

Order, as it is understood today, means nine-tenths of humanity working to procure luxury, pleasure and the satisfaction of the most execrable of passions for a handful of idlers.

Order is the deprivation for this nine-tenths of humanity of all that is necessary for a healthy life and for the reasonable development of the intellectual qualities. Reducing nine-tenths of humanity to the condition of beasts of burden living from day to day, without ever daring to think of the pleasures man can gain from the study of science, from artistic creation – that is order!

Order is poverty; it is famine become the normal order of society. It is the Irish peasant dying of hunger; it is the peasant of a third of Russia dying of diphtheria, of typhus, of hunger as a result of need in the midst of piles of wheat destined for export. It is the people of Italy reduced to abandoning their luxuriant countryside to wander over Europe seeking some tunnel or other to excavate, where they will risk being crushed to death after having survived a few months longer. It is land taken from the peasant for raising animals to feed the rich; it is

that economic frontiers do not exist: the zones of production and exchange of various products interpenetrate each other, tangle with each other, impose themselves on each other. In the same way the federations of Communes, if they were to follow their free development, would very soon start to mingle and intersect, and in this way form a network that would be compact, "one and indivisible," in quite a different way from these statist groupings whose parts are no more than juxtaposed, like the rods bundled around the lictor's axe.

Thus, let us repeat, those who come and say to us that the Communes, once they are freed of the tutelage of the State, will clash together and destroy each other in internecine wars, forget one thing: the intimate pattern of linking that exists already between various localities, thanks to the centres of industrial and commercial gravitation, thanks to the multitude of these centres, thanks to their incessant intercourse. They do not take into account what the middle ages actually were, with their closed cities and their caravans trailing slowly over difficult roads under the eyes of the robber barons; they forget those currents of men, of merchandise, of telegrams, of ideas and feelings, that now circulate among our cities like the waters of rivers that never dry up; they have no real idea of the difference between the two epochs they seek to compare.

Besides, is not history there to prove to us that the instinct for federation has already become one of the most pressing needs of humanity? It will be enough one day if the State becomes disorganized for one reason or another, if the machine of oppression fails in its operations, for the free alliances to appear of their own accord. Let us remember the spontaneous federations of the armed bourgeoisie during the Great Revolution. Let us remember the federations that surged up spontaneously in Spain and saved the independence of the country when the State was shaken to its foundations by the conquering armies of Napoleon. As soon as the State is no longer in a position to impose a forced union, union rises up of its own accord, ac-

ridge, that has not an industrial and commercial centre towards which it gravitates, and with which it cannot break its links.

The development of the great industrial centres has done even more. Even today, of course, parochialism can create many jealousies between neighbouring communes, delaying their alliance and even inflaming fratricidal struggles. But even if such jealousies may at first hinder the direct federation of two communes, their federation can in fact be established by the mediation of the great centres. Today, two small neighbouring municipalities may have nothing that really links them directly; the scantiness of the relations they maintain serves rather to create conflicts than to link them in the bonds of solidarity. But the two of them have already a common centre with which they are in constant communication and without which they could not survive; and whatever may be their local jealousies they will see themselves obliged to come together through the mediation of the large town where they get their provisions and to which they take their products; each of them will have to become part of the same federation so as to maintain their relations with the urban focus and group themselves around it.

Yet this centre will not be able to establish an intrusive preponderance of its own over the communes in its environment. Thanks to the infinite variety of the needs of industry and commerce, all inhabited places have already several centres which they are attached, and as their needs develop, they will enter into relations with further places that can satisfy new needs. Our needs are in fact so various, and they emerge with such rapidity, that soon a single federation will not be sufficient to satisfy them all. The Commune will then feel the need to contract other alliances, to enter into other federations. Belonging to one group for the acquisition of food supplies, it will have to join a second group to obtain other goods, such as metals, and then a third and a fourth group for textiles and works of art. Take up an economic atlas of any country, and you will see

land left fallow rather than being given back to those who ask nothing better than to cultivate it.

Order is the woman selling herself to feed her children; it is the child reduced to working in a factory or dying of starvation; it is the worker reduced to the state of a machine. It is the phantom of the worker rising up at the doors of the rich. It is the phantom of the people rising up at the gates of the government.

Order is a tiny minority, elevated into the seats of government, which imposes itself in that way on the majority and prepares its children to continue the same functions in order to maintain the same privileges by fraud, corruption, force and massacre.

Order is the continual war of man against man, of trade against trade, of class against class, of nation against nation. It is the cannon that never ceases to roar over Europe; it is the devastation of countryside, the sacrifice of whole generations on the battlefield, the destruction in a single year of wealth accumulated by centuries of hard toil.

Order is servitude, it is the shackling of thought, the brutalizing of the human race, maintained by the sword and the whip. It is the sudden death by fire-damp, or the slow death by suffocation, of hundreds of miners blown up or buried each year by the greed of the employers, and shot down and bayoneted as soon as they dare complain.

Order, finally, is the drowning in blood of the Paris Commune. It is the death of thirty thousand men, women and children, torn apart by shells, shot down, and buried alive, under the streets of Paris. It is the destiny of Russian youth, immured in prisons, isolated in the snows of Siberia, the best and purest of them dying by the hangman's rope.

That is order.

And disorder? What is this you call disorder?

It is the uprising of the people against this ignoble order, breaking its fetters, destroying the barriers, and marching to-

wards a better future. It is humanity at the most glorious point in history. It is the revolt of thought on the eve of the revolution; it is the overthrowing of hypotheses sanctioned by the immobility of preceding centuries; it is the opening out of a whole flood of new ideas, audacious inventions, it is the solution of the problems of science.

Disorder is the abolition of ancient slaveries, it is the uprising of the communes; it is the destruction of feudal serfdom, the effort to make an end to economic servitude.

Disorder is the insurrection of peasants rising up against priests and lords, burning castles to give place to farmsteads, emerging from their hovels to take their place in the sun. It is France abolishing royalty, and delivering a mortal blow to serfdom in all of Western Europe.

Disorder is 1848, making the kings tremble and proclaiming the right to work. It is the people of Paris who fight for a new idea and who, while succumbing to massacre, bequeath to humanity the idea of the free commune, and open for it the way towards that revolution whose approach we foresee and whose name will be "the social revolution."

Disorder – what *they* call disorder – is all the ages during which whole generations sustained an incessant struggle and sacrificed themselves to prepare a better existence for humanity by freeing it from the servitude of the past. It is the ages during which the popular genius took its free way and in a few years made gigantic steps forward, without which men would have remained in the condition of the slave of antiquity, cringing and debased by misery.

Disorder is the blossoming of the most beautiful passions and the greatest of devotions, it is the epic of supreme human love.

The word *anarchy*, implying the negation of order, and invoking the memory of the most beautiful moments in the life of the peoples – is it not well chosen for a party that marches towards the conquest of a better future?

How different from the groups that might come into existence today! A small commune could not survive a week without being forced by circumstances to establish stable relations with industrial, commercial andartistic centres, and these centres, in their turn, would feel the need to open their doors wide to the inhabitants of nearby villages, of the surrounding communes, and of the more distant cities.

If one of these cities were to proclaim the Commune tomorrow, wereto abolish within itself all individual property, were to introduce complete communism, i.e. the collective enjoyment of social capital, of thetools of work and the products of that work, in a mere few days- provided it were not surrounded by hostile armies-the convoys of carts would arrive at the markets. The traders would send to the city from distant ports their cargoes of raw materials. The products of the city's industries, having satisfied the needs of the population, would go to seek buyers in the four corners of the earth. Visitors would arrive in crowds, peasants, citizens of nearby towns, and foreigners, and they would depart to tell in their own homes of the marvellous life of the free city where everyone worked, where nobody was any longer poor or oppressed, where all enjoyed the fruits of their labour, without anyone seizing a lion's share. There would be no fear of isolation; if the communists in the United States had reason to complain in their communal colonies, it was not because of isolation, but rather because of the intrusion of the surrounding bourgeois world in their communal affairs.

The fact is that today commerce and exchange, while overflowing the bounds of national frontiers, have also destroyed the walls of the ancient cities. They have established a cohesion that did not exist in the middle ages. All the inhabited places of western Europe are so intimately linked with each other that isolation has become impossible for any of them; there is not a village, however highly perched it may be on its mountain

Chapter 10: The Commune

When we say that the social revolution must be achieved by the liberation of the Communes, and that it is the Communes, absolutely independent, liberated from the tutelage of the State, that alone can give us the necessary setting for a revolution and the means of accomplishing it, we are reproached with wanting to recall to life a form of society that has already outlived its time. "But the Commune," they say, "belongs to another age! In setting out to destroy the State and put free communes in its place, you are looking to the past; you want to lead us back into the heart of the middle ages, to reignite the old communal wars, and destroy the national unities that have been so painfully achieved in the course of history.

Very well, let us consider this criticism.

First, we must understand that comparisons with the past have only a relative value. If, in fact, the Commune as we envisage it were really a mere return towards the Commune of the Middle Ages, must we not recognize that the Commune today cannot possibly clothe itself again in the forms it assumed seven centuries ago? And is it not evident that if it were established in our days, in our century of railways and telegraphs, of cosmopolitan science and research into pure truth, the Commune would have an organization so different from that which it had in the twelfth century that we would be in the presence of an absolutely new fact, emerging in new conditions and leading inevitably to absolutely different consequences.

Besides, our adversaries, the defenders of the State, under its various forms, should remember that we can raise against them, objections as good as theirs. We in our turn can say to

Marseille, Cartagena,[3] and soon all the great cities will unfurl the same flag. This will mean an essential difference from the Commune of the past.

In freeing itself from the lords, did the Commune of the middle ages free itself also from those rich merchants who, by the sale of merchandise and capital goods, had gained private wealth in the heart of the city? Not at all! Having demolished the towers of the overlord, the inhabitant of the town very soon saw within the Commune itself the citadels of the rich merchants who sought to subdue him being built, and the internal history of the Communes in the middle ages was that of bitter struggle between the rich and the poor, a struggle that ended inevitably with the king's intervention. As a new aristocracy took shape in the very heart of the Commune' the people, having fallen into the same kind of servitude to the lord within the city as it had hitherto suffered to the lord outside, understood that it had nothing to defend in the Commune; its members deserted the walls they had built to gain their liberty and which the regime of individualism had turned into the ramparts of a new servitude. Having nothing to lose, the people let the rich merchants defend themselves, and these relations were usually limited to a treaty for the defence of urban rights against the lords, or perhaps a pact of solidarity for the mutual protection of the citizens of the communes on their distant journeys. And when real leagues were formed among the towns, as in Lombardy, Spain and Belgium, these leagues were too lacking in homogeneity and too fragile because of the diversity of privileges, and soon broke up into isolated groups or succumbed under the attacks of the neighbouring states.

[3] Attempts were made to form Communes in Lyon and Marseille at the same time as the Paris Commune; they were largely led by Bakuninists, and Bakunin himself was active in Lyon. The Spanish town of Cartagena was the centre of the socalled Cantonalist movement against centralised authority in 1873, when its communalist defenders withstood a siege of several months. Trans.

them and with much more reason, that it is they who have their eyes turned towards the past, since the State is a form just as old as the Commune. Only there is this difference; while the State in history represents the negation of all freedom, the triumph of the absolute and the arbitrary, the ruin of its subjects, torture and the scaffold, it is precisely in the liberties of the Commune and in the uprisings of peoples and Communes against the State that we rediscover the most beautiful pages of history. Certainly, in transporting ourselves into the past, it is not towards Louis Xl, a Louis XV, a Catherine 11 that we turn our attention; it is rather towards the communes or republics of Amalfi and Florence, those of Toulouse and Laon, of Liege and Courtray, of Augsburg and Nuremberg, of Pskov and Novgorod.

It is not a matter on which we should be satisfied with mere words and sophistries; it is important to study and analyse closely, and not to imitate M. de Laveleye[1] and his zealous students who confine themselves to telling us, "But the Commune belongs to the middle ages! In consequence it must be condemned!" "The State is a whole past of crime," we answer, "and therefore it is condemned with much more justification."

Between the Commune of the middle ages and that which might be established today, and probably will be established soon, there will be plenty of essential differences: a veritable abyss opened up by the six or seven centuries of human development and harsh experience. Let us examine the principal differences.

What was the purpose of that "conjuration" or "communion" made by the burgesses in such and such a city? It was a very modest one: to liberate themselves from the lords. The inhabitants, merchants and artisans, came together and swore

[1] Emile de Lavaleye (1822-1892). Belgian economist; Kropotkin is probably referring to his he socialisme conteporain, which appeared in 1881. Trans.

not to allow "anyone whatever to do harm to one among them or to treat him from this time onward as a serf"; it was against the long-established masters that the Commune rose in arms. "Commune," said an author of the 12th century, quoted by Augustin Thierry,[2] "is a new and detestable word, and this is how it must be understood: taxable people shall pay once only a year the rent they owe their lords. If they commit an offence, it shall be discharged by a legally fixed penalty; and the peasants shall be entirely exempt from the levies of money it has been customary to impose on them."

Thus it was actually against the lords that the Commune rose up in the middle ages. It is from the State that the Commune of today is seeking to liberate itself£ This is an essential difference, for we must remember that it was actually the State, represented by the king who, later on, realizing that the Communes wished to make themselves independent of the lords, sent its armies "to punish," as the Chronicle says, "the presumption of these ne'er-do-wells, who, in the name of the Commune, make a show of rebelling against the crown."

The Commune of tomorrow will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as the other communes. It will know that there can be no middle way: either the Commune will be absolutely free to adopt all the institutions it wishes and to make all the reforms and revolutions it finds necessary, or it will remain what it has been up to today, a mere branch of the State, restricted in all its movements, always on the point of entering into conflict with the State and sure of succumbing in the struggle that will follow. The Commune will know that it must break the State and replace it by the Federation, and it will act in that way. More than that, it will have the means to do so. Today it is not only small towns that raise the banner of communal insurrection, it is Paris, Lyon,

[2] Augustin Thierry. See note 8.

that a new life demands new forms; it is not by clinging to outdated concepts that one sets revolution on its course! It will come from not having understood the incompatibility of revolution and government, from not having perceived that – under whatever form it is presented – the one is always the negation of the other, and that, apart from anarchy, there can be no revolution.

It is the same for that other form of "revolutionary government" about which they will boast to you – revolutionary dictatorship.

2.

The perils to which the revolution is exposed should it allow itself to be managed by an elected government are so evident that a whole school of revolutionaries has completely renounced that idea. They understand that it is impossible for an insurgent people to give itself by electoral means a government that does not represent the past, a government that does not act like fetters around the ankles of the people, above all when it sets out to accomplish that immense economic, political and moral regeneration we mean when we talk of the social revolution. So they renounce the idea of a "legal" government, at least for the period of revolt against legality, and they call for "revolutionary dictatorship."

"The party which has overthrown the government – they say – will forcefully take its place. It will seize power and proceed in a revolutionary manner. It will take the measures needed to secure the success of the insurrection; it will demolish old institutions; it will organize the defence of the territory. As for those who do not want to recognize its authority – the guillotine! And for those, people or bourgeoisie, who do not wish to obey the orders it will issue to regulate the progress of the revolution – the guillotine as well! That is how the

a year, and from whom they gain work that is worth a thousand.

There is no doubt that these people will be the enemies of the revolu- tion; they are already enemies of liberty, upholders of inequality, pillars of exploitation. They form, indeed, a considerable force – round about 200,000 owners, which means 800,000 individuals including families, and today they are a real power in the villages. The State confers on them a great deal of importance, and their means assure them an influence within the commune from which they do not fail to profit. But what will they become when confronted with the surge of a popular uprising? It will certainly not be they who will go forward to resist it: they will stay permanently in their homes and await the outcome of the turmoil.

Those who own between ten and fifty hectares are more numerous than the preceding class. They alone are more than 250,000 landowners, almost 1,200,000 people, if one includes families. They own nearly a quarter of the arable surface of France.

This group represents a considerable force through its influence and activity in the countryside. While the preceding group often live in the towns, these work in their own fields; they have not broken with the village, and up to the present they have remained peasants. It is on their conservative attitudes that the reactionaries count most of all.

It is true that at one time, in the first half of this century, this class of cultivators enjoyed a certain prosperity, and it was natural that, emerging from the Great Revolution and anxious above all to retain what they had won in the Revolution, they should obstinately oppose any changes, fear- ing to lose what they had gained. But in recent years things have changed a great deal. While, in some areas of France, such as the Southwest, the farmers in this category still enjoy a certain wellbeing, in the rest of the country they complain already of need. They are no longer able to save, and it becomes harder for them

to increase their properties, which are constantly being broken up by the division of heritages. At the same time they are no longer finding land to rent on conditions as favourable as in the past; today they are being asked crazy prices for patches they want to lease.

Often owning tiny lots scattered in the four corners of the commune, they cannot make farming profitable enough to sustain the costs that bur- den the cultivator. Wheat brings in very little, and cattle raising offers only a scanty profit.

The State crushes them down with taxes, and the Commune does not spare them: cart, horse, threshing-machine, even manure are taxed. Addi- tional centimes add up to francs, and the list ofduties becomes as high as it was under the defunct kingdom. The peasant has become once again the State's beast of burden.

Moneylenders ruin him, and promissory notes ravage him; mortgages grind him down, the city manufacturer exploits him by making him pay two or three times cost for the smallest tool. He im- agines himself still the owner of his fields, when he is no more than their caretaker; the work he does goes to fatten the moneylender, to nourish the bureaucrat, to buy silk dresses and fine carriages for the industrialist's wife, and to make life agreeable for all the idlers in the city.

Do you believe that the peasant does not understand all this? Come on! He understands it perfectly, and as soon as he feels strong enough he will not miss the chance to shake up these gentry who live at his expense.

With all that, we have still only a tenth of the inhabitants of the countryside. What about the rest?

These are the nearly four million heads of families (meaning roughly 18,000,000 persons) who own properties of five or three hectares per fami- ly, often one hectare, or even a tenth of a hectare, and often nothing. Out of this number eight million persons have all the trouble in the world making ends meet by farming two or three hectares, so that each year they have to

of a few individuals are absolutely incapable of finding the solutions that can only be born out of practical life.

The latter is the situation reflected in a body that is elected by suffrage, even if it does not have all the faults that are generally inherent in representative governments. The few men who represent the revolutionary ideas of the epoch find themselves outnumbered by the representatives of past revolutionary schools or of the order of existing things. These men, whose place – especially during the days of revolution – should be among the people, spreading their ideas widely, setting the masses in motion, demolishing the institutions of the past – find themselves pinned down in a hall, endlessly arguing so as to wring concessions "out of the moderates and convert their enemies, when in fact there is only a single means of leading them to the new idea – that of putting it into execution. The government changes into a parliament with all the faults of bourgeois parliaments. Far from being a "revolutionary" government, it becomes the greatest obstacle to the revolution, and if the people is to cease marking time it will be forced to dismiss it, and to deprive of office those who only yesterday it acclaimed as the elected. But that is not so easy. The new government, which has hurried to organize an entirely new ladder of administration to extend its rule and make itself obeyed, will not be willing to give place easily. Jealous of its power, it will cling on to it with all the vigour of an institution that has not yet had the time to fall into decay. It will be determined to oppose force to force, and to dislodge it there will be only one means, that of taking up arms, repeating the revolution, and sending on their way those in whom we had placed all our hopes.

And here we have the revolution divided! After having wasted precious time on delays and hesitations, it will lose its strength in internecine divisions between the friends of the new government and those who have seen the need to get rid of it! And all that will come from not having understood

of the Commune. The election could not have provided a better government.

We know the result. Shut up in the Hotel de Ville, with the mission of proceeding according to the forms established by preceding governments, these ardent revolutionaries, these reformers found themselves struck by incapacity and sterility. With all their good will and courage, they were not even able to organize the defence of Paris. It is true that today individual men are being blamed for this failure, but it was not individuals who were responsible for this setback, but the system they applied.

In fact, universal suffrage, when it is free, can produce an assembly more or less representing the mean of the opinions that circulate at the moment among the masses; and that mean, at the beginning of the revolution, reveals only a very vague idea of the work to be accomplished, quite apart from how to carry it out. If only the greater part of the nation, of the Commune, could reach an understanding before it happened, on what would have to be done when the government was overthrown! If this dream of closet Utopians could be realized, we would never have had bloody revolutions: the will of the greater part of the nation having been expressed, the rest would submit to it with a good grace. But things do not happen in this way. The revolution breaks out well before a general understanding has been able to establish itself, and those who have a clear idea of what must be done on the morrow of the movement are at this moment only a tiny minority. The great mass of the people has only a general idea of the objective it would like to see realized, without having much knowledge of how to proceed to that objective, or much awareness of the procedure that must be followed. The practical solution will not be found, nor will it become clear until the change has already begun: it will be the product of the revolution itself, of the people in action – or else it will be nothing, for the brains

send tens of thousands of their boys and girls to make a hard living in the city; 7 million of them have for their whole property a miserable plot of land, a house, and a small garden, or even possess noth- ing and make a hard living from day to day, feeding themselves on crusts of bread and potatoes, when they can get them. These are the great bat- talions of the French countryside!

This vast mass counts for nothing in the calculations of the economists. But for us, it is everything. It constitutes the village; the rest are just incidental – parasitical fungi growing on the trunk of a great oak tree.

These are the peasants we are told are rich, absolutely content with their lot, anxious to change nothing, and certain to turn their backs on the socialists!

Let us remark first of all that each time we have spoken to such peasants, telling them what we think in comprehensible language, they have not turned their backs on us. It is true that we have not talked to them of electing us in place of the member of parliament or even of the rural constable; we have not embarked on long pseudo-scientific ha- rangues about socialism; we have not preached to them of putting their bits of land into the hands of a State that would distribute the soil as seemed good to it, according to the whims of an army of bureaucrats. If we had uttered such stupidities, they would in fact have turned their backs on us, and they would have been right.

But, whenever we talked to them of what we mean by the revolution, they always listened to us, and answered that our ideas corresponded with their own. This, in fact, is what we said to the peasants and what we shall keep on saying to them:

"In the past the land belonged to the Commune, composed of all those who cultivated it themselves, with their own hands. But, by all kinds of fraud, by violence, usury and sheer deception, the speculators have successfully appropriated it. All these lands that now belong to Sir So-and-so or Lady This-and-

that were formerly communal lands. Today the peasant needs them to farm and feed himself and his family, whereas the rich do not cultivate them but exploit them to wallow in luxury. Or- ganized in their communes, the peasants must take back the land and put it at the disposal of those who are willing to farm it.

"Mortgages are an iniquity. Nobody has the right to appropriate your land because you have borrowed money, since its value depends on the work carried out by your forefathers when they cleared it, built the vil- lages, made the roads, drained the marshes; even now, it is productive only because of your toil. The peasanf s International will therefore make it a duty to break the bonds of mortgages and to abolish that odious jn- stitution for ever.

"The taxes that crush you are devoured by bands of bureaucrats who are not merely useless but positively harmful. Therefore we must sup- press them. Proclaim your absolute independence, and declare that you know better how to manage your affairs than these gentlemen in gloves from Paris.

"Do you need a road? Let the people of neighbouring communes dis- cuss it, and they will produce something better than the ministry of public works.

"A railway? The interested communes of a whole region can do it bet- ter than the speculators, who amass millions by laying down bad track. Do you need schools? You can do that also as well as – and better than – these gentlemen from Paris. The State has no place in all this: schools, roads and canals can all be better made by yourselves and at lower cost.

"Do you need defence against foreign invaders? Learn to do it your- selves, and above all do not ever confide that task to the generals, who will certainly betray you. Armies have never been able to halt an in- vader, but the people, the peasantry, when they have had an interest in preserving their independence, have got the better of the most for- midable armies.

of deliverance. I went down from my attic room on the Latin quarter to join in that immense open air club which filled the boulevards from one end of Paris to the other. Everyone was discussing public concerns; personal preoccupations were forgotten; nobody was interested in buying or selling; everyone was ready to propel himself body and soul into the future. Even the bourgeoisie, carried away by the universal ardour, looked on joyfully as the new world unfolded itself. If it is necessary to carry out the social revolution – very well, let's do it; let us put everything in common; we are ready for that!" The elements of the revolution were in place; it was only necessary to put them into operation. Going back to my room that evening, I said to myself: "How wonderful humanity is! I always condemned it in the past because I never understood it!" Then came the elections and the members of the Commune were named – and then the strength of devotion and the zeal for action were slowly extinguished. Everyone went back to his accustomed task, saying to himself: "Now we have an honest government. Let it look after things." And one knows what followed from that.

Instead of acting on its own initiative, instead of marching forward, instead of throwing itself boldly into a new order of things, the people, confident of its rulers, delegated to them the power of taking initiatives. Here was the first consequence – and indeed the fatal result – of elections. What in fact did these rulers do, who had been invested with the confidence of everyone?

Never were elections more free than those of March 1871. The adversaries of the Commune themselves recognized it. Never was the great mass of the electors so imbued with the desire to send to power the best men, men of the future, revolutionaries. And this is just what they did. All the well-known revolutionaries were elected by formidable majorities; Jacobins, Blanquists, Internationalists – the three revolutionary fractions – all found their places in the Council

Royalists. It is above all the divorce of the Church and State, followed by their concubinage. This is all very well for the bourgeois revolutionaries. But that socialist revolutionaries should make themselves the apostles of such an idea can be explained, it seems to me, only by supposing one of two things. Either those who accept it are imbued with the bourgeois prejudices they have absorbed, without realising it, through the literature and above all the history created by bourgeois writers for the use of the bourgeoisie, and remain permeated by the spirit of servility, the product of centuries of enslavement, from which they cannot imagine liberating themselves; or, they really want nothing of that revolution whose name has always been on their lips; they would be content with renovating existing institutions, so long as they themselves are carried to power, when they will be prepared to decide later on what must be done to calm the "beast," that is to say, the people. They hold no grudges against those in power so long as they can take their places. With such individuals there is no point in arguing. We will speak only with those who have been honestly deceived, often by themselves.

