

Must It Be So?

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1

Amid fields there stands an iron foundry, surrounded by a wall, with incessantly smoking chimneys, clattering chains, furnaces, a railway siding, and the scattered little houses of the managers and laborers. The working people swarm like ants in this foundry and in the mines belonging to it. Some of them are at work from morning until night, or from night until morning, mining the ore in passages two hundred feet underground, which are dark, narrow, close, damp, and constantly threaten with death. Others in the darkness, bending over, take this ore or clay to the shaft and take back empty cars, and again fill them, and so work for twelve or fourteen hours a day throughout the week.

Thus they work in the mines. In the foundry itself, some work at the furnace in oppressive heat, while others work at the trough of the melted ore and slag. Others again, the engineers, stokers, smiths, brick makers, and carpenters, are at work in the shops, also from twelve to fourteen hours a day throughout the week.

On Sunday all these men receive their wages, wash themselves, or sometimes even do not wash themselves, go to the taverns and pubs which surround the foundry on all sides, and which entice the working people. Early on Monday morning they go back to their work.

Near this same foundry peasants plow somebody else's field with lean, worn-out horses. These peasants get up with the dawn, if they have not passed the night in the pasture near a swamp, which is the only place where they can feed their horses. They get up with the dawn, come home, harness the horses, and, taking a slice of bread with them, go out to plow somebody else's field.

Other peasants are sitting not far away from the foundry, on the highway, and, having made themselves a shield from matting, are breaking rock for the highway. The legs of these men are bruised, their hands are all calluses, their whole bodies are dirty, and their faces, hair, beards, and even their lungs are permeated with lime dust.

Taking a small unbroken stone from a heap, these men put it between the soles of their feet, which are covered with burlap shoes and wrapped in rags, and strike this stone with a heavy mallet until the stone breaks. When the stone has broken, they take the smaller parts and strike them until these are broken fine. Again they take whole stones, and again. And thus these men work from early summer dawn until night, for fifteen or sixteen hours, resting only for two hours after dinner, and twice strengthening themselves with bread and water at breakfast and at noon.

And thus do these men live in the mines and in the foundry, as do the plowmen and the stonebreakers, from early youth until old age. Their wives and their mothers live in similar work above their strength, suffering from diseases of the womb. And thus live their fathers and their children, poorly fed, poorly dressed, doing work that is above their strength and that ruins their health, from morning until evening, from childhood until old age.

A carriage races past the foundry, past the stonebreakers, past the plowing peasants, meeting and overtaking ragged men and women with their knapsacks, who are wandering from place to place and begging in the name of Christ. The carriage has tinkling bells and is drawn by four matched chestnut horses of good height, the worst of which is worth the whole farm of any

of the peasants who are admiring the team. In the carriage are seated two ladies, displaying brightly colored parasols, ribbons, and hat feathers, each of which costs more than the horse with which a peasant plows his field. In the front seat sits an officer, shining in the sun with lace and buttons, and dressed in a freshly laundered uniform. On the box sits a ponderous coachman in blue silk shirtsleeves and velvet sleeveless coat. He came very near to crushing some of the women pilgrims, and almost hit a peasant, who, dressed in a dirty, ore-soiled shirt, was sent jolting in his empty cart into the ditch.

“You see this?” says the coachman, showing the whip to the peasant, who was not quick enough in turning aside, and the peasant pulls the rein with one hand and timidly pulls his cap off his lousy head with the other.

Behind the carriage, glinting in the sun with the nickel-plated parts of their machines, two men and one woman noiselessly race on bicycles. They laugh merrily as they overtake and frighten the wandering women, who make the sign of the cross.

On the side-path of the highway pass two riders: a man on an English cob, and a lady on an ambler. To say nothing of the cost of the horses and the saddles, the one black hat with the lilac veil cost two months’ work of the stonebreakers. As much was paid for the fashionable English whip as will be earned in a week by that young lad, who is happy that he has been hired to work underground in the mine. He is getting out of the way while admiring the sleek forms of the horses, the riders, and the fat, imported, immense dog in an expensive collar, which is running with protruding tongue behind them.

