

Revolution is a Natural Law

Carlo Cafiero

1881

*“Everything changes in the universe,
bodies transform, alteration is the prime law of nature.”*

Giuseppe Ferrari, *Filosofia della rivoluzione*.

*“It will not be a judgement,
it will be a cataclysm,
a geological revolution...”*

Herzen, *From the Other Shore*.

In nature nothing is created and nothing is destroyed — everything is transformed. This is demonstrated by chemistry.

While matter always remains unaltered in its quantity, its form and quality can change infinitely. When one burns, pulverizes or dissolves a body, what takes place if not the transformation of the matter of that body, the transformation of that matter from one form of life to another?

Each period of the life of matter is characterized by a transformation, by a revolution, so that all the infinity of matter draws life from these continuous processes of transformation and revolution.

So, if revolution is the soul, the condition of life, the law of matter, which is everything, it is clear that it must also be the soul, the condition of life, the law of humanity, which is a part.

That is what we intend to explain here, as briefly as possible.

The feeling of one's *self* is without doubt the dominant sentiment of the human soul. The awareness of one's being, its development and betterment, the satisfaction of its needs, these make up the essence of human life. Our betterment, our well-being or our ill-being, our happiness or unhappiness, these are without doubt our first concern and undeniably the most important, dominating all others and the last to leave us when life itself leaves us.

This sentiment of one's being — or egoism — is, basically, the inspiration and regulator of all the activity that takes place in the theatre of human life.

This egoism changes form according to the various epochs of human development and the particular conditions of the individual; but the satisfaction of our needs, be they material or mental,

the realization of our goal, our desire, our will, our requirement for happiness, the satisfaction of the peremptory demands of the *self*, this is always egoism.

In the cannibal who eats his own kind, in the capitalist who exploits the worker, in the lover who risks any danger for one glance at his beloved, in the hunter who labours up mountains and through valleys, in the stalwart who dies fighting, in the thief who kills and robs the traveller, in the sage who consumes himself in his work, in all of these we can always find the spring that is egoism, the base desire to satisfy the demands of the *ego*.

The demand, the desire, can be directed at an objective noble or vulgar, just or unjust, fair or foul, human or inhuman, but not for this will it cease to be the demand of the ego; it will be egoism nonetheless.

“There is a narrow, bestial, filthy egoism just as there is a filthy, bestial, narrow love.”¹

With a change in the time, place, conditions or civilization, the needs change, too; but whatever their nature, we want to satisfy the demands of the ego in any event and whether these demands lead us to oppress and exploit our peers, or to sacrifice our lives for human emancipation, we will be egoists nonetheless.

Carlo Pisacane says:

“Man perceives this in thousands of contradictory aspects: the hero and the coward, the kind and the cruel man, the miser and the generous man... but each of these contradictions disappears when we recognize that these different descriptions are the result of the same cause, of the same single law, namely the search for gain, which, depending upon the capacity of the individual and the social structure of the society in which he lives, changes the methods employed and how they are perceived. Some seek it in glory, others in infamy; some by sacrifice, others in material things.”²

So, the sentiment that drives us to preoccupy ourselves unceasingly with the requirements of the ego remains in us nonetheless while the requirements change continuously, thus articulating the long ladder of human progress, which they themselves create step by step and of which they are both cause and effect at one **and** the same time.

The principle of egoism generates two other principles that are opposed to each other; it is the father of two sons who from birth have always waged relentless war against each other: the principle of *struggle* and the principle of *sociability*.

These equally strong twin brothers, who govern the whole world in the name and interests of their father, have involved humanity in their tremendous conflicts; thus the slaughter, the conflagrations, the pillaging, devastation, servitude, misery and all the other misfortunes that have afflicted and still afflict humankind, all lead back to these two evil brothers, to the action of these two substitutes for the principle of egoism who govern the fortunes of humanity.

The single, sole law that has governed humanity throughout the various ages of its development — cannibalism, slavery, servitude and waged labour — comes from the action of these two principles.

¹ Alexander Herzen, *De l'autre rive*, p. 194. English translation, *From the Other Shore*, p. 140.

² Carlo Pisacane, *Saggi storici-politici-militari sull'Italia*, Vol. III, *Terzo saggio*, *La Rivoluzione*, Milan 1860, p. 8. Quoted in English translation in Richard Mann Roberts, *Carlo Pisacane's La Rivoluzione*, 2010, p. lxxxii.

Under various guises according to the various epochs, man has aimed at nothing other than guaranteeing himself a place amongst his peers, as wide a space as possible, and ensuring his existence and the greatest possible amount of well-being. As soon as he is born, he takes his place in the general struggle: the *struggle for existence*.

In the primitive age of cannibalism, the struggle occurs in such a simple and primitive way that it cannot be distinguished from the general struggle that occurs in the animal kingdom. The cannibal hunts his own kind by himself, to rob him or eat him, no more or less than the other animals.

Now, let us suppose for a moment that this principle of struggle reaches its full development, let us suppose that it runs its course without obstacles or correction, as far as it could and should necessarily run if it were completely left to itself and, in short, our cannibal ends up completely destroying every other human being. What would be the consequences?

What would happen is that this man, the sole remaining representative of his species on the earth, would no longer be a man — he would become an animal.

Man remains man only insofar as he lives in a human environment. If we were to set a man to live completely alone in an animal environment, he too would soon become an animal, no more, no less.

The cannibal, therefore, is driven by the principle of struggle towards the destruction of all other men, and by the principle of sociability towards seeking their preservation, on pain of ceasing to be a man himself.

Without further ado, moving on from the pre-historic age to the modern age, we come to the capitalist, that perfect cannibal of today's system of production.

The capitalist lives by exploiting labourers. The greater the labour-force pumping his machines, the more his capital accrues and prospers; the more his labourers sweat, suffer and die under him, the richer the capitalist becomes and the more he enjoys life. The labourers live in considerable poverty, they become ill and impotent both physically and spiritually: the capitalist, together with his family, enjoys the best of health and his handsome children receive a perfect education and have the chance to become geniuses in the sciences and arts. In other words, the further down one goes on one side, the higher up one goes on the other.

Thus the principle of struggle functions here, just as we have seen it function among cannibals.

