

Ethics and Revolution

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I

It is impossible to find a more characteristic feature of socialist politics than the method by which it tries to carry out its reforms. This method is based on the fact that the reforms are not the product of the ruling spheres but result from the conscious demands of the people and are created under their pressure. Everything that socialism has achieved through legislation has been not solely a question of parliamentary hearings but above all a question of street propaganda; the main efforts have involved persuading the working masses, not the legislative body—on which the implementation of the reform, however, directly depends. A clear example of this method is the introduction into legislation of the eight-hour working day, which has been one of the main points of socialist politics for a decade. Throughout this period of time, we see almost no efforts to obtain support for reform from ministerial cabinets, representative chambers, industrial departments, or international meetings, even when they specifically deal with workers' legislation, such as the Berlin labor congress, while all the energy for action unfolds at trade union meetings, at general meetings, in workers' writings, at May demonstrations, and in countless pamphlets explaining to the people the importance and benefits of the eight-hour working day. In a word, we see at once that the whole plan of politics is aimed at turning its legislative goal—the normalization of the working day—into a collective demand of the working class, as a conscious and strongly felt need of the worker, which today's legislation will be compelled to express. Reform enters the brains of the masses, moves hearts, becomes personal desires; and only in this form, when it has become a new moral force in society, should it impose itself on the legislative bureaucracy as a fact to which that bureaucracy will either have to yield or risk conflict with a new social current that will be dangerous for it. In this way, the reform of the working day becomes, above all, a reform of the worker himself, by awakening in his soul certain needs and concepts which he did not previously possess and which come into necessary contradiction with existing conditions.

The same principle guides the class struggle in winning various concessions from entrepreneurs. In order to obtain better living conditions for the working people, it has never been the policy of socialism to influence the "humanism" of factory owners, nor has socialism attempted to influence legislation by means of parliamentary diplomacy or gaining government influencers; the philanthropy of the entrepreneur is of no importance to socialism, and the benefits received by the workers are considered rather harmful, even if the benefits actually improve the workers' material well-being, because the concession gained not under the pressure of workers' solidarity but as a gift of the humanism of the possessing class or the result of the goodwill of an individual is not a moral gain for the worker; on the contrary, it favors the consolidation of conservative elements, suppressing the conscious development of the need for solidarity and struggle in him.¹ In socialist politics, then, it is not only about the reform itself, or about improving the well-being of the working class, but also about how this reform and improvement are achieved. The same practical postulates that can be found in its program

¹ An exception to this principle was "economic terror": it sought to make the party a kind of revolutionary providence, which would bestow on the workers gains in regard to labor conditions without calling them to collective struggle for these gains. This system was contrary to collusion, that is, a conscious struggle using the weapon of solidarity; consequently, it could be identified as a system of philanthropy, and its results, if it were to develop, would prove to be just as anti-revolutionary as the suppression in the working classes of the need for collective action, which is the seedbed of their revolution.

might also be—and sometimes even are—placed in the program of conservative parties; however, the manner of instituting these demands is almost always different. Conservatives and liberals [*wolnomyślni*]² often favor factory legislation; the Catholic social party is ready to support any reforms aimed at limiting exploitation; it admits the demands of workers on many occasions and stands up for their interests, but at the same time ensures that these just reforms are not the result of class struggle and in order to implement them calls on everyone but the interested class itself. It is a politics that in a fortunate set of circumstances can sometimes provide benefits to the people and hold back certain extravagances of exploitation and poverty, without revolutionizing the people's moral nature at all, while socialist politics, in carrying out even the same reforms, tries to make them the expression of changed human souls, of the achievement of the new desires and new ideas that have developed in the consciousness of the working classes.

We are not concerned to show here that socialist policy has always followed this rule. It can happen that socialist policy is influenced by the old bureaucratic rules of making history, and then such matters occur as the gaining of seats at the price of ideological concessions, and there are theories such as those about parliamentary or conspiratorial “coups” which would liberate the proletariat by legislative decrees—without its conscious participation in liberating itself—and which would reform society without the moral reform of the people. It could even be said that in the history of socialism these two principles of politics are quite opposite to each other: the one that makes reforms on behalf of the authorities and the one that wants to achieve them as the gains of the people's new consciousness clash with each other in a constant struggle, and depending on which of them prevails the socialist movement either regresses, absorbing foreign ideological elements into itself (thanks to which it was possible to obtain a greater number of electoral votes or to win over public opinion for the party), or, on the contrary, it deepens more in the revolutionary direction, neglecting parliamentary and organizational benefits for more essential gains of a moral nature.

There is doubtless a certain antagonism between the official rise of party forces and their revolutionary nature. In constituencies where socialist propaganda was underdeveloped, seats had to be won with what was deeply lodged in the brains of the voting population. Thus, the most ordinary petit-bourgeois ideas, such as state protection of small properties, were introduced into the program and activism. In encountering peasant individualism, “collectivism” was transformed into an almost metaphysical slogan having nothing to do with practical reforms. Encountering the patriotism of the French “*revanche*,” the foreign policy of the most backward segment of the bourgeoisie was honored—a policy that is not only anti-republican but, more importantly, damaging to the interests of the freedom of all humanity. Obviously, as a result of similar frauds and ideological compromises (which in the minds of their creators appeared to be the politics of “positive” socialism), the party necessarily expanded both in parliament and in the number of its supporters, increasing the trust and sympathy of even such spheres of people who had nothing to do with communism and the liberation of labor; but with this it also had to change its character and, instead of revolutionizing minds, to concentrate around its banner only the temporary discontents of elements fused with the morality, concepts, and interests of the ruling system.

However, the same deviations indicate that there is an essential and close link between the regularity of politics and the historical position of socialism. If socialism were only an expression of the defense of the interests of a certain class, having no tendency to create a new social

² Literally: free thinkers.

world, if it were to take a position as the “junkers” party or the peasant party, whose entire task is limited solely to protecting the interests of a given class and being its guide in the battle of social antagonisms on the basis of today’s system and without changing that system’s foundations, then it would be completely indifferent in regard to how and by what path reforms appear. As a defender of the workers, it would try to secure their interests within the existing order of things; it would seek restraints on exploitation, just as the democrats seek protection for property, and it would see the fulfillment of its task merely in obtaining certain reforms, not caring at all that at the same time as the reforms something would change in the soul of the workers, so that a new ideology and needs would emerge along with them. For its purpose—to protect class interests in the existing conditions—these new moral elements would be completely superfluous, and hence the policy of calling on the people to obtain everything for themselves, of seeking to awaken these elements, would then be of no significant importance to socialism, and would at best appear only occasionally as a means of the most effective struggle, just as today, in countries with universal suffrage, the workers’ parties that are least concerned with the consciousness of the people must nevertheless strive to bring their proposals for reform to this consciousness in order to gain more power in the legislative assembly. For socialism, however, such a position is impossible, because the class interests of the proletariat are at the same time decomposing elements for the existing society; by taking on the defense of those interests, the issue of man’s liberation is taken on at the same time and not the preservation of certain privileges or institutions threatened by antagonisms of the system. Furthermore, that defense must not turn against certain relations and arrangements of a given system, but against the system itself. Hence, the workers’ cause inexorably becomes the question of a new social world, and the politics that defend it becomes simultaneously the policy of creating this new world, which, as communism, contradicts all previous factors of human coexistence without exception.

In view of such a task, which is imposed directly by the historical position of the proletariat, when it comes to the fundamental transformation of society the moral revolution must come to the fore in politics, awakening the kinds of needs and ideas in human souls that would contradict the existing order and would, with spontaneous force, push for the creation of communist forms of coexistence. In themselves, reforms for the improvement of the living conditions of the working classes are not enough, because the important thing is primarily to revolutionize these classes, to break all the moral ties with which they are closely related to the ruling system, to eradicate from their souls those interests and concepts that impede the free development of revolutionary elements; therefore, socialist policy should take care that the reforms are not given to the people, but that they are the product of their conscious demands, the result of reformed souls.

It is hard to suppose that the institutions of communism could appear in a society that does not correspond to either the needs or the concepts of these institutions. If such views have sometimes been found among socialist theorists, they have only been the result of a profound sociological ignorance; and practice has always contradicted them, for there have been hardly any socialist activists who, regardless of their theory, were indifferent to what the popular classes thought and demanded. Activism cannot even set itself a goal other than to transform the way of thinking and awaken new needs in those classes that it tries to influence, and if it really leads to a new system, then there must also be admission that this cannot be accomplished except by means of moral revolutions; all other paths to the revolution are inherently closed to it. Activism cannot affect the economic foundations of social life, which it finds ready as a product of the spontaneous

processes of history, nor can it organize any political force capable of becoming a reformer until it produces in society those ideological and moral currents from which the organization, entering the fight against the old society, could derive its vitality. Thus, for activism there is only one field of activity, namely the human soul, in which it can in actuality develop the elements of the revolution with full awareness of its purpose.