Not far from this company there travel in a cart a dressed-up, smiling maid with curls, wearing a white apron, and a fat, ruddy man with well-groomed side-whiskers, who is whispering something to the maid. In the cart may be seen a samovar, bundles in napkins, and an ice-cream freezer. These are the servants of the people who are traveling in the carriage, on horseback, and on bicycles. The present day is nothing out of the ordinary. They live this way the whole summer, going out for pleasure almost every day, and at times, as now, taking with them tea, beverages, and sweets, in order to eat and drink, not in the same, but in some new place.

These people are three families that are passing the summer in the country. One is the family of a proprietor, the owner of two thousand hectares of land, another that of an official, who receives a salary of three thousand rubles, and the third – the wealthiest family – the children of a manufacturer. All these people are not in the least surprised or touched by the sight of all the poverty and hard labor that surround them. They think that all this must be so. They are interested in something quite different.

“No, that is impossible,” says the lady on horseback, looking back at the dog, “I cannot see that!” and she stops the carriage. All talk together in French and laugh, and they put the dog into the carriage and proceed, covering the stonebreakers and the itinerants with clouds of lime dust. The carriage, the riders, and the bicyclists have flashed by like beings from another world.

The people in the foundry, the stonebreakers, and the plowmen continue their hard, monotonous work for somebody else, which will end with their lives.

“Some people have a fine time!” they think, as they watch the travelers leave. And their painful existence appears still more painful to them.

2

What is this? Have these laboring people done something very criminal that they are punished thus? Or is this the lot of all men? And have those who passed by in the carriages and on the bicycles done something particularly useful and important that they are thus rewarded? Not in the least! On the contrary, those who are working with such tension are, for the most part, moral, self-controlled, modest, industrious people. Those who passed by are, for the most part, corrupted, lustful, impudent, idle people. This is so, because such a structure of life is considered natural and regular in the world of men who assert that they are professing Christ's law of love of their neighbor, or that they are people of culture – that is, perfected people.

Such a structure exists, not only in that corner of Tula County, which presents itself vividly to me because I frequently see it, but everywhere: not only in Russia from St. Petersburg to Batum, but also in France from Paris to Auvergne, and in Italy from Rome to Palermo, and in Germany, in Spain, in America, in Australia, and even in India and in China. Everywhere, two or three people in a thousand live in such a way that, without doing anything for themselves, they in one day consume in food and drink as much as would support hundreds of people for a year. They wear clothes that cost thousands, live in palaces where thousands of laboring people could find room, and spend thousands of rubles on their whims – the equivalent of millions of workdays.

Others again, getting neither enough sleep nor enough food, work above their strength, ruining their bodily and their spiritual health for these few elect.

For one class of women, when they are about to bear children, they send for a midwife and a doctor – sometimes even two doctors. Their layettes contain a hundred baby-shirts and swaddling clothes with silk ribbons, and they get little wagons ready that swing on springs. The other class of women, the vast majority, bear children in any chance place and in any chance manner, without aid, swaddle them in rags, put them into woven cradles filled with straw, and are glad when they die.

The children of one class are taken care of by the midwife, the nurse, and the wet-nurse while the mother is lying in bed for nine days; the children of the other class are not taken care of, because there is no one to do so, and the mother herself gets up immediately after childbirth, makes the fires in the oven, milks the cow, and sometimes washes the clothes for herself, her husband, and her children. One class of children grows up among toys, amusements, and instructions; at first, the other children crawl with their bared bellies over thresholds, become maimed, are eaten up by pigs, and at five years of age begin to work above their strength. The first are taught all the scientific wisdom that is adapted to their age; the others learn vulgar curses and the most savage of superstitions. The first fall in love, carry on love affairs, and then marry after they have experienced all the pleasures of love; the others are married off between the ages of sixteen and twenty years to those whom the parents choose, for the purpose of receiving additional aid. The first eat and drink the best and the most expensive things in the world, feeding their dogs on white bread and beef; the second eat nothing but bread and kvass, nor do they get enough bread, and what they get is stale so that they may not eat too much of it. The first change their fine underwear

every day so as not to get soiled; the second, who are constantly doing work for others, change their coarse, ragged, lousy underwear once in two weeks, or do not change it at all but wear it until it falls to pieces. The first sleep between clean sheets on feather beds; the second sleep on the ground, covering themselves with their tattered caftans.