Let us begin with the first of the two forms of "revolutionary government" that are so much praised – elective government. Let us suppose that the government – royal or other – has been overthrown, and the army of the defenders of capital is in retreat; everywhere opinion is in a ferment, public affairs are being discussed, people feel the desire to move forward. New ideas are springing up and the need for serious change is understood: we must act, we must begin a pitiless work of demolition so as to clear the ground for a new life. But what are they proposing that we should do? Call the people to elections, and afterwards choose a government, and then confide to it the work that all and each of us should be doing on his or her own initiative.

This is what Paris did, after the 18th of March, 1871. "I shall always remember," a friend told us, "those beautiful moments

"Do you need tools, or machines? You must come to arrangements with the workers in the cities who will send them to you in exchange for your products, at cost price, without passing through the hands of a mer- chant who gets wealthy at the expense of both the worker who makes the tool and the peasant who buys it.

"Do not be afraid of the power of government. These governments, which seem so formidable, crumble under the first attacks of the insurgent people: we have seen enough of them tumbling down in a matter of hours, and one can foresee that in a few years revolutions will spread out all over Europe and topple authority. Profit from that moment to over- throw the government, but above all to make a revolution, to chase away the great landowners and declare their wealth common property, to demolish the moneylenders, abolish mortgages and protect your absolute independence while the urban workers do the same thing in the cities. After that, organize yourselves by freely federating in communes and regions. But watch out, and do not let the revolution be plundered by all kinds of people who will come and pose as the benefactors of the peasants. Act on your own, without expecting anything from anyone but yourselves."

That is what we have said to the peasants. And the only objection they have offered did not reflect on the substance of our ideas, but con- cerned solely the possibility of putting them into operation.

"Very good," they answer us. "All that would be excellent, if only the peasants could come to an understanding with each other."

Let us work, then, towards the point when they will come together. Let us propagate our ideas, let us scatter freely the writings that expound them, let us work to establish the links that are still lacking between the villages, and, on the day of the revolution, let us be ready to fight beside them and for them!

That day is much nearer than is generally believed.

Chapter 13: Representative Government

1.

When we observe human societies in terms of their essential characteristics, leaving aside the secondary and temporary manifestations, we realise that the political regime to which they submit is always an expression of the economic regime which exists at the heart of the society. Political organization does not change at the will of legislators. It can, indeed, change its name, can present itself today under the guise of a monarchy, tomorrow under that of a republic, but it does not undergo an equivalent modification in substance; it continues to be shaped by the economic system, of which it is always the expression and, at the same time, the consecration and the sustaining force.

Sometimes, in the process of its evolution, the political regime of a country finds itself lagging behind the economic changes that are taking place, and in that case it will abruptly be set aside and remodelled in a way appropriate to the economic regime that has been established. But if on the other hand the political regime during a revolution goes beyond the economic changes, it will remain a dead letter, a formula, inscribed in the charters but without any real application. Thus the Declaration of the Rights of Man, whatever may have been its place in history, survived as no more than a historic document, and those fine words, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, remain a dream, or at most an inscription on the walls of

molishing all the institutions that serve to perpetuate economic or political enslavements. The possibility of acting freely has been acquired. What will the revolutionaries do with it?

On that question it is only the anarchists who answer, "No government at all! Anarchy!" All the others say: "A revolutionary government!" They only differ on the form that government should take when it is elected by universal suffrage, except for those who pronounce themselves in favour of revolutionary dictatorship.

"A revolutionary government!" These are two words that echo very strangely in the ears of those who know the meaning of both social revolution and government. They are two words that contradict and cancel each other out. We have of course seen plenty of despotic governments (for it is in the nature of all government to favour reaction against revolution and to tend towards despotism), but we have never seen a revolutionary government, and with good reason. It is because revolution, synonymous with "disorder," confusion, the overthrow in a few days of secular institutions, the violent annihilation of the established forms of property, the destruction of social castes, the rapid transformation of accepted ideas about morality (or rather about the hypocrisy that takes its place) into individual liberty and spontaneous action – is precisely the opposite, the negation of government, which is synonymous with the "established Order," with conservatism, with the maintenance of existing institutions, with the negation of initiative and individual action. Nevertheless we continually hear about this "white blackbird," as if a "revolutionary government" were the most simple thing in the world, as common and familiar as kingdoms, empires or papacies.

Let the self-styled bourgeois revolutionaries teach this idea – that is appropriate. We know what they mean by the revolution. It is nothing more than the patching up of the bourgeois republic; it is the taking over by self-styled republicans of the lucrative positions that today are reserved for Bonapartists or

Chapter 15: Revolutionary Government

1.

That all present governments should be abolished, so that freedom, equality and fraternity are no longer vain words and become living realities; that all forms of government attempted up to our day have been no better than various forms of oppression and must be replaced by a new form of social arrangement: on these points all those who have an outlook and a temperament even slightly revolutionary are in agreement. One does not even have to be very innovatory to reach that conclusion; the vices of actual governments and the impossibility of reforming them are too striking not to spring to the attention of any reasonable observer. As to overthrowing governments, it is generally known that at certain periods this can be done without much difficulty. There are moments when governments collapse almost of their own accord, like houses of cards, under the breath of the people in revolt. This happened in 1848 and 1870; we shall see it again soon.

To overthrow a government – for the revolutionary bourgeoisie that is the task completed. For us it is only the beginning of the social revolution. The machine of the State has been derailed, the hierarchy of bureaucrats has become disorganized and knows no longer what direction to take, the soldiers have lost confidence in their commanders, in other words the army of the defenders of capital has been thrown into confusion, and it is at this point that there rises before us the great work of de-

churches, and prisons, while neither liberty nor equality will become the foundation of real economic relations. Universal suffrage would indeed have been inconceivable in a society based on serfdom, just as despotism would be in a society that is based on what is called the freedom of transactions but is more truly the freedom of exploitation.

The working classes of western Europe know this very well. They know or divine that our societies will continue to suffocate within existing political institutions so long as the contemporary capitalist system is not overthrown. They know that these institutions, no matter how they may be refurbished with fine names, still represent the corruption and domination of the most powerful transformed into a system that means the suppression of all freedoms and all progress; they know that the only way of shaking off these fetters would be to establish economic relations according to a new system, that of collective property. They know, in sum, that to accomplish a political revolution that is both deep and lasting, there must be an economic revolution.

But, by reason of the intimate links that exist between the political regime and the economic regime, it is evident that a revolution in the mode of production and the distribution of products could not operate if it did not occur parallel to the profound modification of those institutions that one generally describes as political. The abolition of individual property and the consequent end of exploitation, the establishment of a communist and collective system, would be impossible if we wanted to retain our parliaments or our kings. A new economic system calls for a new political regime, and that truth is so well understood by everyone that in fact the intellectual process going on among the proletarian masses at the present time oscillates indecisively between the two sides of the question that has to be resolved. Discussing the economic future, they think also of the political future, and as well as the words *Collectivism* and *Communism* we hear also the words: *Workers' State, Free Com-*

mune, Anarchy, or, equally often, *Authoritarian Communism* or *The Anarchist Collective Commune*.

"General rule: Do you want to study fruitfully? Begin by shedding one by one the thousand prejudices that have been taught you!" These words, with which a celebrated astronomer used to start off his course, apply equally in all the branches of human knowledge, and even more in the social than in the physical sciences because, from our very first step into their domain we find ourselves faced by a mass of prejudices inherited from the past, of absolutely false ideas disseminated to deceive the people, of sophisms carefully elaborated to confuse popular judgment. We have thus a great preliminary task to undertake before we can proceed with any certainty.

But among these prejudices there is one that especially merits our attention, not only because it is the basis of all our modern political institutions, but also because we find its influence at work on almost all the social theories advanced by the reformers. It is that which consists in putting one's faith in representative government, which is *government by proxy*.

Towards the end of the last century the French people overthrew the monarchy, and the last of the absolute kings expiated on the scaffold not only his own crimes, but also those of his predecessors.

At that time, when all that the revolution contains of good and great and durable was accomplished by the initiative and energy of individuals or groups and, thanks to the disorganization and weakness of the central government, it seemed that the people had no wish to resume the yoke of a new authority, based on the same principles as the old and all the stronger because it was not rotted by the faults of the fallen regime.

Far from it. Under the influence of governmental prejudices and deceived by the apparent freedom and well-being offered – as they were told – by the English and American constitutions, the French hastened to give themselves a constitution, and then more constitutions which they kept on changing, varying them

a brother him who has been led by passion to do ill to his kind; above all deprive the truly great criminals, those ignoble products of bourgeois idleness, of the possibility of parading their vices in seductive form, and you can be sure that we shall no longer have more than a very small number of crimes to point to in our society. Apart from idleness, what sustains crime is law and authority; the laws on property, the laws on government, the laws with their penalties and punishments. And Authority, which takes on itself to make these laws and apply them.

"No more laws! No more judges! Freedom, Brotherhood and the practice of Solidarity are the only effective bulwark we can raise to the anti-social instincts of a few among us."

if it is not the king, the judge and the priest, armed by the law, who had flesh torn away by strips, with burning pitch poured into the wounds, had limbs dislocated, bones broken, men sawn in two, so as to maintain their authority? You need merely consider the torrent of depravity let loose in human societies by spying and informing, encouraged by judges and paid for by the government in hard cash under the pretext of assisting the discovery of crimes. You need only to go into prisons and observe there what the man becomes who is deprived of liberty and thrust among other depraved beings permeated with all the corruption and vice that breed in our prisons today, to realise that the more they are "reformed," the more detestable the prisons become, our modern and model penitentiaries being a hundred times more corrupting than the dungeons of the middle ages. Finally, you need only consider what corruption and deprivation of the mind is generated among humankind by these ideas of obedience (essence of the law), of punishment, of authority having the right to punish and judge apart from the urgings of conscience, by all the functions of executioners, jailers and informers – in brief by all that immense apparatus of law and authority. You have only to consider all that, and you will certainly be in agreement with us, when we say that law and its penalties are abominations that should cease to exist.

Meanwhile, people who are not ruled by police, and because of that are less imbued by authoritarian prejudices, have perfectly understood that someone called a "criminal" is simply an unfortunate; that it is not a question of whipping or chaining him, or causing his death on the scaffold or in prison, but of succouring him by the most brotherly care, by treating him as an equal and taking him to live among honest people. And we hope the coming revolution will resound with this call:

> "Burn the guillotines, demolish the prisons, drive away the judge, the policeman, the spy – an impure race if ever there was one – but treat as

infinitely in detail but always basing them on a single principle: representative government.

Monarchy or Republic – it mattered little – the people was not governing itself; it was ruled by representatives, well or badly chosen. It may have proclaimed its sovereignty, but it has hurried to abdicate it. It elects – for better or worse – deputies who assume the regulation of the immense variety of intertwining interests, of human relations so complex in their entirety, over the whole surface of France!

Later on, the whole of continental Europe followed the same evolution. All countries overthrew their absolute monarchies and set out on the parliamentary route. Even the despotisms of the Orient are following the same route: Bulgaria, Turkey, Serbia are experimenting with constitutional regimes; even in Russia they are trying to shake off the chains of a camarilla, and replace them by the easier yoke of a delegate assembly.

What is worse is that France itself, which seemed to be opening new vistas, has continued to lapse into the same error. Disgusted by the sad experience of a constitutional monarchy, the people one day (in 1848) overthrew its government, but on the morrow it hastened to elect an assembly, merely changing its name and confiding to it the cares of government, which it would sell to a brigand[1] who would provoke the invasion of the fair fields of France by foreign armies.

Twenty years later (1871) it would fall into the same error once again. Seeing the city of Paris free of the troops and authorities who had deserted it, the people did not set about experimenting with a fresh approach that would facilitate the establishment of a new economic regime. Happy at having subsumed the word Empire in the word Republic, and the latter in

[1] The "brigand" to whom Kropotkin refers is of course Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, grandson of Napoleon I, who was elected president in 1848, and in 1852 elevated himself to the rank of Emperor with the title of Napoleon III. Trans.

the word Commune, the people hastened to apply once again, in the heart of the Commune, the representative system and to falsify its new ideal by evolving the worm-eaten heritage of the past. It abdicated its own initiative into the hands of an assembly of people elected more or less at random, and it confided to them the responsibility for that complete reorganization of human relationships which alone could have given strength and life to the Commune.

So the constitution is periodically torn into shreds that fly like dead leaves scattered on the river by an autumn wind! No matter; the people always seems to return to its first love; when the sixteenth constitution has been torn up they will remake it a seventeenth time!

And so, we see reformers who, dealing in economic theory, do not hesitate before a complete reshaping of existing forms, and propose to change from top to bottom both production and exchange and abolish the capitalist system, yet as soon as it is a matter of stating their political theory, they do not dare to touch the representative system; under the form of workers' State or free commune, they seek always to maintain, whatever the cost, this government by proxy. Whole peoples, whole races still cling obstinately to this system.

Fortunately the day of reckoning on this subject is approaching. Representative government is now applied in countries of which we know nothing. It functions or has functioned here on the great arena of western Europe in all its varieties from limited monarchy to the revolutionary Commune, and one notices that, hailed first with great hopes, it has become everywhere an instrument of intrigue, of personal enrichment, of hindrance to popular initiative and ongoing development. One begins to learn that the creed of representation projects the same values as those of aristocratic superiority and royal personage. More than that, one begins to understand that the faults of representative government do not depend only on social inequalities; applied in a setting

Besides, it is well known that fear of punishment has not halted a single murderer. Whoever is about to kill his neighbour for vengeance or poverty does not reflect a great deal on the consequences; there has never been a murderer who lacked the firm conviction that he would escape from prosecution. Let anyone think about this subject, let him analyze crimes and punishments, their motives and consequences, and if he knows how to reason without letting himself be influenced by preconceived ideas, he is bound to reach this conclusion:

> "Without considering a society where people will receive a better education, where the development of all their faculties and the possibility of using them will give men and women so much pleasure that they would not risk it all by indulging in murder, without considering that future society, and taking into account only our present society, with the sad products of poverty we see everywhere in the low taverns of the cities, the number of murders would not increase in any way if one day it were decided that no punishment be inflicted on murderers; indeed it is very likely there would be a fall in the number of cases involving recidivists, brutalized in the prisons."

We are told constantly of the benefits of the law and of the salutary effects of punishment. But has anyone ever tried to establish a balance between the benefits that are attributed to the law and its penalties, and the degrading effect of those penalties on humanity? One has merely to consider the accumulation of evil passions that are awakened among the spectators by the atrocious punishments inflicted publicly in our streets and squares. Who is it that has thus fostered and developed the instincts of cruelty among humanity (instincts unknown to the animals, man having become the most cruel animal on earth),

the village wiseacre. "The ultimate end of society is to give every accused person twelve honest jurors," said Edmund Burke.

But despite all the presuppositions that exist on this subject, it is high time the anarchists loudly declared that this category of the laws is as useless and harmful as the rest.

First of all, when we consider the so-called "crimes," the attacks against the persons, it is well known that two thirds or even three quarters of them are inspired by the desire to lay hold of somebody's wealth. That immense category of so-called "crimes and misdemeanours" would disappear on the day private property ceased to exist.

"But," we shall be told, "there will still be the brutes who make attempts on the lives of citizens, who strike with the knife in every quarrel, who avenge the least offence by a murder, if there are not laws to restrain them and punishments to hold them back." This is the refrain that has been sung to us ever since we expressed doubt of society's right to punish. Yet one fact has been clearly established: the severity of punishments in no way diminishes the number of crimes. You can hang, draw and quarter the murderers as much as you like, but the number of murders will not diminish. On the other hand, if you abolish the death penalty there will not be a single murder more. Statisticians and legists know that when the severity of the penal code is lessened there is never an increase in the number of attempts against the lives of citizens. On the other hand, when the crops are abundant, when bread is cheap and the weather is good, the number of murders decreases at once. It is proved by statistics that the number of crimes increases and declines in relation to the price of necessities and to good or bad weather. Not that all murders are inspired by hunger. Far from it; but when the harvests are good and necessities are affordably priced, people are happy and less wretched than usual, and they do not let themselves be led away by dark passions that tempt them to stick knives into the chests of their neighbours for futile reasons.

where all men had an equal right to capital and work, it would produce the same disastrous results. One can easily foresee the day when that institution, born – according to the apt saying of John Stuart Mill – from the desire to protect ourselves against the beak and claws of the king of vultures – will give place to a political organization born of the true needs of humanity and from the realization that the best way of being free is not to be represented, not to abandon affairs – all affairs – to Providence or to the elected ones, but to handle them ourselves.

This conclusion will also be reached – we hope – by you, the reader, when we have studied the intrinsic faults of the representative system, whatever may be the name or the size of the human group within which it is applied.

2.

"Though our modern attitudes make us distrustful of the prestige i absolute monarchy" – wrote Augustin Thierry in 1828 – "there are ye other systems against which we should be on our guard, those of lega order and the representative system."[2] Bentham[3] said almost the same thing. But at that period their warnings went unheard. People there believed in parliamentarism, and replied to those few critics by this argument: "The parliamentary system has not yet said its last word; it should only be judged where it is based on universal suffrage."

Since then, universal suffrage has become part of the pattern of our lives. After having been so long opposed to it, the bourgeoisie have in the end understood that this change will in no way threaten their domination, and they have decided to accept it. In the United States universal suffrage has been

[2] Augustin Thierry. See note. 8. Trans.

[3] Jeremy Bentham. See note 28. Trans.

functioning in full freedom for nearly a century, and it is making headway in France and Germany. But the representative system has not changed; it remains what it was in the days of Thierry and Bentham; universal suffrage has not ameliorated it, and its faults are no less glaring. That is why today it is not merely the revolutionaries like Proudhon[4] who overwhelm it with their criticism; it is also the moderates, like Mill[5] and Spencer[6] who cry out: "Keep an eye on parliamentarism!" One can also sense this feeling among the broad public. Using facts generally known and recognized, one could at this moment fill whole volumes with explaining the drawbacks of representative government, sure of finding an echo among the vast mass of readers. It has been judged – and condemned.

Its partisans – and they include people of good faith if not good judgment – do not fail to boast of the services that, according to them, this institution had rendered to us. To listen to them, it is to the representative system that we owe the political liberties we possess today, unknown under the former absolute monarchies. But is it not taking cause for effect to argue in this way, or, rather, one of two simultaneous effects for the cause?

[4] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), an early anarchist theoretician, the first actually to call himself "anarchist," who advocated mutualism, the interaction of people in small work and community groups, and federalism, by which he meant the replacement of the state by the free interplay of such groups. His most important works among many were probably Wiat is Property? (1840) and The General Idea of the Revolution in the 19th Century (1851). Trans.

[5] John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). British philosopher who described himself as a Utilitarian and was an early advocate of women's rights. His best known work is On Liberty (1859) which is libertarian rather than liberal in approach. Trans.

[6] Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was a non-Darwinian evolutionist who coined the phrase, later wrongly attributed to Darwin, "the survival of the fittest." He was a libertarian thinker who criticized the institution of the state and warned of the dangers of parliamentary democracy, and many of the individualist anarchists accepted him as one of their own. Trans.

the church, etc. – and there are tens of thousands of them in every country – have no other end but to maintain, keep in repair and develop the governmental machine, which in its turn serves almost entirely to protect the privileges of these possessing classes. Analyze all these laws, observe them in action from day to day, and you will see that there is not a single one worth keeping, beginning with those that bound the communes hand and foot to the parson, the local merchant and the governmental boss, and ending with that famous constitution (the 19th or 20th since 1789),[4] which gives us a chamber of dunces and petty speculators ready for the dictatorship of any adventurer who comes along, for the rule of some crowned cabbage-head.

Briefly, regarding these laws there can be no doubt. Not only the anarchists, but also the more or less revolutionary middle class are in agreement on this: that the best use one can make of the laws concerning the organization of government is to burn them in a bonfire celebrating their end.

There remains the first category of laws, the most important, because most of the prejudices cluster around them; the laws regarding the protection of persons, the punishment and prevention of "crimes." If the law enjoys a certain consideration, it is because people believe this category of laws absolutely indispensable for the security of the individual in society. Laws have developed from the nucleus of customs that were useful for human societies and were exploited by the rulers to sanction their domination. The authority of the chiefs of the tribes, of the rich families of the communes, and of the king, were supported by the function of judges which they exercised, and even to the present, when people talk of the need for government, it is its function of supreme judge that is implied. "Without government, people would strangle each other," says

[4] Here Kropotkin is presumably referring to the Constitution of the Third Republic, which was adopted in 1875. Trans.

ing between them, they deal with it without having recourse to the law, by calling in a third party, and if there is anyone who insists on requiring from another person a part of what he has produced, it can only be the property-owner, coming to claim his lion's share. As to humanity in general, it respects everywhere the right of each person over what he has produced, without the need to have any special laws to cover it.

All these laws about property, which make up the great volumes of codes and are the delight of our lawyers, have no object but that of protecting the unjust appropriation of the work of humanity by certain monopolists, and thus have no reason to exist; and socialist revolutionaries are determined to make them vanish on the day of the revolution. We can, in fact and in full justice, make a great bonfire of all the laws that are related to the so-called "rights of property," of all the property titles, of all the archives – in brief, of all that has reference to an institution which soon will be considered a blot on the history of humanity as humiliating as slavery and serfdom in past centuries.

What we have just said about the laws concerning property applies completely to the second category of laws – the laws that maintain the government – constitutional laws, in other words.

Once again there is a whole arsenal of laws, decrees, or ordinances, this time serving to protect the various forms of representative government – by delegation or usurpation – under which human societies struggle for existence. We know very well – the anarchists have often demonstrated it by their incessant criticism of the various forms of government – that the mission of all governments, monarchical, constitutional and republican, is to protect and maintain by force the privileges of the owning classes: aristocracy, priesthood and bourgeoisie. A good third of our laws, the "fundamental" laws, laws on taxes, customs duties, on the organization of ministries and their chancelleries, on the army, the police,

In the last resort, it is not the representative system that has given us – or even guaranteed – the various freedoms we have conquered in the past century. It is the great movement of liberal thought, emerging from the revolution, that has seized them from government at the same time as it insisted on national representation; and it is still this spirit of liberty, of revolt, that has been able to sustain them despite the constant infringements by government and even by the parliaments themselves. Of its own accord, representative government does not offer real liberties, and it can accommodate itself remarkably well to despotism. Freedoms have to be seized from it, as much as they do from absolute kings; and once they have been gained they must be defended against parliament as much as they were against a king, day by day, inch by inch, without ever letting down one's guard; this succeeds only when there is a leisure class in the country, jealous of its freedoms and always ready to defend them by extra-parliamentary agitation against the least infringement. Where such a class does not exist, and where there is no unity above defending political liberties, they will not exist, no matter whether there is a nation-wide system of representation. Parliament itself becomes the monarch's ante-chamber, as in the Balkans, in Turkey, and in Austria.

The freedoms of England are often cited and thoughtlessly associated with the institution of parliament. It is forgotten by what means – all of them *insurrectional* – each of them was snatched from the very same parliament. Freedom of the press, criticisms of the laws, freedom of meeting and association – all were extorted from parliament by force, by agitations that threatened to become rebellions. It was by establishing trade unions and practising strike action despite the edicts of Parliament and the hangings of 1813, and by wrecking the factories hardly fifty years ago, that the English workers won the right to associate and to strike. It was by beating with the Hyde Park railings the police who denied them access that the people of London once again recently affirmed its right to demonstrate

in the streets and parks of the capital even against a constitutional ministry. It has not been by parliamentary jousting but by extra-parliamentary agitation, by calling out a hundred thousand people to growl and yell before the houses of aristocrats and ministers, that the English middle class has defended its liberties. As for Parliament, it impinges continually on the country's political rights, and is ready to suppress them with a stroke of the pen if it does not find itself faced by a mass of people ready to rebel. But what in fact happens to the inviolability of the home and the secrecy of correspondence, when the bourgeoisie chooses to renounce it in order to obtain from the government a pretence of protection against the revolutionaries?

To attribute to parliaments what is due to general progress, to imagine that having a constitution is sufficient for the enjoyment of freedom, is to sin against the most elementary rules of historic judgment.

Besides, the question does not lie in that direction. It is not a matter of knowing whether the representative system does not offer a few advantages over a pack of flunkeys exploiting for their profit the caprices of an absolute master. If the representative system has taken root in Europe, it is because it has accorded better with the phase of capitalist exploitation which we have gone through during the nineteenth century but which draws towards its end. It certainly offered more security to the industrial operator and the merchant, to whom it transferred the power that had fallen out of the hands of the nobility.

But monarchy also, as well as its formidable inconveniences, could offer certain advantages over the reign of the feudal lords. It also was the necessary product of its age. But for that reason should we remain for ever under the authority of a king and his lackeys?

What is important to us, men at the end of the 19th century, is to know whether the faults of representative government are

others, whom he has not paid the true value of their work, and next because his mansion represents a social value he could not produce on his own: the law establishes his rights over a portion of that which belongs to everybody and not to anyone in particular. The same house, built in the beautiful heart of Siberia, would not have the value it has in a large city. Its value derives, as we know, from the works of fifty generations who have built the city, adorned it, provided it with water and gas, with fine boulevards, universities, theatres and shops, with railways and roads radiating in all directions.

Thus in recognizing the rights of Sir Such-and-Such over a house in Paris, in London, in Rouen, the law appropriates to him – unjustly – a certain part of the products of the work of all humanity. And it is precisely because that appropriation is a crying injustice (all other forms of property have the same character) that it has needed a whole arsenal of laws and a whole army of soldiers, policemen and judges to sustain it, against the good sense and the feeling of justice that is inherent in humanity.

Thus the greater part of our laws – the civil codes of all countries – have no other object than to maintain this appropriation, this monopoly to the profit of a few against the whole of humanity. Three quarters of the cases judged by the tribunals are merely quarrels that have cropped up among monopolists; two robbers quarrelling over the booty. And a great part of our criminal laws have the same aim, since their object is to keep the worker in a position subordinate to the employer, to assure to one the exploitation of the other.