History knows no other process: every social change has always been accompanied by a moral one; the appearance of a class that it took upon itself to destroy the old orders and institutions also meant the appearance of a new morality to which the socio-legislative forms had to adapt. Capital has organized today's society not as an economic abstraction but as those human elements of a moral nature that were connected with its economic character, as certain conscious needs, life interests, and the concepts and ethics connected with them, that were completely unknown to the former feudal-type societies. The "bourgeois," as a moral type of human being, with his own conscience and characteristic concepts, existed much earlier than the formation of the bourgeois social system; the type was produced along with the commodity economy and was opposed to the feudal moral type, just as commodity opposes the natural economy; it then developed in the struggles that cities waged with feudal laws; its political awareness was shaped as the "humanist" of the Renaissance. In the sciences, liberated from the influence of the Church, it tried to fight tradition in the "Enlightenment," and in the pre-revolutionary eighteenth century it tried to reform all morality, all beliefs and manners. As mercantile interests prevailed, eradicating from minds ideas that were inconvenient to those interests, institutions also changed; and when the moral revolution, under the pressure of those interests, had penetrated almost all the relations and customs of everyday life, the political revolution was then an unavoidable and elemental necessity, and official only in its confirmation of what had changed in the depths of society.

Is it possible to believe that the emergence of the communist system could bypass its previous phase of moral revolution? That communist institutions could be organized without finding the appropriate needs in human souls, without having their basis in the consciousness of the people? Suppose for a moment that some revolutionary providence appears—a group of conspirators professing the ideals of socialism, which manages to take over the state mechanism successfully and with the help of the police, dressed in new colors, to introduce communist arrangements. Let us suppose that the consciousness of the people is not at all involved in this matter, and that everything is done by the power of bureaucracy itself. What happens then...? The new institutions have removed the fact of legal property, but property remains as a moral need of the people; they have removed official exploitation from the field of production, but all those external factors from which human harm arises would be preserved, and there would always be a sufficiently wide field for their manifestation, if not in the economic field, then in all other spheres of human relations. To stifle property interests, the organization of communism would have to use broad state power; the police would have to substitute for those natural needs through which social institutions live and develop freely; moreover, the defense of new institutions could only pertain to the state, which would be founded on principles of bureaucratic absolutism, since any democratization of power in a society that has been forced into a new system would risk the immediate collapse of this system and the resumption of all the social rights living on in human souls untouched by revolution. In this way, communism would not only be something extremely superficial and weak, but, moreover, it would turn into statehood, oppressing the freedom of the individual, and instead of the old classes it would create two new ones—citizens and officials, whose mutual antagonism would necessarily manifest itself in all areas of social life. If, therefore, communism

in this artificial form, without the moral transformation of people, could even survive, it would in any case be a contradiction of itself and would be a social monster that no oppressed class could have desired, especially not a proletariat defending human rights and destined by history for liberation.

Therefore, the supposition that a new social system can appear without a moral revolution is a sociological absurdity³, and probably no one would argue for it in this form. But there is also another question on whose justification the “heroic,” or rather bureaucratic, theories of revolution seek to base themselves. The idea is that the moral revolution will occur spontaneously, under the influence of economic conditions alone, and that the party, on gaining power even without the participation of the popular consciousness, could carry out a complete social reform, because it would immediately find support in the interests of all the classes oppressed by the yoke of capitalism; today’s oppression itself is supposed to suffice for the economic reform to become a vital need of the greater part of society, and the elements of dissatisfaction and antagonism produced by the ruling system can serve the party to create a new system, and the rest can be done by the political consciousness of those who lead the movement.

It is indubitable that the development of economic conditions produces new moral elements everywhere [that] it strongly affects a person’s life situation. Without this, it would not even be possible to speak of a moral revolution; in order for a propagated idea to penetrate the soul of a person so deeply that it really becomes his moral transformation, his new need, and new rule of behavior, it is necessary to have the proper life influences inclining a person’s sentiments toward these things. But at the same time we also see the opposite influence of the living environment—that it tries to adapt the moral nature of man to itself and—through strong ties of practical advantage, connect his personal interests with the existing order. We see this influence as a common phenomenon even in the class whose economic situation should revolutionize it as much as possible. The worker, who has not been reformed by the influence of socialist propaganda, does not at all sense the historical interests of the proletariat (the abolition of the state, property, and oppression stemming from productive labor). He has his own real personal interests which direct his life, without the least concern for those other ones. The fight against poverty appears to him as a practical matter of obtaining higher wages—even higher enough for him to save and slowly become a small rentier; the freedom of life has a much lower value for him than an increase in wages, so that in almost all spontaneous strikes it has primarily been about increasing wages and rarely about reducing the working day; and factory owners usually manage very easily to introduce additional hours for a small extra payment. Only in the event of major conflicts with the capitalists does he feel genuine antagonism toward the state, but in various minor matters of life he necessarily resorts to the help of state-police institutions, thereby recognizing their usefulness; inheritance proceedings, the retrieval of stolen items, the guarantee of security against thieves, the law that punishes criminals, and so forth, are all facts that connect a personal interest with the organization of the state and consolidate in the brain a certain notion of political orthodoxy. Ownership and police interests themselves develop with even greater force in those working classes that have a little something, such as the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants, and whom the revolution must take into account, especially as they do not at all betray a desire for quick economic disappearance, and with a protective policy on the part of the state they could delay their own social death indefinitely. The theoretical antagonism between individual prop-

³ In the original: *absurd socjalistyczny* (socialist absurdity). This is probably an editorial error.

erty and socialized labor and the development of modern technology does not affect either the peasant or the petty bourgeoisie, as long as it does not really become a threat of economic expropriation, and the difficulty which these classes encounter in keeping their property in the face of the enormous competition of capital primarily develops in them—alongside various social discontents of a conservative nature—the concern to maintain their current position as owners of shops or farmsteads.

It is therefore impossible not to recognize that the influence of the environment in which the working classes live has a dual action: revolutionary and conservative. Moreover, the element of dissatisfaction, the feeling of oppression, considered individually, i.e., in each individual person, often prompts him to seek countermeasures that are not revolutionary at all, to use any help there may be in today's system, starting from the state courts and ending with credit institutions, charity institutions, or any sort of profiteering ideas that could lead him out of a difficult material situation. So even "dissatisfactions" with life are not necessarily a factor in revolutionizing people and can perfectly well be the engine of even the most backward tendencies, as we see in various programs of popular democracy. In order to counteract these conservative influences, and to develop the genuine revolutionary elements which germinate in human brains under the influence of today's oppression, the action of a party is needed, the influence of the ideas which, by using what life itself gives, could form the human being into a new moral type. Both the technical and cultural patterns presented by today's capitalism, and the poverty that develops together with it, can only acquire a truly revolutionary meaning through the interaction of ideas; otherwise, all the human aspirations that are self-generated under the influence of these economic stimuli will revolve—as if in an enchanted circle—around what will remain their moral idol, their life need, that is to say around private property and its necessary complement: police ethics. It would be futile to delude ourselves that today's social institutions exist only by means of artificial state coercion, as if supported by the force of bayonets. They also live in human souls, where they are fastened by many bonds of religion, morality, reasoning, interests, and habits, and therefore destroying them is neither so easy nor possible by way of a bureaucratic overthrow; if they were even superficially combated, in the political sphere, they would revive with their natural force as long as they remained untouched and preserved in their moral center. The same applies also to the reverse—that an essential and complete fight against the property and police system requires introducing communism into human souls and awakening communist needs—because new forms of social coexistence would have to develop with blind fatality from these new moral centers. In this, therefore—in the revolution of the human soul—rests the entire task of the revolution in general. We need not be concerned either with drawing up a detailed plan for the social future, or with laying out in advance the guidelines by which the political revolution is to take place; it will be enough if we develop a moral communism that lives in human needs and concepts; the organization of the society of the future, as well as the nature of the political struggle for it, will be of the same sort as the moral revolution that precedes it and the guidance of which is the entire and sole task of the party.