Mors tua vita mea, the capitalist says to the proletarian, just as the cannibal says to his peer. And the only difference between the two is that the capitalist requires the death of a much more considerable number of men than the life of a cannibal requires.

Faced with the spectacle of the enormous quantity of labour-force that is absorbed by capital every day with an ever-increasing rhythm, we are naturally led to believe that the capitalist, left to his own, a owed to develop his instincts and his ever-greater needs as fully as he needs, will inevitably end up absorbing all the existing labour-force, in short bringing about the destruction of the proletariat.

In reality it is not like that because the proletariat, far from diminishing, increases continually and this is not by chance — it is due to the fact that the principle of sociability intervenes as a moderator against the principle of struggle. The day in which the proletariat no longer existed, the capitalist would cease to be a capitalist and would become the man of a civilization that had been surpassed centuries ago; his machines and all the rest of capital would cease to be capital and would become the silent witness of a civilization that no longer had any reason to exist.

So, it is true that the capitalist is driven by the principle of struggle to exploit the proletariat terribly, to oppress it, torture it, impoverish it and brutalize it ever further; it is true that he is led by his growing accumulation of wealth to accumulate poverty upon the heads of the proletariat; but despite this, he still maintains an interest in preserving the proletariat.

By means of the division of labour, the capitalist expropriates the labourers *artisanal* capacities. Large industry subjects the workingman to the despotism of the machines and, to make room for these hunger-producing monsters, he is hunted out of the factory, thus provoking an excess in the labouring population; a *reserve industrial army*, the absolute property of capital, always ready in case of an unforeseen increase in production to answer the call; an army divided into different categories, the lowest of which become lost in the hell of pauperism!³

In spite of all this, capitalism must preserve the proletariat — in horrid conditions, it is true — but it must nonetheless preserve it, on pain of committing suicide.

The principle of struggle is seen on the one hand as an eminently destructive principle, and on the other from a forcedly conservative aspect. In fact, while the cannibal does struggle with his own kind, he does it only for his own preservation; when the capitalist exploits the labourer, he does it to ensure his own well-being and that of his family; if the proletarians then struggle against the capitalists and at times take up arms and rise up, burning and killing, it is for their preservation and to procure themselves a wider space in the field of humanity.

Struggle is the functioning of the parts in *the whole*: sociability is *the whole* that preserves the parts from reciprocal destruction.

Having determined the essence of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability, we shall now see how they function among men.

In the age of cannibalism, the struggle occurs between one individual and another: all enter the competition on their own initiative and on their own behalf, and struggle hand-to-hand at their risk and peril. Each for himself against all; and all against each other. The consequences of this primitive struggle, as we have seen, are quite simple: the loser is robbed or eaten by the victor.

But the very demands of the struggle (and not only the struggle between men, but also that of man against animals and against the unfavourable conditions of nature) very soon lead men to come together in a primitive society.

It must not be thought, however, that this important change comes about like that, amongst friends, and that upon awaking one fine morning our savage forebears all decided together on an equal revolution.

Revolutions always have the interests of the struggle as their goal and occur for the very reason that they are provoked and driven by the struggle itself: it is the irrevocable law of nature, from which humanity cannot nor can ever escape.

In the state of savage struggle, those who are superior in strength and spirit to other men necessarily prevailed. The superiority of some meant the inferiority of others. When an individual was recognized by a certain number of other individuals as the most resilient in the struggle and

³ See the classic pages of *Capital* on the division of labour, machines and capitalist accumulation. Editor's note: All quotations from Marx henceforth are taken from Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1978.

the ablest at setting a trap, not only could he be sure that he would never be assailed by the others, he could also count on his own influence over the others; and he would often make use of this new power of his. If he wished to assail a stronger enemy, or expected an attack himself, he naturally had to ask for the cooperation of those under him, under his power both physically and mentally. As a result of the repetition of this exercise of superiority on the one hand and subordination on the other (and the occasions for this would have been all too frequent), the two parties would inevitably have ended up establishing stable, constant relations: relations of superiority and dependence, of absolute command and blind obedience.

While relations of this kind were undoubtedly useful to the chief, they would have been no less useful to his underlings who, although it was not the case that they no longer had anything to fear from the superiority of their chief once they were united under him, were nonetheless stronger in the face of the enemy and thus felt their existence to be surer, since their chief placed his superiority at the service of the struggle, just as they did their inferiority.

But what a long arduous struggle the chief of this band of savages had to carry on, before he was able to enforce recognition of his superiority without argument!

Yes, a revolution was needed; the extension of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability was indispensable; but for that goal to be reached, a long struggle was required: a terrible struggle, just as the accomplishment of every revolution, of every step by humanity along the road of progress inevitably requires.

Notable progress was achieved in this primitive society, so savage and tyrannical, since man could now develop much better than in his isolation of yore. By associating, he could now struggle better against other men, against beasts and against the elements: his material well-being would increase, also leading to psychological betterment. But at the same time it must be recognized that his freedom had noticeably diminished — in fact it was lost for good. Once the first bond of human servitude was established, the exploitation of man by his fellow man began.

In order to free himself from the natural misery that oppressed him, man left the natural state and entered the first society, thus marking the first pact of oppression and exploitation. And how long would this oppression and exploitation last? Centuries and centuries would pass before he could escape his slavery and take refuge in servitude, only then to escape from that and move on to waged labour and finally be able to formulate his aspirations for definitive emancipation, the end of every sort of oppression and exploitation; human emancipation.

But revolution does not take any of this into account. It looks neither left nor right during its march.

Driven by the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability, it carries out its mission of progress and, as we shall shortly see in more detail, continually expands these two principles; without worrying about anything and with its head held high, it proudly proceeds, destroying and creating as it goes; and its constantly motto: *Forward, always!*

The state of isolation that was natural to those primitive men was no longer bearable to them, it had become incompatible with their level of development and a transformation had become necessary. The new needs of the struggle required the need for a new sociability and together they both required the need for a revolution.

“Seeing themselves exposed to the robbery and violence of the strong, the weak each invoked the protection of a powerful one so as to defend themselves from the others; thus each strongman had a clientele that he defended and dominated; thus slavery

and the various castes had their origin in man's desire for his own preservation: the strong were the nobility; the clients were the plebs; the prisoners, slaves. Every noble was supreme leader, arbiter of his family and, among his clients, king and high priest."⁴

But not only was life transformed — the struggle was, too. It was no longer an individual initiative, it was commanded by a chief who decided the action of all. No longer was it a struggle between one individual and another, but regular battles between whole bands who plundered those they defeated, it is true, but did not eat them, as before.