As to guaranteeing the producer the product of his work, there are not even any laws that provide it. That is so simple and so natural, so much in accordance with human customs and habits that the law has not even dreamed of it. Open brigandage, with arms in hand, no longer exists in our century; a worker need no longer dispute with another worker over the products of their toil; if there is some failure of understand-

reality. The law which was originally presented to us as a collection of customs useful for the preservation of society, is now no more than an instrument for maintaining exploitation and for the domination of the idle rich over the labouring masses. Today its civilizing mission is nil; it has only one mission, the maintenance of exploitation.

That is how we must tell the history of the development of the law. Must we respect it for that? Certainly not. No more than capital itself, the product of brigandage, does it have a right to our respect. And the first duty of the revolutionaries in the nineteenth century will be to make a bonfire of all existing laws, as they will of all titles to property.

4.

If one studies the millions of laws that rule humanity, one can see easily that they are divisible into three main categories: protection of property, protection of government, protection of persons. And in analyzing these three categories one comes to the same conclusion regarding each of them: *the uselessness and harmfulness of the law.*

As for the protection of property, the socialists know what that means. Laws regarding property are not fashioned to guarantee either individuals or society the fruits of their labour. They are made, on the contrary, to pilfer from the producer part of what he produces and to assure to the few whatever they have pilfered, either from the producers or from society as a whole. When the law established the right of Sir Such-and-Such over a house, for example, it established his right, not over a cabin that he might have built himself, nor over a house he might have erected with the help of a few friends; nobody would dispute his right if such had been the case. The law, on the contrary, established his rights over a mansion that is not the product of his labour, first because he has had it built by

not as glaring and as insupportable as those of absolute power were in the past; whether the obstacles it offers to future development are not just as troublesome, so far as our century is concerned, as the obstacles offered by the monarchy in the last century? Finally, whether a simple "representative" patching up of the political scene will be enough to meet the new economic phase whose outcome we foresee. This is what we have to study, rather than endlessly discussing the historical role of the bourgeois political regime.

Once the question is posed in these terms, there is no longer any doubt of the answer.

Certainly the representative system, that compromise with the old regime which has retained in its government all the prerogatives of absolute power while subordinating them to a more or less fictional popular control, has had its day. Now it has become a hindrance to progress. Its faults no longer depend on men alone, on the individuals in power, they are inherent in the system, and are so profound that no modification can adapt it to the new needs of our epoch. The representative system was organized by the bourgeoisie to ensure their domination, and it will disappear with them. For the new economic phase that is about to begin we must seek a new form of political organization, based on a principle quite different from that of representation. The logic of events imposes it.

Representative government shares all the inherent faults of every kind of government, and, far from mitigating them, it merely accentuates them and creates new faults. One of the most profound sayings of Rousseau on governments in general applies to elective government as much as to all the other kinds: If one is to abdicate one's rights into the hands of an elected assembly, must it not be composed of angels, of superhuman beings? And the claws and horns would be tearing at such ethereal beings, as soon as they tried to govern the human herd!

Like the rule of despots, representative government, whether it is called Parliament, Convention or Council of the Commune, or whether it gives itself any other more or less absurd title, and whether it is nominated by the prefects of a Bonaparte or arch-liberally elected by an insurgent city, will always seek to extend its legislation, to increase its power by meddling with everything, all the time killing the initiative of the individual and the group to supplant them by law. Its natural tendency will inevitably be to take hold of the individual from childhood, and to lead him, law by law, threat leading to punishment, from the cradle to the grave, without ever setting its prey free from its lofty surveillance. Have you ever heard of an elected assembly that declared itself incompetent of dealing with any kind of question? The more revolutionary it claims to be, the more it will seize hold of anything that is outside its competence. To legislate in every aspect of human activity, to meddle in the smallest details of the lives of its "subjects" – that is the very essence of the State, of government. To create a government, constitutional or otherwise, is to constitute a force that will in the end set out to seize control of everything, to regulate all the functions of society, without recognizing any restraint but that which we are able to oppose to it from time to time by means of agitation or insurrection. Parliamentary government – as it has amply proved – is no exception to the rule.

"The mission of the State," we have been told in order to delude us, "is to protect the weak against the strong, the poor against the rich, the working classes against the privileged classes." We know how governments have fulfilled such missions; they have done the reverse. Faithful to its origin, representative government has always been the protector of privilege against those who set out to free themselves from it. Representative government in particular, with the connivance of the people, has organized the defence of the privileges of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie against the

the laws that have been made in the last eighty years, and you will find nothing else. The protection of individuals, which is presented to you as the true mission of the law, occupies only an almost imperceptible place, for in our present-day societies attacks on the person, dictated directly by hatred and brutality, are on the decline. If someone is killed nowadays, it is usually for robbery and rarely for personal revenge. And if this kind of crime and misdemeanour continues to diminish, it is certainly not due to legislation, but to the development of our societies, to our increasingly sociable habits, not to the prescriptions of our laws. If one were to abrogate tomorrow all the laws concerning the protection of people, if one ceased tomorrow all prosecutions for crimes against people, the number of attacks caused by personal revenge or brutality would not show the least increase.

Perhaps someone will say that over the past fifty years a good number of liberal laws have been passed. But when one analyses these liberal laws one finds that they are no more than the abrogation of laws we have inherited from the barbarism of previous centuries. All the liberal laws and the whole of the radical programme can be summed up in these words: abolition of the laws that are inconvenient to the bourgeoisie itself, and a return to the laws of the twelfth century communes, extended to all citizens. The abolition of the death penalty, juries for all "crimes" (the jury, more liberally administered than today, existed in the 12th century), an elected magistrate, the right to prosecute public servants, the abolition of standing armies – all this, which we are told is an invention of modern liberalism, is no more than a return to freedoms that existed before the Church and the King extended their grasp over humanity.

The protection of exploitation, directly by laws regarding property, and indirectly by sustaining the State – there is the essence and substance of our modern codes and the preoccupation of our costly machines of legislation. It is time now no longer to accept phrases but to take account of what exists in

And even later, when all the powers were concentrated in a single person who said, "The State is I," it was "in the secrecy of the Prince's Council," according to the fantasy of a minister or an imbecile king, that the edicts were fabricated which the subjects were expected to obey under pain of death. All judicial guarantees were abolished; the nation became a serf to the royal power and a handful of courtiers. The most terrible of penalties – breaking on the wheel, burning at the stake, flaying alive, tortures of all kinds – produced by the sick fantasy of monks and frenzied fools who sought their pleasures in the sufferings of the tormented: such was the "progress" that made its appearance at this epoch.

It is to the Great Revolution that belongs the honour of having begun the demolition of that crazy structure of laws left to us by feudalism and the reign of kings. But after having demolished certain parts of this ancient edifice, the revolution transferred the power of lawmaking into the hands of the bourgeoisie which in turn began to erect a new scaffolding of laws designed to maintain and perpetuate its domination over the masses. In its parliaments it legislated far and wide, and mountains of useless papers accumulated with alarming rapidity. But what, basically, are all these laws?

Most of them have only one aim: protecting individual property, which means the riches acquired by the exploitation of man by man, opening further fields of exploitation to capital, and sanctioning the new forms exploitation assumes as capital seizes on new areas of human life – railways, telegraphs, electric light, chemical industries, even the expression of human thought through literature and science, etc. The rest of the laws, basically, have always the same aim: to maintain the governmental machine that assures capital the exploitation and accumulation of all the wealth that is produced. Magistrature, police, armed forces, public instruction, finance – all serve the same God: capital; all have but one end, to protect and further the exploitation of the workers by the capitalist. Analyze all

aristocracy on one side and the exploited on the other – showing itself modest, polite, well mannered to the first, and ferocious towards the others. That is why even the slightest of laws protecting the worker, no matter how harmless it may be, can be wrung from a parliament only by an agitation that goes near to insurrection. Remember merely the struggles it was necessary to wage, the agitations to which people had to devote themselves, in order to obtain from the British Houses of Parliament, the Swiss Federal Council, the French Chambers, a few wretched laws limiting the hours of work! The first legislation of this kind, voted in England, was extorted only by putting barrels of powder under the machines in the factories.

Elsewhere, in countries where the aristocracy has not yet been destroyed by the revolution, the lords and the bourgeois get along marvellously together. "Grant me the right to legislate, milord, and I will mount guards around your castle!" – and he mounts the guard as long as he does not feel threatened.

It took forty years of agitation, which sometimes carried fire through the countryside, before the English parliament decided to guarantee to the farmer the benefit of improvements he made on land he held by lease. As to the famous "land law" voted for Ireland, it was necessary, as Gladstone himself admitted, for the country to rise in a general insurrection, openly refusing to pay rents and defending themselves against evictions by boycott, fires and the killing of landlords before the bourgeois would vote the wretched law that purported to protect the hungry land against the lords who starved it.

But if it is a matter of protecting the interests of the capitalist, threatened by insurrection or even agitation, then representative government, that organ of capitalist domination, will turn savage. It attacks, and it does so with more confidence and baseness than any despot. The law against socialists in Germany is the equivalent of the edict of Nantes; and

not even Catherine II after the peasant rising of Pugachev[7] or Louis XVI after the wheat riots displayed such ferocity as the two "National Assemblies" of 1848 and 1871, whose members shouted: "Kill the wolves, the she-wolves and their cubs," and unanimously, without a single opposing voice, rejoiced in their slaughter by soldiers drunken with blood! The anonymous beast with six hundred heads showed himself able to surpass Louis XI and Ivan the Terrible and their kind!

It will be the same wherever there is a representative government, whether it is elected in the regular way or is imposed in the lurid light of an insurrection. Either economic equality will prevail in the nation and the free and equal citizens will no longer surrender their rights into anyone else's hands and will seek out instead a new organization that will permit them to manage their own affairs; or, there will still be a minority who will dominate the masses on the economic level, and it is then that the masses must be watchful. Representatives elected by that minority will act appropriately. They will legislate to maintain its privileges and will act with violence and massacre against those who do not submit.

It is impossible for us to analyse at the present moment all the faults of representative government; that would take up whole volumes. In limiting ourselves entirely to what is essential, we can avoid the trap of pedantic classification. Yet there is still one fact that calls for discussion.

It is a strange fact indeed! Representative government had as its aim to put an end to personal government; it set out to place power in the hands of a class, and not of an individual.

[7] Emilian Ivanovich Pugachev (1726-1775) led a major rebellion of Cossacks and peasants in central Russia between 1773 and 1775 which Catherine the Greaf s armies defeated only with difficulty since Pugachev (who claimed to be the assassinated Tsar Peter III) had instituted the abolition of serfdom over large areas. Pugachev was eventually captured and cruelly executed in Moscow, Trans.

The first revolution, the revolution of the communes, succeeded in abolishing these laws only in part, for the charters of the free communes were mostly no more than compromises between seigniorial and episcopal legislation and the new relations that were created in the heart of the free commune. And yet, what a difference between those laws and our present-day laws! The commune did not bring itself to imprisoning and guillotining its citizens for reasons of State; it limited itself to expelling whoever plotted with the enemies of the commune and demolishing his home. For most of the so-called "crimes and misdemeanours" it restricted itself to imposing fines; one even sees in the Communes of the 12th century that principle which is so just, but now forgotten, by which the whole community took responsibility for the misdeeds committed by its members. The societies of that era, considering crime as an accident or a misfortune – which to this day is the conception of Russian peasants – and refusing to admit the principle of personal vengeance, which is preached in the Bible, understood that for each crime the fault lies with all society. It needed all the influence of the Byzantine church, which imported among the Celts and the Germans the penalty of death and the horrible torments that were later inflicted on those who were considered criminals, and as well as the influence of the Roman civil code – developed by imperial Rome – to introduce those notions of unlimited property in land which, in the end, overwhelmed the communalist customs of the primitive peoples.

We know that the free communes were unable to sustain themselves; they became the prey of the kings. And as royalty gained further strength, the right of legislation passed more and more into the hands of a clique. Appeals to the notion were made only to sanction the taxes imposed by the kings. Parliaments (sometimes called at intervals of two centuries at the pleasure and whim of the Court), "extraordinary councils," "assemblies of noblemen" or ministers who hardly listened to the grievances of the king's subjects – these were the legislators.

were trying to impose their will. But at least they encountered an obstacle to their efforts in the popular masses which often made their strength felt.

As the Church on one side and the gentry on the other succeeded in reducing the people to servitude, the right to make laws escaped from the hands of the nation and passed into those of the privileged. The Church extended its powers; sustained by the wealth which accumulated in its coffers, it interfered more and more in private life, and, under the pretext of saving souls, it exploited the soil of its serfs; it levied its dues from all classes and broadened its jurisdiction; it multiplied both crimes and punishments, and enriched itself in proportion to crimes committed, since it was into its strongboxes that the proceeds of the fines would flow. The laws had no relevance to the interests of the nation: "One might rather think of them as emanating from a gathering of fanatics rather than of legislators," observed one historian of French law.

At the same time, as the lord for his part extended his power over the farm labourers and the town artisans, he became also both judge and legislator. In the tenth century such monuments of public law as existed were not much more than treaties regulating the obligations, feudal tasks and tributes of the serfs and the lord's vassals. The legislators of this period were a handful of brigands, ever increasing in numbers and organizing themselves to exploit a people that became more and more passive as its members dedicated themselves to tilling the fields. They exploited to their advantage the feeling of justice that is inherent in all peoples; they posed as men of justice, yet made the very application of justice a source of revenue, and formulated laws that served to sustain their domination.

Later on these very laws, gathered together and classified by the legal experts, served as the basis for our modern codes. And people still talk of respecting the codes – those heritages of the baron and the priest!

Yet it has always shown the tendency to revert to personal government and to submit itself to a single man.

The reason for this anomaly is quite simple. In fact, having armed the government with thousands of prerogatives which are still from the past; having confided to it the management of all matters that are important to a country, and given it a budget of billions, was it possible to confide to the mob in parliament the administration of such numberless concerns? Thus it was necessary to nominate an executive power – the ministry – which was invested with all these quasi-royal prerogatives. What a miserable authority, in fact, was that of Louis XIV, who boasted of *being* the State, in comparison with that of a constitutional chief minister in our day!

It is true that the Chamber could overturn such a minister – but for what reason? To name a successor who would be invested with the same powers and whom it would be forced, if it were consistent, to dismiss in a week? So it prefers to keep the man it has chosen until the country cries out loudly enough, and then it discards him to recall the man it has dismissed two years ago. It becomes a seesaw: Gladstone-Beaconsfield, Beaconsfield-Gladstone. And basically it changes nothing, for the country is always ruled by one man, the head of the cabinet.

But when the choice falls on a clever man who guarantees "order" – that is to say internal exploitation and external expansion – then the parliament submits to all his caprices and arms him with ever new powers. However much contempt he may show for the constitution, whatever the scandals of his government, they are accepted, and even if there are quibbles over details, he is given a free hand with everything of importance. Bismarck is a living example of this; Guizot, Pitt and Palmerston were such in preceding generations.

That is understandable: all government has a tendency to become personal since that is its origin and its essence. Whether the parliament is elected by property-owners or by universal suffrage, even if it is named only by workers and

consists only of workers, it will always search for the man on whom it can unload the cares of government and to whom in turn it will submit. As long as we confide to a small group all the economic, political, military, financial and industrial prerogatives with which we arm them today, this small group will necessarily be inclined, like a detachment of soldiers on a campaign, to submit to a single chief.

This happens even in undisturbed times. But let a war blaze on the frontier, let a civil struggle start up in the interior, and then the first ambitious newcomer, the first clever adventurer, seizing control of the machine with a thousand ramifications which we call the administration, will be able to impose himself on the nation. The parliament will no more be capable of preventing him than five hundred men picked by chance in the street; on the contrary, it will paralyse the resistance. The two adventurers who carried the name of Bonaparte did not succeed by chance. As to the efficacy of the parliamentary debating society in resisting coups d'Etat, France knows something about this. Even in our day, was it the Chamber that saved France from MacMahon's[8] attempted coup? As we now know, it was the extra-parliamentary committees. Perhaps the example of England will be cited. But it should not boast too loudly of having retained its parliamentary institutions intact during the nineteenth century. It is true that it has managed throughout that century to avoid class warfare, but everything leads one to believe that it will break out there too, and that Parliament will not emerge intact from that struggle and will founder in one way or another during the march of the revolution.

[8] General Marie Esm£ Patrice de MacMahon was a French monarchist chosen as president of the country in 1873. Instead of restoring the monarchy he seems to have intended a coup d'etat in his own benefit, but a newly elected republican chamber of deputies resisted his efforts, and MacMahon was forced to accept the principle of ministerial responsibility to parliament rather than to the president. Trans.

needed and in the end most of them will only disappear during revolutionary periods.

The socialists have already told on many occasions the history of capital. They have recounted how it was born of wars and pillage, of slavery and serfdom, of fraud and modern ways of exploitation. They have shown how it was nourished by the blood of the workers and how it has slowly conquered the entire world. They have still to write the same kind of history regarding the genesis and development of the law. The popular mind, as always going ahead of the savants, is already working out the philosophy of that history and marking out its essential landmarks.

Created in order to guarantee the fruits of pillage, monopoly and exploitation, the law has followed the same phases of development as capital; twin brother and sister, they have walked hand in hand, both of them feeding on the sufferings and sorrows of humanity. Their history has been practically the same in all the countries of Europe. It is only the details that differ; the basic system is identical, and one has only to cast an eye over the development of the law in France, or in Germany, to understand the essential characteristics of its development in most European countries.

In its origins, the law was the national pact or contract. On the Roman parade ground the legions and the people agreed on their contract. The Field of May[3] of the primitive communes of Switzerland (where the assembled people vote their own laws) retains a memory of that epoch despite all the changes that have taken place through the permeation of a centralizing bourgeois civilization. It is true that this contract was not always freely accepted; even at that epoch the rich and the powerful

[3] The Field of May. In some of the smaller Swiss cantons a measure of direct democracy still prevails, and the citizens gather in a field on the edge of the town, often with a great lime tree as a focus as in Appenzell, and actually vote their own laws on the spot, appointing at the same time a council to see that the people's will is carried out. Trans.

Of all this we shall become even more convinced as we analyze, in the following chapter, the further development of the law under the auspices of religion, authority, and the present-day parliamentary system.

3.

We have seen how the law was born out of established customs and usages, and how from the beginming it represented a clever mixture of sociable customs necessary for the preservation of the human race, with other customs imposed by those who exploited to their advantage popular superstitions and the right of the strongest. This double character of the law has determined its further development among peoples who are increasingly disciplined. But while the nucleus of sociable customs written into the law undergoes a slight and slow modification over the centuries, it is the other aspect of the law that develops apace, always to the advantage of the dominant classes, always to the detriment of the oppressed classes. Only with difficulty and very rarely can one wrest from the dominant class any law that represents, or seems to represent, a guarantee for the disinherited. But then that law will merely abrogate a preceding law that had been made for the advantage of the ruling class. "The best laws," said Buckle[2] "were those that abrogated preceding laws." But what terriible efforts have been necessary, what streams of blood have had to be shed each time the effort was made to abrogate one of those institutions that serve to keep the people in fetters! To abolish the last vestiges of serfdom and of feudal rights, to break the power of the royal gang, France had to pass through four years of revolution and twenty years of war. To abrogate the least of the iniquitous laws that the past has bequeathed to us, dozens of years of struggle are

[2] Buckle. See note 53. Trans.

If we want, at the time of the coming revolution, to leave the gates wide open to reaction, to monarchy perhaps, we have only to confide our affairs to a representative government, to a ministry armed with all the powers it possesses today. Reactionary dictatorship, first tinged with red, and then turning blue in proportion as it feels itself more securely in the saddle, will not be far behind. It will have at its direction all the instruments of domination; it will find them all at its service.

But even if it is the source of so much evil, does not the representative system at least render some services in the progressive and peaceful development of societies? Has it no perhaps contributed to the decentralization of power which has asserted itself in our century? Has it not perhaps helped to hinder wars? Has it not bowed to the exigencies of the moment and sacrificed to time certain antiquated institutions, so as to prevent civil war? Does it not offer at least certain guarantees, a hope of progress, of amelioration within the nation?

What a bitter irony is to be found in each of these questions and in so many others that nevertheless spring up as soon as one judges the institution! For all the history of our century is there to condemn it.

Faithful to the royalist tradition in its modern guise, which is Jacobinism, parliaments have done nothing other than concentrating powers in the hands of the governments. Bureaucracy carried to an extreme becomes the characteristic of representative government. Since the beginning of this century the talk is all of decentralization, of autonomy, and nothing is done but centralize and kill the last vestiges of autonomy. Even Switzerland is suffering from this influence, and England submits to it. If it had not been for the resistance of manufacturers and merchants, we should today be in the position of having to ask permission in Paris to kill a cow in Brive-la-gaillarde. Everything falls more and more under the high hand of government. All that is left to us is the management of industry and commerce, of production and consumption, and the social

democrats – blinded with authoritarian prejudices – already dream of the day when in the parliament of Berlin they can regulate manufacturing and consumption over the whole surface of Germany.

Has the representative system, which we are told is so pacific, saved us from wars? Never has there been so much extermination as under the representative system. The bourgeoisie needs to establish its domination over markets, and that domination is gained only at the expense of others, by shot and shell. Lawyers and journalists like to talk of military glory, and there is nobody more warlike than stay-at-home warriors.

But is it not true that parliaments lend themselves to the needs of the moment and are ready to modify institutions that are in decay? As in the days of the Convention it was necessary to put a knife to the throats of the Conventioneers to extort from them nothing more than agreement to fails accomplis, so today we have to stage a full insurrection to tear from the "representatives of the people" the smallest of reforms.

As to the improvement of the elected body, never has there been seen a generation of parliaments like that in our day. Like every institution in its decadence, they carry on while their condition gets worse. People used to talk of the corruption of parliaments in the days of Louis Philippe. Speak today to the few honest men who have wandered into these morasses and they will tell you:" I am sick at heart with it all!" Parliamentarism inspires only disgust in those who see it close at hand.

But is it really impossible to improve it? Would not a new element, the working class element, infuse it with new blood. Very well, let us analyse the constitution of representative assemblies, study their functioning, and we shall see that such dreams are as naive as the thought of marrying a king to a peasant girl in the hope of being given a succession of good little kings!

sanctified by the priest and having at its service the warrior's mace. It sought to stabilize the customs that were advantageous to the dominant minority, and the military authority undertook to ensure obedience. At the same time the warrior found in this new function an instrument for validating his power; no longer did he have at his service mere brute force, for now he was the defender of the law.

But if the law presented nothing more than a series of regulations favouring merely the rulers, it would have difficulty in being accepted and obeyed. Therefore the legislator mingled in his code the two currents of which we have just been speaking; the maxims that represent the principles of morality and solidarity developed through life in common, and the orders that are always needed to consecrate inequality. The customs that are absolutely essential for the very existence of society were easily mingled in the Code with practices imposed by the rulers, and aspired to the same respect from the crowd. "Do not kill!" says the Code, and it hastens to add, "Pay your tithe to the priest!" "Do not steal!" says the Code, and immediately afterward, "Whoever does not pay his taxes shall be punished!"

Such is the law, and the double character that it sustains to this day. Its origin lies in the desire of the dominant class to preserve the customs which they themselves have imposed for their own advantage. Its true character lies in the clever mingling of customs which have no need of laws to be respected, with the other customs that offer advantages only for the rulers, that are harmful to the masses and are maintained only by the fear of punishment.

No more than individual capital, born of fraud and violence and developed under the auspices of authority, has the law any title to human respect. Born of violence and superstition, established in the interest of the priest, the conqueror and the rich exploiter, it will be abolished entirely on the day the people decide to break their chains.

something better, to criticize his old way of living, to desire a change. If that desire has not penetrated him, if he has not shaken off the tutelage of those who make use of his superstitions and fears, he will choose to remain in the same situation. If the young people want to change something, the old will raise the cry of alarm against the innovators. A primitive man may well prefer to let himself be killed rather than transgress the customs of his people, since from childhood he has been told that the slightest infraction of established customs might bring misfortune down upon him and even result in the ruin of his whole tribe. And even today, there are many politicians and even self-styled revolutionaries who act in the same way, clinging to a past that is on its way out. How many of them have no care but to seek out precedents? And how many ardent innovators are merely the imitators of past revolutions?

This spirit of routine, which finds its origin in superstition, indolence and cowardice, is always the great strength of the oppressors; and in primitive human societies it was always exploited by the priests and the military chiefs, perpetuating customs advantageous to them alone, which they succeeded in imposing on the tribes. So long as this spirit of conservatism, cleverly exploited, sufficed to allow the chiefs to trespass on the freedom of individuals; so long as the inequalities between men were natural ones and were not magnified and multiplied by the concentration of power and wealth; there was not yet any need for the law and for the formidable machinery of tribunals that would impose it with their ever increasing penalties.

But when society had begun to split up into two hostile classes – one that seeks to establish its domination and the other that seeks to escape from it – then the struggle broke out. Whoever was the conqueror now hastened to give permanence to the accomplished situation; he sought to make it unchallengeable, to render it holy and venerable by all the criteria that the conquered might respect. Law made its appearance,

3.

The faults of representative assemblies should not in fact astonish us if we reflect for just a moment on the manner in which they are recruited and in which they function.

Must I offer again the picture, so disgusting, so thoroughly repugnant, which we all know – the picture of what happens at elections? In bourgeois England and democratic Switzerland, in France as in the United States, in Germany as in the Argentine Republic, is not that sad comedy everywhere the same?