II

We shall now see how the party carries out the task of "moral revolution" and whether the method used for it actually achieves the intended purpose. Usually the whole propaganda of com-

munism consists in speaking to the workers about it as the system of the future, explaining that common property results necessarily from today's development of manufacturing technology and that it will provide people with all the social comforts; at the same time, it is naturally made clear that the conquest of such an order can only be the work of the revolution of the proletariat, and that there must be a striving for this revolution, an organizing of one's forces for the struggle. The worker thus acquires new knowledge and concepts, with which, however, he does not know what to do. For him, communism remains a matter of a distant, undefined future, a theoretical message which he might hear with curiosity and try to understand but which has no practical application in his life. The whole practical side of propaganda is reduced to strikes, to trade-linked coffers, to defending current interests, to participation in election voting or in demonstrations, and all this is not in any direct connection with communism but could equally be conducted with or without an awareness of the idea. In a word, today's propaganda in regard to "communism" is limited to giving workers theoretical information about it, as about the social system of the past, more or less in the same way as popular information about Darwinism or about primitive peoples is imparted; and in matters of current interest it follows a different method; it is no longer just a question of understanding the matter, but also of its practical application, of putting it into practice. Class antagonisms, the political rights of the workers, the importance of organizations and strikes, are promoted so that new messages and concepts are expressed by appropriate conduct. The difference, of course, comes from the fact that communism—considered solely as a system of society that will someday exist—must necessarily remain an abstract question in regard to the problems of life and to have at most a purely intellectual meaning and interest. The idea of it, having penetrated the brain of the worker and satisfying a certain mental curiosity, has nothing more to do there, because, being a theory of the social future, separate from current life, it thus becomes completely alien to all those real, living facts that constitute the content of human life and of the soul. If it appears from time to time in consciousness, it is only in a completely sterile form, as a theoretical conviction or a scientific message, not binding anyone to anything, as a thought of a detached nature, untranslatable into anything specific that surrounds a person in life. It sometimes speaks at meetings in discussions; it is recalled during demonstrations or voting in elections, but always in the same abstract character, not having anything to do with the existing reality; moreover, beyond those exalted moments of conviction, a person lives, thinks, and acts as if the idea were not in his brain at all.

Of course, an idea that lives in the mind in this way, isolated from everything that really concerns and moves a person, from his interests and everyday affairs—an intellectual idea only—cannot constitute the root of a moral revolution; for this it is too superficially connected with human nature. First of all, it must remain abstract, living only in a verbal formulation, in more or less vague sentences, because the body and blood of the life surrounding it have been removed. As with all practical ideas concerning human needs and the human conscience, we can always point out its relation to this or that matter—that this fact confirms it, and the other contradicts it; we can find its practical models in our own surroundings and in some way see tangibly what it is by looking at its real form. With communism, understood only as a system of the distant future, this cannot be done; if we disconnect individual ethics from it, then in the surrounding life we find nothing in which it expresses itself concretely, not a single matter with which it is vitally and directly connected; therefore it necessarily remains in people's minds only as a certain economic and legal formula, with very general meaning, whose development even in its presumed and imagined details presents great difficulties. By the same token, the idea remains weak, poor in its

associations, and it cannot take possession of either the mind or the moral conscience; it appears only as a result of intellectual motives, the rarest and least vital in man, bypassing at a distance his real internal driving forces, those that govern his conduct in everyday affairs. It can only be enlivened and nourished by speculative minds, which are interested in purely theoretical issues, and thus by few in number.

In addition, only speculative minds can preserve its conceptual purity; thus, usually due to the fact that it remains an abstract, general formula, devoid of the content of life, it transforms itself, absorbing elements completely alien to it. This is a psychological law that cannot be prevented. Communism, as an isolated concept, tries to translate itself in every mind into a very concrete concept and takes on what it encounters in the human soul: the life patterns and the moral motives of today's system. Since the human being's practical and everyday ideology has remained individualistic, property-based, and police-based, the communism of the future takes on the same features in his brain, and it does so in such a spontaneous and unconscious manner that a person does not even notice when he starts to enact a comedy in his mind, concealing old things under the veil of a revolutionary new name. Hence, such widespread logical monstrosities arise as, for example, the police dictatorship of the proletariat in the future system, "work cheques" replacing the role of money, remuneration on the basis of the number of hours worked, state collectivism with officials instead of factory workers, a penal system forcing individuals to fulfill the obligations of communism, and so forth; and in completely uneducated minds, in workers who have only occasionally been thrown ideas of the future system by propaganda, communism takes this form: we will take the place of the bourgeoisie and rule over it as it rules over us today. In a word, only the roles and names change, and the relations between people and people remain the same. Ideality, being overgrown with life, defeats the abstraction and impresses its mark on it; the idea keeps the old content and the pretence of revolution and is the more disastrous because in deluding itself about being something new and better, it allows the firmer preservation of the conservative moral type.

Leaving aside this degeneration, truly revolutionary ideas are always merely a sort of showy feature of people; their whole life is contained in words: we are revolutionists when we speak at meetings, when we have discussions, when we formulate our wishes for the social future—thus generally in our reasoning and theoretical intentions. The cases where life comes into contact with a revolutionary idea are always symbolic in nature: voting for a socialist candidate at election time or taking part in a demonstration.

There is, however, no direct embodiment of the idea of communism, such as, for instance, the realization of the principle of "fraternity" in deed, a disinterested principle, when the idea itself becomes a living and visible fact without any explanation; there is only a conventional relationship, consisting in making a certain agreement as to the meaning of a fact: I am taking part in a street march, which means, according to the party proclamation, that I am, for example, a proponent of common property or an opponent of the government; so for a moment this idea comes alive in my brain, as long as, naturally, the very meaning of the manifestation is not altered; and the distortion of this pre-arranged meaning is very frequent, because each participant is demonstrating for what he imagined to be contained in the given slogan. Thus false content, having nothing to do with revolutionary ideas, is all the more likely to appear in electoral voting,

because in this case the tactics of the candidates, who want to have at least “*Stimmvieh*”⁴ in the absence of other kinds, often contribute to it.

Against this fragile, symbolic nature of the ties of the revolutionary idea with life there is the whole old conservative ideology, burrowing deeper into the human soul every day. A communist, outside of meetings, demonstrations, or voting, is an ordinary person and the same as everyone else; like everyone else, he cares for money, for property; he cares first of all for his personal interests, calls for police assistance, uses state institutions, is enthusiastic about the national army, victories, and the power of the state, if he is in a politically free country; he exhibits sincere patriotism and even racial chauvinism; in a word, this is the most ordinary petty-bourgeois type of person, who only in solemn moments of “political action” becomes a revolutionary.

In recent times, since the current of “positive” politics began to prevail more and more in the camp of social democracy, a point of honor has even been made of this moral socialist petty bourgeoisie, in trying to convince opponents of the party that a socialist is the same good patriot and citizen of the country, a follower of the same domestic gods of home, work, and order, like every other decent person.

What might result from this state of affairs? This is above all the division of the indoctrinated individual into the conventional revolutionist and the actual conservative; therefore, in order to organize a social revolution with people of bourgeois morality, “Jacobinism,” a bureaucratic revolution, is absolutely necessary; it is necessary that the conscious party intelligentsia, having in some way gained the support of the masses, seize state power and by means of a “dictatorship” build a new society. The theory of “state coercion” is thus closely related to the nature of today’s communist propaganda, and it must be admitted that it is the entirely logical result of this conventional, conviction-based revolution, to which propaganda has voluntarily confined itself.

Communism, as a separate concept, is too weak a moral factor to suffice for the spontaneous transformation of society, even if assisted by all the forces of technological development; the proletariat, which has preserved in its soul the needs of the petty bourgeoisie, the property-and-police conscience, would not be able to liberate itself according to the truly revolutionary motto “liberate thyself”; it thus needs to be helped toward a “revolutionary state” and by a dictatorship to do that for which there is no basis in the people’s consciousness. Moreover, “statehood” is considered to be such an innocent thing that it cannot change the desired social ideals in any way, and it is overlooked that on entering the new world as a component factor, statehood thereby prevents it from being essentially new.

In countries without political freedom, such as Poland in the Russian partition, where there is no regular party life, the relation between revolution and conservatism is even worse. The socialist ideology that has reached workers at club meetings or through pamphlets does not even have the points of consolidation and connection with life that it has in free countries; only mental activities could sustain it in the form in which it is propagated, but these, by its very nature, cannot be enjoyed by the wider working masses; it is therefore doomed to fade away as soon as the first period of interest in the novelty—the period of adolescent faith that at any moment this social ideal may descend to earth—has passed.