We are already in the age of slavery. Once men had associated, they began to raise cattle and cultivate the land: these and other tasks required daily efforts that it was natural to off-load, onto the shoulders of those who were forced to serve.

By now, there was no scarcity of victuals that would require recourse to eating other men. It was discovered that through work, the land could provide abundantly and it was possible to create stores of victuals: the urgent necessity of the day was not to eat, but to work. Consequently, those defeated in war were no longer eaten, but made into slaves by the victor and forced to work.

As we can see, no philanthropy, no idealism, just pure interests: this man, who had once been useful to eat, was now more valuable if preserved in order to make him work the land.

When man had just emerged from the bowels of nature, not only did he not know what work was and how much it produced, he was also entirely without even the simplest instrument of labour. Without any abilities, but nonetheless driven by natural needs, he was naturally forced to get hold, in the most elementary and primitive way, of the first object that could satisfy him that nature placed in his path: fruit, animal or man.

These first efforts, no matter how simple and primitive they were, generated basic, elementary ideas in primitive man on usefulness, on nature and on the combination of these efforts, and in an embryonic fashion the first instrument of labour was born.

The later development of this primitive system of production itself indicated to the primitive producer the usefulness of preserving the life of the defeated enemy who, transformed into an instrument of labour, would provide him with much more food than he would if skewered onto a spit.

But this occurred only after a long, difficult period was overcome, as in all revolutions and even more so in primitive ones.

Primitive man often had to eat his living instrument of labour, weaned child will often continue to suckle at his mother's breast, and just as today in certain barbarous areas the farmer driven by poverty will eat his beast of burden, his working animal.

Still driven by the principle of struggle, these men — organized into bands — moved around both in order to pillage or wage war and to find the most fertile place with the best climate to settle. As a result of the struggle they waged against each other, these bands grew considerably in strength; when they did not succumb they gradually diminished in number, with those remaining beginning to assume the proportions of a people. These peoples began to settle and build towns,

⁴ C. Pisacane, *Saggi storici-politici-militari sull'Italia, Vol. I, Primo saggio, Cenni storici*, Genoa 1858, p. 13–14.

that were surrounded by high walls and deep moats — signs of the external struggle they had to carry on; and they were also endowed with prisons — a sign of the internal struggle.

By now the town had its people and its chief, who was set apart from all, surrounded by men armed with staves and axes, representing repression, always ready to intervene in defence of the existing state of sociability.

So then, external and internal struggle. War on the outside world; sedition, uprising and revolts on the inside.

The ancient founders of the town, who formed a patrician class, could not bear the absolute domination of the king: they wanted power directly; they drove out the king and took over in his place.

Those newly arrived in the town, who made up the plebs, could not in turn bear the supremacy of the patricians. This would lead to more sedition and disorder, and the struggle would not end until such times as the plebs were allowed the same rights as the patricians. Elsewhere, the poor fought against the rich. But their struggle, unlike that of the plebs, would meet with anything but success. It was just a far-off skirmish, a prelude to the battle that would in future be carried on by the proletariat; because the economic equality that will crown their triumph will be nothing other than the heir of a sociability that is as vast as the whole of human kind. Lastly, the slaves fought against their owners, but their triumph would not be long in coming.

In the meantime, on the outside, the struggle was no less heated than the internal struggle.

In the course of its extraordinary development, this people encountered other peoples; it fought and it won. Its civilization was extended to all the known peoples, whose living conditions were revolutionized. A great transformation came about among the conquered peoples; but they did not forget their independence, and when the life force of the conquering people waned, they would leap to strike where they had been struck.

A solemn moment: one civilization is about to die, another is about to be born.

The new forces that were to come into play were ready, the clash was imminent. All that was missing was a sign that the times were ripe and the sign was at the gates.

A voice from the East arose: a voice that encapsulated the centuries-old laments, condemnations and curses of an oppressed mass; a voice that condemned and cursed the oppressors. It condemned and cursed their strength, which annihilated the weak; it condemned and cursed their wisdom, which oppressed the simple, it condemned and cursed their wealth, which insulted the poor.

It was the thunderclap that presages a cataclysm, and the storm was not long in breaking.

The ancient civilization was destroyed and on its ruins the Christian civilization arose. The age of slavery had passed and gave way to the age of servitude.

The principle of struggle continued to function under new forms, but with the same vigour; and the principle of sociability, extended, continued to resist against it with equal energy.

Wars continued and conflagrations, slaughter and violence of every sort continued to ravage human kind. But the conquered no longer became the slaves of their conquerors: they became their serfs.

“To the blending of barbarians into the Roman world is owed the abolition of slavery: each warrior from the North — writes Sismondi⁵ — established himself on the land of a Roman landowner; he called him his host but obligated him to share land and harvests with him; the land owner was forced to work, and the difference between the work of a slave and that of a free man was thus seen. The advantages were evident: the steward cost less and produced more than the slave. For this reason, the barbarians began to free the slaves and without the law involving itself, without the disgraceful trade in men being prohibited, slavery ended. The popes sought its return by ordaining the sale of citizens who would not obey papal authority.

Boniface VIII decreed this punishment against his Colonna vassals, Sixtus IV against the Florentines and Julius II against the Bolognese and Venetians. But despite this, they continued to be free, thanks to their personal assets.”⁶

Thus, as we can see, it is always interests that determine (as far as the needs of struggle and sociability are concerned) changes and transformations in human relations — revolutions. The same needs that had driven pre-historic man to revolutionize his relations once he had freed himself from his subjugation to nature and saved himself in subjugation to humans, those same interests — but of greater usefulness — that had driven man from cannibalism to slavery, now led him to a new revolution, pushing him from slavery to servitude.

The system of human exploitation had been transformed. The economically enslaved man was no longer a thing with which his master could do as he wished; but he did depend on his lord and was bound to the land, as if a necessary complement of it.