The first drive out with well-fed horses, not for work, but simply for pleasure; the second work hard with ill-fed horses, and walk if they have any business to attend to. The first wonder what to do in order to occupy their leisure time; the second find no time to clean themselves, to wash, to take a rest, to say a word, or to visit their relatives. The first read four languages and amuse themselves every day with the greatest variety of things; the second do not know how to read at all and know no other amusement than drunkenness. The first know everything and believe in nothing; the second know nothing and believe any nonsense that they are told. When the first get sick, they travel from place to place in search of the best curative air, to say nothing of all kinds of spas, every kind of attention, and every kind of cleanliness and medicine; the second lie down on the oven in a smoky hut with unwashed sores, with the absence of any food but stale bread, with air that is infected by ten members of the family, the calves and the sheep, and they rot alive and die before their time.

Must it be so?

If there is a higher reason and a love that guide the world, if there is a God, He cannot have wished to see such division among men. One class of them do not know what to do with the surplus of their wealth and senselessly squander the fruit of the labors of other men, and the others grow sick and die before their time, or live an agonizing life, working above their strength.

If there is a God, this cannot and must not be. But if there is no God, such a structure of life, in which the majority of men must waste their lives so that a small number of men may enjoy an abundance, which only corrupts this minority and weighs heavily upon it, is, from the simplest human point of view, insipid because it is disadvantageous for all men.

3

Why, then, do men live thus?

It is natural for the rich, who are used to their wealth and who do not see clearly that wealth does not give happiness, to try to maintain their position. But why does the vast majority, in whose hands is every power, assume that there is happiness in wealth, continue to live in want, and submit to the minority?

Indeed, why do all those men who are strong in muscles, artisanship, and the habit of work – the vast majority of men – submit and give in to a handful of feeble people, pampered old men and mainly women, who for the most part are not fit for anything?

Take a walk before the holidays or during bargain weeks along the business streets, through the Moscow Passages for example. Ten or twelve Passages, consisting of solid rows of magnificent shops with immense plate-glass windows, are all filled with all kinds of expensive and exclusively feminine wares: stuffs, dresses, laces, gems, foot-gear, house adornments, furs, and so forth. All these things cost millions and millions of rubles, and all these articles have been manufactured in establishments by working people who frequently ruin their lives over this work, and all these articles are of no use, not only to the working people, but even to the wealthy men – they are all amusements and adornments of women. At the entrances, porters in galloons stand on both sides, and coachmen in expensive garments sit on the boxes of expensive carriages, which are drawn by trotters that cost into the thousands. Again, millions of working days have been wasted on the production of all the luxury of the harnesses. Old and young working people, men and women, have devoted all their lives to the production of all these articles. And all these articles are in the power and in the hands of a few hundred women, who are dressed in expensive furs and hats of the latest fashion, saunter through these shops, and purchase all these articles, which are manufactured for them.

A few hundred women arbitrarily dispose of the labor of millions of working people, who work to support themselves and their families. The fate and lives of millions of people depend on the whims of these women.

How did this happen?

Why do all these millions of strong people, who have manufactured these articles, submit to these women? Now a lady in a velvet fur coat and a hat of the very latest fashion drives up with a pair of trotters. Everything upon her is new and most expensive. A porter hurries to throw back the boot of her sleigh, and respectfully helps her out by supporting her under her elbow. She walks down the Passage as though through her kingdom, enters one of the shops, buys five thousand rubles' worth of material for her drawing-room, and, having given the order to send it up to her house, goes elsewhere. She is an evil, stupid, and not at all beautiful woman, who does not bear any children and has never done anything in her life for anyone else. Why, then, do the porter, the coachman, and the clerks fawn before her in such a servile manner? And why has all that, over which thousands of workmen have labored, become her property? Because she has money, and the porter, the coachman, the clerks, and the workmen in the factory need money

with which to support their families. The money is most convenient for them, and frequently can be gained only by serving as a coachman, a porter, a clerk, or a workman in a factory.