Usually, a few years are enough for everyday personal life, which has remained completely alien to the revolutionary ideology acquired thanks to propaganda, to outweigh it, obliterate

⁴ An English equivalent would be “voting cattle”—translator’s note.

it with the vitality of its interests, and almost oust it from the brain of the worker. This is the origin of those situations often observed in the Polish movement, where groups of workers who were previously animated by the idea of socialism, and among whom there had been vigorous propaganda efforts, withdrew from the sphere of party influence after a few years, simply because intellectual interest in the idea had weakened. Over the passage of time, the idea itself had not merged with anything practical in life, remaining at best general theoretical knowledge; thus, if there was no occupational affair—no current interest such as successful strikes—contact with the party would break off and the socialist movement would be extinguished in the given group.

In such conditions, “Jacobinism” seems to be an even more necessary, artificial means of conducting a revolution—the only possible means; it is necessary, however, to have something to uphold the slogan of a revolution that is unable to take root in human souls, to give it a fictitious force, if there is no real one. No wonder then that the tactic of “terror,” which gives the party in the eyes of the people the charm of some hidden providence that is fighting for it, so often returns to the minds of activists struggling with the inadequacy of propaganda for which they could not create a living form.

It is obvious that when communist ideology has such a theoretical, purely intellectual character, the influence of the party cannot be sustained, nor can it extend to the larger masses of the population, if it (the party) did not embrace the vital interests of the present moment with its propaganda. The “minimum program” only saves it from political lethargy. Instead of theoretical postulates isolated from current life, there are goals of a practical nature, ideas associated with everyday interests, such as gaining a higher wage, a shorter working day, political rights, class antagonism—ideas which, on being brought to the consciousness of workers’ brains, also become new needs and provoke appropriate action; they enter into life and change the conditions of life, and are therefore extremely vital.

Out of all the socialist propaganda, they alone penetrate the working masses in a significant way and constitute the real content of the class movement. In seeking the “revolution” of the proletariat today, no other mass manifestations could be identified but those that fulfill the minimal program of socialism—the struggle for current class, economic, and political interests; and the idea of communism is only formally connected with it, as a kind of superfluous addition, which the aims of the current struggle could do very well without.

When it comes, for example, to getting better terms of hire from the factory owners, or forcing the government to introduce some reform favorable to the working class, such as the 8-hour day or universal suffrage, the communist thesis plays a purely conventional role in these matters; everything goes the same with it or without it, because it does not participate either in the subject matter or in organizing people for the struggle undertaken; workers’ organizations, such as the former English Trade Unions, waged an economic struggle with the capitalists, setting the same goals and principles of class antagonism as the socialist parties; and parties such as those advocating for people’s democracy or liberal ones [*wolnomyślnych*], which take an essentially hostile position toward the idea of communism, have organized the masses to fight for political rights on an equal footing with the socialists, setting out the same postulates and goals to be achieved, as was the case, for example, with universal suffrage in Austria and Belgium. It only proves that the minimal program of the socialist movement is not bound by any significant link with its revolutionary principles—that it essentially behaves with indifference toward communism—and therefore its propagandizing in that regard, although it gives the party enormous benefits, does not yet constitute that revolution of minds that would lead society to communism.

The socialist party is perfectly aware of this and usually considers that this whole class-struggle movement for the interests of the day is only a preparatory period for revolution, a school in which the proletariat learns to know its own strength, to organize and fight with its terrible weapon of solidarity. However, there can be no stopping there, as this would risk the reversal of history and the bankruptcy of the revolution. Higher wages, normal working days, and political democratism can perfectly come to terms with the present-day system and become only a certain improvement of the ownership and police society⁵, lulling its factors of discontent and rebellion.

The gains achieved in this regard in the face of the party's historic tasks mainly involve the preparation of a freer field for propaganda. The improvement of the economic welfare of workers, and especially the shortening of the working day, gives them greater freedom of life and mind, and raises their intelligence; the right to vote in elections makes it possible for socialist propaganda to come into more frequent contact with the ideas of the masses and can therefore be beneficial for the purposes of revolutionary parties; no one, however, supposes that the mere fact of achieving better material conditions or greater political freedom will bring a worker morally closer to communism and social revolution, in view of the fact that there is often tremendous conceptual conservatism in those categories of the proletariat that have been able to win favorable terms of hire (e.g., the workers' aristocracy of the English Trade Unions), or in those countries where the political rights of the people are the most extensive, such as Switzerland. There is a double game here, between the soul of the human being and the social fact that has made his life easier without changing the foundations of the existing system in any way. On the one hand, as a result of acquiring greater freedom in life and politics, he becomes more intellectually gifted and can adopt new concepts and participate in social reform movements; on the other hand, he is more tightly bound to the ruling system; the basic institutions of the system, such as property, the state, the penal system, and the army, find a more solid basis in his personal needs, he becomes morally less capable of accepting a revolutionary idea. Even if it were true, the supposition that the desires of the working class will increase as they receive various concessions does not yet settle the question of becoming revolutionized, for the task is not really about increasing the desires of the human being today, but rather about changing the direction of desires; the point is not that the working class should develop an appetite for "bourgeois" life, but rather that the desire for a new life based on entirely new principles and moral factors should develop. This is especially the case given that even the improvement of the material existence of the working classes cannot become a universal and permanent fact, while the property foundations of the present system are maintained; with the ever stronger tendency of manufacturing technology to limit the number of hands occupied in production, and with ever greater pressure on the world market by the great capitalist monopolies, the gains made in terms of employment conditions would necessarily become the lot of a smaller and smaller part of the proletariat, jealously guarding their privileged place as workers engaged in regular work against a mass withdrawn from production, living on the basis of temporary jobs, or non-production jobs, such as domestic servants, for whom the benefits of the concessions obtained in factory occupations would have no significance. The extension, therefore, of only those moral factors that lead the workers to fight for better conditions of hire, the desire for a higher standard of living in bourgeois society, cannot in any way lead to

⁵ In the original: *społeczeństwo wolnościowo-policyjne* (libertarian and police society). This is probably an editorial error. Throughout the text, Abramowski uses the phrase "własnościowo-policyjny" (ownership and police).

the liberation of the proletariat, being economically limited as to its realization under the capitalist system and morally conservative; there is no reason even to suppose that a skilled worker who has succeeded in the gradual struggle to achieve higher wages would not be closer to becoming a shareholder in these various enterprises—which are founded on the principle of small shares, which develop more and more, concentrating small savings—than to transforming himself into a communist who wants to free human life from all forms of exploitation and monetary interest. Similarly, political gains are not a sufficient factor for a revolution, because if propaganda has failed to embed the idea of communism in minds, the political rights obtained will serve to consolidate ownership institutions and the police state associated with them, as is the case today in all democratic societies; political consciousness, although revolutionized enormously with the democratization of power—the popular vote, the right of initiative, of referendum, etc.—has a fatal and fundamental end in economic conditions, namely that it cannot make a firm break with the police as long as there is a private-property interest.

So we come to the following two conclusions: first, that the propaganda of communism, which has been conducted to date by the intellectual method, is due to this very method completely incapable of making a moral revolution; and second, that the conduct of this moral revolution, which necessarily precedes the new system, is also impossible through the promotion of a “minimal” program, as it lacks a revolutionary ideology and thus may even become a factor of social conservatism. However, the solution to the task is very simple and results from the juxtaposition of these two types of propaganda. The vitality of the ideas promoted by the minimal program consists in the fact that they translate, in the minds of the workers, into concrete things that concern them personally—they pass from the intellectual sphere to the sphere of life and seek to transform present life. The worker, having adopted them, not only thinks differently about social phenomena, but, more importantly, acts differently and evaluates his own life interests differently; the acquired ideology is thus perpetuated by everyday matters, and the very course of life constantly fuels it with every clash of class antagonisms. Therefore, out of all socialist propaganda, only a few minimal postulates survive among the masses and develop elemental force, not even caring about material influences. The propaganda of communism must acquire the same character if it is truly to fulfill its task of morally revolutionizing people. Instead of being only an abstract concept and theoretical message, not affecting the current affairs of life in any way, the idea of communism should translate in the brains of its followers into concrete things, find itself in everyday matters, be a question of the living present. Instead of remaining only in mental convictions, where it is condemned to deadness and degeneration, it should reach the real human being—what he feels, what he desires, and what guides his behavior; it should connect with his personal needs, and become, in a word, his moral conscience and banish from there all this bourgeois Christianity by which all the institutions of the present-day system are supported.