The economic bond remained essentially the same. The slave master had to provide everything the slave needed in the form of victuals, clothing, housing, etc., and made use of him all day as he wished; the lord, however, provided the serf with the necessities in the form of the instruments of labour and time in which he could work for himself.

But while the results of slavery and those of servitude were the same, their mental condition was quite different.

Though the principle of human subjugation had been condemned during the age of slavery, the same principle was bound to be quickly revealed and condemned in servitude. While the subjugation of the serf was no different in substance from that of the slave, a step had nonetheless been taken towards the liberation of the whole of human kind, the principle of equality had nonetheless achieved a great victory. Though equality, defeated in slavery, had taken refuge in servitude, how could it hope to resist within this second fortress for more than it had resisted in the first?

The day would come when the serf in turn would feel that, as a man, he could not allow his fellow man to oppress him and exploit him; servitude would then have had its day.

As with the struggle, so all the other conditions of life had been transformed.

Women were no longer considered the property of men and although their subjugation remained, their moral condition had changed greatly. Their praises were sung at court and among

⁵ *Editor's note:* The reference is to J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, *Histoire de la chute de l'Empire romain et du déclin de la civilisation de l'an 250 à l'an 1000*, Paris 1835. English translation, J.C.L. de Sismondi, *History of the fall of the Roman empire: comprising a view of the invasion and settlement of the barbarians*, Philadelphia 1835.

⁶ C. Pisacane, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

the people; some warriors, too, bronzed by the sun of a hundred battles, took to the field to defend their virtues, proudly carrying their lady's favours.

It is true that the new ministers of God raged and fumed against woman, declaring her to be the door to hell, but is such ferocity not proof of the influence exercised by women in Mediaeval society?

Even *patria potestas* was no longer as it had been: there was no longer the right of life or death over one's children.

And what of religion? That too was revolutionized from head to toe.

The false, lying gods were replaced with one single God, who in turn would soon be revealed as being just as false and mendacious as the others, and meet with the same fate.

All the rich and powerful of the earth heard the solemn, one could say social, proclamation of their sentence for the first time. There would be no escape for the rich. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."⁷

It was a statement of the principle of equality, based on the common "Father who is in heaven"; but it is equality nonetheless. Others would later come and give an earthly meaning to this principle; but in the meantime, it was an early, fertile cry of revolt, and the carpenter from the Galilee who gave it and strengthened it with his martyrdom, was a great revolutionary, one of our illustrious precursors.

And as long as this principle remained among the people, its effects logically did not cease to work to the advantage of the people. The rich threw off all their goods and hurried to bring them to the community of brothers.

Those who believed in the new doctrine, those who revolted against the old law, took refuge in underground caves to escape the yoke of the powerful, to practise equality freely, to conspire to promote it among men.

It was only when the constituted order of priests gave an official form to these principles that they changed from being revolutionary to reactionary.

If men at the time had been evolved enough to be able to prevent this reaction, so that the revolutionary principle would be free to continue its natural course, it would have been gradually modified and perfected, simply through contact with the real conditions of life and of the existing needs.

Ecclesiastical government, by its very nature, could only arrest the course of revolution in order to use its Christian momentum. Having become powerful and strong, it blessed domination and exploitation once more and believed that it had killed off revolution and buried it for ever.

But, far from being dead, the revolution that had seen its progress interrupted concentrated an even greater explosive force, thanks to which it would soon throw down every obstacle and begin its march once more.

Men can be killed, not principles.

If a principle is unjust, that is to say incorrect, it is not a principle and it will not survive for long. But if the principle is just, if it is a true law or a true principle, it is foolish to attempt to stop it as no such attempt can meet with success.

But apart from all this, it cannot be denied that the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability were considerably extended by the Christian revolution, and that is where the progress of the Middle Ages compared to antiquity lay.

⁷ Editor's note: *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Chap. 19:24.

We have already seen how the principle of sociability is the principle that protects humanity from the dire results of the principle of struggle.

Thus, when we observe these two principles at work, we must recognize that their gradual enlargement constitutes what is rightly called human progress.

In the beginning the two principles were quite restricted. The struggle in the cannibalistic period took place between two individuals and the principle of sociability was limited to the preservation of the very first elements of humanity, which risked falling back into an animal state, should the principle of struggle prevail.

In the second period of antiquity, that of slavery, the two principles underwent considerable development. The struggle began between bands and, continuing to expand, became one between peoples, externally, while internally one class fought another. The principle of sociability was in turn extended to the entire constituted society which, for all its imperfection, nonetheless merited protection against the superiority of the principle of struggle, which threatened to send humanity back towards primitive individualism.

In the third period, that of slavery, there was a new revolution and new evolution of the two principles. The struggle, which was carried on externally only between countries, between nations, was carried on internally between a similar meagre number of classes, which had in return become broader. In the Middle Ages, the various classes of antiquity coalesced into two great bands: lords and vassals. But they were not yet two compact groups. On the one hand, there were lords of varying sort and degree: noblemen, clergymen, large and small vassals on the other hand serfs and burghers, with the former suffering more due to their political and civil subjugation.

But, although they were made up of elements that were anything but homogeneous, they were still two groups that waged war on each other.

No matter how different the origin of the men in each of these groups, they would fight together, however, in the pitched battle that was imminent, some in favour of, others against the principle of freedom and equality.

A new revolution was drawing near, much more formidable and profound than all the others that had preceded it

The thunderclap before the storm could be heard; a powerful voice arose against papal authority. The revolt was purely religious, true; however, "this pope whom he was moving to overthrow, is a spiritual king; but still he is a king. Throw him down, the others would follow. Because it is a matter of the principle of authority, however little it is struck in its most respected form, in its most august representative; and every religious Luther will undoubtedly generate a political Luther."⁸

The cry of the reformer awoke people in the German forests who, believing it to be a cry for general claims, rose up arms at the ready to free themselves from servitude of the body at the same time as that of the soul.

They were no longer theologians who debated predestination: they were peasants full of anger who took up arms against the palaces of their lords; it was no longer a matter of diets rendered illustrious by the presence of the emperor, but of fields full of revolt, lit up by the flames of burning castles.

⁸ Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, vol. I, Paris 1847, p. 34–35. Published in English as *History of the French Revolution of 1789*. Philadelphia 1848.

It was the prologue of the drama that would end with the proclamation of the rights of man and the execution of a king.

