Fera Sylvain
On Subsistence & Slavery
2017

Backwoods, Volume 1

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2017

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is, we will likely find ourselves still having to resist the attempts of authoritarians who want to put us to work.

It hardly needs saying that if the supermarket shelves start emptying out, being away from highly-concentrated population of people, on land from which the necessities of your life can be procured, with the knowledge and skills needed to procure them, is clearly a preferable place to be. If, following some sort of collapse in the authority of the state, a new state apparatus rises from its ashes, not being dependent on it for survival will offer the more advantageous position for resisting the spread of authoritarian ways. There are no models for us to follow, for our position is unique. The most inspiring stories we have all seem to come from other times and other places – even if we know something of the subsistence lifeways that were once practiced on the land on which we live, it is no longer the same place. If they are still practiced where we live, so much the better for us, and so much the better for those who still practice them. May they live long and prosper! Our own path out, however, we can only make ourselves.

In 1855, summing up Franklin's philosophy, satirist Ferdinand Kürnberger said, "They make tallow out of cattle and money out of men." (Weber 1930: 49, 51)

production of autarky. Put your efforts into getting access to land – enough to support a subsistence autarky – and developing the skills, knowledge and wisdom needed to live anarchically with kin of your choosing. The solitary individual may wish to strike it out alone, and I wish them well, but I would suggest that if we are not merely to trade work for drudgery, cooperation with others will be a serious advantage if not an absolute necessity. The small-group then: large enough so that daily subsistence activities do not become *Work*, small enough to have face-to-face community, and thus, simple *anti-economic* organization – or, "constituted disorganization" as Marshall Sahlins called this "species of anarchy." (Sahlins: 95)

This slave ship on which we sail is surely headed for some rough seas, and just as surely, the institutions and apparatuses of control that maintain ship discipline will try to keep the thing afloat by any means necessary. Industrial manufacturing, industrial scale "natural resource" extraction, industrial scale production of pollutants, remain the means by which the basic survival needs of the vast majority of people in our techno-industrial civilization are met, and which must be kept operational if the slaves are to be fed, clothed, housed, and distracted, and the parasites are to continue getting their fill. Sunk by rising seas, or ship-life under permanent state-of-emergency discipline…either way, the worst place to be is in the hold. But what really keeps us down in the hold is less its rigid structure than the belief that our dependency on that structure, *our inability* to survive without it, is for the time being, at least, inevitable.

While climate change-induced collapse or "financial meltdown" will severely curtail the destructive capacity of our species, we should not expect that it will give us a clean slate on which to create a "better world," for given how long we have been slaves subjugated by the State, it seems inevitable that something resembling a State and/or its apparatuses of control will quickly reemerge. That

> The institution of Slavery is the principal cause of civilization. Perhaps nothing can be more evident than that it is the sole cause… Without it, there can be no accumulation of property, no providence for the future, no taste for comforts and elegancies, which are the characteristics and essentials of civilization… Servitude is the condition of civilization.
>
> - Senator William Harper, 1837

> It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself.
>
> - Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

These words of Thoreau's, while undoubtedly controversial when first published, are perhaps even more so today. For in Thoreau's time, when chattel slavery was still being practiced in the South, comparisons between chattel slaves and wage slaves were not uncommon. (Davis 2015: 306-315) What is unsettling for many, then as now, is that Thoreau is suggesting that "progress" may perhaps be better understood as a recalibration and deepening of the systems of domination under which we are forced to toil. Rather than leading to a freer way of life, it leads instead to a more complete form of enslavement where the very notion of freedom is rendered meaningless.

Those outraged by Thoreau's words will argue vehemently that there can be no comparison between the brutal system of institutionalized chattel slavery and the condition of the wage earner in a capitalist market-economy. It should be remembered, however, that although we look back on chattel slavery in North America as a monolithic form of tyrannical brutality, it was, in fact, like all systems of control, not static, but subject to changes, adjustments, and fine tuning, that is, more or less brutal depending on changing circumstances. At the time Thoreau was writing, the resemblances be-

tween chattel slaves and wage slaves were not so difficult to discern because many Southern plantation owners had already adopted the capitalist technique of encouraging work through a system of rewards and punishments as more effective than the older system of pure punishment. (Davis 1975: 317) Further, in Thoreau's time waged workers could still be subjected to physical punishment for infractions against their employer's will. Although the treatment of waged workers in the North and chattel slaves in the South may not have always been as dissimilar as we might believe today, the point being made by Thoreau actually has little to do with the physical conditions or treatment of these two groups of slaves but is rather a comparison of their psychic condition: at least the Southern chattel slave desired an end to her enslavement! If the worst is to be slave-driver of yourself, it is because your condition of slavery has become normalized to the point where not only is there no desire to end your enslavement, you will likely fight to defend it.