For a moral revolution—this core of every social transformation—to take place, communism should take control of people in such a way that it can be known from their very lives, their customs, their private and everyday matters, that they are communists, people of a new type, of a new revolutionary morality, so that, upon entering among them, it would immediately be felt that this is some other human world, having nothing to do with the bourgeois world, a social life developing on completely different principles and governed by new moral motives and factors. For this to happen, however, first of all the very idea of communism should cease to be treated solely as an economic and legal thesis of the future—because in this form it must remain only

an intellectual issue—but should also become a thesis of individual ethics which could even now govern human life. Let us see if this is possible and if there are such conditions in today's life that would allow communist morality to be introduced into it, as a fact united with people's needs and significantly shaping people's mutual relations.

III

Properly speaking, there has not been a single social system, not a single institution established by custom and law, which did not have its expression in the individual ethics of the human being. There is such an essential relationship between the two that from the moral laws professed by people individually, as the internal motor of their personal behavior, the social arrangements among which they live can always be known. The legal code repeats what a person sees in conscience as his duty, with the only difference that, in the former case, the police act as a "sufficient cause" and in the other we have an imperative of theological origin. So we find marriage as a social institution, protected by law, and marriage as a personal ethic, with its sins and its virtues, scruples of conscience and rules of "honor"; we find the institution of "property," whose functioning involves various bureaucrats, courts, and prisons, and "property" as an ethics that lives inside man, which guides his behavior, defining the boundaries between theft and exploitation, the fair and unfair acquisition of property. Individual morality dictates the punishment of the criminal, condemns idleness, the non-payment of debts, and extravagance; likewise, the legal code penalizes offenses, persecutes vagrants, and protects the interests of creditors and owners. In a word, the same life needs, which socially organize themselves into institutions and laws, individually appear as the conscience of man and take the form of ethical principles. A member of the Iroquois tribe leaves his home open to any passerby who needs a rest and a meal: "The efforts (says the Jesuit Charlevoix) with which the redskins [sic] surround widows, orphans, and the infirm, the hospitality they cultivate in such a delightful way, are for them only the result of the belief that everything should be shared by people."⁶ The Bushman, having caught the game, divides it among his companions, leaving the smallest part for himself. When, in search of food, the Fijians find a whale, they do not start feasting until they inform their tribesmen of their prey. The commons appears here not only in family institutions such as property and collective work, which are necessary for the maintenance of an individual's life, but also as a rule of morality, a voice of duty, and is so deeply rooted in the human soul that it is preserved in some customs even when it has already disappeared economically, giving way to individual farms and property. A member of bourgeois society has a different ethics, just as his social organization is different from that of barbarian families. The morality he professes does not in the least require him to share what he has with anyone; his conscience would not be moved by the first-come passerby who asked him for hospitality; in refusing to help him or in invoking the police order against vagrants, he is not only in harmony with existing laws but also in harmony with his own conscience and with that ethics which his soul has absorbed since childhood.

Therefore, if we consider a certain social system as an economic and legal issue, it is completely arbitrary and artificial. In fact, the social system lives not in a bureaucratic world—the formula of a code and administrative regulations, or in some disconnected production technique, but

⁶ P.-F.-X. de Charlevoix, *Journal d'un voyage fait par ordre du roi dans l'Amérique Septentrionale: adressé à Madame la Duchesse de Lesdiguières*, vol. 6, Paris 1744, p. 13.

in the human world, where every type of behavior and mutual relation has its internal motives—in needs and their justification in a set of concepts, and where, therefore, every institution that embraces a certain side of man’s life must necessarily fuse with some part of his soul and have there its moral representation. Socialist theorists know very well about this relationship between the social system and the moral type of man, and are not inclined to imagine that in the communism of the future the bourgeois human brain will be preserved as it is today. They assume, however—it is not clear why—that the moral change, i.e., the change of individuals, the formation of a new conscience, will appear only as a result of the age-long influence of the social system on people. The question arises, however, of what this new system would be supported by, if people’s needs and ideas about life remained the same; how could it encompass human life and be its social expression, if in its essential factors, i.e., individual interests and aspirations, it remained permeated, as in the past, with the spirit of property, competition, and exploitation? The need to eliminate poverty and the pursuit of prosperity cannot be a sufficient cause for the introduction of communism; as internal engines of man, they probably existed from the very beginning of the appearance of humans, despite the fact that social life took various forms, and ethics expressed various moral types; in this respect, a communist will not differ from a member of the bourgeoisie—both must equally avoid hunger and desire the comforts of life that the surrounding culture can give. The difference between them is something else, namely that well-being in life for the bourgeois is conditioned by property and exploitation, and for the communist by commonality; in both cases it appears in different moral categories, in a different context of human relations. Hence, with the same civilizational striving to increase social riches, different moral aspirations must appear in the classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and only under the influence of this difference can the course of history change—toward the ideals of communism. If, therefore, we say that the social transformation will come under the pressure of the interests of the proletariat, it should not be forgotten that its class and historically revolutionary interest is not the interest of achieving prosperity in general—which is common to all the classes and, since the flood, has had its place in human souls—but the interest of commonality, the only one which, in the present conditions of production technology, can ensure the social liberation of the class and the individual liberation of man.

For these reasons, since it is about the emergence of a new interest, communism cannot be considered as a bureaucratic question, dealt with by the same people, but is above all a life and moral matter which can only develop socially and politically along with an appropriate moral revolution. However, the most important question remains: how can the new communist interest develop in today’s social environment? What are the natural factors coupled with the economic conditions that would favor this development? For it is obvious that the teaching of a new morality can only find appropriate ground for its development when the very conditions of life instill its elements in human brains by inborn force; the power of ideological creativity and purposeful action, however great it may be, cannot create new mass currents out of nothing, but develops only those seeds that arise under the action of spontaneous processes of history. If the establishment of communism is really, as we suppose, the historical task of the proletariat, to be fulfilled by it, then in the very conditions of the life of this class there must be an unknowing germ of the same force that will one day express itself in the new social system; to know it would be to discover the true “magic word” for socialist propaganda.

Among all the factors of life that are cultivated in the atmosphere of contemporary capitalism, there is only one that is the germ of the self-generated revolution, the most working-class

and the most opposed to the foundations of the existing society, and that is solidarity—a significant coupling between my interests and life and the well-being of other people. Comparing the successive types of production, from the family producing for its own use, to machine factories and their modern combinations into cartel enterprises, we can see the continuous growth of this new type of life solidarity. The former economic unit—the family, which had a natural economy and was able to meet all its needs on its own—is completely isolated from the rest of people in the interests of everyday life; its well-being in no way depends on the conditions in which other families live; their spheres of interest are alien to each other. In a barter economy, this distinctness of producers' interests takes the form of competition, of economic struggle; the artisan seeks protection against it in guild organizations, and this may be the first beginning of common interests, which then turns into a monopoly. Moreover, all types of small-scale production and property, farmers, shopkeepers, and foremen, meet each other in their economic interests only in competition with the market, and, insofar as they do not participate in the interests of exchange, remain completely independent from each other; hence self-help has become the moral principle of the petty bourgeoisie and peasant farm-owners. It is only with the arrival of the factory and the wage-earners that the conditions appear that make solidarity a necessary business of life. In a group of people subjected to the same exploitation, the interests of the individuals are interdependent and form a single collective interest; the source of my misery or well-being applies equally to all my fellow workers; they can only benefit if everyone else gains; I will lose when others lose. Therefore, with each clash of class antagonisms, wage labor, and exploitation, the principle of solidarity and mutual aid must appear in the minds of workers, as the only factor of their struggle and the only means of resisting exploitation. This principle extends to more and more groups of the proletariat as capitalist enterprises themselves come into ever closer economic relationship with one another through the universal market and the development of productive technology.

The fall in wages in competing factories, the labor exploitation of women and children which threatens to oust the better paid male labor force, the lack of resilience on the part of workers arriving from the countryside and their easy submission to the worst employment terms—all of these are of personal interest to workers employed in any enterprise and directly affect the conditions of their lives, even though occurring outside the sphere of their own exploitation. Likewise, the excess of labor on the market and the length of the working day in other enterprises (which influences the former) affects those who work in better conditions and does so increasingly the more machine production develops equality between hirelings, devaluing workmanship and enabling everyone to work in various areas of production. With the emergence of cartels concentrating various phases of production—from the selection of raw materials to the retail trade—in companies associated and grouped under the control of the same capital, the life solidarity of hirelings expands even more, because then the interests of agricultural, factory, and railway workers and shopkeepers are directly linked to each other and are opposed to one capitalist organization. The personal well-being of the worker becomes increasingly bound by economic ties to the conditions in which his fellow workers live and, as a result, any effort on his part to improve his position in life is massively and unknowingly transformed into an interest of mutual assistance.