Must one tell how the agents and electoral committees contrive, canvass and carry out an election, making promises on all sides, political in meetings and personal to individuals: how they penetrate into homes, flattering the mother, the child, and if necessary caressing the asthmatic dog or cat of the "voter"? How they spread themselves around in the pubs and cafe's, trying to convert the voters and entrap them in their discussions just as their counterparts in roguery try to involve them in the "three card trick"? How the candidate, making himself desirable, appears among his "dear voters" with a benevolent smile, a modest look and a cajoling voice, like an old vixen of a London landlady trying to capture a lodger with her sweet smile and angelic looks? Need we enumerate the lying – entirely lying – programmes, whether socialist-revolutionary or merely opportunist in orientation, in which the candidate himself believes no more than he believes the predictions of an Old Moore's Almanac, yet which he defends with a spirit, a sonorous voice, a show of feeling, worthy of a clown or a wandering actor? It is no wonder that the popular theatre no longer limits itself to exhibiting Bertrand and Robert Macaire[9] as simple rogues, Tartuffes or swindlers, but adds to these traditional

[9] Robert Macaire was the picaresque hero of a play of the same name by Frederic Lemaitre and Benjamin Antier which was produced in the 1830s. He was, par excellence, the wholly amoral and charming rogue. Trans.

types the representatives of the people, in quest of votes and pockets to pick.

Finally, must we talk about the cost of elections? Surely all the newspapers keep us well informed on this question. One has only to reproduce the expense lists of electoral agents, in which figure roasts of lamb, flannel waistcoats, and sedative waters sent by sympathetic candidates to the "dear children" of their voters. Need we also recall the cost of boiled potatoes and rotten eggs "to confound the opposing party" that occur in the electoral budgets of the United States, or the costs of libellous placards and "last minute tricks" that already play such an honourable role in our European elections.

Thus it is, and it cannot be otherwise so long as there are voters to give themselves masters. Think only of the workers, who are equal among themselves, taking it into their heads one day to pick rulers; it will be just the same as ever. Perhaps roast lamb will no longer be distributed, but praise and lies will, and there will be no shortage of rotten eggs! What better can people hope for when they are willing to put up their most sacred rights for auction?

What, in fact, is asked of voters? To find a man to whom they can confide the right to legislate on everything they cherish most: their rights, their children, and their work! So why be surprised when two or three thousand Robert Macaires turn up to compete for these royal rights? We are seeking a man to whom we can confide – in the company of others chosen in the same lottery – the right to ruin our sons when they are twenty-one, or even nineteen if that is more convenient, and to shut them up for three years – or even up to ten years – in the pestilential atmosphere of a barracks! And to let them be massacred when and where the rulers want to start a war which the county will be forced to carry on to the bitter end once it has been started. Such rulers can close the universities at their will, and either force the parents to send their children to them or refuse entry. Like a new Louis XIV they can favour

But, alongside these customs, necessary for the life of societies and conservation of the race, other passions and desires appear and other habits and customs emerge from them. The desire to dominate others and impose one's will on them; the desire to lay hold the products of a neighbouring tribe's work; the desire to subjugate other men, so as to gather luxuries around one, without oneself working, while slaves produce what is necessary and procure for their master all the pleasures and sensual satisfactions: such personal and egotistic desires create another current of habits and customs. The priest, that charlatan who exploits superstition and, having freed himself of the fear of devils, spreads it among others; the warrior, that braggart who urges the invasion and pillage of neighbours so as to return loaded with booty and followed by slaves: both, hand in hand, succeed in imposing on primitive societies customs that are advantageous to themselves and that tend to perpetuate their domination over the masses. Profiting from the indolence, fear and inertia of the ordinary people, and from the constant repetition of the same actions, they succeed in establishing permanently the customs that become the basis of their domination.

To that end, they exploit first of all the spirit of routine that is so developed among men and already is so striking among children, and primitive folk, as well as among animals. Particularly when he is superstitious, man is always fearful of exchanging what is for what might be; in general he venerates whatever is ancient. "Our fathers lived so; they were not unhappy and, as they taught, you should do the same!" say the old men to the young people whenever the latter want to change something. The unknown frightens them; they prefer to hold on to the past, even when that past means poverty, oppression and slavery. One might even say that the more unfortunate a man is, the more he fears changing his situation, lest he become even more wretched; it is only when a ray of hope and a hint of well-being enter his miserable cabin, that he begins to want

Since man is not a solitary creature, he develops within himself the feelings and habits that tend to sustain society and propagate the race. Without sociable feeling, without practices leading to solidarity, life in common would have been entirely impossible.

Such feelings and practices are not established by the law; they precede all laws. Nor is it religion that lays them down; they are anterior to all religions, for they are to be found already among animals that live in societies. They develop spontaneously, through the nature of things like those habits among animals which men call instinct; they emerge from a useful and even necessary process of evolution that sustains society in the struggle for existence in which it is involved. Savages end up no longer eating each other, because they find that it is much more advantageous to devote themselves to some kind of culture rather than to procure once a year the pleasure of nourishing themselves on the flesh of an aged parent. Within those tribes which are absolutely independent and know neither laws nor priests and whose ways have been portrayed by many travellers, members of the same clan cease to knife each other in every dispute, since the habit of living in society has ended by developing in them a certain sense of brotherhood and solidarity; they prefer to refer to third parties to settle their differences. The hospitality of primitive peoples, the respect for human life, the feeling for reciprocity, compassion for the weak, the courage to sacrifice oneself in the interest of others, which one learns to practice first towards children and friends and afterwards towards all members of the community – all these qualities developed among mankind before there were any laws and independently of any religion, as they had developed among all the social animals. Such sentiments and practices are the inevitable result of life in society. Without being inherent in man (as the priests and metaphysicians say) these qualities are the result of life in common.

an industry or kill it if they prefer; sacrifice the North to the South or the South to the North; annex a province or give it away. They can dispose of something like three billion francs a year, which they snatch out of the mouths of the workers. They retain the royal prerogative of naming the executive power, a power which, however in agreement with parliament it may be, can at the same time be just as despotic and tyrannical as the former kings. For, while Louis XIV could command a few tens of thousands of officials, the new rulers can command hundreds of thousands; while, if the king could steal from the exchequer a few paltry bags of coins, the constitutional ministry of today can "honestly" pocket a few millions by a simple manoeuvre at the stock exchange.

It is astonishing to see what passions come into play, when there is a call for a master who can be invested with such powers! When Spain put its throne up for bids, it was not in the least surprising to see the brigands flocking in from every side. As long as this commerce in royal powers continues, nothing can ever be reformed; elections will be fairs at which vanities are traded for consciences.

Furthermore, even if one manages to reduce the power of the deputies, if one breaks power up by making each commune a State in miniature, everything will remain the same.

The question of true delegation versus representation can be better understood if one imagines a hundred or two hundred men, who meet each day in their work and share common concerns, who know each other thoroughly, who have discussed every aspect of the question that concerns them and have reached a decision. They then choose someone and send him to reach an agreement with other delegates of the same kind on this particular issue. On such an occasion the choice is made with full knowledge of the question, and everyone knows what is expected of his delegate. The delegate is not authorised to do more than explain to other delegates the considerations that have led his colleagues to their conclusion. Not being able

to impose anything, he will seek an understanding and will return with a simple proposition which his mandatories can accept or refuse. This is what happens when true delegation comes into being; when the communes send their delegates to other communes, they need no other kind of mandate. This is how it is done already by meteorologists and statisticians in their international congresses, by the delegates of railway and post administrations meeting from several countries.

But what is being asked nowadays of the voter? Ten, twenty, even a hundred thousand men, who do not know each from Adam, who have never even seen each other and have certainly never met to discuss a common concern, are expected to agree on the choice of one man. Moreover, this man will not be mandated to explain a precise matter or to defend a resolution concerning a special affair. No, he will become an instant Jack of All Trades, expected to legislate on any subject, and his decision will become law. In such circumstances the nature of delegation is betrayed and it becomes an absurdity.

The omniscient being whom everyone is seeking nowadays does not exist. But suppose we can present an honest citizen of probity and good sense and a modicum of education. Is he the sort of man who will get elected? Obviously not. Hardly twenty people from his grammar school remember his excellent qualities. He has never sought the limelight, and he despises the means by which attention might be drawn to his name. He will never gather more than two hundred votes! He will not even be nominated as a candidate, but instead they will choose a lawyer or a journalist, a glib speaker or scribbler who will carry into parliament the ways of the bar and the newspaper office, and will add himself to one of the herds that vote with the government and the opposition. Or perhaps it will be some merchant, anxious to get the title of M.P., who will not hesitate about spending ten thousand francs to gain a scrap of fame. And where life is notably democratic, as in the United States,

its attributes." That cowardly maxim, "Obedience to the law," we replace by "Revolt against all laws!" Merely compare the crimes committed in the name of each law and what good it may have produced, weigh the good against the bad – and you will see whether we are right.

2.

The law is a relatively modern phenomenon; humanity lived century after century without any kind of written law, not even one simply carved in symbols, on stones, at the entries to temples. In that epoch the relations between men were regulated by simple customs, by habits and usages, which constant repetition rendered venerable and which everyone acquired in childhood, as they learnt to win their food by hunting, rearing cattle or tilling the land.

All human societies have passed through that primitive stage, and even at the present time a great proportion of humanity lives without written rules. The tribes have manners and customs – "customary right" as the jurists say; they are social by habit, and that is enough to sustain good relations, between the members of the village, the tribe, the community. It is the same among us, the civilized people; you need only go out of the great cities to see that the mutual relations of the inhabitants are still regulated, not by the written law of the legislators, but by old customs that are still generally accepted. The peasants of Russia, Italy, Spain, and even much of France and England, have no conception of the written law. The latter enters their lives only to control their relations with the State; as to their mutual relations, they still follow the old customs. Once it was so for all humanity.

When one studies the customs of primitive peoples, two very different currents appear.

or a heritage of bloodshed, of conquest by iron and fire. They study its character, and they find its distinctive characteristic in immobility, as opposed to the continuing development of humanity. They ask how the law is sustained, and they see the atrocities of Byzantinism and the cruelties of the Inquisition; the tortures of the Middle Ages, living flesh cut into ribbons by the executioner's whip, and the chains, clubs and axes that are put at the service of the law; the dark dungeons of the prisons, and the sufferings, tears and curses they conceal. Even today they are still there, the axe, the rope, the rifle, and the prisons; on one hand the brutalization of the prisoner reduced to the condition of an animal in a cage, and on the other the judge, stripped of all the feelings that form the better part of human nature, living a kind of dream in a world of juridical fictions, and applying with a voluptuous pleasure the penalty of the guillotine, which is bloody or dry according to the pleasure of this coldly wicked fool, who is the only one unaware of the abyss of degradation into which he has fallen in comparison with those he condemns.

We see a race of law-makers who know nothing of the areas on which they legislate, voting today on a law regarding city sanitation, without the least knowledge of hygiene, and tomorrow regulating the arming of the troops without having handled a rifle, making laws on education without giving an honest education to their own children, legislating in every direction, but never forgetting the penalties that will strike with imprisonment and worse men who are a thousand times less immoral than these same law-makers. Finally we see the jailor who has lost almost all human feeling, the gendarme trained as a bloodhound, the complacent stool-pigeon, informing turned into a virtue, corruption transformed into a system; all the vices, all the worst sides of human nature, nurtured and favoured by the triumph of the law.

We see all this, and because of it, instead of repeating idiotically, "Respect the law!" we cry out "Despise the law and all

where committees spring up constantly to counterbalance the influence of great fortunes, the worst type of all is elected, the professional politician, that abject being who these days has become the plague of the great Republic, the man who makes politics an industry, and practices it according to the methods of great industry – with display, pizzazz and corruption!

Change the electoral system however you like; establish the secret ballot; make elections in two stages, as in Switzerland, make all the modifications you can to apply the system with the greatest possible equality; arrange and rearrange the voting lists; the intrinsic faults of the institution will continue. Whoever manages to gather more than half the votes will always be a nonentity, a man without convictions but anxious to please everyone.

That is why, as Spencer has already remarked, parliaments are generally so badly composed. The members of parliament, he says in his Introduction,[10] are always inferior to the average of people in the country, not only in terms of morality but also in terms of intelligence. An intelligent people always seems to demean itself in its choice of representatives, and betrays itself by choosing nobody better than the boobies who are supposed to act on its behalf. As for the honesty of the representatives, we know what that is worth. Merely read what is said about them by the ex-ministers who have known and understood them.

What a shame it is that there are no special trains to allow the electors to see their "Chamber" at work! They would soon be disgusted. The ancients used to make their slaves drunk to teach their children the evils of intoxication. Parisians, go to the Chamber and see your representatives at work so that you will become disgusted with representative government!

To this rabble of nonentities the people abandons all its rights, except that of dismissing them from time to time and

[10] Herbert Spencer. See note 48. Trans.

naming others in their places. But since the new assembly, chosen by the same system and charged with the same mission, will be just as bad as the last, the great mass of the people end up losing interest in the comedy and restricting themselves to a bit of patching up here and there by accepting a few of the new candidates who thrust themselves forward.

But if the process of election is already marked with such constitutional and irredeemable faults, what is there to be said of the way parliament fulfils its mandate? Think for a moment, and you will see at once the insanity of the task you have imposed on it.

Your representative is expected to express an opinion, give a vote, on the whole infinitely various series of questions that surge up in that formidable machine – the centralized State.

He must vote the dog tax and the reform of university instruction, without ever having set foot in a university of known a country dog. He must pronounce on the advantages of the Gras rifle and on the site to be chosen for the State stud farm. He will vote on phylloxera, on tobacco, on guano, on elementary education and on the sanitation of the cities; on Cochinchina and Guiana, on chimney pots and on the Paris Conservatory. Having never seen soldiers on parade, he will rearrange the army corps, and having never seen an Arab, he will make and remake the Moslem landholding laws in Algeria. He will protect sugar and sacrifice wheat. He will kill the vine, imagining he is protecting it; he will vote for reforestation against pasture, and protect the pastures against the forests. He will know all about railways. He will kill off a canal in favour of a railway without knowing in what part of France either of them may be. He will add new items to the Penal Code without ever having consulted it. An omniscient and omnipotent Proteus, today soldier, tomorrow pig breeder, in turn banker, academician, sewer-cleaner, doctor, astronomer, drug manufacturer, currier and merchant, according to the Chamber's orders of the day, he will never hesitate. Accus-

and it proclaimed the equality, before the law, of the poor and the rich. That promise, as we know today, was a lie; but at that time it seemed to be a progress, a homage paid to truth. That is why, when the saviours of the threatened bourgeoisie, the Robespierres and the Dantons, basing themselves on the writings of the bourgeois philosophers, the Rousseaus and the Voltaires, proclaimed "respect for the law, equally and for all" – the people, whose revolutionary urge was already dying down in the face of an enemy more and more solidly organized, accepted the compromise. It placed its neck under the yoke of the law, so as to save itself from the arbitrary rule of the aristocracy.

Since then the bourgeoisie has not ceased to exploit this maxim which, with that other principle, representatiye government, comprises the philosoghy of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century. It has preached it in the schools, it has created its arts and sciences with that aim in view, it has pushed it everywhere, like those devout English ladies who slip their religious tracts under our doors. And it has worked so well, that today we see the emergence of this appalling fact: that on the very day when the spirit of rebellion is reawakened, men who wish to be free demand of their masters to be so good as to protect them by modifying the laws created by the same masters.

But times and minds have nevertheless changed during the past century. Everywhere one finds rebels who do not wish to obey the law unless they know where it originates, what its use may be, whence came the obligation to obey it and the respect with which it is surrounded. The revolution that is approaching will be a true revolution and not a simple uprising, precisely because the rebels of our day submit to their criticism all those foundations of society that have been venerated up to the present, and above all, the great fetish of the law.

They analyze its origins, and they find there, either a god – product of the terror of savages, and stupid, mean and spiteful like the priests who lay claim to its supernatural origin –

It is since the advent of the bourgeoisie – since the Great French Revolution – that this cult of the law has been established with especial success. Under the old regime little was said about it, except among men like Montesquieu[1], Rousseau and Voltaire, who posed the law in opposition to royal caprice by which one was expected to obey the good pleasure of the king and his flunkies, under the penalty of being hanged or thrown into prison. But during and after the revolution, the lawyers who came to power did their best to affirm this principle, on which they sought to establish their power. The bourgeoisie accepted it without hesitation, as a means of salvation, to establish a dam that would hold back the popular torrent. The priesthood hastened to sanctify it to save its own ship that was foundering in the waves of the torrent. The people finally accepted it as an improvement on the caprice and violence of the past.

To understand all this, we must transport ourselves imaginatively into the eighteenth century. One's heart must have bled from hearing of the atrocities which in those times were perpetrated on men and women of the people, by the all-powerful nobles, if one is to appreciate the magic influence that these words: "Equality before the law, obedience to the law, without distinction of birth or fortune," exercised a century ago on the peasant mind. Having been treated in the past more cruelly than an animal, having never had any rights and having never obtained justice against the most revolting acts of the nobility, unless he avenged himself by killing the lord and getting himself hanged, he saw himself recognized in this maxim, at least in theory and in regard to his personal rights, as the equal of the lord. Whatever that law might be, it promised to extend itself equally to the lord and the labourer,

[1] Montesquieu, Charles-Louis, Baron de. (1669-1755). French political philosopher, whose main and most influential work, L'Esprit des Lois was 14 years in preparation, although it took only 2 years before an English translation appeared in 1750. Trans.

tomed in his function of lawyer, journalist or public orator, to talking of things he knows nothing about, he will vote on all these questions, with the sole difference that in his newspaper he amused housemaids with his nonsense, and at the assizes he kept the sleepy judges and jurors awake with his voice, while in the Chamber his opinion becomes law for thirty or forty million people.

And since it is materially impossible to have his views on the thousand subjects on which his vote will make law, he will gossip with his seat mates, spend time in the bar, write letters to warm up the enthusiasm of his "dear voters," while a minister reads a report crammed with figures put together for the occasion by his administrative assistant; and at the moment of voting he will declare himself for or against the report according the nod of his party leader.

Thus a question of pigfood or soldier's equipment will be merely a matter of parliamentary bickering between the two parties of the ministry and the opposition. They will not ask themselves whether the pigs really need more food or whether soldiers are already as overloaded as desert camels; the only question that interests them is whether an affirmative vote will profit their party. The parliamentary battle is carried out on the backs of the soldiers, the farmers, the industrial workers, in the interests of the ministry and the opposition.

Poor Proudhon, one can imagine his disappointment when he had the childlike naivete, on entering the Assembly, to study profoundly each of the questions on the order of the day.[11] He offered figures and ideas, but nobody listened to him. Parliamentary questions are all resolved well before the bills are presented by that very simple consideration: is it useful or harmful to our party? The scrutiny of votes is made; those submitted are

[11] Proudhon tells, in his Confessions d'un Rtvolutionnaire (1849) how, when he was elected to the French Constitutent Assembly in 1848, he found himself entirely isolated from public life and especially from that of the workers he set out to represent. Trans.

registered and the abstentions are carefully noted. Speeches are made principally for the sake of effect; they are heard only if they have some artistic value or lead to scandal. Simple people imagine that Roumestand has aroused the Chamber by his eloquence, while Roumestand, after the sitting, works out with his friends how he can keep the promises he made to capture the vote. His eloquence was no more than a cantata for the occasion, composed and sung to amuse the gallery, and to maintain his own popularity by sonorous phrases.

"Capture the vote!" but who in fact are those whose votes are captured, so that the totals cause the parliamentary balance to lean one way or another? Who are those who overthrow and remake ministries and give the country a policy of reaction or of external adventurism, who decide between the ministry and the opposition?

They are those who have so justly been called "the toads in the marsh"! Those who have no opinion, those who sit always between two stools, who float between the two principal parties in the Chamber. It is precisely this group – fifty or so nonentities, people without convictions of any kind, who sway like a weather vane between the liberals and the conservatives, who allow themselves to be influenced by promises, places, flattery or panic; it is this little group of nobodies who, by giving or refusing their vote, decide all the business of the country. It is they who pass the laws or pigeonhole them. It is they who support or overthrow ministries and change the direction of policy. Fifty or so nonentities making the law of the country, that is what, in the last resort, the parliamentary regime has been reduced to.

It is inevitable that whatever may be the composition of a parliament, even if it is stuffed with stars of the first magnitude and men of integrity – the decision will belong to the toads in the marsh! Nothing in that can be changed so long as the majority makes the law.

the same divinity. The heroes of history that they fabricate are those who obey the law and protect it against rebellion.

When, later on, the child finds his way into public life, both society and literature, striking each day and each moment like the drop of water wearing at a stone, continue to inculcate him with the same prejudice. Books of history, of political science, of social economy abound in this respect for the law; even the physical sciences have been recruited, and, through the introduction of false language into these languages of observation borrowed from theology and authoritarianism, it has become easy to befog our intelligence with the aim of maintaining respect for the law. The press performs the same task; there is not an article in the newspapers that does not propagate obedience to the law, even when each day on the editorial page they declare the impeccability of the law and show how it is dragged through all sorts of mire, through all kinds of ordure, by those who are appointed to maintain it. Servility towards the law has become a virtue, and I doubt if there is a single revolutionary who did not begin in his youth by defending the law against what are generally called "abuses," which in fact are the inevitable consequences of the law itself.

Art sings in chorus with so-called science. The heroes of the sculptor, the painter and the musician cover the law with their shields and with eyes aflame and quivering nostrils, are ready to strike with their swords anyone who would dare to harm it. Temples were raised to such heroes, they were declared to be high priests whom even the revolutionaries did not dare to touch; and if the revolution sought to sweep aside an old institution, it was again by a law that it would attempt to consecrate its work.

This jumble of rules of conduct, inherited from slavery, serfdom, feudalism and royalty, which we call the law, has replaced those monsters of stone before whom human victims were sacrificed, and whom men in servitude did not dare even to flout for fear of being killed by the fires of heaven.

tion of the labourer, the cattle breeder and the grain speculator; even the old clothes merchants demand a law to protect their little trade. The employer lowers wages or lengthens the working day. "We must have a law to put an end to that," clamour the fledgling deputies, instead of telling the workers that there is a more effective way of "putting an end to that," by taking from the employer whatever he has stolen from generations of workers. In brief, what is needed is a law about roads, a law about fashions, a law about mad dogs, a law about virtue, a law about a dyke to keep out all the errors and all the evils that are the result only of human idleness and cowardice.

We are all so perverted by an education that from an early age seeks to kill in us the spirit of revolt and develop that of submission to authority; we are so perverted by an existence under the rod of the law that rules all: our birth, our education, our development, our loves and our friendships, that, if this continues, we shall lose all initiative, all habit of reasoning for ourselves.

Our societies seem no longer to understand that it is possible to live otherwise than under the regime of law, elaborated by a representative government and applied by a handful of rulers; and even when they have succeeded in emancipating themselves from this yoke, their first course is to resume it immediately. "Year One of Freedom" has never lasted more than a single day, for the very day after proclaiming it, people hastened to put themselves once again under the yoke of the law, of authority.

In fact, for thousands of years those who govern us have continually repeated in every tone: "Respect for the law, obedience for authority." Fathers and mothers bring up their children with this feeling. The schools reaffirm it: they prove its necessity by inculcating into the children scraps of false science, cleverly put together; they make a cult of obedience to the law; they mingle the Deity and the law of the masters in one and

After having briefly indicated the constitutional faults of representative assemblies, we should now show these assemblies at work. We should show that all of them, from the Convention to the Council of the Commune in 1871, from the English parliament to the Serbian Skoupchtchina, are plagued with incapacity; how their best laws – according to Buckle's[12] expression – have been no more than the repeals of preceding laws; how these laws had to be torn from their hands by the pikes of the people, by insurrectional means. That would be a tale to tell, but it would go beyond the limits of our review.

Besides, anyone who knows how to reason without being misled by the prejudices of our vicious educational system will find for himself enough examples in the history of representative government in our age. And he will understand that, whatever the representative body may be, whether it is composed of workers or the middle class – and even if it is wide open to social revolutionaries – it will retain all the faults of representative assemblies. These do not depend on individuals; they are inherent in the institution.

To dream of a workers' State, governed by an elected assembly, is the most unhealthy of all the dreams that our authoritarian education inspires.

Just as one cannot have a good king, whether it is Rienzi[13] or Alexander III, so one cannot have such a thing as a good parliament. The socialist future lies in a quite different direction; it

[12] Henry Thomas Buckle (1821-62), set out to write a history of civilization instead of battles and kings. By his death he completed only the two volumes of his History of Civilization in England, but these profoundly influenced liberal historiography. Trans.

[13] Cola di Rienzi (or Rienzo) (13137-1354) was the leader of a popular movement in Rome and tried, with wavering support from Pope Clement VI and Pope Innocent VI to create a popular empire in central Italy. However, power went to his head and his arbitrary rule led to a popular rising and his assassination. There is no real difference, Kropotkin is suggesting, between autocrats and demagogues. Trans.

will open to humanity new directions within the political order, in the same way as in the economic order.

4.

It is above all in glancing over the history of the representative system, its origin and the way in which the institution became perverted as the State developed, that we may understand its time is over, its role is ended, and it should give place to a new form of political organization.

We need not go back too far; let us begin with the 12th century and the liberation of the Communes.

In the very heart of the feudal system there emerged a great libertarian movement. The towns freed themselves from the lords. Their inhabitants swore oaths of mutual defence; they organized themselves for production and exchange, for industry and commerce; they created the cities which for three or four centuries served as refuges for free work, for the arts, for the sciences, for ideas – and in this way they laid the foundations for the civilization in which we glory today.

Far from being entirely Latin in origin, as Raynouard and Lebas pretended in France, followed by Guizot, in part by Augustin Thierry, and by Eichhorn, Gaupp and Savigny in Germany; far from being wholly Germanic in origin, as the brilliant school of "Germanists" has affirmed, the commune was a natural product of the middle ages and the steadily growing importance of the towns as centres of commerce and industry. That is why simultaneously, in Italy, in Flanders, in Gallic societies, in Germany, in the Scandinavian and the Slav worlds (where Latin influence is non-existent and Germanic influence hardly counts), we see emerging in the same era of the 11th and 12th centuries those independent cities that would fill three centuries with their active existence and later would become the foundation stones of modern States.

Chapter 14: Law and Authority

1.

> "When there is ignorance in the heart of a society and disorder in people's minds, laws become numerous. Men expect everything from legislation and, each new law being a further miscalculation of reality, they are led to demand incessantly what should emerge from themselves, from their education, from the condition of their manners and morals."