While the anti-slavery Thoreau seems to have been in agreement with William Harper, the pro-slavery senator from South Carolina, that "servitude is the condition of civilization," their conclusions were far from the same. For Harper, the conclusion was: therefore we must accept slavery in our society. Thoreau, on the other hand, concluded that if civilization implies slavery, then we best take to the woods and return to a subsistence way of life.

The vast majority of the planet's human inhabitants are indeed slaves, for their survival is dependent on their working to earn money in order to pay for the necessities of survival. They are owned by the economy, for they cannot survive outside of it. Life (time) is traded on the job market, and survival is purchased in the supermarket.

There is *apparently* no choice but to undertake some kind of waged work. Participation in the economy is guaranteed by the demand that tribute be paid to the State in the currency of the State, a demand clearly backed by force and the threat of violence. Even if one has access to land on which one could conceivably

As the recalibration of systems of control is a constant of civilized life, the dangers perceived by today's social engineers are not the same as those of the 18th or 19th centuries. To their minds those battles, particularly in the West, have long been won. In a world where almost everything has already been monetized, where it is believed that anything that can be monetized eventually will be monetized, where all the proposed "solutions" to our ecological and social problems are market-based, combined with the apparent acquiescence of nearly everyone, subsistence practices are no longer seen as the threat they once were: every thing and every activity will eventually be subsumed into the economy *anyway*.

Resistance to this system of slavery is expected (of course) and thus there are, as James Stephen recommended there should be, military, naval, police, and mercenary forces "so irresistible and so palpable as to repress whatever disposition to revolt may be manifested." States, and the corporations with which they are intertwined, prefer direct confrontation, for such confrontations they can easily win, having an overwhelming capacity for violent repression or recuperation through reform (recalibration). I would suggest then that focusing on evasion more than confrontation or interaction will likely present the more promising paths to both expanding one's personal freedom and to the creation of spaces where anarchic practices can be realized in concert with others. No, the totality of domination will not magically disappear with small groups of radicals abandoning the economy and exploring possible paths to uncivilization – for those groups of individuals, however, the economy, that most oppressive mechanism of social control to which we are daily subjected, will have lost its power. This is to steal back ownership of one's life.

If, like I, you desire to reinhabit a green world full of self-willed plants and self-willed animals, then I would only say, that world is still there, go live in it! If you wish to cease being an economic unit kettled about in service to the economy, then look for some self-willed people with whom you can cooperate in the daily re-

tion in order to increase his profit, doltishly infer from this primitive economy's intrinsic inferiority." (Clastres, 2010: 193) Subsistence economies, producing no expropriable surplus, are viewed as economies of poverty, quaint throwbacks to an earlier stage of social development. But Clastres has it that "if primitive man is not an entrepreneur, it is because profit does not interest him; that if he does not optimize his activity…it is not because he does not know how to, but because he does not feel like it!" (*Ibid.*) Primitive society, then, is not awaiting the appropriate material and social conditions necessary to begin its advance to a more developed form of society (economic society) but *actively choosing* not to go down that path. For Clastres, primitive societies are societies that act *against* economy. They are *anti-productive*. They do not allow their means of survival to be linked to political power and thus, his further claim, they are also *societies against the State*. (Clastres 1989, 2010)

But what of us, born within a state apparatus, into a world of economic dependency and a life of work, whether we feel like it or not? If this is our great misfortune, then we are only compounding it daily through our acquiescence in the production and consumption of exchange value, the surplus beyond our needs: letting our lives, our relationships, our intellectual and physical efforts, be used to daily reproduce the civilization that enslaves us. What would it mean for us to live, not in servitude to, but *against* economy?