Servitude had had its day: the feudal system had been defeated; the Christian civilization had completed its mission. All that was now a thing of the past and there was no need for it to last any further: they were bonds that had lost their original usefulness and now only served as obstacles to the further development of humanity, torturing it monstrously. The old principle of Christian-feudal sociability was no longer sufficient; humanity had evolved and the old principle had been inexorably condemned to disappear in order to make way for another, wider principle.

It was the people, the lower class, who caused this transformation because, as usual, the destiny of humanity rests on the people.

It is the ones who suffer who make the history of the past and of the future, while the satisfied *write* the history of the past..!

To say that a civilization has had its day and that it is no longer adequate for a humanity that now considers itself evolved, is to say that the oppressed begin to consider their condition to be unjust and that they want to change their fortunes; it is to say that a revolution is necessary. Now, revolutions follow the ladder of human progress, indeed it is revolutions that make that progress; but who are the direct agents of revolution if not the oppressed and the unsatisfied? Thus, the oppressed and the unsatisfied, those who suffer, those who belong to the lower classes, are the main artifices of all progress and every civilization, that is to say the artifices of every new expansion of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability.

It is the oppressed who begin each new struggle, it is from them that the impulse emerges, because it is not the satisfied who stand to win; only those who must and want to win are capable of developing and alone can feel the need for further expansion of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability.

This evolution of the two principles which is the goal of revolution and constitutes the very essence of human progress can be reduced to a process of elimination and simplification. Indeed how does the extension of these two principles come about?

We have already seen it: men were originally isolated, they led a savage life, they fought one against the other for their existence, one against all and all against one. Driven by the very needs of life, thanks to the domination of the strongest over the weakest, they began to come together first in groups and then in bands. From this moment on the struggle was no longer restricted to individuals against each other but between bands; life was no longer individual but social. In other words, individual struggles were absorbed into a smaller number of wider struggles and the small, individual relationships of life were absorbed into a smaller number of wider social relationships: elimination and simplification.

And when these bands began to establish themselves in fixed places, when they became an agglomeration and built towns then the various struggles between bands were absorbed into the vaster struggle between one people and another, externally, and between one class and another internally. At the same time, the various complicated relationships that characterized organized life in the bands were absorbed into vaster, simple relations between peoples: elimination and simplification.

And when the Christian-feudal revolution finally dealt the death blow to the old, decrepit world, are we not witnessing a new process of simplification of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability?

Externally, the struggles between the smaller peoples were absorbed into conflicts between nations and, internally, the complex conflict between the different classes was simplified into a struggle between two large armies.

We thus come to the rise of the bourgeoisie which, placing itself to fight at the head of the people, had already forced the decrepit nobility to retreat and ended up completely routing it.

A great revolution had occurred. All political privilege had been abolished and this time humanity was seen to be rigorously divided into two classes, composed of perfectly homogeneous elements connected to each other: the proletariat and the capitalist class. Expansion and simplification of the principle of struggle.

The bourgeoisie had absorbed the nobility and the clergy and had moulded all into that perfectly homogeneous whole known as the capitalist class. Expansion and simplification of the principle of sociability.

The conditions of life had also changed. Every bond of servitude had been destroyed; the labourer was no longer tied to the land but proclaimed free like every other man. But where was his freedom, if he was poor? Poverty is the real servitude. His economic subjugation was still the same. As a serf, he had had to work part of the week for his lord: now, as a waged labourer, he had to work a great many hours a day to produce surplus value for the capitalist. And how his conditions had worsened! As a serf he had had the instruments of labour that ensured his survival, but as a waged labourer, what would he live on come the day that he could no longer sell the only thing that was his — his labour-force?

The free labourer costs much less and produces much more than the bonded labourer: that is the thought of the bourgeoisie when it impedes the progress of the revolution; if the revolution had been allowed to follow its path freely, it would surely have succeeded on its own in establishing a balance between the producer and the means of production. Production carried out by unpaid labour, that is by the blood and sweat of the people — that is what the glorious conquests of the bourgeois revolution consist of.

“If one examines the relationships between lords and their coloni and their serfs, feudalism has a much less favourable appearance. Seen in this way, everything is arbitrary, hateful; it is an insolent abuse of force; it is the excess of victory in its most terrible aspect. So, is it to be believed that the conditions of today’s proletarians is much preferable to that of the serfs of yore? However little dignity the serf had was comparable only to how much more security he had. They could stop to think about their future without turning white. While they may have groaned under their harsh tyranny, at least they could look that tyranny in the face; they could in some way touch it, they could call it by name. Ah me, how much harsher is the tyranny that today is known by that frightening, vague name — poverty! Freedom accompanied by poverty and isolation is also servitude, and what servitude, my God Feudal despotism was in men, but bourgeois despotism is in things it is a mysterious despotism that is felt everywhere but seen nowhere and in whose breast the indigent is seen to die without knowing the evil that is killing him. Thus, if we must weigh the instability of a regime on the basis of the extent of the misfortunes it generates, the

feudal regime cannot have been any less consistent than the regime that arose out of its ashes seems to be!”⁹

Thus it happened that a revolution, brought about thanks to the heroic impulse of the people, who gave their purest blood, benefited everybody but the people. It was the bourgeoisie that emancipated itself from feudal servitude, it is the capitalist class that has become master of the situation; the proletariat remains in bondage as before, because it is poor. In fact, its economic subjugation is even worse, since it has been deprived of the instruments of labour that it possessed in the age of servitude, because whether it lives or dies no longer interests anyone, while even in the age of slavery it did, at times, interest the slave-owner.

Revolution has always had its exploiters. The priests exploited the Christian revolution: the capitalists exploit the bourgeois revolution. Freedom and equality, so longed for and proclaimed by the makers of the revolution and paid for with their blood, are transformed into the freedom to oppress and exploit, to the benefit of the rich, and the equality of oppression and exploitation, to the detriment of the poor.