It was not a revolutionary who said that, or even a reformer. It was a jurisconsult, Dalloz, author of the collection of French laws which goes by the name of *Repertoire de la Legislation*. And his words, though written by a man who himself was a maker and admirer of laws, represent accurately the normal condition of our societies.

In contemporary States a new law is considered a remedy for all ills. Instead of themselves reforming what is wrong, people begin by demanding a law that will modify it. If the road between two villages becomes impassable, the peasants will say a law is needed regarding local roads. The rural policeman has insulted someone, taking advantage of the timidity of those who show him their respect. "We need a law," says the insulted man, "that will make policemen more polite." Trade and agriculture are lagging behind. "We need a law of protection!" is the reac-

the satisfaction of all the multiple needs of individuals within society.

Modern societies are already moving in that direction. Everywhere the free grouping, the free federation, sets out to take the place of passive obedience. These free groups can already be counted in the tens of millions, and new ones are appearing every day. They are spreading constantly and already they affect all branches of human activity: science, the arts, industry, commerce, social assistance, even defence of territory and protection against theft and also against abuses of the law. Nothing escapes them, and their domain will spread until finally it embraces everything king and parliament have in the past arrogated to themselves.

The future belongs to the free grouping of interests and not to governmental centralization; it belongs to freedom and not to authority.

But before sketching out the kind of organization that will arise from such free groupings, we have yet to deal with the political prejudices with which we have up to now been imbued, and this is what we intend to do in the following chapter.

Leagues of the emergent bourgeoisie who armed themselves for their own defence and gave themselves an organization independent of temporal or ecclesiastical lords, as well as of the king, these free cities soon flourished behind their town walls, and even when they tried to substitute themselves for the lords and dominate the villages, they inspired the latter with the same breath of freedom. *Nus sumes homes cum il sunt* – "We are men like them!" – the villagers soon sang as they made one more step towards the enfranchisement of the serfs.

Asylums for the working life, the cities freely constituted themselves internally as leagues of independent guilds. Each guild had its own jurisdiction, its own administration, its own train-bands for defence. Each was in control of its own affairs, not merely in matters of occupation or trade, but in all the State would later arrogate to itself: education, public health, military defence. Political as well as industrial and commercial bodies, the guilds were linked with each other in the forum, the people assembled to the sound of the tocsin on great occasions, either to pass judgment on differences between the guilds, or to make decisions on matters concerning the city as a whole, or to reach agreement on the great communal enterprises that needed the support of all the inhabitants.

In the Commune, particularly in the early days, there was not yet any trace of representative government. The street, the quarter, the guild, the city as a whole, made its decisions – not by majority votes but by discussing the matter until the supporters of one opinion ended up accepting with a good grace, even if only on trial, the view that gained the support of the greater number.

Was agreement really attained in this way? The answer lies in the great works which we never cease to admire yet which we are unable to surpass. All the beautiful things that survive from the end of the middle ages are the work of these cities. The cathedrals, those gigantic monuments which tell in carved stone the history and aspirations of the Communes, are the

creations of these guilds, working because of piety, because of the love of art and of their cities (for the cathedrals of Reims and Rouen could not have been built out of municipal funds alone), and rivalling each other in the embellishment of their city halls and the raising of their town walls.

It is to the free Commune that we owe the Renaissance of art; it is to the guilds of merchants, often comprising all the citizens of town, each venturing his share in the equipment of a caravan or a trading fleet, that we owe the development of commerce that soon led to the Hanseatic League[14] maritime discoveries. It is to the productive guilds, so stupidly desired recently by the ignorance and egotism of modern industrial entrepreneurs, that we owe the creation of almost all the industrial arts from which today we still benefit.

But the Commune of the Middle Ages was doomed to perish. Two enemies attacked it at the same time, one from outside and one from within.

Trade, and wars, and an unfeeling domination over the countryside, tended to increase the inequalities within the Commune itself, to dispossess some and enrich others. For a time the guilds hindered the development of the proletariat within the city, but soon they succumbed in the unequal struggle. Trade supported by piracy, enriched some and impoverished others; the emergent bourgeoisie worked to foment discord, to exaggerate the inequalities of fortune. The city became divided into rich and poor, into "whites" and "blacks"; the class struggle made its appearance, and with it the State in the heart of the Commune. As the poor became poorer, more and more enslaved to the rich by usury –

[14] Hanseatic League, an alliance of North Sea and Baltic German trading cities founded formally in 1358 and lasting into the 17th century. Hamburg, Lubeck and Breman were its leading cities; it dealt especially with trade to Scandinavia, Russia and England, where its establishments were called Steelyards. Trans.

reinforce the central government even more, to invest it with powers of which the king himself would never have dreamt, to concentrate everything in its hands, to subordinate to it the whole of France from one end to another – and then to make sure of it all through the National Assembly. This Jacobin idea is still, down to the present day, the ideal of the bourgeoisie of all European nations, and representative government is its arm.

Can this ideal ever become ours? Can the socialist workers dream of reconstituting in the same terms as before the bourgeois revolution? Can they in their turn dream of reinforcing the central government by surrendering to it the whole economic realm and confiding the direction of all their affairs – political, economic, social, to a representative government? Should such a compromise between royal power and the bourgeoisie become the ideal of the socialist worker?

Obviously not.

A new economic phase demands a new political phase. A revolution as profound as that dreamed of by the socialists cannot accept the mould of an outdated political life. A new society based on equality of condition, on the collective possession of the instruments of work, cannot tolerate even for a week either the representative system or any of the modifications with which people try to galvanise its corpse.

That system has had its day. Its disappearance in the present age is as inevitable as its appearance was in time past. It corresponds to the reign of the bourgeoisie.

It is through this system that the bourgeoisie have reigned for a century, and it will disappear with them. As for us, if we want the social revolution, we must seek a form of political organization that will correspond to the new method of economic organization. This political form, in fact, is in existence already. It consists in the formation from the most simple to the most complex level of groups that come freely into being for

the organization of the communes, that royal power insinuated itself more and more into the lives of its subjects – to such an extent that under Louis XIV it could proclaim, "The State – it is I!"

Afterwards came the decay and debasement of royal power as it fell into the hands of the courtiers, and its attempt to revive itself under Louis XVI through the liberal measures of the beginning of the reign, until it succumbed under the weight of its misdeeds.

What caused the Great Revolution whose axe cut down the king's authority? What made that revolution possible was the disorganization of the central power, reduced in a period of four years to absolute impotence, to the role of a simple registrar of accomplished deeds; it was the spontaneous action of the towns and the rural areas tearing away from the royal power all its prerogatives, refusing it either taxes or obedience.

But how could the high-ranking bourgeoisie accommodate itself to this state of affairs? It saw that the people, after having abolished the privileges of the lords, would proceed to attack those of the urban and rural bourgeoisie, and it set out to take control of the movement. To that end it made itself the apostle of representative government, and for four years worked with all its might and its organizational abilities to inculcate that idea into the nation. Its idea was that of Etienne Marcel: a king who, in theory, is invested with absolute power, and in reality finds himself reduced to a zero by a parliament composed – it goes without saying – of representatives of the bourgeoisie. The omnipotence of the bourgeoisie through parliament, under the cover of royalty: that was its aim. If the people imposed a Republic on the bourgeoisie, the latter accepted it reluctantly and got rid of it as quickly as possible.

To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralize, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to

municipal representation, government by proxy which meant government by the rich, gained a foothold in the commune.

It formed itself into a representative State, with a municipal exchequer, a paid militia, armed condottiere, public services and bureaucrats. A true State, but a State in miniature, how could it avoid becoming the prey of the great State that was built up under the auspices of royalty? Undermined from within, it was in the end swallowed up by its external enemy – the king.

While the free cities flourished, the centralized State was already coming into being at their gates.

It was born far from the noise of the market place, far from the municipal spirit that inspired the independent cities. It was in a new town, like Paris or Moscow, an agglomeration of villages, that the emerging power of royalty was consolidated. What was the king until that time? A bandit chief like the others. A chief whose power extended hardly beyond his own band of brigands and who found it hard to wring a tribute from those who wanted him to leave them in peace. So long as such a chief was enclosed within a town proud of its communal liberties, what could he achieve? As soon as, from a simple defender of the walls, he tried to make himself master of the city, the people of the market place chased him away. He took refuge in a neighbouring settlement, a new town. There, drawing wealth from the labour of serfs, and meeting no obstacles among the turbulent lower classes, he began with bribes, fraud, intrigue and arms the slow work of acquisition and centralization which the wars of the epoch, the continual invasions, favoured all too much and indeed imposed simultaneously on all the nations of Europe.

The Communes, already in decadence, already States within their own walls, served him as both models and targets. He need only absorb them little by little, take over their institutions, and make them serve the development of the royal power. This is what royalty did, with much caution to

begin with, but more and more brutally as it felt its power growing.

Written law was born, or rather cultivated, in the charters of the Commune. It served as a basis for the State. Later on, Roman law would give it sanction at the same time as it gave sanction to kingly authority. The theory of imperial power, disinterred from Roman glossaries, was propagated to the king's benefit. The Church, on its side, hastened to add its benediction, and after having failed in its attempt to constitute the universal empire, rallied around whoever might be the intermediary through whom it hoped one day to reign on earth.

For five centuries the kings pursued their slow work of accumulation, inciting the serfs and the Communes against the lords, and later crushing the serfs and the Communes with the help of the lords, who became their faithful servitors. The kings began by flattering the Commune, while they waited until intestine quarrels opened its gates to them, when they stole and pocketed its funds and manned its battlements with their mercenaries. Yet the kings proceeded with caution against the Commune, and recognized that it retained certain privileges even when it had become their servant.

Leader of soldiers who obeyed him only while he assured them booty, the king was always surrounded by a Council of his under-chiefs, which in the 14th and 15th centuries became a Council of the Nobility. Later a Council of the Clergy would be added. And as the king succeeded in laying his hands on the communes, he would invite to his court – especially in critical times – the representatives of his "good cities" to demand subsidies from them.

This is how parliaments were born. Now we should observe that these representative bodies, like the kings themselves, had only very limited powers. What was asked of them was no more than pecuniary help for such and such a war, and once this help had been agreed on by the delegates it had to be ratified by the city. As to the administration of the Commune, that

was in no way affected. "Such a town is ready to grant you a certain subsidy to repel an invasion. It agrees to accept a garrison to strengthen it against the enemy." Such would be the clear and precise mandate of a representative in that age. How different from the boundless mandate, embracing the whole world, which today we give our M.P.s!

Yet the breach had been made. Nourished by the struggles between rich and poor, the kingdom was created under the cover of national defence.

Soon, as they saw their subsidies squandered in the royal court, the representatives of the Communes sought to put things in order. They imposed themselves on the kings as administrators of the national exchequer, and in England, supported by the aristocracy, they gained acceptance as such. In France, after the disaster of Poitiers, they were very near to arrogating the same rights; but Paris, which had risen at the call of Etienne Marcel, was reduced to silence, at the same time as the Jacquerie,[15] and the kingdom emerged from the struggle with renewed strength.

After that, everything contributed to the affirmation of royalty, to the centralization of powers in the hands of the king. Subsidies were transformed into taxes and the bourgeoisie hastened to put at the king's service its powers of order and administration. The decadence of the Communes which succumbed one by one to the royal power; the weakness of the peasants reduced more and more to servitude – economic if not personal; the theories of Roman law exhumed by the jurists; the continual wars which meant a constant renewal of authority; everything favoured the consolidation of royal power. Inheritor of

[15] Etienne Marcel (1316-1358) was an early French advocate of parliamentary government who in the period after the French king's defeat by the Black Prince at Poitiers managed to seize control of Paris and enter into allegiance with the peasant revolt of 1358. However, the peasant revolt was suppressed, Paris was isolated, and Marcel lost his popularity and was assassinated. Trans.

Pëtr Kropotkin
Words of a Rebel
1885

Retrieved on 13 May, 2019 from
http://www.ditext.com/kropotkin/rebel/rebel.html
First published during Kropotkin's imprisonment, this collection contains articles written between 1879 and 1882. The first complete English version. Footnotes and sub-headings were sometimes missing, and had to be manually entered by estimating where they should have been. Some remain unmarked (this may have been intentional); please restore them to their correct locations if you find an undamaged copy.

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budding Robespierres reason – those who have retained from the great epoch of the past century only its declining phase, who have learnt nothing from it but the speeches of the public prosecutors.

For us, the dictatorship of one individual or one party – and basically it is the same thing – can be judged without hesitation. We know that a social revolution is not directed by the ideas of a single man or group. We know that revolution and government are incompatible; the one must destroy the other, no matter what name one gives to the government: dictatorship, monarchy or parliament. We know that what makes the strength and originality of our party lies in its fundamental formula: "Nothing good and lasting is made except by the free initiative of the people, and all power tends to kill it." That is why the best among us, if his ideas are not accepted by the people as fit to be applied, and if he becomes master of the formidable engine of government that allows him to act out his own fantasies, will in a week be fit only to be struck down. We know where every dictatorship – even the best intentioned of them – leads: to the death of the revolution. And we know finally that this idea of dictatorship is never more than an unwholesome product of that governmental fetichism which, in the same way as a religious fetichism, has always perpetuated slavery.

But today it is not to the anarchists that we are addressing ourselves. We speak to those among the governmentalist revolutionaries who, misled by the bias of their education, sincerely deceive themselves and are open for discussion. We will approach them from their own viewpoint.

To begin with, a general observation. Those who preach dictatorship do not generally perceive that in sustaining this attitude they only prepare the ground for the successors who will swallow them up. There is even a saying of Robespierre which his admirers would do well to remember. He of course never denied the principle of dictatorship. But he brusquely told Mandar, who talked to him of the matter, "watch out for

Brissot![1] He would like to be dictator!" Yes, Brissot, the cunning Girondin, bitter enemy of the egalitarian tendencies of the people, furious defender of property (which he has formerly described as theft), Brissot, who had calmly incarcerated in the Abbaye prison Hubert, Marat and all the moderantists among the Jacobins!

But that remark dated from 1792! At that epoch, France was already three years into its revolution. Royalty, in fact, existed no longer; it only remained to give it the final blow, while the feudal regime was already abolished. And yet, even at that epoch, while the revolution still rolled freely on its waves, the counter-revolutionary Brissot already had every opportunity of being acclaimed dictator. And what had been the situation before that, in 1789? It was Mirabeau[2] who was then regarded as the centre of power. The man who made a deal with the king to sell his eloquence – it was he who would have been carried to power at that time, if the insurgent people had not imposed its sovereignty, supported by pikes, and sustained the achievements of the peasant uprising, by making illusory all power established in Paris or in the provinces.

But the predisposition to government so completely blinds those who talk about dictatorship, that they would prefer to further the dictatorship of a new Brissot or Napoleon rather than renounce the idea of giving another master to men who break their chains.

The secret societies that sprang up during the Restoration period and the reign of Louis-Phillipe contributed to sustaining this cult of dictatorship. The middle class republicans of the period, supported by the workers, initiated a long series

[1] Jacques-Pierre Brissot (1754-1793) was a leader of the moderate Girondins during the French Revolution, and active opponent of slavery. Falling into rivalry with Robespierre, he was guillotined, as the other Girondin leaders had been, on the 31st October, 1793. Robespierre would follow him 7 months later. Trans.

[2] Mirabeau. See note 21. Trans.

of conspiracies which aimed at overthrowing royalty and proclaiming the Republic. Failing to take into account the profound transformations that would have to take place in France, even to enable a bourgeois republican regime to be established, they imagined that by means of a vast conspiracy they would in a single day overthrow the monarchy, seize power, and proclaim the Republic. For nearly thirty years these secret societies continued to work with boundless devotion and heroic perseverance and courage. If the Republic emerged naturally from the insurrection of February 1848 it was thanks to such societies, thanks to the propaganda of the deed they carried on for thirty years. Without their noble efforts, the Republic would even now have been impossible.

Their aim was thus to seize power for themselves, to install themselves as a republican dictatorship. But of course they never reached their goal. As always, through the inevitable course of events, it was not a conspiracy that overthrew the kingdom. The conspirators had indeed prepared for the event. They had spread broadly the republican idea; their martyrs had offered an ideal to the people. But the last thrust, which finally overthrew the bourgeois king, was much broader and much stronger than anything that could come from a secret society; it came from the popular masses.

The result is well known. The party which had prepared the downfall of the monarchy was pushed to the side on the steps of the Hotel de Ville. Others, too prudent to run the risks of conspiracy, but better known and also more moderate, watched for the moment to seize power, and assumed the position which the conspirators thought they had conquered to the sound of the cannonade. Journalists, lawyers, glib talkers who had worked at making names for themselves while the true republicans forged their arms or died in the prisons, seized hold of power. Some were acclaimed by the boobies because they were already celebrated; others pushed themselves forward, and were accepted because their names

represented nothing or at best a programme of being all things with all men.

Let no one stand up and tell us that it was a lack of practical intelligence on the side of the party of action – that others could have done better. No, a thousand times no! It is a law, like that of the movement of the stars, that the party of action stays on the outside, while the intriguers and the talkers take over power. They gather more votes, with or without ballots, by acclamation or through the intervention of the voting booths, because basically it is always a kind of tacit election that takes place even when there is only acclamation. Those chosen are acclaimed by everyone, and especially by the enemies of the revolution who like to push forward nonentities, and in this way acclamation recognizes as leaders those who, basically, are foes of the movement or indifferent to it.

The man who more than any other was the incarnation of the system of conspiracy, the man who paid by a life in prison for his devotion to that system, uttered on the eve of his death these words which are a whole programme: "Neither God nor Master!"[3]

3.

To imagine that the government can be overthrown by a secret society, and that this society can take the government's place, is an error into which have fallen all the revolutionary organizations born in the heart of the republican bourgeoisie of France since 1820. But other facts abound which give added witness to that error. What devotion, what abnegation, what perseverance did not the secret republican societies of Young

[3] Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), the personification of French conspiratorial revolutionism, spent more than 33 of his 75 years in gaol and knew the insides of 30 prisons. He founded or joined a whole series of secret societies, fomented a number of revolts and was at least once condemned to death. He remained active until his death by apoplexy in 1881. Trans.

Italy[4] display – yet all this immense work, all these sacrifices made by young people in Italy, before which even those of Russian revolutionaries seem to pale, all these corpses piled up in the casemates of Austrian fortresses and under the axe and bullets of the executioners – all of it became the inheritance of the rascals of the bourgeoisie and the hangers-on of royalty.

It is the same with Russia. It is rare to find in history a secret organization that with such scanty means obtained results as immense as those attempts by Russian youth, which proved itself so powerfully in the energy and action of the Executive Committee.[5] It has shaken that colossus which seemed invulnerable, Tsarism, and it has made autocratic government henceforward impossible in Russia. Yet only the naive can imagine that the Executive Committee will become the master of power when the crown of Alexander III is trailed in the mud. Others – those who worked to make a name for themselves while the revolutionaries laid their mines or perished in Siberia, the intriguers, the talkers, the lawyers, the scribblers who from time to time shed a quickly wiped tear on the tombs of the heroes and posed as friends of the people – these will come forward to take the place made vacant by the disintegration of the government and to shout ”Step back!” to the ”unknowns” who have prepared the revolution.

This is inevitable, it is a matter of fate, and it cannot be otherwise. For it is not secret societies, or even revolutionary organizations, that give the fatal blow to governments. Their function, their historic mission, is to prepare people’s minds

[4] Young Italy (Giovoni Italia), was founded by the Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini in 1831. Its propaganda was successful, but its attempts at insurrection failed. In

[5] The Executive Committee was the activist core of Narondnay Volya, the People’s Will, a terrorist group founded in 1879 by militants disillusioned with the failure of gradualist policies. It was the Executive Committee that planned and carried out the assassination of the Tsar Alexander II in 1881. Trans.

for the revolution. And when the peoples' minds are prepared – with the help of external circumstances, the last push comes, not from the initiating group but from the masses that have remained outside the society. On the 31st of August Paris remained deaf to Blanqui's[6] calls. Four days later it proclaimed the downfall of the government; but then it was no longer the Blanquists who were the initiators of the movement: it was the people, the millions, who dethroned the "Citizen King," and acclaimed the comedians whose names had been resounding for a couple of years in their ears. When a revolution is ready to break out, when the impulse can be felt on the air, when success has already become certain, then a thousand new men, over whom the secret organization has never wielded a direct influence, arrive to join the movement, like the birds of prey which appear on a battlefield to take their part in tearing apart the victims. They help in giving the final push, and it is not from the puppets on the seesaw that they will take their leaders, so convinced they are by the idea that a leader is necessary.

The conspirators who sustain the superstition of dictatorship thus work unwittingly at bringing to power their own enemies. But if what we have just said is true in relation to revolutions which are really political disturbances, it is even more true in relation to the revolution which we desire – the social revolution. To allow any kind of government – a power that is strong and demands obedience – to establish itself is to put the brakes on the revolution from the very beginning. The good that this government might do is nil, and the evil immense.

In fact, what is it that we understand by revolution? It is not a simple change of rulers. It is the seizing by the people of all social wealth. It is the abolition of all those powers that have not ceased to hobble the development of humanity. But is it in fact by decrees emanating from a government that such an immense economic revolution can be accomplished? In the

[6] Blanqui. See note 64. Trans.

last century we saw the Polish dictator Ksciuzko[7] decreeing the abolition of personal servitude, but serfdom continued to exist for eighty years after that decree. We saw the Convention, the omnipotent Convention, the terrible Convention, as its admirers called it – decreeing the sharing out according to the need of all the communal lands regained from the lords. Like so many others, the decrees remained a dead letter, because, in order to put it into execution, it would have needed a new revolution made by the proletarians of the countryside, and revolutions are not made by decree.

For the repossession of the social wealth by the people to become an accomplished fact, the people itself must feel its elbows free, must shake off the servitude to which it is no longer bound, must use its collective intelligence and march ahead without heeding the orders of anyone. For it is precisely this which will frustrate the dictatorship, even if it is the worst intentioned in the world, incapable of advancing the revolution by a single inch.

But if the government – however it may strive for the revolutionary ideal – creates no new force and does not further the work of demolition which we have to accomplish, even less can we count on it for the work of reconstruction that must follow the demolition of the old order. The economic changes that will result from the social revolution will be so immense and so profound, they will so alter all the relations based on property and exchange, that it will be impossible for one or even a number of individuals to elaborate the social forms to which a further society must give birth. This elaboration of new social forms can only be the collective work of the masses. To satisfy the immense variety of conditions and needs that will emerge

[7] Tadeusz Kosciuzko was a Polish officer who fought with distinction on the side of the rebels in the American War of Independence, and then, returning to Poland, led in 1794 an uprising against Russia, Prussia, and Austria, the powers that had divided his country between them. He lived out his life in France, the United States and Switzerland, where he died. Trans.

on the day when property is swept away, we shall need the flexibility of the collective spirit of the community. Any kind of external authority will be merely an obstacle, a hindrance to the organic work that has to be accomplished; it will be no better than a source of discord and of hatreds.

But it is surely time to abandon that illusion, so often dismissed – and also so often paid for dearly – of a revolutionary government. It is time to say once and for all – and adopt it as a political axiom – that a government cannot be revolutionary. People talk about the Convention,[8] but we must not forget that the few measures of even a slightly revolutionary character taken by the Convention were the confirmation of acts accomplished by the people who at that moment advanced over the heads of all governments. As Victor Hugo said in his flamboyant manner, Danton pushed Robespierre, Marat watched and pushed Danton, and Marat himself was pushed by Cimourdain, that personification of the clubs, of the rebels and enrages. Like all the governments preceding and following it, the Convention was no better than a ball-and-chain on the feet of the people.

The facts that history has to teach us are so conclusive in this direction; the impossibility of a revolutionary government and the harmfulness of what is proposed under this name are so evident, that it would seem difficult to explain the stubbornness which a certain school of selfstyled socialists puts into maintaining the idea of a government. But the explanation is very simple. However much they may call themselves socialists, the adepts of that school have a quite different conception from ours of the revolution which it is incumbent on us to accomplish. For them – as for all the bourgeois radicals – the social revolution is a matter not to be thought of today. What

[8] After an insurrection in August 1792, a National Convention was elected, which abolished the kingdom of France and established the First Republic. Trans.

so long breathed an air heavy with poison. Instal yourselves in the palaces and mansions, and make a bonfire of the piles of bricks and wormeaten wood that were your hovels. The instinct to destroy, which is so natural and so just because it is also an urge to renew,[3] will find much to satisfy it. So many outworn things to replace! For everything will have to be remade: houses, whole towns, agricultural and industrial plant, in fact every material aspect of society.

To each great event in history there is a corresponding evolution in human morality. For the morality of equals is certainly not that of the charitable rich and the grateful poor. In a new world we will need a new law, and it is clearly a new world that manifests itself. Our adversaries have been endlessly lamenting: "The gods depart! the kings depart! the prestige of authority is vanishing!" And who will replace the gods, the kings and the priests, if it is not the free individual, relying on his own strength? Naive faith departs. Make way for science! Good will and charity disappear. Make way for justice!

It is well known that, despite the laws supposed to protect children, the factories and even the coal mines of Europe are swarming with children, who often work twelve hours a day. Peter Kropotkin.

1848 it was absorbed into Mazzini's Italian National Committee. Trans.

[3] This, of course, is a modification of the famous aphorism by Kropotkin's great predecessor, Michael Bakunin (1814-1876) who in 1842 declared "The passion to destroy is also a creative urge." Trans.

to be done, and confide it to representatives if it wishes to be betrayed.

We know that reasoning is not everything. It is not enough that those who are concerned recognise what their concern really is: to live without continual worries about the future and without the humiliation of obeying masters; our ideas regarding property must also change, and public morality must be changed accordingly. We must understand without hesitation or reserve that all products, the whole of what man has accumulated and made use of, are due to the common work of all, and have only one owner, humanity. We must see private property clearly for what it is in reality, a conscious or unconscious theft of the wealth of all people, and take hold of it joyously for the common benefit when the hour of reckoning sounds. In earlier revolutions, when it was a question of replacing a king of the older line by a king of the younger line, or of substituting lawyers in "the best of all republics," proprietors succeeded to proprietors, and the social system did not change. Thus the placards proclaiming "Death to Thieves," which at that time were placed at the entrances to all the palaces were in perfect harmony with current morality, and many a poor devil who laid fingers on a coin of the realm or perhaps even on bread in the baker's shop, would be shot as an example of the people's justice.