This interest, among all the moral phenomena of capitalism, has the special value that it eminently points to its contradiction of the existing understanding of life—that it is reflected back from the social environment in which it appeared as an anachronism, contradicting by its nature the entirety of established customariness and all the basic foundations of the ruling

system: competition, individual property, self-help in the struggle for existence and exploitation. The human being's inherent striving to secure his well-being, which in today's organization of relations between people requires, above all, selfishness and skilful use of socially weaker individuals, in this case abandons its previous moral allies, defeats the established understanding of life as an exclusively selfish matter, and brings to the fore the need for commonality, for solid concern for the harm being done to someone else, and shows human life in this new light which is so foreign to eyes used to the bourgeois mode of seeking happiness.

Obviously, the entrance of such a new factor into capitalist society, which lives by quite different elements, must be very timid; it must wear the cloak of old custom and adapt to the prevailing morality, hiding in the unconscious of man under cover of that morality's established and despotic doctrines; it does not have sufficient inborn strength to oppose the idols of society, its rules of conduct, clearly and openly. Hence, left to its own devices the factor of solidarity appears only as a temporary means of fighting for the personal interest and, being consequently dependent on the set goal, it cannot develop morally and control minds. Being limited to one form only—strikes to win a higher wage, a shorter working day, or other concessions from manufacturers—it is weakened by the various economic and political conditions that hinder striking or make it impossible to achieve the intended goal; it also weakens when this goal is achieved by other means, such as government reform or carefully made voluntary concessions on the part of entrepreneurs. In general, the principle of solidarity appears here in a very modest role and is limited to only some moments of workers' lives; that is, during the strike period, fading away when the strike has passed, or when personal interest does not require this form of struggle.

In other cases, however, and in working-class groups in which the class consciousness is more mature and more morally independent of bourgeois doctrines, we see mass phenomena in which the principle of solidarity manifests itself as the slogan of struggle or other collective efforts not necessarily linked to the personal benefit of those who are struggling. These are facts such as strikes on account of harm affecting only some individuals among the working people (e.g., the famous coalman's strike in France in 1894, due to the expulsion of several hundred old miners as unfit for work); strikes supporting the struggle of another trade (e.g., the recent construction works at the Paris exhibition in 1898); or mass support, by donations, of a strike taking place in another enterprise, in another country, or even another part of the world. In such cases, solidarity becomes completely independent of personal interest; it starts from its limited role as a temporary means of gaining certain benefits and shows itself to be strong enough to become the driving force behind people's actions. It is in this solidarity that there is the natural element of the whole ethics of communism, an element developed by economic conditions that creeps spontaneously into the brains of the workers as the characteristic stamp of their class. It is also the only way by which communism can enter human life, regaining its vital and real form of individual ethics, as an everyday matter. A huge and completely unexploited field opens for the party to carry out a real revolution of minds, not solely an intellectual one based on formulas of convictions, but life-practical, reaching the very core of the human soul, its innermost moral essence—a conscience on which conduct, life concepts and ideals are all completely dependent.

The development of conscious solidarity would first of all consist in its being able to manifest itself freely in all its forms and, from the role of a temporary means of struggle for personal interest, to pass on to all life as mutual aid for the oppressed; and such a task can be fulfilled only with the help of the influence of propaganda working in this direction. There is no doubt that this type of propaganda has all the givens for development, since the factor of solidarity is

self-born in the proletariat, and therefore it could also be propagated with the same success and inexhaustible vitality as, for example, class antagonism, which today absorbs almost all the forces of activism. Just as raising awareness of the contradictions of class interests now expands their scope immeasurably and finds practical application at every step, giving a different direction to various matters, the same is the case with the propagation of solidarity—this factor, increasing in size, would make itself into a class consciousness, and would one by one seize ever more areas of human relations, producing a new kind of life in the working class, based on mutual help and commonality. It is easy to foresee that such a revolution in customs would also be a spontaneous infiltration into human brains of a new morality—one that without caring for any theological dogmas rebels eternally against all property and police laws, i.e., the morality of fraternity. Suppose it became the class consciousness of the proletariat and dominated the human being so strongly that it became his inherent conscience; then the task of the moral revolution would be fulfilled, and the transformation of the social system into communism would result automatically from the first clash between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as two different moral worlds. For there is such a close and natural relationship between the communist system and the morality of fraternity that even when social conditions do not at all tend toward this system, its ideals and basic principles appear automatically in minds, if that morality has developed in the conscience. We see this, for example, in the first Christians who, while they were followers of the religion of fraternity, did not recognize private property or the state, lived in communes, and were governed by the resolutions of the group; and we see the same in some sects today. It might be surprising that the socialist concepts—common possession and anti-statehood, which, as social results, derive only from the final stages of the development of the capitalist process—should appear in undeveloped social environments having nothing to do with those modern conflicts into which the human individual has entered. This phenomenon can be individually explained, however, if we note that the ethical ideal of fraternity, which independently of the era or environment can take control of certain minds, in seeking its real application to various matters of life must by means of intuition alone, ignoring all complexities of understanding, adopt those same ideas that are advanced by the theory of socialism.

Here there is a blind force of feeling that gives a human being clairvoyance in regard to the truth. A special logic—very simple but at the same time immensely powerful—also appears.

There is only one dogma in the ethics of fraternity—absolute respect for the human being, and one principle of understanding life as the interest of the community, in which the individual finds the true meaning of existence and the desired happiness. Hence the complete revolutionizing of human concepts and relations; communism—“everything for everyone”—is opposed to property; the “obligation to work with the sweat of my brow” is contrasted with maximum freedom as a condition for human development and joy; self-government of the individual is opposed to the state. In the morality of conduct, all virtues lead to collective pleasure, all sins to human harm; other than that—let everyone do as he pleases. In religious terms, there is only room for “God in man,” and this one anti-theological dogma—the worship of the human being—defines all the duties and principles of the communist world. So if the future social system—the expected work of the proletariat—has its own ethics (and it must have, like any other system), then this ethic can only be the morality of fraternity. And if there is any way to put the idea of communism into human life and make it a real and living thing, then it is only by way of workers’ solidarity, which develops automatically under the influence of economic conditions, as the class element

of this very morality of fraternity. In my opinion, the whole focus of the true revolution today is there.

How propaganda could develop in the working masses not only new general-theoretical beliefs, but also a new revolutionary conscience—life communism—remains to be specified, at least in general terms.

IV

There are three main theses of socialism which propaganda should turn into a concept of life, i.e., those that find their application in everyday human behavior; these are the rules on property, labor, and the state. Let us consider them one by one, trying to find an ethical expression for each of them, because only in this form could they even today enter human life and become something real for well-instructed minds.

1. The communist principle of property—this is the granting to every human being the right to use all resources, as the complex result of forces of nature and the social production of entire generations. By comparing it with the original notion of property in clan society [*społeczeństwo rodowym*], according to which being a clan member [*członkiem rodu*] is sufficient to be co-owner of everything the clan [*ród*] possesses, the principle of communism today can be defined as an extension of this old idea of “clanhood” [*idei “rodowości”*] to all humankind. The title of human being is identified here with all the attributes of an owner. This principle, which by its nature belongs to ethical concepts, is the essential core of the organization of social collectivism; we cannot imagine in what precise form this organization will develop in the future society, to what extent it will adopt a decentralizing or centering of production, or on what administrative foundations the relations between demand and production will lie. Any definitions in this respect would today be only premature and even unnecessary assumptions. As a guideline for reform efforts, the basic principle itself—the organization of social production, freed from individual property—should be quite sufficient to grant every human being an equal and absolute right to enjoy the resources, preventing any expropriation of this privilege, which has been restored to the form of a natural law. Thus whatever administrative forms may be created, communism will exist—bestowing human life with all the consequences of its new civilizational power—only if this principle is socially realized; and it would degenerate into a system of state production that permits economic inequality among people if the right to enjoy the resources was violated by making it conditional upon “labor checks” or some other measure between production and the individual’s consumption. It cannot come to terms with the system of private property because any life matter that takes place on the basis of this system—the limited use of the source of wealth, the protection of my property interest—would necessarily require the elimination of this principle, both in social facts and in the individual conscience.