Slavery or subsistence is clearly what the Statecrafters and managers of civilization have believed our choice to be, for as we have seen, they have systematically worked to eliminate our ability to choose by dispossessing us from our land bases and undermining our broad skill sets through forced specialization. Nevertheless it remains, that if one does not want to be a slave, the alternative – that doesn't keep one bound to the economy and therefore contributing to the reproduction of the entire system of domination – is to head for the woods and take up a subsistence way of life.

subsist, taxes or rents on that property must be paid. As with the "hut tax" introduced by British colonial officials in Africa to force self-sufficient rural communities into the money-economy, the formerly self-sufficient household or community must now dedicate part of their time to activities that produce a surplus (anything beyond what is needed for their own subsistence) to be traded in the marketplace in order to obtain State-issued currency with which they can pay tax (tribute).

In a "free society," a society without slavery, we would have a choice as to whether we undertook this extra economic activity – necessary only for the continuation of economic society – or not, instead simply producing what we need. But not living in the Land of the Free, that choice has been stolen from us. Taking away our ability to choose has long been the policy of this civilization's ruling elites, resulting in sustained and calculated attacks by the State against subsistence lifeways. The destruction of self-sufficiency is sound economic policy, as any mainstream economist will tell you, for a capitalist market-economy needs perpetual growth.

Over-production – producing more than the producer needs to subsist – is a condition *necessary* for the creation and maintenance of authoritarian societies.[1] The assertion of authority depends upon being able to compel the subjugated to follow the rulers' will, and compulsion, in one way or another, takes the form of violence: the threat of starvation, of eviction, of eternal damnation, of torture, of imprisonment, of execution… Without the ability to back up such threats, Power is empty. Power must be backed by violence, and violence has a price. Gangs of thugs, temple

[1] I define authoritarian societies as any society that has a formal hierarchical structure through which authorities (self-appointed or elected) can compel subjects to follow their rule. In other words, we're not only talking North Korea or Belarus here but every society that has an organ of political power that claims authority over a population of people and has the ability to enforce this claim. By this definition it follows that all States constitute authoritarian societies but not that all authoritarian societies will necessarily assume State form.

builders, bureaucrats, developers of control technologies,…must all be paid for. To pay for the creation and maintenance of the institutions that secure and deepen the reach of authority over a subjugated population, it is necessary that a surplus is being produced somewhere.[2]

In order to maintain authority then, subjugated people must be put to work in the creation of a surplus, the currency of Power. But work is an activity that most people take up grudgingly – that is, unless compelled to do otherwise, they will work as little as possible (just enough).

As Joseph Winogrand explains, our word *Work* comes directly from Old English and meant "labor" as it does today. But, it also meant "affliction, suffering, pain, trouble, distress," and in the adjective/adverb form of *worky*, "painful, bitter, difficult, hard…" (Winogrand: 106) Given these meanings, it is unlikely that the English peasant of the Middle Ages considered their own subsistence activities – tending their gardens and small flocks, foraging and hunting, spinning yarn or weaving baskets – as *work*. No, as Winogrand suggests, much more likely is that these meanings are the result of "forced military construction, of interminable road, bridge and fortress building and repair imposed on the local populace by kings, lords and their riding knights." (*Ibid.*)

Until recently, the industrious individual has been an aberration. It is only through long centuries of physical and psychological coercion that his frenetic activity has come to be seen as normal. That this aberration has come to represent the ideal in our society merely reflects the degree to which we have internalized the will

[2] Prior to the widespread use of money, taxation involved feeding the army, bureaucrats, and rulers directly from the State's expropriation of one's crops. This is one of the reasons states show a strong preference for sedentary agriculture: where crops are grown in monocultures in open fields and animals are raised *en masse* in open pastures or penned, harvest yields are easy to calculate for the purposes of taxation or confiscation.

Subsistence, Autarky, and Anarchy

> The Savages produce to live, they do not live to produce.
>
> - Pierre Clastres

Living to produce is a kind of madness. The idea that "rational people in pursuit of their own self-interest" would dedicate the better part of their lives to production and consumption of mostly unnecessary crap is irrational. Yet economists take this insane idea as the measure to which human activity is held.

That the word subsistence has come to be used in contemporary English almost exclusively as a thinly veiled slur connoting backwardness and dire poverty is due perhaps to the very notion of subsistence life being at odds with the reigning ideology. Capitalist civilization cannot abide subsistence lifeways because subsistence lifeways are incompatible with capitalism, have no need for mass society, and are, therefore, obstacles in the path of civilization.