“The Church of Rome defended with violence the empire it had seized through fraud, and the number of dissidents that died in single province during a single reign greatly exceeded (so writes the learned and impartial Grotius) the number of martyrs that perished under the Romans over three centuries and throughout the three long years of the empire.”¹⁰

“If the friends of order in Rome did not preach the massacre and extermination of the Nazarenes, this was only because the pagan world was more human, not so spiritual, less intolerant than the Catholic bourgeoisie. Ancient Rome did not know the strong methods invented by the Western Church and so successfully adopted in the extermination of the Albigenses and on the Eve of St Bartholomew, to the glory of which there are still frescoes in the Vatican.”¹¹

The feudal reaction exceeded the reaction of antiquity, but how it in turn has been exceeded by the bourgeois reaction! The fifteen thousand who were massacred in the June days and the forty thousand corpses that resulted from the week of blood are more than ample proof.

It is the extension of the principle of struggle, setting one increasingly large mass against the other with continually growing violence. It is one of the phenomena of progress.

In the primitive age, we can always see the intervention both of brute force and supernatural or divine force, even in the simplest of individual relations. Drawing water from a well or passing along a certain road was motive enough for war: the impregnation of a barren woman, the decision in a dispute concerning individuals or entire peoples, the building of a house or town, all often required the intervention of a divinity.

Later the struggle became more serious, both regarding the motives behind it and the number and violence of the masses fighting. And that is natural, since its force must represent the sum

⁹ L. Blanc, *op.cit.*, pp. 128–9.

¹⁰ C. Pisacane, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹¹ A. Herzen, *op. cit.*, p. 212. English translation, *cit.*, pp. 160–1.

of the forces that were previously expended in so many single fights, together with the divine force that no longer intervenes as often as before in support of brute force. For each miracle suppressed, a new sword must be forged.

Religion is the submission of man that is reflected in our spirit; the reflection is believed to be reality, by virtue of which a bond — albeit unreal — is established, of submission to God. God is the magnified shadow of the tyrant, that is reflected in our minds as a reality that really subjugates the mind. It is for this reason that whenever human oppression diminishes, we see a proportional diminution of divine oppression. To each absolute, autocratic, prying king there corresponds an absolute, autocratic, prying God; for each constitutional king, a God who reigns and does not govern: and when the wealthy class is called to power in a republic, monotheism is substituted by pantheism. The fate of God is thus closely linked to that of the tyrant; and divine action will disappear from among men along with the disappearance of brute force. Once the body is destroyed, the shadow too will disappear.

We shall see a continued growth in the force and amount of violence, both in future wars, which by now are only possible between federations and alliances of States on each side, and in the organized, decisive battle that the proletariat will unleash in order to conquer its emancipation.

But if this bloody struggle is not the last and if the new reaction of the authoritarian socialists must condemn us to the violence of new revolutionary explosions, we can state without a shadow of a doubt that the red reaction, and the anarchist revolution that will inevitably follow, will exceed every previous reaction and revolution, both in the number of combatants and in violence...

However it may be, for now we can acknowledge that the increase in the force of the struggle, both as regards violence and as regards the number of combatants, is the expression of its expansion, which itself is the expression of progress; everything, cause and effect of the revolution, that has inscribed in its future programme the complete disappearance from among men both of brutal force and divine force.

Founded on a natural principle and constituting the inexorable law of all human progress, revolution aims directly at its goal — the extension and simplification of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability. It follows its course imperturbably, its gaze firmly ahead, indifferent to all that happens around it, without eyes and without ears for the victims who fall at its passing. Like a devastating flood that does not concern itself to cry look out!, it fells the good and the bad, passing quickly over their bodies, driven as it is by its own constitution towards and end it will never reach.

How could it be otherwise? Reactionary sybarites halt its course in order to exploit it; and in order that it may resume its course, all obstacles to it must be broken down.

It is this repression or violent suppression of its functions that develops the violent, aggressive and destructive character in it, which is then revealed when it erupts.

We have seen how the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability function within human development: in the same way, one can see this principle at work in the single conflict between capital and labour, that is to say in the development of capitalist production.

Just as the various phases in human development are reflected — in tiny proportions — in the various phases of the development of each individual, so the development of humanity as a whole is reflected exactly in the development of capitalist production, which is at the same time the development of the proletariat — the class which, by emancipating itself by itself, is fatefully destined to bring about the abolition of all classes, that is to say it will accomplish the emancipation of humanity.

In the first epoch of human development, man is removed from his individual state thanks to his inferiority in the isolated struggle, and united with others into an early form of domination by one man with superior strength.

In the same way, at the beginning of modern production, the single labourer is forced by his economic inferiority to submit to the man with money, who buys his labour-force, dominates and exploits him, engaging him first in cooperative labour. The bourgeois has expropriated the labourer, he has used blood and fire¹² to create the working mass needed for the development of capitalist production; thus, among savages, too, the strongest had to use these methods in order to impose himself on the others, who would certainly have preferred savage freedom to social subjugation, doubtful guarantee of a more prosperous existence as it was.

As soon as he was subjugated for the first time, primitive man began to experience all the heartache of human servitude, unknown to him during his existence as a savage, and to compare his suffering now with the suffering that nature imposed on him; in the same way, as soon as he became a waged labourer the primitive labourer began to compare the suffering he felt in his old, relatively free, work and the suffering he felt in his current work, carried out under the direct, immediate oppression of the capitalist.

But despite this, no matter how his suffering increased instead of diminishing, progress had been made; the principle of struggle had been extended and simplified. So many individual producers had been eliminated, absorbed into collective producers, that the struggle was no longer between one shop and another, but between one factory and another. They were no longer struggles between individual producers, but struggles between bands, so to speak, of producers, each of which obeyed a boss and acted according to a common plan of action, indicated by the boss.

The principle of sociability, too, was extended. The individualistic sociability of producers was followed by the sociability of exploited producers from the same factory, the first seed, that after a long, difficult development would generate the tree of the sociability of humanity.

A new revolution took place, a new epoch began: man went from slavery to servitude: the principle of struggle was extended and the old type of sociability gave way to mediaeval sociability.

In the same way, a new revolution took place in the system of capitalist production: the age of the *division of labour* began and waged labour went from *simple cooperation* to *manufacturing*.

“In the Middle Ages, interests transformed the slave of antiquity into the serf, bound to the land and supplied with tools to cultivate it: in the system of capitalist production, interests have transformed the factory into an organism for production whose members are men.”

¹² See K. Marx, *op. cit.*, and what he says about *Primitive accumulation* [Volume I, Book One, Part 8].