The same principle of an ethical nature, which occupies the main and guiding place in the understanding of communism of the future as a social fact, may also have its practical application in the lives of today’s people, because in this case it is no longer about the issue of legal and economic organization, but only about a new way of understanding human relations, and about facts that fall within the scope of my private conduct, and which properly express the recognition or non-recognition of the moral principle of communism. Above all, then, when communism is put into practice, it should eliminate all the customs of bourgeois property, such as borrowing

money at interest, exploiting other people's work (which is often practiced in the family relations of workers), legal proceedings for debts or inheritance, and, in general, all kinds of profiteering. This would be entirely possible, since the material existence of workers would not be undermined at all by the abandonment of this category of interest. It is only necessary for the working class to develop a strong opinion in this respect to compel the individual to such behavior, in the same way as the idea of strike solidarity or the condemnation of betrayal and espionage has been formed. There is really no reason why party propaganda, which has been able to embed in the minds of workers the ethics of strikes and a strong moral aversion to betraying comrades for personal gain, could not just as well shape opinion on any private conduct such as exploitation, harm, or profiteering, which most vividly deny the idea of communism. The loss of personal benefits could not be an obstacle; though strike solidarity sometimes requires sacrifice of the personal interest of the worker, it has managed to become a moral rule of conduct. Introducing such an abstention from the bourgeois rules of life into workers' ethics would depend, above all, on the influence of propaganda; it would have to use all the wealth of artistic and conceptual resources that exist in minds and hearts to humiliate and ridicule the smallest symptoms of profiteering and exploitation, to pillory them before the ideal of the workers' cause, and above all to develop moral, literary, and aesthetic influences that will awaken a feeling of fraternity, opposing the habits of property most forcefully.

There is another, associated means of propagandizing—a positive one—which could help communism enter human life; this is the development of mutual assistance, of solidarity, in all possible forms. It is not known in fact why the solidarity that we so value in strikes could not become a general principle of workers' lives. The party's neglect of this can only be explained by the fact that the party has so far cared mainly for organizational benefits (for which strike solidarity has meant a lot), while paying little attention to what constitutes an individual revolution of minds. If mutual aid—this simple and vivid expression of communism—instead of being limited to instances of strikes were to extend to the whole of working class life, it would create an enormous customary revolutionary movement which would manifest in all sorts of forms the very idea of communism; it is even easy to suppose that it would become a certain protection of the workers' well-being, and thus take root more strongly in their habits. Workers' communes could appear, offering the collective protection of comrades over each of their members in all cases of illness, disability, loss of earnings, or any kind of misery in life, and providing friendly assistance to widows and orphaned children, making it unnecessary for them to have recourse to humiliating bourgeois alms, and finally having their own grocery stores, kitchens, etc., as has been successfully practiced by the socialist parties of Belgium and the Netherlands, and developing the inexhaustible resources of common social life, accustoming people to breathe an atmosphere of collective and genuine friendship. Such communes, and the practical negation of everything that is exploitative and profiteering, with the strong support of opinion in this regard, would be something more than general theoretical beliefs: it would be a new human world, a new form of life which the proletariat would oppose to bourgeois society; in its atmosphere, self-generated revolutionary ideas would germinate and be absorbed by human minds from the earliest years of childhood.

2. The revolutionary principle of work is related to the development of manufacturing technique and the social organization of production. Combined, these two conditions can limit man's productive efforts to the smallest possible amount, extending his freedom in life accordingly. We suppose that the communist system will intentionally strive in this direction and that liberating

man from the yoke of forced and utilitarian labor will be one of its main tasks, the fulfillment of which will determine the entire further development of humanity and the civilizational power of communism. This pursuit, however, includes not only a change in the physical conditions of human existence but also a new understanding of life.

The most outstanding characteristic of the soul of today's human being is this constant prudence, the constant worry and effort to secure his economic existence, which for some individuals is limited to working solely for the necessary maintenance of themselves and their family and for others takes the form of various speculations aimed at increasing their wealth or preventing bankruptcy; it is enough to look at the course of everyday life among ordinary people to see that this is where the whole content of their lives—everything that is serious and obligatory for them—is concentrated. In the ethics that bourgeois Christianity has imprinted in human brains, the pleasures of a purposeless, non-utilitarian life, without any economic interest, are disregarded and the search for them is considered immoral; while work and utilitarian procedures are presented as proper and essential tasks in life; they are understood not only as a necessity arising from the conditions, but also as a moral duty and merit. Obviously, removing from human life all its present-day utilitarian content through the social organization of production and property communism would be a complete revolution of such an understanding. Since the concern for existence would disappear by itself and productive work would be reduced to a small amount of effort, pleasures of an aimless nature would thus come to the fore as almost the sole content of existence, and accordingly the understanding of life as a duty of work would have to give way to a new understanding—as a question of pleasure, freely determined by the individualism of each person.

It is precisely against this that not only the official morality comes to the fore, but also the inner conscience of today's man; we simply do not have the moral courage to make beauty, play, and love the goal of life in themselves, for the sake of enjoying life together, without any secondary consideration of some "higher" ethics, utilitarianism, or theology; we are afraid to recognize that the joy of the human being itself can contain "the highest and absolute good" without needing any justification or any "ennobling" stamp—that its creation in the human soul can be a virtue and sufficient end in itself. This moral cowardice is closely related to the addiction to work and profiteering, which has suppressed the need for freedom in the human being and left a place in his soul for only such pleasures as are associated with benefit for the purposes of the struggle for economic existence, making him obtuse to everything beyond that sphere. It can be determined how poorly developed the need for freedom in life is among the working classes from the fact that strikes over the working day appear spontaneously quite rarely, while agitation for an eight-hour working day had to be combined with the notion of higher earnings in order to increase the popularity of the slogan, showing the economic relationship that exists between wages and a normal working day, or to demonstrate its importance for hygiene, health, life expectancy, etc. The aim itself of obtaining free hours, "the right to idle," is relatively unattractive because both by economic conditions and by the prevailing moral concepts connected with them, man's sense of using life has been blunted so much that beyond that economic concern in which his desires, hopes, endeavors, and thoughts develop, only an extremely narrow and poor range of needs that he is capable of feeling remains. In this respect, we are incomparably lower than the barbarian who knows how to participate with his soul in the life of all nature, or the ancient Greek, who was surrounded by the beauty of artistry, was fond of competitions and games, and was able to be keenly interested in the dialectic of philosophers; for such types, the need for the

freedom to be idle is so strong that they often prefer to endure hunger and material shortages rather than submit to the regular yoke of labor.

Therefore, the revolutionary principle of work is directly linked to the development in people of the need for freedom in life, the expansion of the scope of their desires. This would be the liberation of the various senses and feelings of man, which have been suppressed and blunted under the pressure of work, economic concern (which is often an addiction and not just a necessity), and Christian-bourgeois ethics. For it should not be forgotten that only that person needs freedom in whom desires have been developed that are incompatible with the manner of a busy life, and that people with a work addiction, with a dull sense of freedom, would not be able to take advantage of the possibility of freeing themselves from work which would be given to them by the technique of collective production; just as today they care little about the hours of rest obtained as a concession in factories, and often exchange them for an advance in earnings.

Moreover, awakening this need for freedom—by extending the scope of life—may be one of the strongest factors of antagonism toward the ruling system, because nothing would push people so strongly toward the collective organization of production and oppose their needs for individual economy and property as just that need to be free from production work, whose system of fragmented production and its subordinate private interests it could not satisfy; the strongest internal incentive for a small peasant owner to break with his economic individualism would be to feel this need. How can propaganda extend the scope of the life of a worker and tear his soul out of the pedestrian precinct of utilitarianism? First, it would have to conceptually liberate man's pleasure from the bonds of the prevailing ethics and inculcate the conviction that any pursuit by the people of common pleasure, even though it is completely pointless, is a virtue in itself, and that there is no sin where there is no human harm; this would make a person morally freer to experience the various sides of life and more capable of movements of the soul, not being caught in any rules. Then it would be about evoking desires and their qualitative development; we say "evoking" because virtually all of them, even those which seem to be the exclusive property of thinkers and artists, are embryonic in the soul of every human being, even of the lowest culture, and are only suppressed in their development by the unfavorable conditions of life; however, the manifestation of these needs can often be observed in self-generated aesthetics, and in the people's thinking, which proves that they are only artificially stifled. In order to develop them there would have to be appropriate centers of culture, not only intellectual ones but also aesthetic ones; for everything that develops the imagination of man and gives access to his soul, a purposeless psychology of beauty, perceived under all kinds of figures in nature, in arts, in play, or in memories—all this also has the power to free minds from the sole dominance of utilitarian motives, opens the senses to various sides of life, extends its scope, and awakens desires that require as many hours of rest and freedom as possible, but which are suppressed by concern for everyday life. This could also be achieved by developing a social life among workers, organizing various games, workers' holidays, common feasts, and trips. In an atmosphere of freedom and liberation from the interests of life, under the influence of uniting for common pleasure, people are easier to bring together; they are more accessible to the attraction of sympathy and friendliness. There is a close relationship between feelings of fraternity and the "right to idleness"; they are only granted to those people in whom the human being is valued; in the eyes of the bourgeois moralist they can only be possessed by natures favored by talent or the creative intelligence of the mind, since only for them does the door to the Olympic lands open; the revolutionary principle of work wants to open them to everyone without exception, and considers the simplest man

sufficiently worthy to use in his own way what the atmosphere of freedom, the liberation of the soul from the burden of work and daily routines, can give.