As anthropologist Pierre Clastres notes, the insistence on calling the economies of primitive societies "subsistence economies," has less to do with the general function of the production systems – after all, all economies are subsistence economies in that a crucial function of any society's production is to assure the subsistence of its members – and more to do with the manner by which the primitive economy fulfills its function. Economists, not finding in primitive people "the psychology of an industrial or commercial company head, concerned with ceaselessly increasing his produc-

pel Epping Forest to submit to the yoke of improvement.

- John Sinclair (*Ibid.*: 34)

Sinclair's language is clear enough: this was war, the subjugation of people and land on which they lived. As for "liberation," as Silvia Federici notes in *Caliban and the Witch*, a history of women and reproduction during the transition to capitalism, "What was 'liberated' was capital, as the land was now 'free' to function as a means of accumulation and exploitation, rather than a means of subsistence. Liberated were the Landlords, who now could unload onto tho workers most of the cost of their reproduction, giving them access to some means of subsistence only when directly employed. When work would not be available or would not be sufficiently profitable…workers, instead, could be laid off and left to starve." (Federici: 75) That war was being waged upon them was not lost on the victims of enclosure. As one man reported to Arthur Young, an 18th-century writer on agriculture and economics, "Inclosure was worse than ten wars." (Sale: 35)

of our rulers, the degree to which we've all become little Franklins, the slave-drivers of ourselves.[3]

[3] "Remember, that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but six pence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon *that* the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides." - Benjamin Franklin.

The Economics of Slavery

How to keep chattel slaves working once "emancipated" was a central concern of the British abolitionists petitioning their government for an end to chattel slavery in Britain's West Indian colonies early in the 19th century. All sides of the debate – abolitionists, plantation owners, slavery apologists and parliamentarians (these latter usually belonged to one of the former camps anyway) – were in perfect accord on one point: whatever happened, the plantations were still going to need workers. And, as preeminent slavery historian David Brion Davis tells us, though their fine speeches were couched in the language of "evangelical appeals to sin, guilt, retribution, and deliverance" their particular conception of order and moral progress involved "a highly utilitarian analysis of punishment, nutrition, land use, labor incentives, productivity, and revenue." (Davis 1984: 211) For the abolitionists, as for the managers of the British Empire, granting freedom to slaves would be morally irresponsible unless the slaves showed themselves able, that is, *willing*, to climb the ladder of progress and embrace Western Civilization, to be sufficiently possessed by the spirit of capitalism.

Yet, experience had shown this not to be the case: given half a chance, the slave would immediately return to a life of "sloth" and "idleness." They took up subsistence horticulture and worked only as much as was necessary to meet their needs, which were few. (*Ibid.*: 196) Therefore, "freedom," as conceived by the abolitionists, was to be granted only within the narrowest of confines. In essence, it was the planters, the slave owners, who were to be set free: free from having to concern themselves with the expensive business of keeping slaves sufficiently subjugated while also keeping them

wage slaves whose *survival* was dependent on their earning and spending a wage.

In *Change in the Village*, published in 1912, George Sturt wrote:

> To the enclosure of the common more than to any other cause may be traced all the changes which have subsequently passed over the village. It was like knocking a keystone out of an arch. The keystone is not the arch; but once it is gone, all sorts of forces, previously resisted begin to operate towards ruin, and gradually the whole structure crumbles down… The enclosure…left the people helpless against influences which have sapped away their interests, robbed them of security and peace, rendered their knowledge and skill of small value, and seriously affected their personal pride and their character… When the cottager was cut off from his resources…there was little else that he could do in the old way. It was out of the question to obtain most of his supplies from his own handiwork: they had to be procured, ready-made from some other source. That source, I need hardly say, was a shop. (Sale: 35)

Naturally, the destruction of rural communities, in order to reposition a population to where the capitalist economy needed them, was not exactly how arguments justifying enclosure were presented in public. Then, as now, justifications tended to be couched in the language of *progress*, of *modernization*, *efficiency* and *improvement*. However, not always did such rationalization veil what "progress" really meant:

> Let us not be satisfied with the liberation of Egypt, or the subjugation of Malta, but let us subdue Finchley Common; let us conquer Hounslow Heath; let us com-

person of all tenements and their appurtenant common rights; the issuing by the King of a special license to enclose, or the passage of an enclosure act by Parliament; an agreement between landlord and tenants, embodied in a Chancery decree; the making of partial enclosures of waste by the lords…" (Federici: 2004) In this set of legal practices, we clearly see the origins of what today we would call *eminent domain* and *privatization*. The enclosing continues. Then, as now, these "legal methods…frequently concealed the use of force, fraud, and intimidation against the tenants." (Manning: 25)