Forced by the manufacturing process to carry out fragmented operations, that is to say the execution of a simple, minimal part of the product, and expropriated of all his old artisanal virtue, the worker became a thing of capital.

“Manufacture thoroughly revolutionises it, and seizes labour-power by its very roots. It converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts; just as in the States of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide or his tallow. Not only is the detail work distributed to the different individuals, but the individual himself is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation, and the absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa, which makes man a mere fragment of his own body, becomes realised [...] Dugald Stewart calls manufacturing labourers ‘living automatons... employed in the details of the work.’”¹³

At first the worker sold his labour force to capital because he lacked the material means of production. Now, his labour force refuses to carry out any serious service if it is not sold. In order to function, it nonetheless needs the social centre that exists only in the capitalist’s factory. Just as the chosen people carried a sign on their foreheads that they belonged to Jehovah, so the manufacturing worker is branded, as if by a red-hot iron, by the division of labour, which claims him as the property of capital.

But all this suffering disturbs the irresistible, inexorable law of revolution in no way at all. We have already said it and will always repeat it: revolution is a natural law that follows its course unmoved, without worrying in the slightest about its friends and its enemies, without looking right or left, its gaze firmly ahead to a sublime end that it will never reach. Its friends can do no more than free its path of the obstacles erected by its enemies who, far from managing to arrest its progress, only make it start from the explosions that they themselves provoke by restricting its force. It often happens that, paradoxically, reactionaries render the revolution great service without realizing it; and thus they are punished like the jealous husband who, without knowing it, is responsible for driving his wife into the arms of a lover. The capitalist class, for example, made widespread use of violence to prepare the terrain on which, alone, it could develop its production system; today it continues to use violence and believes it does so to its exclusive advantage; but what will it achieve with its great ability and its accumulation of capital, except to prepare the terrain necessary for that new system of production and consumption that will be characterized by the very absence of the capitalist?

Destiny, bourgeois; resign yourselves to dying!

Destiny, proletarians; rekindle your trust!

Continuing our analysis, we can see that with the manufacturing revolution, although the capitalist is better off and the worker worse, progress has been made because the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability have acquired new impetus. As in the Middle Ages, the struggle began externally between nations and internally between two large classes, so in the period of manufacturing the struggle is only fought between two large factories. The new sociability of exploited producers in manufacturing is even vaster; and the effects of the struggle that

¹³ *Editors note: Dugald Stewart, Lectures on Political Economy. Now first published. Vol. I. To which is Prefixed, Part Third of the Outlines of Moral Philosophy, edited by Sir William Hamilton, Edinburgh, 1855, p. 318.*

Editor’s note: K. Marx, op. cit., Vol. I, Ch. XIV.

they carry on against the capitalist can be seen and begin, in this period, to make themselves increasingly felt.

But let us come to the period of large industry, that reflects the third period of human development marvellously — the advent of the bourgeoisie.

By breaking every feudal bond and proclaiming the serf of yore free, the bourgeois revolution in effect only breaks the bond that tied the labourer to the land that fed him, leaving him the alternative of starving to death or allowing himself to be exploited at will by the capitalist. Likewise, by introducing machines and insinuating that the aim was to alleviate the labourer from the most thankless exertions while at the same time increasing the public wealth, the great industrial revolution in reality only expropriated him from his ancient art that had been left to him under the manufacturing system, and enslave him to a machine, producing ever-increasing wealth that went to an ever-smaller number of capitalists.

We have already seen how the worker was mutilated, demeaned and beaten down to the lowest level because of the division of labour in manufacturing. Now we can see how he suffers new, unspeakable sorrows because of the introduction of the machines needed by large industry. Having expropriated him of his last particle of artisanal virtue, transformed him into the common appendix of a mechanism, and tortured him with the staggeringly intense work of a machine that continually threatens to rip off a piece of his flesh or mince him in its fearsome cogs, the beast with a hundred tentacles does not content itself with sucking the blood of the proletariat; now it wants to swallow him with all his flesh, all his blood and all his bones. Developed out of all proportion, monstrous, gigantic, with a black, terrible appearance, with eyes and mouth of fire, its tentacles mutate into enormous breathing pumps and it wheezes and pants, revealing its new, inhuman need. Dragged along fatally by its irresistible force of attraction, the proletariat with his wife and children have today become the slave of the monster who tomorrow will devour them...

And his last curse against capital will be smothered by the joyful cheer of the capitalist for the prodigious discoveries of large industry...

But the day draws near when the roles will be reversed. Tears will change to laughter and laughter to tears; curses to blessings, cheers to curses...

Most of the proletariat knows it already; and they can already feel the sneers rising to their lips, directed against the capitalists. Busy yourselves now, hurry up there my good man, perfect your machines and make as many of them as you want: they will be your fortune, you will accumulate an immense capital; you will torture us, even wipe us out, but not for long. Your biggest task will not be for your own good — it will be for ours. You are preparing the terrain for our revolution wonderfully; you have even begun to build it for some time now. *Bon appetit* — eat and devour until you are sated; because when you have eaten everything, it will be our turn to eat you. So, fatten yourselves up, you will be all the tastier for it. And how hungry we are! What is the problem? It is inhuman to devour one's own father? But you, too, ate yours — now it is your turn: Destiny!

Prepare the house fittingly, otherwise we cannot enter it. We are destined by fate to live in peace and fraternal concord as much as you have lived in war. Only you can bequeath your goods,

as you control them fully, in such a way that can only help the community of fine brothers that we promise to be after you are truly dead!

And although we are quite impatient to succeed you, we will in way press you to hurry; there beside you lies the “thirst for interests” that inexorably drives you along the same path that we would have you travel. We do not even need to hide our feelings and calculations for the future from you, because we know that it is no longer possible for you to turn around or even stop.

You are fatally condemned to go on developing your industrial mechanism and all the means of modern production, which increasingly takes on the nature of the community it will logically have to be tomorrow, characteristic, too, of consumption. You are condemned before you die to cooperate in the realization of the first part of our programme: production in common. Consumption in common — that is to say the second part — will be our concern and you can rest assured that it will come about once you no longer exist. For all that you are our enemy, paternal instinct leads you to arrange your interests in such a way that our inheritance will be achieved with the least disorder possible: thus we will be able to listen serenely to the last voice that sings: bourgeois spirit, out from this world!