And why does this woman money have money? She has money because people who have been driven off the land and have forgotten how to do any other work are living in her husband's factory. Her husband, while giving the workmen only as much as they must necessarily have for their support, takes all the profit from the factory for himself, to the amount of several hundred thousand rubles. Not knowing what to do with the money, he is glad to give it to his wife, for her to spend it on anything she may wish.

And here is another lady, in a still more luxurious carriage and garments, who is buying up all kinds of expensive and useless things in all kinds of shops. Where does she get the money? She is the mistress of a wealthy landowner of twenty thousand hectares, which were given to his ancestor by a harlot queen for his debauchery with that old queen. This landowner owns all the land around a colony of peasants, and rents this land to the peasants at seventeen rubles per hectare. The peasants pay this money because they would starve without the land. And this money is now in the hands of the mistress, and with this money she buys things that have been made by other peasants, who have been driven off the land.

Here again a third rich woman, with her fiancé and mother, is walking down the Passage. This woman is about to marry, and she is buying bronzes and expensive dishes. She has money given her by her father, a distinguished official, who is receiving a salary of twelve thousand rubles. He gave his daughter a dowry of seven thousand rubles. This money was collected from import revenues and taxes, again from the peasants. These same taxes compelled the porter, who opens the door (he is a Kalúga peasant, and his wife and children are left at home), the coachman, who brought them up (he is a Túla peasant), and millions of men, who work out in houses or in factories, to leave their homes and to work on articles that are consumed by the ladies, who receive the money, which is collected by the manufacturers, landowners, and officials from the profit from the factories, or from the land, or from the taxes.

Thus millions of workmen have submitted to these women, all because one man has taken possession of a factory in which people work, another has taken possession of the land, and a third has seized the taxes, which are collected from the laboring classes. It is this that produced that which I saw about the foundry.

The peasants plowed somebody else's field, because they do not have enough land, and he who owns the land permits them to use his land only on condition that they work for him. The stonebreakers broke rock because they were only able to pay the taxes demanded of them by means of this work. The people worked in the foundry and in the mines because the earth from which the ore is extracted and the smelter where it is smelted do not belong to them.

All these working people do hard work, not for themselves, because the rich have taken possession of the land, collect taxes, and own the plants.

4

Why does he who does not work own the land, and not he who works? Why do a small number of men make use of the taxes that are collected from all men, and not those who pay them? Why are the factories owned, not by those who built them and work in them, but by a small number of men who did not build them and do not work in them?

To the question as to why non-workers have seized the land of the workers, the customary answer that land was given them as a reward or bought with money earned. To the question as to why one set of men, a small number of men, the non-working managers and their helpers, collect for themselves the greater share of the wealth of all the working people and use it at will, the customary answer is that the men who use the money that is collected from the masses manage the others, defend them, and preserve order and decency among them. And to the question as to why rich people of leisure own the products and implements of the labor of the working people, the answer is that these products and implements of labor were earned by them or by their ancestors.

And all these men – the landowners, the servants of the government, the merchants, and the manufacturers – are sincerely convinced that their possession is quite just and that they have the right to such a possession.

However, neither the possession of the land, nor the collection of the taxes and use of them, nor the possession of the products and implements of labor by people of leisure has any justification. The possession of land by those who do not work upon it has no justification, because the land, like the water, the air, and the sunlight, forms an indispensable condition of the life of every man, and so cannot be the exclusive possession of one person. If the land, and not the water, the air, and the sunlight, has become an object of possession, this is not due to the fact that the land is not just as indispensable and appropriable a condition for the existence of any man, but only because it has been impossible to deprive people of water, air, and sunlight, while it has been possible to deprive them of the land.

The ownership of land, having originated in violence (through conquest people appropriated the land, and then gave it away and sold it), has remained, in spite of every effort at turning it into a right, nothing but an act of violence of the strong and armed against the weak and unarmed.

Let a man, who is working the land, violate this imaginary right, let him plow the land that is considered to be the property of another, and there will soon appear that on which this supposed right is based: at first in the form of policemen, and then in the form of a military force of soldiers, who will stab and shoot those who are trying to make use of their real right to support themselves by means of work on the land. Thus, what is called the right to the ownership of land is nothing but violence exerted against all those who may have need of this land. The right to the land is like the right to a road which robbers have seized and over which they do not permit people to travel without a ransom.