Since the entire development of the socialist cause depends on the acquisition of free time—because only in freedom can a new humanity develop normally and only in it can a revolution mature—the awakening of the need for this freedom, by awakening the need for a more versatile use of life, is one of the first practical tasks. Each intensification of new moral desires—aesthetic, social, mental—will have to manifest itself in a struggle to gain new hours of rest; every breach made in the blunting of the life of the worker, every particle of his soul torn from utilitarianism, will at the same time constitute a breach in the working class's day and in its moral adaptation to the capitalist system. The gains of freedom will be a field for the further development of the life of the workers, which will push them more and more toward the struggle for the "right to idleness."

3. Let us now turn to the third thesis of socialism, concerning statehood. In communism, the entire social organization is reduced to a purely economic one, as a result of which the political, legislative state that regulates relations between people ceases to exist. The idea of the state is always connected with the concept of bureaucratic and police power, through which society comes in contact with the human individual, forcing him to regulate his life in accordance with the system of existing laws. Such mediation, which today intrudes on all relations between people as a factor regulating their coexistence forcibly and automatically, is precisely the principle of "statehood," which can manifest itself in various political systems, both autocratic and republican, always maintaining the same attribute of the police oppression of the individual. This mediation historically grows out of property relations, as a necessary regulator of the antagonisms connected with them, and therefore it may become a socially unnecessary factor when these relations disappear under the communist system. The administrative affairs of production, having become the common interest of society, thereby completely separate themselves from the government of the people, and their settlement by any people's representative office can only have the nature of a "government over things." Thus, the political principle of communism is statelessness, the complete removal of the bureaucratic and police factor from relations between people, and the related "self-rule of the individual." The principle is economically justified by the fact that matters of production and consumption will find their natural regulators in the commonality of human interests, thereby completely separating themselves from the individual, personal interests of the human being (whereas today the economic question is connected with the whole private life of an individual); morally, it justifies itself by the fact that maintaining state coercion contradicts the most essential task of communism—to endow man with absolute individual freedom.

All political movements of socialism have this character—the striving for an ever greater democratization of power, to transfer all its attributes to the masses of the people. From the period of expanding representation, they must move to the struggle for direct popular legislation, then to the dependence of the executive authorities on popular assemblies, and finally to the replacement of the executive power by dealing directly with matters at assemblies, which would only turn out to be possible after the overthrow of the private property system and the resulting significant simplification of human relations; so ultimately the democratization process would arrive at the complete removal of the state.

Political movements, however, are not enough to introduce into human brains the revolutionary principle of statelessness: first, because as a conceptual formula relating to the future

it presents itself too abstractly for a human being participating in a certain political movement, and then because mass political struggle can only be a temporary fact, not a continuous thing, and it cannot even be undertaken everywhere—in countries without a constitution or in political stagnation for whatever reason, political indoctrination must be limited to the purely theoretical awareness of the anti-state ideal of communism.

On the other hand, there is a very simple way for this principle to enter the life of the working-class masses, to become visible and concrete, taking the form of a continuous revolution. First of all, it should be expressed in the practical negation of the state. To deny the state is to deny all the social needs by which the state exists and all the functions it performs as a defender of property rights, as an executor of justice, and as a guardian of public morality. The state, in spite of the hostile stance it usually takes toward the working classes, nevertheless encompasses all classes and is related to the needs of all insofar as property, justice, and morality concern all classes, whose private interests it socializes in itself: it therefore becomes necessary for people in a real manner and is recognized by them in practice, despite even theoretical negation, every time they call upon it for protection against thieves, punishment of an offender, or the settlement of any dispute in court in regard to perpetuating their paternal or marital rights. The negation of the state in individual life, the recognition of the essential revolutionary concept, would be to renounce all those activities where the state is needed and to refrain from all aid provided by its functions. Propaganda should make every effort to remove the mediation of the state from relations between workers. This should be achieved in conjunction with the spirit of mutual assistance and should take the form of an amicable, democratic settlement of various cases and disputes, without resorting to the assistance of judicial and police bodies. Furthermore, in disputes with factory owners, it should be accepted that they can only be settled by boycott or strike, and never through government inspectors or courts. In addition, it is possible to extend the revolutionary negation even further and not to assign the state the role of a minister of justice and defender of moral principles by denying it all private or collective assistance in the prosecution and persecution of criminals. Both of these types of conduct should become fundamental concepts of workers' ethics, so that their betrayal—in actions such as bringing complaints to the courts, bearing witness, detecting wrongdoers, denouncing them to the police, etc.—should be treated in class opinion as equal to treason or breaking the solidarity of a strike. In this way, people would learn to do without the help of the authorities, and would break all links between the state and their personal interests; only then would the revolutionary anti-government concepts become the essential belief, the idea of a life value that has passed into conscience. It would be a workers' boycott of the state, a boycott with the effect that the state would in fact be canceled as a useful life force, at least in the working classes, which is where we expect its final defeat to come.

However, since the moral factors on which the state rests are closely linked in human souls with the corresponding ideology, the transformation brought about by propaganda must also combat this ideology. It is mainly summarized in two concepts: first, that the state is needed for the protection of property rights, which is sufficiently counteracted by communism in eliminating the very need for property; and the second concept—that the state should exist as a means of social coercion, obstructing bad and harmful human drives. The latter in particular supports police morality, which seeks the same under various forms, namely, social coercion, an organization of power that can oppress an individual in the name of the code it deems proper. Here, then, the idea of “statehood” is closely related to the idea of “coercion as a means of combating

evil” and it is impossible to oust the former without ousting the latter. The latter is so deep in the brains that it even creeps into socialism in the form of a “revolutionary dictatorship” and “future state,” understood as an effective means of teaching freedom and commonality. Statehood has its strongest roots in it; nothing so preserves its vitality, elevating it until it almost has the meaning of something absolutely necessary for all periods of history, like the conviction that legislation, with the executive which protects and implements it, and the associated penal system, is an innocent means in itself, which can only counteract evil and consolidate good, completely changing its moral and social value depending on what purpose it serves and what ideology animates it. Hence, logically a bourgeois or autocratic state could be condemned, but the same bureaucratic-police organization could be recognized if it were to work toward democracy and collectivism; in the political consciousness propagated among the masses, this principle appears as an attempt to improve the state, to give it in new social colors but not to destroy it completely; thus, any “radicalization” of ministerial cabinets or the government’s entry into the path of a workers’ policy protecting the class interests of the proletariat can easily evoke the strengthening of allegiance and state patriotism even among the masses of the people who are headed today by socialist parties.

The concept of state utility—as a condition of security and a dam against vices—is also connected with concepts that have nothing to do with politics but directly influence what people think about government institutions and how they relate to them. Here, first of all, it is necessary to view crime and the penal system as a system of justice. A certain moral respect for the police authorities and recognition of their usefulness awakens in a person every time they deal with a criminal and act on behalf of social justice. For there is, on the one hand, the belief that the penal system moralizes people and prevents the spread of vices, thereby increasing social security, and on the other hand, that justice, as a moral principle, requires punishing the criminal; the unpunished criminal outrages not only the sense of order and security, but also the conscience of police morality. Against this, propaganda should spread the natural view of crime, showing that it is only a product of the social environment or a pathological fact, so there can be no judiciary as a moral principle, because there are no “guilty” in the legal and theological sense. It should also show that the penal system, courts, and prisons are actually a school of misdemeanors and by no means contribute to their social reduction. In addition, people should be made aware of the danger that lies in granting the state the power to judge and punish, while paying attention to the fact that the law and its executive organs, being bureaucratic in nature and based on formalistic and general schemes, can always draw into their categories of offenses even such deeds and intentions that are neither individually nor socially a fault, as court yearbooks provide abundant evidence for; and that they can become an instrument of political oppression, extending the concept of “crime” to anything that contradicts the established rules of order and social morality.

We are stopping on these general guidelines, because our only concern was to provide an indication as to the direction in which the moral revolution should develop in order to carry out that fundamental idea that the ideas of socialism should become life-concrete concepts for the masses of the people and that only a continuous revolution, living in the conduct of a human being’s private life and growing in his conscience, in his daily convictions, can become a truly revolutionary force and achieve the social and human ideals of the proletariat.

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Edward Abramowski
Ethics and Revolution
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