The worthy national guard, incarnating all the infamous solemnity of the laws the monopolists drew up for the defence of their properties, proudly showed the corpse laid out on the palace steps, and his comrades praised him as a champion of right. But those placards of 1830 and 1848 will not be seen again on the walls of the insurgent cities. For theft will no longer be possible when everything belongs to all. "Take and do not waste, for all this belongs to you, and you will have need of it." But destroy without delay everything that should be overthrown: the penal fortresses and the prisons, the forts directed against the towns and the unhealthy quarters where you have

they dream of in the depths of their hearts without daring to admit it, is something quite different. It is the institution of a government similar to that of Switzerland or the United States, making a few attempts at State appropriation of what they ingeniously call "public services." It has something in it of the ideas of Bismarck and of the tailor who became president of the United States.[9] It is a compromise, reached in advance, between the socialist aspirations of the masses and the appetites of the bourgeoisie. They would like a complete expropriation, but they do not feel in themselves the courage to attempt it, so they put it off for the next century, and before the battle takes place they have already entered into negotiations with the enemy.

For us, who realize that the moment is getting near to strike a mortal blow at the bourgeoisie; that the time is not far away when the people will be able to put their hands on the whole of social wealth and reduce the exploiting class to impotence; for us, I say, there can be no hesitation. We will throw ourselves body and soul into the Social revolution; once that path has been taken any government, no matter what headgear it wears, will be an obstacle, and we shall reduce to powerlessness and sweep away whoever is ambitious enough to try and impose himself on us to control our destinies.

Enough with governments! Make way for the people! Make way for anarchy!

[9] "The tailor who became president of the United States" was Andrew Johnson (18081875) who succeeded on Lincoln's assassination in 1865. His reconstruction programmes, attempting to repair the damage of the Civil War, were mostly failures, and he was actually impeached by his opponents, though he continued in office to 1869, the end of his term. Trans.

Chapter 16: All of Us Socialists!

Since the socialist idea began to penetrate into the heart of the working masses, it has given birth to a most interesting tendency. The worst enemies of socialism, understanding that the best means of mastering socialism is to pass themselves off as its adherents, hasten to declare themselves socialist. Talk to one of these capitalists who mercilessly exploit the worker, his wife and his children. Talk to him of the scandalous inequalities in fortune and of the crises and poverty the workers endure; speak to him of the need to ameliorate the system of private property with the aim of bettering the situation of the working men; and if the bourgeois is intelligent and is seeking to make it in politics, and especially if you are one of his constituents, he will hasten to say to you: "Good lord, but I too am a socialist like you. The social question, savings banks, legislation on working conditions – I am perfectly in agreement with you about all that! Still, you know, we must no overthrow everything in a day! We must proceed gently! "And he will leave you to "gently" squeeze a few more pence from "his workers" in anticipation of the losses which the socialist agitation may one day cause him. In the past he would have turned his back on you. Today he tries to make you believe that he shares your ideas, so as to cut your throat more easily whenever he gets a chance.

This fact was shown especially in the last elections in France. It was enough at a political meeting to raise the question of socialism for anyone who was seeking votes to

and its needs as well as its instincts for justice must be fully satisfied.

Yet it is not enough to recognize the principle; it must be applied.

It is often repeated to us: "Try then to touch the peasant's plot of land, the labourer's shack, and you'll see how they'll greet you! A jab with a pitchfork and a good kick!" Fair enough! But, as we have already said, we have no intention of touching either the plot of land or the shack. We shall be very careful not to attack our best friends, those who, without knowing it today, will certainly be our allies tomorrow. It is for their benefit that expropriation will be carried out. We know that there exists a level of income below which lies destitution and above which lies superfluity. In each town, in each country, that level is different; but popular instinct is not deceived, and without it being necessary to lay down statistics on fine paper and fill a whole series of volumes with figures, the people will know how to regain its dues. In our beautiful society it is a scanty minority that has allocated to itself the better part of the national revenue, that has built for itself the palaces in the cities and the great homes in the country, that in the banks accumulates bullion, notes and bonds of all kinds which represent the savings of collective work. Seize all that, and at the same blow you liberate the unfortunate peasant every clod of whose ground is encumbered with a mortgage, the small shop- keeper who lives constantly in fear as he foresees bills falling due, distraints, inevitable failure, and all that lamentable crowd who have no bread for the morrow. Would that multitude remain indifferent on the eve of the revolution, could it fail to understand on the very day of uprising that it depends on itself whether it remain free or fall back into poverty and eternal anxiety? Or will it again have the naivete1, instead of liberating itself, to name once again a government of people with supple hands and glib tongues? Will it have no awareness that thus it will replace old masters by new ones? Let it do its own work if it wants that

their cause, seeing a propitious turn of fortune flee without seizing on it!

So, when these days come – and it is for you to hasten their coming – in which a whole region and great cities with their suburbs will have got rid of their governments, our work is marked out; all industrial and other plants must be returned to the community, social property held by individuals must be returned to its true master – which is all of us, so that each can have his full share of the goods available for consumption, so that production of all that is necessary and useful can continue, and that social life, far from being interrupted, can be carried on with the greatest energy. Without the gardens and fields that give us produce indispensable for life, without the granaries, the warehouses, the shops that gather together the products of work, without the factories and workshops that provide textiles and metalwork, without the means of defence, without the railways and other ways of communication that allow us to exchange our products with the neighbouring free communes and combine our efforts for resistance and attack, we are condemned in advance to perish; we shall stifle like a fish out of water which can no longer breathe though bathed entirely in the vast ocean of air.

Let us remember the great strike of railway engineers that took place a few years ago in America. The great mass of people recognized that their cause was just; everyone was fed up with the insolence of the companies, and was happy to see them placed at the mercy of their workers. But when the latter neglected to take hold of the railway lines and locomotives of which they were masters, when the movement of goods of all kinds was interrupted, when produce and merchandise went up double in price, public opinion changed sides. "The companies may rob us and break our arms and legs, but it is these fools of strikers who leave us to die of hunger!" Do not forget such incidents! The interests of the crowd must be safeguarded

hasten and declare that he too was a partisan of socialism – of true socialism, of course, the socialism of the pickpockets.

Two-thirds of the delegates led the electors to believe that in the Chamber they meant to occupy themselves with the social question. M. Cle'menceau has declared himself a socialist, and M. Gambetta was very near doing so; if he had not anticipated the supreme happiness of one day touching the hand of some royalty, he would not have hesitated to make a frank declaration of socialism. Bismarck himself did not hesitate to do so: he declared himself more socialist than anyone else, the socialist of all socialists; and in England it is not unusual to hear it said that if Lord Beaconsfield had lived, he would certainly have "resolved the social question." Even among the wearers of cowls and cassocks there are few who do not turn to the party. The chaplain in the Court of Berlin preached socialism, and in France the blackrobed clergy published a journal in which they claim to possess the true socialism. It even appears (according to the English newspapers) that the tsar – since he deposited on his writing table a piece of black bread made of grass seeds and a bit of flour to remind him constantly of the diet of Russian peasants – has fancied that he also possesses the true socialism; it appears that he is only awaiting the blessing of Bismarck and of the patriarchs of Antioch and Constantinople to begin the application of his socialist doctrine.

In a word, we are all socialists! Jobbers who speculate on the price of bread to buy jewels for their wives; employers who cause working women to die of tuberculosis and children of malnutrition; potentates who imprison in Berlin and hang in St. Petersburg; the policemen who search our houses – all of them, whether they look through our papers, whether they imprison and hang socialists, whether they massacre workers and their children, whether they meddle in politics and finance – claim to do it only in order to hasten the triumph of true socialism.

And there are still socialists so naive that they break into songs of triumph before this spectacle. "Mr. So-and-so had de-

clared himself a socialist; M. Gambetta has recognized the existence of the social question! New proofs that the idea is gaining ground!", they hasten to announce in their journals. As if we had any need of the approval of anyone to know that the socialist idea is gaining ground in the heart of the people!

This spectacle leaves us grieving rather than rejoicing. It proves to us, on the one hand, that the bourgeoisie is plotting to steal socialism in the same way as in the past it stole the republican idea, and on the other hand it shows us that those who yesterday were considered socialists are today letting go of socialism, by renouncing its mother idea and passing over into the camp of the bourgeoisie, while retaining, so as to hide their turnabout, the label of socialism.

What, in fact, was the distinctive idea, the mother idea, of socialism?

The idea of the need to replace the wage system and to abolish individual ownership of land, of houses, of raw materials, of the instruments of work – in a word, of the whole of social capital. Whoever did not recognize this fundamental idea, whoever did not put it in practice in his private life by renouncing the exploitation of others – was not recognized as a socialist.

"Do you admit the necessity of abolishing private property? Do you agree about the need for expropriation, for the profit of everybody, of the present possessors of social capital? Do you feel the need to live according to these principles?" This is what in the old days we would ask a newcomer before offering him our hands as socialists.

It is evident that in posing these questions to you, we were not asking you if you would see the necessity of abolishing individual property in two hundred years or two thousand years! We do not pose idle questions about what it will be good to do in a couple of centuries. When we talked of the abolition of individual property it was in recognition of its necessity from today onwards, and it was understood that the attempt must be made at the time of the next revolution. "The next revolution"

themselves even poorer today. You will remember the naive republicans of 1848 proposing to put "three months of poverty at the service of the provisional government." The three months of poverty were accepted with enthusiasm, and indeed they were repaid when the time had gone by, but with grapeshot and mass transportation. The poor had hoped that the painful months of waiting would be enough for those mitigating laws to be passed that would transform them into free men and assure them, with work, their daily bread. Instead of asking, would it not have been a surer method to take? Instead of making a show of their poverty, would it not have been preferable to put an end to it? There is no doubt that devotion is a great and beautiful thing, but it is not devotion but betrayal when we abandon to their wretched fate all those who march beside us. That those who take part in the fight may die is fitting, but their deaths must be useful! Nothing is more just than that the men of devotion should sacrifice themselves, but the people in general should profit from the sacrifice of these valiant ones!

Only a general expropriation can satisfy the multitudes who suffer and are oppressed. From the domain of theory we must enter that of practice. But for expropriation to respond to the need, which is to put an end to private property and return all to all, it must be carried out on a vast scale. On a small scale, it will be seen only as a mere pillage; on a large scale it is the beginning of social reorganization. Undoubtedly we shall show ourselves entirely ignorant of the laws of history if we imagine that, in the twinkling of an eyelid, a whole vast country might become our field of experiment. The peoples of France, Europe, the world, will not turn into anarchists by a sudden transformation; yet we know that on the one hand the insanity of governments, their ambitions, their bankruptcies, and on the other hand the incessant propaganda of ideas will result in great disturbances of equilibrium. At such a time we must act. But how often already have the revolutionaries been surprised, letting events pass by, without utilizing them for

preoccupy ourselves too much with them. Let us seek rather to determine what form the appropriation of social wealth by all the people should assume; let us attempt to identify the dominant tendency of modern society, and standing on that foundation, try to discover what form expropriation can take at the time of the coming revolution.

3.

No problem is more important, and we urge all our comrades to study it in all its aspects and discuss it continually in view of the fact that realizing it is a task that sooner or later will be imposed upon us. On that expropriation, and its good or bad application, the immediate success or the temporary failure of the revolution depends.

In fact, none of us can ignore that any attempt at revolution must be condemned in advance if it does not respond to the interests of the great majority and find means to satisfy them. It is not enough to cherish a noble ideal. Man does not live by high thoughts or superb discourses, for he needs bread as well; the belly has even more rights than the brain, for it nourishes the entire organism. Very well! If on the morrow of the revolution the popular masses have only words at their disposal, if they do not recognize by facts whose evidence is as blinding as sunlight that the situation has been transformed to their advantage, and if the overturning of power ends up as merely a change of persons and formulas, nothing will have been achieved. There will remain only one more disillusionment. And we shall have to put ourselves once again to the ungrateful task of Sisyphus, rolling his eternal rock.

For the revolution to be anything more than a word, for the reaction not to lead us on the morrow to the same situation as on the eve, the conquest on the day itself must be worth the trouble of defending; the poor of yesterday must not find

– said the socialists ten years ago, and so those who remain socialist still say – "the next revolution must be no more a simple change of government, followed by a few improvements in the governmental machine: it must be the social revolution."

That conviction of the need to prepare ourselves for expropriation at the next revolution constituted the mother-idea of the socialist; it was this that distinguished him from all those who admitted the need for a few improvements in the lot of the workers, who sometimes went as far as agreeing that communism was the ideal society, but who would not assert for certain that we must be ready to realize communism tomorrow.

Professing such ideas, the socialist was aware of not being confused with his enemies. He was sure that the name of the socialist would not be stolen by those who want nothing better than the maintenance of existing exploitation.

All that has now changed.

To begin, there emerged in the heart of the bourgeoisie a nucleus of adventurers who understood that without assuming the socialist label they would never climb up the ladder of power. So they had to find a way to make themselves acceptable to the party without adopting its principles. At the same time those who had concluded that the best way of manipulating socialism was to enter its ranks so as to corrupt its principles and divert its activities, made a move in the same direction.

Unfortunately it turned out that certain socialists, who had once been true to the name, were now desirous of gathering as many followers as possible, so long as the newcomers accepted the label of socialist, and they opened the gates wide and allowed the entry of these selfproclaimed converts. They themselves had renounced the mother idea of socialism, and under their auspices there has developed a new kind of socalled socialist who has kept nothing of the party but the name.

These people are rather like the Russian colonel of gendarmes who told one of our friends that he also found the

communist ideal admirable, but that since that ideal could not be realized for another 200 or perhaps 500 years, it was necessary in the meantime to put our friend behind bars to punish him for the communist propaganda he had carried on. In the same way as that colonel of gendarmes, the new "socialists" declare that the abolition of individual property, and the expropriation that must bring it about, have to be postponed for a distant future; that such ideas are romantic and Utopian, and in waiting for them to become feasible we must carry out realisable reforms, and that those who talk of expropriation are the worst enemies of such reforms. "Let us prepare the ground," they say, "not with the intention of expropriating the land but in order to seize hold of the governmental machine, by means of which we will later improve, step by step, the lot of the workers. Let us prepare for the coming revolution, not by the conquest of the factories, but by the conquest of the municipalities."

As if the bourgeoisie, still holding on to its capital, could allow them to experiment with socialism even if they succeeded in gaining control of power! As if the conquest of the municipalities were possible without the conquest of the factories!

The consequences of this turnaround within socialist ranks are already making themselves felt.

Now, when you deal with one of these new socialists, you do not know any longer whether you are speaking to a gentleman like the Russian colonel of gendarmes or to a thoroughgoing socialist. Since it seems enough to admit that one day – in a thousand years perhaps – property may become collective, and that while we wait for this we should vote for someone who will call on the Chamber to reduce the hours of work, the difference between the socialism of the aforementioned colonel of gendarmes and that of so many neo-socialists seems imperceptible. All socialists together! The worker who does not have the time to follow thirty newspapers at the same time, no longer knows who are his allies and who are his enemies, who

impelled by the thirst for gain! Most of them have died on straw pallets, and we know how capital and private property have actually retarded the putting into practice of great innovations and the improvements they bring about.

At the same time, to uphold on this ground the advantages of individual property it would still be necessary to prove that the latter is opposed to industrial progress. Without that proof, the assumption is pointless. But this thesis is clearly unsustainable, for the sole and good reason that we have never seen a communist collective that possessed the capital necessary to operate a great industry opposing the introduction into that industry of new inventions. On the contrary, no matter how imperfect are the associations, cooperatives etc., that we have recently seen emerging, no matter what their faults, their sin has never been that of being deaf to industrial progress.

We may find much to criticize in the various institutions of a collective character that have been attempted over the past century. But the notable fact is that the greatest reproach we can make to them is precisely that of not having been collective enough. Against the great joint stock associations that have pierced isthmuses and chains of mountains, we bring above all the reproach that they have constituted a new form of anonymous employership and have whitened with the bones of human beings each metre of their canals and tunnels; against the working class organizations we bring the reproach of constituting an aristocracy of the privileged, who ask for nothing better than to exploit their brothers. But neither one nor the other can be accused of showing a spirit of inertia, hostile to the improvement of industry. The only conclusion one can draw at present is that the less opportunity personal interest and the egoism of individuals have of taking the place of the collective spirit in these enterprises, the better their chance of success.

It follows from this quick and much too brief analysis that when people boast of the benefits of personal property, such statements reveal a truly desperate superficiality. Do not let us

everything from the swingbridge that weighs hundreds of tons to the finest of lace! All that is due to private enterprise, to the desire of men to enrich themselves!"

And indeed the progress accomplished in the production of wealth over the past hundred years has been gigantic, and it is for that very reason – let us note in passing – that a corresponding change in the sharing out of the products becomes necessary today. But is it entirely to the personal interest and the intelligent greed of the employers that we owe such progress? Have there not been other factors much more important which might have produced the same results and might have counterbalanced the harmful effects of the industrialists' appetites?

We all know what these factors are. It is enough to name them for their importance to become evident. First of all, there is the steam engine – handy, easy to operate and always ready to work – which has revolutionized industry. There is the creation of the chemical industries that have become so important that their development, according to the technologists, gives the true measure of the industrial growth of each nation. They are entirely the product of our century: can you remember what chemistry was in the past century? Finally there is the whole movement of ideas that has appeared since the end of the eighteenth century and, in disengaging man from the embrace of metaphysics, has allowed him to make physical and mechanical discoveries that have transformed industry. Who would dare to say, in the presence of these powerful factors, that the abolition of controls and guild restrictions was more important for industry then the great discoveries of our century? And, given these discoveries, who would dare to affirm at the same time that a method of collective production, whatever its form, would not have benefitted from them in the same way, or even more, than private industry?

As to the discoveries themselves, one must have neglected reading any of the biographies of inventors, and have known none of them personally, to persist in supposing that they were

are socialists and who are the plunderers of the socialist ideal. And when the day of the revolution comes he will have to go through some harsh ordeals and terrible blood-lettings, before he recognizes his friends and his enemies.

Chapter 17: The Spirit of Revolt

1.

In the lives of societies there are epochs when revolution becomes an imperative necessity, when it imposes itself. New ideas germinate everywhere, they seek to emerge, to find an application to life, but they continually clash with the force of the inertia of those whose interest is to maintain the old system; they stifle in the suffocating atmosphere of old prejudices and traditions. At the same time accepted ideas on the constitution of states, on the laws of social equilibrium, on the political and social relations between citizens, no longer hold ground before the severe criticism which saps them every day and on every occasion, in the salon as much as in the tavern, in the works of the philosopher as much as in daily conversation. Political, economic and social institutions begin to fall into ruin; like buildings that have become uninhabitable, they obstruct and hinder the development of the seeds that germinate in the cracks of their crumbling walls and sprout all around them.

The need for new life makes itself felt. The established code of conduct, which governs most men in their daily lives, no longer seems sufficient. It becomes evident that a situation, hitherto considered to be equitable, is in fact nothing but a crying injustice; the morality of yesterday is today recognized as a revolting immorality. The conflict between new ideas and old traditions breaks out in all classes of society, in all circles, even in the heart of the family. The son enters into a struggle

for capital. All socialists are well aware of that and of the nature of these evils. The poverty of the worker, the insecurity of his future, even if hunger is not knocking at the door today; the endless crises and unemployment, the exploitation of women and children, the wasting away of the race; the unhealthy excesses of the idle rich and the reduction of the worker to the condition of a beast of burden, deprived of the means of sharing in the joys of knowledge, of art, of science; all that has been discussed so often and so well that it is pointless to repeat it here. The same applies to the wars to promote export and the domination of markets; the civil wars, and the colossal conflicts between nations with their monstrous budgets that result in the extermination of whole generations! Nor must we forget the moral depravity of the possessing class, and the false direction it gives to science, to the arts, to ethical principles. And finally there are the governments that justify themselves by the need to stem the rebellion of the oppressed; the law and its crimes, its executioners and judges; the subjection and servility that result from their presence and the depravity that it spreads through society. Such is the cost of personal property and the personal power it engenders.

But perhaps, despite all these faults, despite all these evils, private property still provides us with a few services that counterbalance its negative aspects? Perhaps, given the human stupidity of which our rulers tell us, it is still the only means by which society can work? Perhaps we owe to it the industrial and scientific progress of our century? This is what the so-called ”savants” tell us, at least. But let us see on what they base their statements, and what are their arguments.

Their arguments? Here is the only one, the unique one, that they have advanced: ”Look – they say – at the progress of industry over the past hundred years, since it was freed from the fetters of guild and government! Look at all those railways, those telegraphs, those machines each of which replaces the work of a hundred or two hundred persons, and which make

longer toils for an employer, but to meet the needs of all, bands of workers – joyous and gay – will set out for the countryside to give the expropriated fields the kind of cultivation they lack and to transform the barren lands in a short time into fertile plains, spreading the wealth of the land through the country, and offering to all – "take it, it is there!" – the rich and varied products that the earth and the warmth and light of the sun are asking to give them. As to the small proprietor, do you think he will not ask to play his part in the great human family?

The support that the battalions of ragged unemployed Londoners, known as the Hop-Pickers, give today to the Kentish farmers, the help the town sometimes gives to the village at vintage time, will be offered in the future for cultivation, as it is today for the harvest. Agriculture, as the speculators of the Far West have admirably understood, is an eminently periodic industry which at certain times calls for great reinforcements of labour, to improve the soil, above all to bring in the crop, and if this need led to the common working of the soil, it would become the bond of union between the village and the town; it could blend them into a single family.

Enterprises like the Mammoth Farms and similar undertakings in the United States, where culture is carried out nowadays on an immense scale by thousands of barefoot workers, hired for a few months and dismissed immediately the particular task or harvest is accomplished, could just as easily become the parks where industrial workers recover from their exhaustion.

The future does not belong to individual property, to the peasant penned in a fragment of land that barely sustains him. It belongs to communist cultivation. That alone – yes, that alone – can give back to the earth what we have a right to demand from it.

But it is perhaps in industry that we shall find the benefits of private property? There is no need to expand on the evils generated in industry by private property, which is another word

with the father; he finds revolting what his father found natural throughout his life; the daughter rebels against the principles which her mother has transmitted to her as the fruit of long experience. The popular consciousness is up in arms against the scandals that arise every day in the very heart of the privileged and idle class, against the crimes that are committed daily in the name of the right of the strongest to maintain the privileges of the few. Those who long for the triumph of justice, who want to see the new ideas put into practice, are soon forced to recognize that the realization of their generous, humanitarian and regenerative ideas cannot take place in society as it is constituted: they understand the necessity for revolutionary turmoil that will sweep away all this decay, enliven with its breath the hearts that have grown torpid, and bring to humanity the devotion, the abnegation, the heroism, without which a society becomes debased and degraded and eventually decomposes.

In epochs set on an unbridled course of self-enrichment, of feverish speculations and crises, of the sudden ruin of great industries and the brief flourishing of other branches of production, of scandalous fortunes amassed in a few years and dissipated as quickly, one soon realizes that the economic institutions which preside over production and exchange are far from giving society the good health they were supposed to guarantee it; they lead precisely to a contrary result. In place of order, they breed chaos, in place of well-being, poverty and insecurity for the future, in place of harmony of interest, a perpetual war of the exploiter against the producer, of the exploiters and producers among themselves. One sees society breaking up more and more into two hostile camps and subdividing at the same time into thousands of small groups waging bitter war on each other. Tired of such conflicts, tired of the miseries they engender, society begins to search for a new organization; it cries out for a complete remodelling of the property system, of the systems of production and exchange and all the economic relations that stem from them.

The governmental machine, charged with sustaining order, has not yet completely broken down. But at each turn of its wornout wheels, it stumbles and halts. Its functioning becomes more and more difficult, and the discontent caused by its failures steadily increases. Every day there are new demands.

"Reform this! Reform that!" people are crying out from every side. "War, finance, courts, police, everything must be remodelled, reorganized, established on new foundations," say the reformers. Meanwhile, everyone understands that it is impossible to repair and remodel any individual institution because all are interdependent; everything would have to be changed at the same time, and how is this to be done when society is divided into two openly hostile camps? If one satisfied the malcontents, it would merely create new ones.

Incapable of moving in the direction of reform, since that would mean engaging in revolution, and at the same time too powerless to show themselves as frankly reactionary, the governments turn to half measures, which satisfy nobody and merely arouse new discontents. The mediocrities who in these transitory times are charged with steering the ship of state, dream only of one thing: to enrich themselves in anticipation of the coming disaster. Attacked from all sides, they defend themselves clumsily, they dodge from side to side, they commit folly upon folly, and they come together in the end to cut the last cord of salvation; they drown the prestige of the government in the ridicule of their incompetence.

At such periods, the revolution imposes itself. It becomes a social necessity; the situation is a revolutionary situation.

When we study, in the works of our best historians, the genesis and the development of the great revolutionary outbreaks, we usually find under the title of "the causes of the revolution" a striking panorama of the situation on the eve of events. The poverty of the people, the general insecurity, the vexatious measures of the government, the odious scandals that expose the great vices of society, the new ideas striving to emerge

his vivifying work before pouring out its rain of golden grain – and man fails to do so. Shut up all his life in industrial barracks, he makes marvellous textiles for the rajahs of India, for the slave-owners of Africa, for the wives of bankers; he weaves to clothe the Egyptians, the Tartars of Turkestan, when he is not walking around with folded arms outside the silent factories, and the land does not receive the cultivation that would provide for the needs and comfort of millions. Meat is still a luxury for twenty million French people.

Apart from those who already apply themselves day by day to work on the land, it still needs millions more helpful hands at certain periods, to improve the fields, to clear the meadows of stones, and to create with the help of nature's own powers an enriched soil that in due course will provide bountiful harvests. The land calls on the town to send its men, its machines, its vehicles, but these all remain in the town, the men unoccupied, the machines and vehicles employed to satisfy the vanity of the rich of the entire world.