A still lesser semblance of justification can be found for the right of the government to a forcible levy of taxes. It is asserted that the taxes are used for the defense of the government against

foreign enemies, for the establishment and support of domestic order, and for the execution of necessary public works.

But, in the first place, foreign enemies have long ago ceased to exist, even according to the declarations of the governments themselves. They all assure their nations that they wish for nothing but peace. The Emperor of Germany wants peace, the French republic wants peace, England wants peace, and Russia wants the same. Still more urgently do the Transvaalers and the Chinese want peace. So against whom are we to defend ourselves?

In the second place, in order to give up the money for the establishment of domestic order and public works, it is necessary to be sure that the men who establish order will do so, and, besides, that this order will be good and that the public works to be executed will actually be needed by society. But if, as is always and everywhere repeated, those who pay the taxes are not convinced of the fitness or even of the honesty of those who establish order, and consider the order itself to be bad and the public works about to be executed not such as the taxpayers need, it is evident that there is no right to collect taxes, but only violence.

I remember the utterance of a Russian peasant, who was religious and, therefore, truly liberal. Like Thoreau, he did not consider it just to pay taxes for things that his conscience did not approve of, and when he was asked to pay his share of the taxes, he asked what the taxes would be used for, saying, "If the taxes shall be used for a good thing, I will at once give you not only what you demand, but even more; but if they shall be used for something bad, I cannot and will not give a kopeck of my own free will."

Of course, they lost no time with him, but broke down his closed gate, carried off his cow, and sold it for the taxes. Thus in reality there is but one true and real cause of taxes: the power that collects them. The robbing of those who do not give the taxes willingly, the beating of those who refuse, their imprisonment and punishment – all of this is actually done.

The fact that, in England, in France, in America, and in most constitutional governments, the taxes are determined by the parliament, the supposed representatives of the people gathered together, does not change the matter. The elections are so arranged that the members of the parliament do not represent the people, but are politicians. If they were not to start with, they become such as soon as they get into parliament, and are busy with their personal ambition and the interests of the warring parties.

Just as groundless are the justifications of the supposed right of ownership, which the leisure class claims in respect to the products of the labor of other people. This right of ownership, which is even called a sacred right, is generally justified on the ground that property is the result of self-restraint and industrious activity, which are useful to men. But we need only analyze the origin of great fortunes to be convinced of the contrary.

Fortunes always originate, either in violence (this is most common), in nastiness, in rascality on a large scale, or in chronic cheating, like what is practiced by merchants. The more a man is moral, the more certain he is to be deprived of the fortune which he has, and the more he is immoral, the more certain he is to gain and retain a fortune. Popular wisdom says that one cannot earn stone palaces with righteous labor, and that labor gives one stooping shoulders instead of wealth. Thus it was, indeed, of old, and it is still truer of the present, when the distribution of wealth has long ago taken place in a most irregular manner. Though we may admit that a more temperate and industrious man in primitive society will gain more than an unrestrained man, who does not work much, nothing of the kind is true in our present society.

No matter how temperate and industrious a man or laborer may be, who is working on somebody else's land, who purchases such articles as he may need at a price established for him, and who works with other people's implements of labor, he will never acquire any wealth. But the most unrestrained and idle of men, as we see in the case of thousands of individuals, who stand in with the government or with rich men, who busy themselves with usury, factories, houses of prostitution, banks, or the sale of liquor, will easily acquire a fortune.

The laws, which are supposed to protect property, only protect property which has been stolen and which is already in the hands of the rich. They not only fail to protect the laborers, who have no property except their labor, but even aid in robbing them of this labor.

We see an endless number of administrators – the czar, his brothers, uncles, ministers, judges, and the clergy – who receive enormous salaries, collected from the people, and who do not even attend to those easy duties which they have undertaken to attend to for this remuneration. And so, it would seem, these people steal the salary collected from the masses, that is, the property of the masses, but it does not even occur to anyone to condemn them. But let a laborer make use of even a part of the money received by these people, or of the objects bought with this money, and it will be said that he has violated the sacred ownership, and he is sentenced, imprisoned, and deported for making use of this sum.