So long for now. Prepare our betrothed, we will crown her with roses; prepare an opulent banquet for us, we will dine like hero prepare your best wine for us, we will celebrate it with your funeral!

As with the economic field internally, so it will be externally with the political field — the revolution will make use of its cruellest adversaries to prepare the terrain for its solemn advent.

As Luther, that worthy representative of authority, first struck a mortal blow at authority’s most illustrious incarnation, “so the kings themselves (such is the power of destiny) broke the dams of the torrent that would swallow them up.”¹⁴ Kings *by the will of the people* overthrow the thrones of kings *by the grace of God*. And even the King of Prussia, *the anointed of the Lord* par excellence, himself strikes a terrible blow at the principle of authority, by sweeping away crowns that are no less legitimate than his own, carving himself an imperial diadem with which he crowns himself, acclaimed by his cohorts.

Destroy, ye powerful, the power of others; throw down, ye tyrants, the authority of others! Hurry! You who have placed all your belief in iron will perish by iron! When you have destroyed and thrown down everything, the hour will sound for the people, who will rise up in turn to destroy you. And on the ruins of your power will ride the waves of the revolution.

The great States will annex the little ones, the more civilized peoples will conquer the more barbarous. Military corridors are opened through barbarous or almost barbarous lands; enormous railway networks are built, passing through the highest mountains and the deepest valleys to join what nature had unforgivingly separated. It is the war of modern titans against the decrees of God — now known to be powerless — to refute them and destroy them.

Struggle, ye heroic sons of the earth, bind that which was unbound, join that which was separate! Hurry, because your mission is close to its end, and you will soon have to disappear, as your violent annexations will have to disappear. The hour of the people will not be long in coming, the people who know each other well enough thanks to the brutal bonds you created. Knots will be untied, chains broken and humanity will at last be able to regain free use of its expression.

Even the wars that the powerful carry on between each other out of interests have played into the hands of the revolution! Just think, for example, of the latest, that was started in order to

¹⁴ C. Pisacane, *op. cit.*, p. 85

consolidate the throne of the Napoleons and ended with the ruin of papal power and the advent of the Commune.

So make your wars, ye powerful of the earth, break as often as you can the deadly leaden pall of conservatism and the *status quo*! Transform and revolutionize the internal and external relations of the people! Hurry, because when you have transformed and revolutionized everything, your end will have come.

In determining the natural law of revolution, the mother of all human progress, we have seen the workings of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability, which, through their successive expansions, mark the various stages of human progress, even when the greater part of humanity did not thus improve its condition and even when the condition of the exploited became worse than before.

We have said it many times, revolution's course is inexorable, it does not trouble itself with consequences, it carries out its mission each time in developing the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability and follows its path. Without the interruptions it meets, it would not arrive at the truly complete expansion of the dual principle, human emancipation, but the counter-revolutionaries halt it, in the absurd hope of extinguishing its driving force and exploiting its conquests to their advantage.

The conquests of the revolution — that only a small part of humanity exploits, to the detriment of all others — necessarily render the oppression by the former of the latter more potent, but this does not mean that they should cease to be considered precious gains of the revolution. If an affirmation of liberty is exploited by a minority made up of capitalists to the detriment of a majority made up of workers, is it the fault of revolution or of the reactionary bourgeoisie who, by halting its course, have prevented it from developing and extending the original concept of freedom to all of humanity?

We have seen how the condition of the worker worsened when servitude gave way to waged labour; but we have also had to recognize the progress achieved by bourgeois sociability compared to mediaeval sociability; similarly today we can see how the condition of the proletariat, far from improving, has worsened with the transition from monarchy to republic.

The freedom that has been achieved, no matter how great, works to the advantage of the rich, the only ones who can make use of it, against those who have nothing and who consequently cannot make even the slightest use of it. But despite all that, this transition is nonetheless progress.

We have already said that the different phases of human development are reflected exactly, in minimum proportions, in the different phases of industrial development. An individual's infancy is happier than his early adolescence — where he first must submit to discipline — to the same extent as humanity's infancy in its savage state was happier compared to the age of submission, of civil servitude. The proportion always remains the same for all the other ages. There are some very painful phases in the development of the individual, as there are in the development of humanity; but despite this, development is development, and going back is impossible.

Just as a doctor is satisfied when the crucial stage of an illness arrives, increasing the suffering of the patient but at the same time starting him on the road to recovery, so the revolutionary joyfully greets a new period in human development which, though increasing the misery of the oppressed, also marks a step forward along the path to human emancipation. No doctor who

were to commit the madness of prolonging any stage of an illness would be worthy of the name; equally, no revolutionary who wished to arrest the course of revolution, to keep humanity at any particular stage of its development, would be worthy of the name. Just as a good doctor does everything to reduce the stages of an illness as much as possible, with the sole aim of healing the patient, so the good revolutionary must work in order to shorten the painful period of human development as much as possible, with the constant inspiration of an ideal of well-being, nobility and human greatness.

We can thus conclude:

That the sentiment of one's self, the prime inspiration of every human action, generates its substitutes, the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability. That the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability together make up the fundamental law that regulates all actions between men.

That the action of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability constantly tends to extend and simplify itself, and this constitutes human progress.

That this extension of the principle of struggle and the principle of sociability is both cause and effect of revolution.

And that, in consequence, revolution — cause and effect of all human progress — is the condition of life, the natural law of humanity. To halt it is to commit a crime; to re-establish its course duty of humanity.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Carlo Cafiero
Revolution is a Natural Law
1881

Chapter I from: Cafiero, Carlo, and Nestor McNab (Ed. & trans.). 2012. *Revolution*. 1st English ed.
Edmonton: Black Cat Press.

Originally published in French translation in “La Révolution sociale,” Paris on 20, 27 February;
6, 13, 27 March; 3, 10, 17, 24 April; 1, 8, 29 May; 6, 12, 19 June; 31 July 1881. Translated to
English by Nestor McNab (2011) from the Italian text contained in Carlo Cafiero, *Rivoluzione
per la rivoluzione: raccolta di scritti a cura e con introduzione di G. Bosio*, Rome 1970.

theanarchistlibrary.org