Although the massive privatization of land associated with enclosure began in the 15th century,[3] it was between 1770 – 1830, the period to which the industrial revolution is usually ascribed, that the enclosing of land intensified. During these years, the English parliament passed some 3280 bills which resulted in the enclosure of six million acres of commonly held lands. It is estimated that private arrangements – those not directly sanctioned by the State – enclosed the same amount again. In total then, more than half the acreage of all the land then in cultivation in England was enclosed during this period. By 1830, England had not a single county with more than three percent of its land outside of private ownership. (Sale: 34)

Clearly it is no coincidence that the most intense period of enclosure happened at the beginning of this civilization's most intense period of development and expansion, for industrial civilization would not have been possible without a captive workforce and captive consumers. The enclosures were not just a blatant transfer of land from the public weal to the British ruling class, they were a calculated attack on the self-sufficiency of the rural population with the express purpose of *creating* a working class, a class of

[3] Kirkpatrick Sale, in *Rebels Against the Future*, his excellent history of the luddite uprising of 1811 – 1814, suggest that the practice of enclosure dates back to the 12th century. (Sale: 34) Other sources I have used generally place the first incarnation of the "enclosure movement" in the 15th century.

fed, clothed, and housed. Utilitarian thinkers of the time had already pointed out that chattel slavery was a costly, inefficient way to keep the production machine running.[1] Nevertheless, the reluctance to free slaves in the British West Indies was based on the belief that productivity, profits, and land values would plummet. (*Ibid.*: 214) The abolitionists were fearful of such an outcome for, as Davis explains, they believed that "success of emancipation in the eyes of the world would ultimately depend on the ability of free labor to produce cheaper sugar than that produced by the slaves of Cuba, Brazil, the United States…" (*Ibid.*: 219)

The problem of abolition, then, was a problem of how to rein in the inefficiency and overt violence of chattel slavery while keeping the slaves on an evolutionary path from lazy savage to *Homo economicus*: how to coercively guarantee ongoing contributions to civilization's expansion, how to free a slave while simultaneously keeping them enslaved. The answer for the abolitionists, an answer entirely agreeable to the Statecrafters they appealed to – for after all, given its utility to the State it was *progressive* – was to transform chattel slavery into wage slavery.

The slave's predilection to slack, to doing no more than necessary, to living a subsistence life, was the main obstacle to be overcome. The plan for overcoming this barrier to progress involved "a liberal motive" taking the place of a "servile one," that is, "the dread of starving" taking the place of "the dread of being flogged."

> If all the soil which for the present, may be regarded as superfluous, were rendered barren or inaccessible until an increasing population should require encreased supplies, the alternative of industry or starving would be presented to the whole Body of the people, and

[1] Benjamin Franklin was to make a similar argument regarding slavery in the American colonies. In his *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* (1755), Franklin posited that slave labor could never be as cheap as free labor in a densely populated country like England. (Davis 2015: 99)

> there is no doubt what would be their choice. But that which we may not hope from nature, we may do for ourselves; and a discriminating land-tax may as effectually forbid the culture of the particular Districts affected by it, as though they were annually visited by the locust. The Owners of the privileged soils would thus have a virtual monopoly of food, and of all other necessaries & comforts of life… The manumitted Slave must therefore not only cease to indulge himself in a life of idleness, but must betake himself to that description of labour in which the land-holder of the privileged class, may be pleased to find him employment. The dread of starving is thus substituted for the dread of being flogged. A liberal motive takes the place of a servile one. The "Emancipist" undergoes a transition from the brutal to the rational predicament; and the Planter incurs no other loss than that of finding his whips, stocks and manacles deprived of their use & value.
>
> - James Stephen, 1832. (*Ibid.*: 218)

Sir James Stephen[2] was architect of the Slavery Abolition Act that was passed by the British parliament in 1833. If his words are striking, it is not for their originality – his reasoning was not new, he was merely applying the thinking of classical political economists to the West Indian colonial continent, thinking which had already been put into action at home, as we shall see – no, what is striking is the clarity with which he expresses himself. It should be noted, however, that the above quotation is taken from