A manufacturer, who is a millionaire, promises to pay the laboring man a wage which for him, the manufacturer, represents one ten-millionth part of his fortune – almost nothing. But the laborer puts himself under obligation, in consequence of his want, to furnish in the course of the year, with the exception of the holidays, his daily work of twelve hours, which is dangerous and harmful for his health. He puts himself under obligation to give the manufacturer the greater part of his life, perhaps his whole life, and the government protects alike either kind of ownership.

In this manner the manufacturer, as is well known, year in and year out robs the laborer of the greater share of his earnings, and appropriates it to himself. It would seem to be obvious that the manufacturer robs the laborer of the greater half of his property, and so ought to be made responsible for it, but the government considers the manufacturer's property thus gained to be sacred, and punishes the laborer who carries off two pounds of copper under his coat, which amounts to one-billionth part of the manufacturer's property.

Let the laborer try, as happens during the anti-Jewish riots, to take away from the rich ever so small a part of what was lawfully taken from the laborers; let a starving man, as lately occurred in Milan, appropriate a loaf, which, taking advantage of the famine, the rich are selling at a high price to the laborers; or let a laborer endeavor to get back a small part of what was taken from him by means of a strike – this laborer violates the sacred right of property, and the government immediately comes with its army against the laborer and to the aid of the landowner, the manufacturer, or the merchant. Thus the right on which the rich base their ownership of the land, the right to levy taxes and possess the products of labor of other people, has nothing in common with justice, and all of it is based on nothing but violence, which is produced by the army.

5

Let a farmer try to plow the field which he needs for his support; let him endeavor to refuse to pay the taxes, either direct or indirect; let him try to take provisions of corn which he has not earned, or implements of labor, without which he cannot work – and the army will appear and will use force to keep him from doing so.

Thus the alienation from the land, the levy of taxes, and the power of the capitalists form, not the cause, but the result of the wretched condition of the laborers. The fundamental cause why millions of laborers live and work at the will of the minority does not lie in the minority seizing the land, owning the implements of production, or receiving the taxes. The cause lies in the fact that the minority *can* do so – that there is an instrument of violence, an army, which is in the hands of the minority and is ready to kill those who do not wish to do the will of this minority.

When the peasants want to take possession of the land which is considered to be the property of a man of leisure, or when a man does not want to pay the taxes, or when the strikers want to keep other laborers from taking their places, there appear the same peasants whose land has been taken away, the payers of taxes and the laborers, except that they wear uniforms and bear arms, and they compel their brothers – who are not in uniforms – to go away from the land, to pay taxes, and to stop the strike.

A man can hardly believe it when he first comes to understand this, it seems so strange. The working people want to free themselves, and the working people themselves compel themselves to submit and to remain in slavery.

Why do they do so? Because the working people, drafted or hired into the army, are subjected to an artificial process of stupefaction and corruption, after which they cannot help but blindly obey their superiors, no matter what they may compel them to do.

This is done in the following manner. A boy is born in the country or in the city. In all the Continental countries, as soon as the boy reaches the age when his strength, agility, and flexibility have reached the highest point, while his spiritual forces are in a dim and indeterminate state (about twenty years), he is taken into the army. He is examined like a beast of burden, and when he is found to be able-bodied, he is attached to some particular part of the army and is made solemnly to swear that he will slavishly obey his superiors. He is then removed from all the former conditions of his life, filled up with whiskey or beer, dressed up in motley garments, and locked up with other lads like him in barracks, where he is in absolute idleness (that is, doing no useful or rational work). He is taught the most insipid military rules and names of objects, and the use of the implements of murder: the sword, the bayonet, the rifle, and the cannon. Above all, he is taught, not only blind, but even mechanically reflex obedience to the superiors put over him. It is done like this in the countries where there is mandatory military service. Where it does not exist, men specially appointed for the purpose look up men who are for the most part dissipated, but strong – men who have fallen from the right way and either do not wish, or are unable to live by honest labor. They are filled with liquor, bribed, enlisted in the army, similarly shut up in barracks, and subjected to the same discipline. The chief problem of the superiors consists in