Far from being a source of wealth to the country, individual property has become a hindrance to the development of agriculture. While certain innovators are opening up new ways of cultivating the earth, this process remains stationary over almost the whole vast mass of Europe, thanks to individual property.

Does it follow that the social revolution should overthrow all the boundaries and hedges of private properties, demolish gardens and orchards, and drive the steam tractor over everything, so as to introduce the doubtful benefits of large-scale cultivation as certain authoritarian reformers image?

This is precisely what, for our part, we want to avoid. We would take care not to touch the holding of the peasant who cultivates it himself with .his children and without wage labour. But we would expropriate all land that was not cultivated by the hands of those who at present possess the land. And when the social revolution is accomplished, when the city worker no

This simple fact which can be summed up in a new word: "no agriculture without reserve funds," contains a whole education on which the "nationalisers of the land" would do well to reflect.

If tomorrow the partisans of Henry George[2] were to dispossess all the English lords of all their properties; if they distributed the land in small holdings to all who wanted to cultivate it; if the cost of a lease were reduced as low as one wished, even to nothing; there would be a surplus or well-being over twenty or thirty years; but at the end of twenty or thirty years everything would start all over again.

The land demands more care. To obtain twenty-nine hectolitres – of wheat as they do in Norfolk, and up to thirty-six or forty-two hectolitres and such a crop is no longer a fiction – the land must be cleared of stones, drained, and the soil ploughed deeply; manure must be bought and roads kept up. Finally, land has to be cleared, to keep pace with the growing needs of a growing population.

All this calls for expenditure and for a quantity of labour the family alone cannot provide – and that is why agriculture remains stationary. To obtain the crops that are now being gotten by intensive cultivation, it is sometimes necessary to spend on drainage, in a month or so, four or five thousand days of work (twenty thousand francs) on a single hectare. This is what the capitalist does, and this is what the small landowner can never do with the wretched hoard he manages to put aside through depriving himself of everything that would enter into the life of a truly human being. The earth demands that man contribute

[2] Henry George (1839-97) is best known as the founder of the single tax movement, whose ideas were very influential among American socialists and radicals in the late nineteenth century. Believing that one of the main causes of poverty was the fact that both land revenues and the unearned increase in land values profited only the few, he proposed a single tax on land from which all the expenses of government would be met. Kropotkin appears to have misread his proposals. Trans.

and clashing against the incapacity of the supporters of the old system; nothing is lacking. In contemplating such a panorama one reaches the conviction that the revolution was in fact inevitable, that there was no real way out except through insurrectionary activity.

Let us take, for example, the situation before 1789, as the historians show it to us. You seem to hear the peasant complaining of the salt tax, of the tithes, of the feudal dues, and developing in his heart an implacable hatred for the landlord, the monk, the monopolist, the steward. You hear the bourgeois complaining of having lost their municipal privileges, and loading their curses upon the king. You hear the people cursing the queen, rebelling against what they hear the ministers are doing, and telling each other all the time that the taxes are intolerable, the rents exorbitant, the crops are bad and the winters too hard; that food is dear and the merchants greedy, that the village lawyers devour the peasants' harvests and that the rural gendarme acts like a little king, that even the postal service is badly organized and the officials are lazy. In short, everyone complains that nothing is working. "It cannot go on! It will come to a bad end!" people are saying on every side.

But from these still pacific thoughts about insurrection and revolt, extends a great abyss which among the major part of mankind divides reason from act, thought from will, from the need to act. How is that abyss crossed? How did these men, who just yesterday grumbled peacefully about their fate as they puffed their pipes and a moment afterwards humbly saluted the same gendarme they had just been cursing a few days later, seize their pitchforks and billhooks, and attack in his castle the lord who yesterday had seemed so terrible? By what magic have these men, whom their wives justifiably treated as cowards, become transformed today into heroes who march through shot and shell to conquer their rights. How have these words, so often spoken in the past and

lost on the air like the fading sound of bells, at last become transformed into acts?

The answer is simple.

It is the *action* of the minorities, continuous action endlessly renewed, that achieves this transformation. Courage, devotion, the spirit of sacrifice, are as contagious as cowardice, submission and panic. What forms will the agitation take? All the most varied forms that are dictated to it by the circumstances, the means and the temperaments that are available. Sometimes mournful, sometimes mocking, but always audacious; sometimes collective, sometimes purely individual, it will not neglect any of the means at hand, any circumstance of public life, to keep the spirit awake, to propagate and formulate discontent, to excite hatred against the exploiters, to ridicule governments and expose their weakness, and above all and always to reawaken audacity, the spirit of revolt, through preaching by example.

2.

When a revolutionary situation is produced in a country where the spirit of revolt is not yet sufficiently awakened in the masses to express itself through tumultuous street demonstrations or by riots and uprisings, it is through their action that the minorities reawaken the feeling of independence and the breath of courage, without which no revolution could be accomplished.

Men of courage who are not content with words, but who seek to put them into execution, integrated characters for whom the act is one with the idea, for whom prison, exile and death are preferable to a life against their principles, who know one must be daring in order to succeed – these are the scouts who start the combat long before the masses are excited

even a matter of taxes; reduce them and the process will slow down, but it will not be halted. The explanation lies in another fact; having remained stationary for fifteen centuries, agriculture has begun to progress in Europe during the past fifty years in various directions (whose immediate effects are negative). The growing needs of the farmer are complemented by the facilities for borrowing offered him by the bank, the factory, the brokers, the petty gentry of the towns, to entangle him in their coils; to this must be added the high cost of land, so much monopolised by the rich, whether for their enjoyment or for the needs of industry or trade.

Let us analyze the first of these factors, which in our view is the more widespread. To keep ahead of the progress of agriculture, and to sell at the same price as those who cultivate the land by steam-driven machines and increase their crops with chemical fertilisers, the peasant today must have a certain capital to allow for improvements in his methods. Without reservejunds no agriculture is possible. The house becomes dilapidated, the horse grows old, the cow ceases to give milk, the plough wears out, the wagon breaks down: they have to be replaced or repaired. But beyond that, it is necessary to increase the livestock, to get improved kinds of implements, and to enrich the soil. For that it is necessary all at once to spend several thousand-franc notes, and it is thousand-franc notes that the peasant can never find. What then is he to do? He practices in vain the ”system of a single heir,” which has depopulated (rural) France, but this does not save him. He ends up sending his children to the town to augment the urban proletariat; he himself is mortgaged and driven into debt so that he becomes a serf once again, a serf of the banker as he formerly was of the lord.

This is small property as it is today. Those who still sing its praises are half a century behind the times; they reason from facts observed fifty years ago; they ignore present-day realities.

land will never be properly cultivated so long as the cultivator knows that in one way or another the best part of his crop will be taken by some idler – landlord, bourgeois or creditor – or by the taxes of the State. As for finding in these facts the least basis of a comparison between individual property and collective possession – to do that one must be much inclined to draw conclusions where the facts do not support them.

Yet there is something also to be deduced from these facts. The work of the sharecropper and the tenant farmer, of whom we have spoken, and above all that of the small proprietor is more intensive than that of the serf or slave. Yet agriculture does not prosper, either under the system of sharecropping, or that of tenancy, or even that of small proprietorship. Half a century ago one could reasonably believe that the solution to the agrarian problem had been found in the small landholding, for at that epoch the peasant proprietor was indeed beginning to enjoy a certain prosperity, all the more striking since it succeeded to the poverty of the previous century. But that golden age of the small landowners passed away quickly. Today the peasant who owns a small plot hardly makes ends meet. He falls into debt, he becomes the prey of the cattle merchant, the land shark, thejusurers; pjromissory^notes and mortgages ruin whole villages, even more than the frightful taxes imposed by the State and the municipality. The small proprietor flounders in difficulties, and if the peasant still retains the title of ownership, he is virtually the tenant of the bankers and moneylenders. He believes he will one day be rid of his debts, but they do nothing but grow. Against the few hundred who prosper, one must count the millions who will never escape from the bonds of usury except through a revolution.

How does this well-recognized situation, documented by volumes of statistics, come into being and overturn all the theories of the benefits of property?

The explanation is quite simple. It does not lie in American competition: the situation existed before that began. It is not

enough openly to raise the flag of insurrection and to march, arms in hand, to the conquest of their rights.

In the midst of the complaints, the chatter, the theoretical discussions, an act of revolt, individual or collective, takes place that gives expression to the dominant aspirations. Perhaps at the first the masses remain indifferent. While admiring the courage of the individual or the group that initiates action, they may well follow first of all the wise and prudent ones who hasten to condemn action as "folly" and to say that "the fools and hotheads will compromise us all." They have so carefully calculated – these wise and prudent ones – that their party, carrying on its work slowly, will succeed in a hundred, in two hundred, or perhaps in three hundred years in conquering the whole world – and here the unexpected intervenes! The unexpected, of course, is whatever had not been foreseen by them, the wise and prudent. Whoever knows and possesses a brain even slightly organized, is well aware that a theoretical propaganda for the revolution will necessarily be translated into deeds, long before the theoreticians have decided that the moment to act has come; nevertheless, the wise theoreticians will get angry with the fools, will excommunicate them, will declare anathema against them. But the fools will gather sympathy, the mass of the people will secretly applaud their audacity, and they will find imitators. As the first of them go to populate the prisons and penitentiaries, others will appear to continue their work: the acts of illegal protest, of revolt, of revenge, will continue and multiply.

Henceforward indifference is impossible. Those who in the beginning did not even ask themselves what the "fools" wanted, are forced to become concerned, to discuss their ideas, to take sides for or against. But the deed that attracts general attention, the new idea, infiltrates into men's minds and gains proselytes. Such an act in a few days does more than the propaganda of thousands of leaflets.

Above all, it awakens the spirit of revolt, it gives birth to audacity. The old system, defended by police, magistrates, gendarmes and soldiers, seemed indestructible, like that old fortress, the Bastille, which also seemed impenetrable in the eyes of the unarmed people who gathered under its high walls, garnished with cannons ready to fire. But people soon see that the established system does not have the strength they had supposed. Here an audacious act will be enough to throw into confusion for several days the whole government, to shake the colossus. There a riot turns a whole province topsy-turvy, and the soldiers, so imposing up to now, withdraw before a handful of peasants, armed with stones and staves; the people observes that the monster is not so terrible as it had believed, and begins to realise that a few energetic efforts will be enough to bring it to the ground. Hope is born in men's hearts; let us remember that if exasperation often leads to riots, it is always hope, the hope of winning that makes the revolutions.

The government resists; it reacts in fury. But, if repression in the past killed the energy of the oppressed, now, in periods of ferment, it produces the contrary effect. It provokes new acts of rebellion, individual and collective; it pushes on the rebels to heroism and more and more their actions move into new areas, become generalized and develop in complexity. The revolutionary party is reinforced by elements which hitherto had been hostile to it – or had wallowed in indifference. The government, the ruling classes, the privileged groups, all begin to disintegrate; some are for complete resistance, others declare themselves ready to renounce their privileges temporarily, so as to calm the spirit of revolt, with the intent of taking control later on. The cohesion of the government and of the privileged classes is broken down.

The ruling classes indeed may have recourse to a furious reaction. But it is no longer the time for that; it will only make the struggle sharper and more terrible, and the revolution which

them. It is content with comparing the peasant proprietor with the serf, the sharecropper, the tenant!

But the serf, when he worked the land of his lord, knew in advance that the lord would take from him everything he produced, except for a meagre ration of buckwheat and rye – just enough to hold flesh and bone together; he knew he could exhaust himself at his work and nevertheless, come springtime, he would be forced to mix grass into his flour, as the Russian peasants still do and as the French peasants did up to 1789; he knew that if he had the misfortune to enrich himself a little he would become the target of persecution by his acquisitive lord. Therefore he preferred to work as little as he could and as badly as he could. And people wonder that the grandsons of that same peasant farm his land infinitely better since they know they can store the crop for their own benefit!

The sharecropper already shows an advance on the serf. He knows that half of the crop will be taken from him by the owners of the land, but he is sure that the other half, at least, will remain his. And despite this condition – revolting in our eyes but very just in those of the economists – he succeeded in bettering the land he cultivated so far as that could be done with the power of his own hands.

The tenant farmer, provided his lease is assured for a certain number of years and its conditions are not too burdensome and allow him to put something aside to better his farm – or if he has a little working capital – will do even more in the way of improvement. Finally, thejpeasant proprietor, if he is not crippled by debts through purchasing his bit of land, and if he can build up a reserve, will cultivate even better than the serf, the sharecropper and the tenant because he knows that, apart from taxes and the lion's share taken by his creditors, whatever he draws from the land by his hard labour will belong to him.

But what can one conclude from these facts? Nothing except that nobody likes to work for another and that the

owner of the land he cultivates; see how he digs and harrows his lot, what crops he gains from his unpromising land! See what industry is able to realize once it is liberated from impediments, controls and guild restrictions. All these prodigies are due to individual property!"

It is true that having painted this picture, the economists do not conclude, "The land to him who cultivates it." On the contrary, they hasten to deduce from the situation, "The land to the lord who will get it cultivated by wage earners!" All the same it appears that a number of good people are taken in by such reasoning and repeat it without reflecting on it. As for us, "Utopians" precisely because we are "Utopians," we set out to lpok more deeply, to analyze, and here is what we find.

In relation to the land, we also conclude that its cultivation is done much better when the peasant becomes the owner of the field he cultivates. But to whom do our friends the economists compare the small landed proprietor? Is it, for example to one of those communities of Doukhobors (Fighters for the Spirit) who, reaching the shores of the Amur, put their cattle and the work of their young men into a common pool, drove ploughs drawn by four or five pairs of oxen through the scrub, build their houses together, and from the first year onwards found themselves rich and prosperous while the individual and isolated emigrant who tried to clear some marshy hollow had to beg from the State a few pounds of flour? It is to one of those American communities of which Nordhof tells us that, having given everyone in the commune food, clothing and shelter, would allocate a sum of a hundred dollars to each member to allow him to buy a musical instrument, a work of art, or some knickknack not to be found in the communal stores?

No! To research, to gather oneself the contradictory facts so as to elucidate them and so support or reject one's hypothesis – that is food for a Darwin; official science prefers to ignore

emerges can only be all the bloodier because of it. On the other hand, the smallest concession on the part of the ruling classes, because it comes too late and is torn from them by struggle, will merely do more to awaken the revolutionary spirit. The people which, in the past, might have been content with such concessions, now realizes that the enemy is flinching; it anticipates victory, it feels its courage growing, and the very men who yesterday, crushed down by poverty, were content with complaining in secret, now raise their heads and go forward proudly to the conquest of a better future.

Finally, the revolution breaks out and the more bitter the struggle preceding it has been, the more formidable it will become.

The direction which the revolution will assume is clearly dependent on the sum of the circumstances that have led up to the cataclysm. But it can be foreseen in advance, by reference to the strength of the revolutionary action deployed in the preparatory period by the various advanced groups.

Such a group or party may have ably elaborated the theories it puts forward and the programmes it seeks to realize, and it may have propagated these activities by word and pen. But it has not sufficiently affirmed its aspirations openly, in the streets, by actions which are the *realization* of the way of thinking it represents; it has acted very little or – just as serious – it has not acted at all against those who are its real enemies, it has not struck against the institutions it would like to undo. It is strong in theory but it has not developed strength of action; it has done little to arouse the spirit of revolt or to direct it against all it must seek to attack when the revolution takes place. So this party is less well known. Because its aspirations have not been affirmed continually and each day by acts whose fame reaches the most isolated cabin and so have not sufficiently infiltrated the mass of the people, it has not passed through the crucible of the crowd and the street, and has not received their simple endorsement in the language of the people.

The most zealous writers within the party may be known to their readers as thinkers of merit, but they have neither the repute nor the capacities of the man of action, and on the day when the crowd goes down into the street, it will prefer to follow the counsels of those whose theoretical ideas are perhaps less clearly formulated and whose aspirations are less broad, but whom it knows because it has seen them in action.

The party which has done most revolutionary agitation, which has manifested most liveliness and audacity, will get the best hearing on the day when action becomes necessary, when someone must march at the head to accomplish the revolution. But a party which has not had the audacity to declare itself by revolutionary action in the preparatory period, a party which has not generated an impetus powerful enough to inspire individuals and groups with feelings of renunciation, with an irresistible desire to put their ideas into practice (if that desire had existed it would have been translated into action well before the whole populace had gone down into the streets), a party that has not known how to make its flag popular and its aspirations palpable and comprehensible, that party will have a scanty chance of realizing even the smallest part of its programme. It will be overtaken by the activist parties.

This is what we learn from the history of the periods that preceded the great revolutions. The revolutionary bourgeoisie perfectly understood all this; they neglected no means of agitation to awaken the spirit of revolt as they sought to demolish the monarchical regime: The French peasant of the past century also understood it instinctively when he agitated for the abolition of feudal rights; and the International acted in accordance with these same principles when it sought to awaken the spirit of revolt in the hearts of the city workers, and to direct it towards the natural enemy of the wage-earner – the monopolist of the instruments of work and of raw materials.

and Robespierre, instead of doing what the peasant in the past century did, taking the social wealth, putting it to immediate use and establishing the people's rights over this wealth so that all can profit from it.

To avert this peril, there is at present only one means: it is to work incessantly, from now onwards, at sowing the idea of expropriation by all our words and all our actions, so that each of our acts relates to this mother-idea, so that the word Expropriation penetrates into every area of the country, so that it be discussed in each village and become for each worker, each peasant, an integral part of the word Anarchy, and then – but only then – we shall be sure that on the day of revolution it will be on everyone's lips, that it will surge up formidably, thrust by the whole people, and that the blood of the people will not have been spilt in vain.

That is the idea which is emerging at this moment among anarchists in all countries concerning the task that awaits them. Time presses, but even that gives us new strength and makes us redouble our energies to reach the objective, for without that all the efforts and all the sacrifices of the people will once again be lost.

2.

Before exposing how we see expropriation happening, we must respond to one objection, which is theoretically feeble but is widespread. Political economy – that pseudo-science of the bourgeoisie – does not cease to give praise in every way to the benefits of individual property. "Look" – it says – "at the prodigies the peasant accomplishes once he becomes the

secutor of all who disagreed with him. Some have seen him as a saint of the revolution, others – with perhaps more justice – as a cold-blooded and sadistic bigot. He was guillotined at the same time as Robespierre in July 1794. Trans.

It would be a fatal error to believe that the idea of expropriation has already penetrated the minds of all the workers and that it has become for all people one of those convictions for which the man of integrity would give his life. Far from that, there are millions who have not even heard it spoken of, except through the mouths of its adversaries. Even among those who accept it, how few are those who have examined it in its various aspects and in all its details! We know, it is true, that it is above all at the time of the revolution itself that the idea of expropriation will gain most adherents, when everyone will be interested in public issues, will be reading, discussing and acting, and when the most concisely and clearly expressed ideas will be most capable of attracting the masses. And we also know that if there were only two parties in evidence during the revolution, the bourgeoisie and the people, the idea of expropriation would be accepted immediately by the latter, as soon as it was launched by no matter how small a group.

But we have to think of other enemies of the social revolution than the bourgeoisie. There are all the bastard parties that have arisen between the bourgeoisie and the socialist revolutionaries; all those who will seek to save from the wreck a part of their privileges and will cry out all the more strongly against the privileges they are prepared to sacrifice for the moment – in the hope of regaining them later. All these intermediary groups will deploy their activity to persuade the people to let go of the substance and accept the shadow. There will be thousands of people ready to say that it is best to be content with a little so as not to lose everything; there will be people who will seek to waste time and exhaust the revolutionary impulse in vain attacks on futile things and insignificant men rather than resolutely attacking institutions; who would like to play Saint Just[1]

[1] Louis de Saint Just (1767-1794) became one of the leading Jacobin ideologues when he published his Esprit de la revolution et de la Constitution de France. He was tireless in self-sacrifice for the cause, but, when he became a member of the Committee of Public Safety in 1793, became a ruthless per-

3.

A study has still to be made – and highly interesting, attractive and above all instructive it would be – of the various means of agitation to which revolutionaries have had recourse in various periods, to accelerate the advent of the revolution, to make the masses aware of the events that are in preparation, to show the people more clearly who are its main enemies, and to awaken audacity and the spirit of revolt. We know very well why a revolution may have been necessary, but it is only by instinct and by groping in the past that we can divine how revolutions come into being.

The Prussian general staff has recently published a manual for the use of the army on the art of defeating popular insurrections; it teaches in this work how one disorganizes a revolt, how one demoralizes and scatters its forces. The study of which we speak would be a reply to that publication and to so many others that treat the same subject, sometimes with less cynicism. It would show how a government can be disorganized, how its forces can be scattered, how one can restore the morale of a people weighed down and depressed by the poverty and the oppression it has suffered.

Up to the present, no such study has been made. Historians have told us eloquently of the great steps by which humanity has marched towards its liberation, but they have paid little attention to the periods preceding revolutions. Absorbed by the dramas they attempt to sketch out, they skim with a quick hand over the prologues, and it is the prologues that interest us most of all.

For what picture could be more gripping, more sublime or more beautiful than that of the efforts made by the precursors of revolutions? What incessant labour on the part of the peasants and a few men of action from the bourgeoisie before 1789; what persevering struggle on the part of the republicans from the Restoration of the Bourbons in 1815 to their fall in

1830; what activity on the part of the secret societies during the reign of the grand bourgeois Louis Philippe! Could any picture be more poignant than that of the conspiracies initiated by the Italians to shake the Austrian yoke, their heroic attempts, the unspeakable sufferings of their martyrs? Could there be a tragedy more sad yet impressive at the same time than that which would recount all the vicissitudes of the secret activity undertaken by the youth of Russia against the government and the landowning and capitalist systems from 1860 down to our own day? What noble figures would rise up before the modern socialist in reading such dramas; what examples of sublime devotion and self-sacrifice, and at the same time, what revolutionary education – not theoretical but practical – from which the present generation might profit!

This is not the place to make such a study. We must therefore limit ourselves to choosing some examples, so as to show how our predecessors went about their revolutionary agitation, and what kind of conclusions might be drawn from such studies.

We shall throw a glance over one of these periods, that preceding 1789, and, leaving aside the analysis of the circumstances which created a revolutionary situation towards the end of the past century, we shall be content with a review of various methods of agitation employed by our predecessors.

Two great achievements emerged as a result of the revolution of 1789-93. On the one hand, the abolition of the royal autocracy and the advent of the bourgeoisie to power, and on the other the abolition of serfdom and of feudal tenure in the countryside. The two are intimately linked; neither could have succeeded without the other. And these two currents are present already in the agitation that preceded the revolution; the agitation against the monarchy in the heart of the bourgeoisie, and the agitation against the landlords among the peasants.

Let us take a look at both.

finally, there emerges a new class of rulers who give orders to the ruled, the insurrection will not have been a revolution, and we shall have to start all over again. The worker, having shaken the yoke from his neck for a moment, will have to bow his head again beneath the same yoke and again submit to the whip and the goad of his employer, the arrogance of his bosses, the vice and crimes of the idle – without mentioning the white terror, the deportations and executions, the frenzied dance of the murderers over the corpses of the workers.

Expropriation – that is the guiding word of the coming revolution, without which it will fail in its historic mission: the complete expropriation of all those who have the means of exploiting human beings; the return to the community of the nation of everything that in the hands of anyone can be used to exploit others.

To create the situation where each person may live by working freely, without being forced to sell his work and his liberty to others who accumulate wealth by the labour of their serfs – that is what the coming revolution must do. Ten years ago this programme (at least in its economic aspects), was accepted by all socialists. Those who called themselves socialists admitted it without reservations. Since then, so many knights of industry have come to exploit socialism in their personal interest, and have worked so well to abridge the programme, that today only the anarchists will be found to have maintained it in its integrity. It has been mutilated, stuffed with empty phrases, so that each person can interpret it as he wishes; and it has been diluted in this way, not to satisfy the workers – for a worker when he accepts socialism usually accepts it entirely – but simply to please the bourgeoisie, to gain a place in its ranks. Thus it is the anarchists alone who bear the immense obligation to propagate, even in the most inaccessible places, this idea of expropriation. There are no others who can be relied on for this task.

have to wage against capital. In itself it will do no more than scare the bourgeoisie and leave everything in the same condition. Our objective is far broader than that, our plans are far higher.

For us, it is a matter of abolishing the exploitation of man by man. It is a matter of making an end to the iniquities, the vices, the crimes that result from the idle existence of some and the economic, intellectual and moral servitude of others. The problem is immense. But since past centuries have bequeathed this problem to our generation, since it is we who find ourselves under the historic necessity of working out its entire solution, we must accept the task. Besides, we have no longer to grope at hazard for a solution. It has been imposed on us by history, at the same time as the problem; it has been named and declares itself loudly in all the countries of Europe, and completes the economic and intellectual development of our century. It is expropriation; it is anarchy.

If social wealth remains in the hands of the few who possess it today; if the factory, the warehouse and the workshop remain the property of the owner; if the railways and the other means of transport continue in the hands of the companies and individuals who have made them monopolies; if the mansions in the cities and the villas of landlords remain in the possession of their present owners instead of being placed, on the day of the revolution, at the free disposition of all the workers; if all the accumulated treasures, in the banks or in the houses of the rich, do not return immediately to the collectivity – because all of us have contributed to produce them; if the insurgent peoples does not take possession of all the goods and provisions accumulated in the great cities and does not organize affairs so that they are put at the disposal of those who need them; if the land, finally, remains the property of bankers and usurers – to whom it belongs today, in fact if not by right – and if the great properties are not taken away from the great proprietors to be placed in the hands of those who wish to cultivate the soil; if,

The newspaper had not at that time gained the importance it enjoys today; the brochure, the pamphlet, the leaflet of three or four pages then took the place it now occupies, and such publications swarmed and multiplied. The brochure made available to the great masses the ideas of the philosophers and the economists who where the precursors of revolutions; the pamphlet and the broadsheet served the agitation by their attacks on the three principal enemies, the king and his court, the aristocracy and the clergy. They did not concern themselves with theory but operated by means of derision.