[2] Sir James Stephen (1789 – 1859): member of the British ruling class, abolitionist and Statecrafter. Stephen served in the colonial office from 1825 – 1847. Such was his influence that his colleague, Sir Henry Taylor opined that Stephen "literally ruled the colonial empire." It was Stephen who drew up the Slavery Abolition Act, passed in 1833.

little over half their income from wages (doing full-time work) with the difference made up from selling the agricultural produce they raised in their free time. And if this deal doesn't sound bad enough, he further calculated that "one-third of their money wages was expected to return to the landed gentry in the form of rents paid for their tiny plots of land." (*Ibid.*: 48 – 49)

As the industrial revolution intensified, periodic recalibration of the formula was required. As mentioned above, early capitalist technology was essentially no different from that used in traditional agricultural methods of production and thus, in order to increase the surplus value that could be extracted from the laborers' toil, the necessity of the two-pronged approach to pushing down wages: surreptitiously extending the working day while lowering the standard of living. With new production technologies ushering in new industrial methods of production, the little free time left to the rural worker – that time in which they were expected to self-provision themselves and their families – was now required by the capitalists. An example of this, provided by Perelman, is that of the textile industry: "spinning,…traditionally an agricultural sideline, could not keep pace with the increase from the mechanized capacity to weave cloth. Accordingly, the textile industry needed to move more people from part-time farming into full-time spinning." (*Ibid.*: 49)

The set of strategies that enabled British capitalists and Statecrafters to deliver people to market – by attacking the self-sufficiency of rural communities – were the infamous Enclosures. Most simply, "enclosure" meant "surrounding a piece of land with hedges, ditches, or other barriers to the free passage of men and animals, the hedge being the mark of exclusive ownership and land occupation. Through enclosure, collective land use, usually accompanied by some degree of communal land ownership, would be abolished, superseded by individual land ownership and separate occupation." (Slater: 1-2) The principle *legal* ways in which land could be enclosed included "the purchase by one

> a labourer becomes possessed of more land than he and his family can cultivate in the evenings…the farmer [employer] can no longer depend on him for constant work, and the haymaking and harvest…must suffer to a degree which…would sometimes prove a national inconvenience. (Thompson: 219-220)

Sir John Sinclair,[2] first president of the British Board of Agriculture, understood the equation well. In his 'Observations on the Means of Enabling a Cottager to Keep a Cow by the Produce of a Small Portion of Arable Land' from 1803, he laid down his three principles for small farming:

> 1. That a cottager shall raise, by his own labour, some of the most material articles of subsistence for himself and his family;
>
> 2. That he shall be enabled to supply the adjoining markets with the smaller agricultural productions; and
>
> 3. That both he and his family shall have it in their power to assist the neighboring farmers, at all seasons, almost equally as well as if they had no land in their occupation. (Perelman: 48)

By giving peasants little parcels of land for their private use, Sinclair hoped they would more readily accept the confiscation of large areas of traditional common lands. Further, he thought that a properly proportioned parcel of land (i.e., not quite enough) would result in a cheap labor force becoming available to agricultural employers. By Sinclair's calculations, the rural laborer would earn a

[2] Sir John Sinclair of Ulster, 1st Baronet (1734 – 1835): member of the British ruling class; a Scottish politician and writer on finance and agriculture; a Statecrafter. Sinclair was an advocate of "scientific" agriculture and the modernization of farming techniques, and the first person to use the word statistics in the English language. He was instrumental in setting up the British Board of Agriculture and served as its first president from 1793 – 1798.

a commentary on a confidential colonial office memo. Amongst themselves the ruling elites were open and frank about their plans, for the general public a different tone and message was adopted. As Viscount Howick[3] expressed it, there was no need "to state publickly the theory of the proposed method of inducing the Slaves to continue their emancipation to labour for hire." (*Ibid.*: 217)

The abolitionists' public claim was that of being the representatives, as Thomas Fowell Buxton[4] put it, of the "moral and religious feelings of the people," to represent a new sensibility "that condemned public displays of cruelty, torture, coarseness, drunkenness, and physical disorder." (*Ibid.*: 212) Well-intentioned this may sound, but in the same letter Buxton goes on to say how he was "impressed by the connections between the public refinement in manners and the new prison system, asylums, workhouses and other institutions for social control." (*Ibid.*: 351) In the name of high Christian morality, the abolitionists were sanctioning State experiments in social engineering. And indeed, as Davis tells us, "Great Britain was the first nation in which a government responded to such modern sensibilities with modern and scientific formulas for social control. The merger of altruism and utilitarianism." (*Ibid.*: 212) Naturally, this merger produced some inconsistencies. Davis points out that Stephen "stressed the almost unequaled docility of black slaves; suggested that this otherwise barbarous and tyrannical system had prepared emancipated slaves, 'in common with