Thousands of these broadsheets told of the vices of the court and particularly of the queen, ridiculing the establishment, stripping it of its deceptive embellishments, showing it naked with all its faults, its dissipations, its perversity, its stupidity. The royal love affairs, the scandals of the courts, the crazy extravagance, the Famine Pact – that alliance of the rich with the wheat monopolists to enrich themselves while starving the people: such were the subjects of these pamphlets. The pamphleteers were always on the attack and they did not neglect any circumstance of public life if it could be turned against the enemy. One had only to bring the facts into the open and the pamphlet and the broadsheet would be there, treating them freely in their own way. They lent themselves better than the newspaper to this kind of agitation. The newspaper is a considerable enterprise, and one must consider the risks of capsizing it; such a mishap would make difficulties for a whole party. But the pamphlet and the broadsheet compromise only the writer and the printer – and they have to be tracked down!

Such authors, to begin with, have emancipated themselves from censorship. It is true that the pretty little instrument of contemporary Jesuitism – the modern newspaper journalism that annihilates all of a revolutionary writer's freedom of expression – had not then been invented, but there was still the

"lettre de cachet" by which writers and printers could be locked away in prison, a brutal method, but at least frank.

That is why authors got their pamphlets printed either in Amsterdam or in some unnamed place "a hundred leagues from the Bastille, under the Liberty Tree." In this way they were not forced to constrain themselves about hitting hard, about vilifying the king, the queen and her lovers, the grandees of the court, the gentry. The police occupied themselves with the clandestine press by searching the bookshops and arresting those who peddled pamphlets, but the unknown authors avoided prosecution and continued their work.

Songs – which are sometimes too frank to be printed yet find their way all over a country once they have been committed to memory – have always been one of the most effective means of propaganda. They poured contempt on established authority, they scoffed at crowned heads, they disseminated in the very hearts of families a contempt for royalty, a hatred for the clergy and the aristocracy, a hope of soon seeing the advent of the revolution.

But it was above all the poster to which the agitators resorted. The poster was more talked of, it stirred up the people more than a pamphlet or a brochure. Thus placards – either printed or made by hand – appeared on every occasion when something had happened that interested the mass of the public. Torn down today, they reappeared tomorrow, enraging the government and its myrmidons. "We missed your grandfather; we shall not miss you!" the king reads today on a sheet pasted on his palace walls. Tomorrow it is the queen who weeps with rage on learning how the details of her shameful life are being displayed upon the walls. Such were the beginnings of that hatred which the people afterwards dedicated to the woman who would coldly have exterminated Paris, so long as she could remain queen and autocrat.

The courtiers propose to celebrate the birthday of the Dauphin. The posters threaten to set fire to the four corners

more formidable than the unity represented by some committee or other: all these trends can only confirm such forebodings.

Finally, the situation in France which is again entering the phase when all the parties ambitious of power are willing to give each other a hand to attempt a rising; the intensified activity of diplomats which presages the approach of a European war, so many times postponed and therefore all the more certain; the inevitable consequences of that war which will necessarily be a popular insurrection within the defeated and invaded country: all these facts coming together in an epoch full of events like ours, make it possible to foretell that we are perceptibly nearer to the day of the revolution.

The bourgeoisie understands this, and is prepared to resist with violence, since it does not know and does not want to know any other means. It has decided to resist from the start and to massacre a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand workers, if necessary, plus fifty thousand women and children, to maintain its domination. It will not draw back because of the horror of the massacres. That was proved well enough on the Champ de Mars in 1790, in Lyon in 1831, in Paris in 1848 and 1871. To save their capital and the right to idleness and vice, all methods are good enough for people like this.

Their programme of action is already decided. Can we say as much for ours?

For the bourgeoisie, massacre is already a programme in itself, so long as there are soldiers – French, German, Turk, no matter – to whom it can be confided. Since it sets out only to sustain what already exists, to prolong the status quo, even for only fifteen years longer, the question reduces itself for them to a simple armed struggle. The matter appears before the workers in quite a different way; since their wish is precisely to modify the order of existing things, the problem for them is not so odiously simple. It extends before them in vast immensity. The bloody struggle, for which we must be as well prepared as the bourgeoisie, is nevertheless only an incident in the battle we

Chapter 19: Expropriation

1.

We are no longer the only ones to say that Europe finds itself on the eve of a great revolution. The bourgeoisie for their part are beginning to see it and to declare the fact through the mouths of their newspapers. The Times recognized it in a recent article all the'more remarkable for emanating from a paper that never displays alarm on any subject. Deriding those who preach saving and abstention, the organ of the City invited the bourgeoisie to reflect rather on the lot which the workers endure in our society and to consider what concessions might be made to them, since they had every right to be discontented. The Journal de Geneve – that old sinner – said that the republic has certainly not occupied itself enough with the social question. Yet others, which we would find it repugnant to mention, but which are nonetheless the faithful voices of the great bourgeoisie and of high finance, already lament the fate reserved in the near future for the poor employer who will be forced to toil like his own workers, or fearfully declare that the waves of popular rage are mounting around them.

Recent events in the capital of Austria, the underground agitation that goes on the north of France, events in Ireland and Russia, the movements in Spain and a thousand other signs that we all know; the link of solidarity that unites the workers of France among themselves and with those of other countries – that impalpable link which one day will make all their hearts beat together and unite them into a homogenous league, far

of the city, and thus they sow panic while preparing people's minds for something extraordinary. Or they announce that on the day of rejoicings "the king and queen will be led under a good escort to the Place de Grave, and then go on to the Hotel de Ville to confess their crimes, and will mount a scaffold to be burnt alive." The king convokes the Assembly of Notables, and immediately the posters announce that "the new troupe of comedians organized by the Sieur de Calonne[1] (prime minister) will begin its representations on the 29th of this month and give an allegorical ballet entitled The Barrel of the Danaides." Or perhaps, becoming ever more bold, the posters find their way into the queen's own porch, announcing to her that the tyrants would soon be executed.

But it is above all against the wheat monopolists, against the tax farmers, against the intendants, that placards were used. Each time there was a ferment among the people, the posters announced a St. Bartholomew's day of the intendants and the farmers general. If a particular wheat merchant or manufacturer or official were detested by the people – the placards condemned him to death "in the name of the Council of the People," in the name of the "Popular Parliament," etc., and later, when the occasion arose to start an uprising, it was against these exploiters, whose names had so often been announced on the posters, that popular anger was directed.

If one could only gather together all the innumerable posters that were pasted up during the ten or fifteen years that preceded the revolution, one would understand what an immense role this kind of agitation played in preparing for the uprising of the people. Jovial and jesting to begin, increasingly

[1] Charles-Alexandre de Calonne (1734-1802) was Louis XVI's controller general of finance who through attempts at reform precipitated the French Revolution. Attempting to throw more of the burden of taxation on the nobles and the clergy, he convened an Assembly of Notables in February 1787, the precursor of the States General of 1789 in which the Third Estate gained control. He was never "prime minister." Trans.

menacing as the moment of crisis drew nearer, they were always alert, always quick to respond to each circumstance of current politics and to the disposition of the masses; they excited anger and contempt, they named the true enemies of the people, they aroused in the breasts of the peasants, the workers and the bourgeoisie alike a hatred against their enemies, and they announced the day of liberation and revenge.

To hang or to tear apart an effigy was a very widespread custom in the past century. It was also one of the most popular means of agitation. Every time there was a popular ferment, processions would form carrying a lifesize doll representing the enemy of the moment which they hanged, burnt or tore apart. "Childishness!" said the young old men who think themselves so reasonable. But in fact the assault on the home of Reveillon during the elections of 1789, the execution of Foulon and of Bertier,[2] which changed completely the character of the expected revolution, were no more than the accomplishment in reality of what had been prepared for long ago by the execution of puppets of straw.

Here are a few examples among a thousand. The people of Paris did not like Maupeou, one of the ministers dear to Louis XIV. One day there was a demonstration; voices from the crowd shouted: "Judgement of the High Court condemns the Sieur Maupeou, Chancellor of France, to be burnt alive and his ashes scattered to the wind!" after which the crown actually marched to the statue of Henry IV with a dummy of the chancellor, fitted out in all his insignia, and the doll was burnt to the cheers of the crowd. Another day, a puppet of Abbe Terray was hanged from a lamppost in ecclesiastical garb with white gloves. In Rouen they quartered Maupeou in effigy, and when

[2] For a fuller account of these incidents and of those mentioned below, see Kropotkin's own book, Vie Great French Revolution (1909), reprinted by Black Rose Books, 1990. Trans.

This difference exists; do not let us try to ignore it. On the contrary, let each of us frankly express our purpose, and the discussion that goes on continually, every day and at each moment in the groups, on too personal a level to find a place in the newspapers, will develop among the popular masses a common idea to which the majority will one day be able to rally.

As far as the immediate present is concerned, we have a number of areas of common action, on which the various groups can act in agreement. There is the area of struggle against capital, and that against the sustainer of capital – government. Whatever may be our ideas on the future organization of society, there is one point to which all socialists adhere: the expropriation of capital must result from the coming revolution. Therefore any struggle that prepares for that expropriation should be sustained in unanimity by all the socialist groups, to whatever shading they belong. And the more the various groups encounter each other on this common terrain, and on all levels to which shared circumstances lead us, the sooner a common understanding of what must be done during the revolution will establish itself.

But let us always keep in mind that if we expect a more or less general idea of what is to be done to emerge among the masses on the day of conflagration, we must not neglect to constantly expose our concept of the society that must emerge from the revolution. If we want to be practical, let us continue to discuss what the reactionaries of all kinds have always described as "Utopias and theories." Theory and practice must become one if we are to succeed.

as to make it notably popular, so popular that on the day of action it will be on everybody's lips. It is a task much greater and much more necessary than is generally imagined; for if the objective has taken on life in the minds of a small number, such is not the case with the great mass of the people, worked on as they are in every way by the press – whether it be bourgeois, liberal, communalist, collectivist, etc.

On that objective depends our way of action in the present and future. The difference between the anarchist-communist, the authoritarian collectivist, the Jacobin and the communalist-authoritarian, lies not wholly in their conceptions of a more or less distant ideal. Not merely will it be felt on the day of the revolution, but it is evident even today, in every act and in every judgment, no matter how slight it be. On the day of the revolution, the statist-collectivist will hurry to install himself in the Hotel de Ville of Paris, whence he will issue his decrees on the system of property; he will do his best to establish a powerful government that will poke its nose everywhere, even so far as gathering statistics and issuing decrees on the chickens reared in Fouilly-les-Oies. The communistautonomist will also hasten to the Hotel de Ville and, instituting his rival government, will try to repeat the history of the Commune, forbidding anyone from touching the sacred institution of property if the Council of the Commune has not decided it is opportune to do so. But the anarchistcommunist will immediately take possession of the workshops, houses, granaries and the whole of social wealth, and organize within each commune and group community of production and consumption, so that all their needs can be provided for.

The same differences extend to the smallest manifestations of our daily life and activity. Since every man seeks to establish a harmony between his aims and his actions, it follows that the anarchist-communist, the statist-collectivist and the autonomist-communalist will find themselves in disagreement on all points where immediate action is concerned.

the gendarmes prevented a demonstration from forming, they contented themselves with hanging by the feet an effigy of a monopolist, with wheat leaking from its nose, mouth and ears.

A whole propaganda was contained in that puppet and a propaganda far more effective in making itself known than abstract propaganda, which speaks only to a small number of the converted.

The essential factor in preparing the uprisings that preceded the revolution was that the people became used to going down into the street, to manifesting its opinions in public places, and learnt to defy the police and the troops, even the cavalry.

That is why the revolutionaries of the epoch did not neglect any of the means they disposed of to draw the crowd into the streets and to provoke the security forces.

Each circumstance of public life in Paris and in the provinces was utilized in this manner. If public opinion had induced the king to dismiss a detested minister, there would be rejoicing and endless illuminations. To attract everybody, they let off fireworks and shot up rockets "in such quantity that in some places one seemed to be walking on cardboard." And if money was lacking to buy such things, they would stop passers-by and ask of them "politely but firmly – contemporaries record – a few pennies for the diversion of the people." Then, when the crowd had gathered, orators would address them, explaining and commenting on events, and the clubs would openly recruit and organize. And if the cavalry or other troops came to disperse the crowd, they would hesitate to employ violence against peaceful men and women, while the squibs that exploded before the horses and the foot soldiers, to the cheers and laughter of the public, tempered the ardour of those who advanced too far in among the people.

In the provincial towns the chimney sweeps often went through the streets, parodying the royal "bed of justice"; everyone burst into laughter on seeing a man with a sooty face

playing the part of the king or his wife. Acrobats and jugglers, attracting thousands of spectators in the main square, would let fly, in the course of their comical patter, all kinds of barbs against the powerful and the rich. A procession takes shape, the statements become increasingly threatening. Then let the powerful or rich man look out if his carriage appears on the scene! He will certainly be manhandled by the crowd. Occasions are never lacking for intelligent men to provoke demonstrations, first of all by mockers, but then by men ready to act, especially if the agitation is prepared in advance through the deeds of men of action.

Once all this is present – on the one hand a revolutionary situation and general discontent, and on the other the posters, pamphlets, songs, executions in effigy – the population will be emboldened and their gatherings will become more and more threatening. Today, it is the Archbishop of Paris who is assaulted in a public square; tomorrow it is a duke or a count who narrowly escapes being thrown into the water; another day the crowd amuses itself by jeering at the members of the government as they pass by; thus the acts of revolt vary constantly in anticipation of the day when a spark will be sufficient for a demonstration to turn into a riot and a riot into a revolution.

"It is the dregs of the people, scoundrels and layabouts, who make such riots," our pompous historians will tell us today. And of course it was not among people in easy circumstances that the bourgeois revolutionaries in fact found their allies. Such folk confined themselves to recriminating in the drawing rooms and grovelling on their bellies a moment afterwards, and it was among the ill-famed taverns of the workers' suburbs that the revolutionaries went in search of comrades armed with cudgels when they stirred people to jeer at the Archbishop of Paris. I say this with all due deference to the good fellows of historians who deny these facts today.

bread and work – what a terrible cacophony of contradictory answers one would have received! Must we take possession of the workshops in the name of the Commune of Paris? Can we lay our hands on houses and declare them property of the insurgent city? Is it necessary to take possession of all the provisions and organize rationing? Should one proclaim all the riches piled in Paris to be the common property of the French people, and apply these powerful means to the liberation of the whole nation? On none of these questions did the mass of the people form any opinion. Preoccupied by the necessities of the immediate struggle, the International itself neglected a thorough discussion of such matters. "You are indulging in fantasy and theory," was the answer to those who brought them up; and when the social revolution was mentioned the discussion was limited to defining it by other words just as vague, such as Liberty, Equality, Solidarity.

It is far from our intent to elaborate a detailed programme to be put into operation in the event of a revolution. Such a programme would do nothing but inhibit action; many would profit from the occasion to be guided by sophisms like this: "Since we cannot realize our programme, let us do nothing and save our previous blood for a better occasion."

We know very well that any popular movement is a step towards the social revolution. It awakens the spirit of revolt, it makes men accustomed to seeing the established order (or rather the established disorder) as eminently unstable. One needs the stupid arrogance of a German parliamentarian to ask: "What was the use of the Great Revolution or the Commune?" If France is in the avant garde of the revolution, if the French people is revolutionary by spirit and temperament, it is because it has made so many of these revolutions now disowned by doctrinaires and fools.

But what is important for us to determine is the aim which we ourselves propose to attain. And not only to decide on it, but also to make it known, by words and deeds, in such a way

must throw open on the battlefield the gates to a new future? But by that time we must already have made a resolution and have a firm intention of putting it into operation. There will no longer be time for discussion. We must act, on the spot, in one way or another.

The reason why preceding revolutions did not give the French people all they had a right to expect, was not that these people had talked excessively about the aims of the revolution which they felt approaching. The task of determining that aim and seeing to its achievement has always been left to the leaders, who have invariably betrayed the people, as one might expect of them. It was not that the people ever had a readymade theory that prevented them from acting; they had none at all.

The bourgeoisie, in 1848 and 1871, knew very well what it was going to do when the people overthrew the government. It knew that it would seize power, gain approval through elections, and arm the petty bourgeoisie against the people; controlling the army, the artillery, the means of communication and the monetary funds, it would be able to throw its mercenaries against the workers on the day they dared demand their rights. It knew exactly what it would do on the day of the revolution.

But the people knew nothing like this. On the political question they repeated in 1848, imitating the bourgeoisie, "Republic and Universal Suffrage," and in 1871 they said, with the petty bourgeoisie, "The Commune!" But neither in 1848 nor in 1871 did they have any precise idea of what must be done to solve the question of bread and work. "The organization of work," that slogan of 1848 (a phantom recently resuscitated by the Germany collectivists), was a term so vague that it said nothing; the same was the case with the equally vague collectivism of the International in France during 1869. If, in March 1871, one had questioned all those who worked to bring about the Commune on what should be done to solve the question of

4.

If its action had been limited to attacking the men and institutions of government, without touching economic institutions, would the Great Revolution ever have become what it was in reality – that is to say, a general uprising of the popular masses – peasants and workers – against the privileged classes? Would the revolution have lasted four years? Would it have shaken France to the marrow? Would it have developed that invincible spirit which gave it the strength to resist an alliance of kings?

Certainly not! Let historians celebrate as much as they wish the glories of the "gentlemen of the Third Estate," of the Constituent Assembly, of the Convention; we know what really happened. We know that the revolution would have ended with nothing more than a microscopic constitutional limitation of royal power, without touching the feudal system, if peasant France had not risen from one end of the land to the other and had not, for four years, sustained a true anarchy – the spontaneous revolutionary action of groups and individuals, independent of all governmental tutelage. We know that the peasant would have remained a beast of burden for the landlord, if the Jacquerie had not raged from 1788 to 1793, up to the time when the Convention was forced to consecrate by a law what the peasants had already accomplished through action: the abolition without compensation of all the feudal dues and the restitution to the Communes of the property that in the past, under the old regime, had been stolen from them by the rich. One might have waited in vain for justice from the Assemblies if the barefooted fellows without breeches had not thrown into the parliamentary balance the weight of their cudgels and their pikes.

But it was neither by agitation against the ministers nor by pasting up in Paris posters directed against the Queen, that the uprising of the small villages could be brought about. This

uprising, a result of the general situation of the country, was also prepared by the agitation that went on in the heart of the populace, conducted by men of the people who attacked its immediate enemies: the squire, the landholding priest, the wheat monopolist, the rich merchant.

This kind of agitation is less well known than that we have already described. The history of Paris has been written, but that of the villages has not been seriously begun: history still ignores the peasant, yet even the little we know of the matter is enough to give us a good idea of what happened.

The pamphlet and the broadsheet did not penetrate into the villages; hardly any peasants at that time could read. It was by the image, printed or often daubed by hand, simple and easily understandable, that propaganda was carried on. A few words traced in the margins of crudely made images, and a whole story took shape in the popular imagination concerning the king, the queen, the Count d'Artois, Madame de Lamballe,[3] the famine pact, the lords – "vampires sucking the blood of the people"; it ran through the villages and prepared people's minds. A typical poster, made by hand and attached to a tree, would provoke the people to revolt, promising the advent of better times, and telling of the riots that had broke out in provinces at the other end of France.

Under the name of "The Jacks," secret groups formed themselves in the villages, either to set fire to the lord's manor house, or to destroy his crops or his livestock, or in the last resort to execute him; many times a corpse was found in a chateau pierced by a knife with this inscription: "In the name of the Jacks."

[3] Charles, Comte d'Artois, was the young brother of Louis XVI and head of the reactionary faction at court. The Princesse de Lamballe was a Piedmontese noblewoman and Marie Antoinette's confidante. Both of them helped to keep the king on the disastrous course he followed. Madame de Lamballe was murdered by the mob during the Terror. The Comte d'Artois escaped and returned, at the Restoration in 1815, to become Charles X in the revived monarchy. Trans.

ories" do everything possible to propagate their ideas and also their errors, against which one day we shall have to struggle. To cite only one example, it is enough to mention merely the *Quintessence of Socialism* by Schaeffle,[1] a book written by an Austrian ex-minister who, under the pretence of defending socialism, has no other real aim than saving the bourgeois order from collapse. It is true that this book has not had much success among French and German workers; nevertheless, its ideas, peppered with a few revolutionary phrases to build up indignation, are propagated every day.

But that is all quite natural. It is repugnant to the human mind to plunge into a task of demolition without having some idea – even if only in relation to the essential outlines – of what might replace the structures that are being demolished. "We will establish a revolutionary dictatorship," say some. "We will nominate a government chosen from among the workers and will confide to them the organization of production," say others. "We will put everything in common within the insurgent communes, say a third group." But all, without exception, have some conception of the future to which they more or less hold; and that idea reacts, consciously or unconsciously, on their mode of action in the present preparatory period.

Thus we gain nothing by avoiding these "questions of theory"; on the contrary, if we wish to be "practical," we must of necessity, from today onwards expound, and discuss under all its aspects our ideal of anarchist communism.

Besides, if we are not now – in this period of relative calm through which we are passing – to expound, discuss and propagate that idea – when are we to do it?

Will it be on the day when, in the smoke of the barricades, among the debris of the overthrown structure [of the State], we

[1] Albert Schaeffle (1831-1903) was briefly the Austrian minister of commerce and agriculture (1871). He was a radical reformist rather than a radical, and had a considerable influence on social welfare legislation in both Austria and Germany. Trans.

Chapter 18: Theory and Practice

When we discuss the order of things which, in our view, should emerge from the coming revolution, we are often told: "All that is theory, with which we should not be concerning ourselves. Put it aside, and let us think of practical things. (Electoral questions, for example). Let us prepare for the coming to power of the working class. And later we shall see what will emerge from the revolution."

Yet there is something that tends to make us doubtful about the rightness or even the sincerity of such reasoning. It is that in putting it forward those who do so already have their own theories on the way of organizing society on the morrow or even the very day of the revolution; far from making light of such theories, they propagate them, and all that they do now is a logical extension of their ideas. In the end those words: – "Let us not discuss theoretical questions" really mean: "Do not subject our theory to discussion, but help us put it into execution."

In fact there is not a single newspaper article into which the author does not introduce his ideas about the organization of society, as he sees it. Consider the words they use: "Workers' State"; "organization of production and consumption by the State"; "collectivism" (limited to collective ownership of the means of production and repudiating the communalization of the products); "party discipline," etc. – all those phrases a crop up constantly in newspaper articles as well as in pamphlets. Those who make a pretence of attaching no importance to "the-

A heavy coach would be descending a ravine-broken hillside, taking the lord to his domain. But two peasants helped by the coachman would strangle him and tumble his body into the ravine, and later in his pocket would be found a paper saying: "In the name of the Jacks!" – and so it went on.

Or one day, at a crossroads, a gallows would appear, bearing this inscription: "If His Lordship dares to collect his dues, he will be hanged on this gibbet. Whoever dares to pay His Lordship will meet the same fate!" And the peasant made his payments no longer unless he was forced to do so by the local police, happy at heart to have found a pretext for not paying. He felt that there was a hidden force that sustained him; he became used to the idea of not paying, of rebelling against the squire, and soon, in fact, he no longer paid anything at all and wrung from the landlord, by means of threats, the renunciation of all feudal dues.

Continually in the villages one saw posters announcing that henceforward there would no longer be any dues to pay, that the chateaus must be burnt and the registers of dues destroyed at the same time, that the Council of the people was about to issue a degree to that effect, etc.

"Bread! No more dues or taxes!" These were the slogans that were spread in the villages – slogans that were comprehensible to all, that went right to the heart of the mother whose children had not eaten for three days and straight to the mind of the peasant harassed by the constabulary for his back taxes. "Down with the monopolist!" went the cry, and his storehouses were broken into, his convoys of wheat held up, and rebellion was unleashed in the provinces. "Down with the toll-gates!" and the barriers would be burnt, the officials beaten to death, anD the towns, lacking money, revolted in their turn against the central power which demanded it of them. "Set fire to the tax registers, the account books, the municipal archives!" and as the musty old documents burned in July 1789, so power dis-

integrated, the lords emigrated, and the revolution extended ever more broadly its circle of fire.

Everything that was played out on the great stage of Paris was no more than a reflection of what had happened in the provinces during the revolution which, for four years, rumbled through each town, each hamlet, and in which the people concerned itself much less with its enemies in the central government than with its closer enemies: the exploiters and bloodsuckers at home.

To sum it up: The revolution of 1788-93, which offers us on a grand scale the disorganization of the State by popular revolution (eminently economic as all truly popular revolutions must be) can thus provide us with valuable lessons.

Long before 1789, France already presented a revolutionary situation. But the spirit of revolt had not yet sufficiently matured for the revolution to break out. This is why it was towards the development of that spirit of insubordination, of audacity, of hatred against the social order, that the revolutionaries directed their efforts.

While the revolutionaries from the bourgeoisie directed their attacks against the government, the popular revolutionaries, the men of the people whose names history has not even preserved, prepared their uprising, their revolution, by acts of revolt directed against the lords, the revenue officials and the exploiters of every kind.

In 1788, when the approaching revolution made its presence known through serious riots by the mass of the people, the royal party and the bourgeoisie sought to control it by a few concessions. But how could one calm that popular wave by such expedients as the States General, the Jesuitical concessions of the 4th August, or the wretched acts of the legislature? In this way one might appease a political skirmish, but with so little it was impossible to restrain a popular revolt. The wave kept on mounting. But in attacking property, at the same time it disorganized the State, it made all government absolutely im-

possible, and the revolt of the people, directed against the lords and the rich in general ended after four years, as we all know, in the sweeping away of both the monarchy and absolutism.

Such is the progress of all great revolutions. It will also be the way in which the next revolution will develop and progress if, as we are convinced, it will be not merely a simple change of government, but a true popular revolution, a cataclysm which will transform from top to bottom the system of property.