[3] Viscount Howick, Henry George Grey, 3rd Earl Grey (1802 – 1894): member of the British ruling class; early proponent of "free trade"; Statecrafter. Grey became a member of parliament in 1826, under the title Viscount Howick. In 1830 he became the Under Secretary of State for War and the Colonies. In 1835, his position changed to Secretary at War. In 1845, following the death of his father he became Earl of Grey. By 1846, he was serving as colonial secretary. In 1848, despite having never visited the colony of Australia, Grey was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Council as the representative for the city of Melbourne.

[4] Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786 – 1845): English Statecrafter, abolitionist and social reformer.

other free men,' to 'imbibe the sentiment of deference for an authority which though occasionally unequal in its exercise, is established for the common good of the whole Society, and is habitually exercised with no other view'; and then called for a military, naval, and constabulary force 'at once so irresistible and palpable as to repress whatever disposition to revolt may be manifested.'" (*Ibid.*: 213)

The commonly held view amongst abolitionists, politicians, and planters was that the "freedman" would most likely retreat to the forested mountains and take up subsistence horticulture, and, as Davis summarizes the argument, having "no incentive to better his condition or impose any but the slightest discipline on himself…might well become a more degraded being than his ancestors in Africa." (*Ibid.*: 214) Davis points out that the assumptions underlying the abolitionists' plans "were essentially identical with those Stephen embodied in a circular dispatch intended for colonial governors in January 1833… Everyone acknowledged the need for a vast educational program aimed at Christianizing and civilizing the freedmen, whose aspirations and habits of life should eventually sustain such a demand for the products of human industry 'as can be gratified only by *persevering and self-denying labor.*'" (*Ibid.*: 215, Emphasis added) A critical part of this educational program, as Stephen made so clear, was simply to make a subsistence life impossible. The freed slaves would certainly learn to be their own slave-drivers if they had no other choice. Stephen again:

> …measures must be adopted, tending more directly to counteract the disposition to sloth which may be expected to manifest itself, so soon as the coercive force of the Owners' Authority shall have been withdrawn. The manumitted Slaves must be stimulated to Industry by positive Laws which shall enhance the difficulty of obtaining a mere subsistence.
>
> (*Ibid.*)

workplace discipline, deadlines, production quotas, 12 – 14 hour work days, low wages and punishments for failure to comply. To accomplish this, it was necessary to both increase production on cultivated lands and to move people from their land-based ways of life into the factories.

The problem was clear, but the solution had to be gradual. As Michael Perelman notes, these economists were well aware that "capitalist employers were not prepared to absorb the entire subsistence sector and that self-provisioning subsidized wage labor." (Perelman: 45) By leaving part of the already-existing system (where the common people, outside of cities and towns, were largely self-sufficient) in place, the workers' standard of living would be reduced and the working day lengthened as "the time spent in self-provisioning is, in effect, an extension of the working day." (*Ibid.*). *Self-sufficiency* was to become *self-provisioning* – just self-sufficient enough to allow for more surplus value to be appropriated from their labor, but not enough to allow the worker to forgo wage labor altogether. Self-provisioning, spending their "free time" providing for themselves outside of the market meant that less time on the job was used in producing what was required for their survival and more time spent in producing a surplus value that was the sole property of the capitalist.

However, caution was necessary lest the worker become "a little gardener instead of a labourer." (Chambers: 134) To prevent this undesirable outcome a calculus of exploitation was formulated, as in this statement from an 1800 issue of *Commercial and Agricultural Magazine*:

> …a quarter acre of garden-ground will go a great way toward rendering the peasant independent of any assistance. However, in this beneficent intention moderation must be observed, or we may chance to transform the labourer into a petty farmer; from the most beneficial to the most useless of industry. When

the reproduction of the community as a whole. Rural people had no need for the factories, only the factories needed the people. A future of industrial production and mass consumption of its products necessitated the elimination of rural self-sufficiency. So critical was this that, as with the chattel slaves in the colonies, the State was not prepared to allow the peasants a choice in the matter. The life of an English peasant under feudalism may not have been the easiest, but industrial capitalism promised that it would get a whole lot worse.

Given that for the modern reader "industrialism" is likely to conjure images of sprawling factories at the edges of urban centers, or the rust belts that have been left in the wake of more recent economic recalibration, it is good to remember that the dawn of the industrial revolution occurred in the English countryside and that it was entirely dependent on greatly increased agricultural production. A proto-industrial agriculture, and an expansion of this agriculture around the world, was necessary for supplying the new factories with raw materials and for meeting the subsistence needs of the workers, soon to be barred from the existing practice of meeting their needs with their own hands on common land to which they had access. In many of these factories workers were occupied with crafts they had previously been practicing at home, such as the weaving of textiles or the making of shoes. As the 18th century author and lexicographer Samuel Johnstone observed, while a cottager could make a pair of Scottish brogues (leather shoes) in an hour at home, the price of a pair of shoes in the marketplace was one half-crown per pair. Based on Adam Smith's estimates of wages for laborers – calculated for the vicinity of Edinburgh where wages were likely higher than the countryside – to afford a pair of shoes a laborer would need to work three full days! (Perelman: 45) In many cases, the factory was to replace existing out-sourced modes of production – where the producer, working from home, could negotiate how much they would produce and in what amount of time – with a system of centralized production,

In a colonial office memo, Howick argued that "there was only one way to ensure the 'combination of productive power' on which civilization and progress depended: making the use of land so expensive for freedmen that they would have no choice but to sell their labor in a competitive market." (*Ibid.*: 217) The corollary to this, once again succinctly articulated by Stephen, in response to Howick's memo, is that "the Proprietors of the Soil in every Country are the arbiters of the condition of all other Members of society… They who hold the keys to the Granary may (so long as they can keep their hold) make what terms they please with the rest of the world." (*Ibid.*: 218)

The Slavery of Economics

> [T]he historical movement which changes the producers into waged workers, appears on the one hand as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds… But on the other hand these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production and all the guarantees of existence offered by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.
>
> - Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*

Modern economists like to speak of the market-economy as something natural, that is, as the best way to organize the production of goods and services and therefore something that rational people will *naturally* gravitate toward. The foundational myth of modern economics has it that when a society's exchange relations reach a certain level of complexity, the expediency of a market economy will *inevitably* lead to its preference over the clumsy arrangements of barter. The problem with this tale is that there is zero anthropological evidence for the existence of barter prior to a society's coming into contact with money. (Graeber: 28–29) Despite the lack of evidence, *exchange is assumed* as the foundation on which material culture must be built and the market-economy is claimed to be the natural response to the ever-increasing complexity of exchange relations in a society as it develops.

Not only do modern economists ignore the work of other disciplines, they ignore the work of their own predecessors. Classical political economists of the late 17th to the early 19th centuries were under no illusions that there was anything natural about the market. People certainly couldn't be expected to gravitate towards it. No, that their participation would require coercion was well understood.[1]

Economists and planners further understood that in order to deliver people to market, their ability to subsist outside of the market had to be undermined. Access to communal land and the solidarity and mutual aid found within self-sufficient communities were obstacles to the expansion of a market-economy and needed to be eliminated. Thus, the problem was the same as that later to be encountered by the managers of "emancipation" in the West Indies: how to undermine subsistence lifeways in order to ensure people have no choice but to participate in the market-economy, to become wage slaves.

The creation of a working class, a class of people dependent on waged work for their survival, that is, a class who would have no choice but to enter the new factories that were springing up in the English countryside, was a condition necessary for the development of industrial capitalism. The peasants and crafts-people of feudal England, although serfs and thus already working beyond their own subsistence needs to produce a surplus for their Lords, were still, by and large, self-sufficient: rural communities produced the items necessary for the survival of community members and

[1] The need to force people into the market-place was well understood but not well advertised. As Michael Perelman points out, the classical political economists "placed their writings outlining the less attractive, coercive side of classical political economy in their less famous works, especially in their correspondence. In all likelihood, these early economists were not eager to advertise the harsh nature of the supposedly benign program they advocated…Later economists never acknowledged this crucial aspect of the work of their predecessors…" (Perelman: 44)