bringing these men to the state of the frog which, when touched, uncontrollably jerks its leg. A good soldier is he who, like this frog, unconsciously makes the motion demanded in response to certain shouts of his superior. This is obtained by making these unfortunate men, who are dressed in the same motley uniform, for weeks, months, and years, walk, twist around, and jump, at the sound of a drum and music, and do it all together, in a body, and by command. Every failure to obey is punished with the cruelest punishments, even with death. With this, drunkenness, debauchery, idleness, vulgarity, and murder are not only not prohibited, but even established. The soldiers are given whiskey, houses of prostitution are arranged for them, they are taught obscene songs, and instructed in murder. (Murder is considered a good and praiseworthy matter to such an extent in this circle of men that, under certain conditions, the superiors and officers are commanded to kill a friend, which is called a duel.) And so a meek and peaceable fellow, after having passed about a year in such a school (before that time the soldier is not yet ready – he has still some human qualities left in him), is turned into what he is wanted to be: a senseless, cruel, mighty, and terrible instrument of violence in the hands of his superiors.

Whenever I walk past the palace in Moscow in the winter, I see a young lad, the sentinel, who is dressed in his heavy sheepskin fur coat and is standing or walking, splashing his enormous overshoes on the sidewalk. He is supporting a rifle of the latest fashion on his shoulder, with its bayonet sharpened. I always look into his eyes, and every time he turns his glance away from me, and every time I think: a year or two years ago he was a merry village lad, natural, good-natured, who would cheerfully have talked to me in his good Russian, telling me, with the consciousness of his peasant dignity, his whole history. Now he looks maliciously and gloomily at me, and to all my questions knows only how to say, “Yes, sir,” and, “Can’t know, sir.” If I should enter through the door at which he is standing – I always feel like doing so – or should put my hand on his gun, he would stick the bayonet through my abdomen without a minute’s hesitation, would pull the bayonet out of the wound, would wipe it off, and would continue to walk, splashing with his overshoes on the asphalt until the arrival of relief with the corporal, who would whisper the watchword into his ear. And he is not the only one. In Moscow alone, I think, there are thousands of such lads, almost children, who are turned into machines and are armed with guns. There are millions of them in the whole of Russia and in the whole world. These unthinking, strong, and agile lads are picked up, corrupted, and bribed, and, thanks to them, the world is held in subjection. All that is terrible. What is more terrible is that bad, idle people, thanks to these deceived men, are in possession of all those palaces and all that criminally acquired wealth which is produced by the labor of the masses. But most terrible is that, to do so, they have to bestialize these simple, good fellows, and in this they have partly succeeded.

Let those who own wealth defend it themselves. That would not be so disgusting. But what is terrible is that, to rob the people and defend what has been stolen, they use those very people whom they rob, and for this purpose corrupt their souls. Thus the soldiers, taken from the laboring classes, use violence against their own brother laborers, because there exists a means for making people into unconscious instruments of murder, and the governments, in drafting or enlisting soldiers, make use of that means in regard to them.

6

But if that is so, there involuntarily appears the question as to why people become soldiers. Why do their fathers let them become soldiers?

They could become soldiers and be subject to discipline so long as they did not see the consequences of it. But, having once come to see what results from it, why do they continue to subject themselves to this deception?

This is due to the fact that they consider military service not only useful, but also unquestionably honorable and good. And they consider it such because they have been impressed with it by that doctrine to which they are subjected from their childhood and in which they are maintained in their adult age.

And so the existence of the army is also not a fundamental cause, but only an effect. The fundamental cause is to be found in that doctrine which is inculcated upon people, that military service, which has the killing of men for its purpose, is not only sinless, but also good, virtuous, and praiseworthy. Thus, the cause of the wretched condition of the men lies still farther away than it seems at first.

At first it seems that the whole matter lies in the landowners having seized the land, the capitalists having taken possession of the implements of labor, and the government having forcibly taken the taxes. But when one asks himself why the land belongs to the rich and the working people cannot make use of it, and why not the working people, but the capitalists, are in possession of the implements of production, one sees that this is due to the fact that there is an army which secures the land to the rich, collects the taxes from the laborers for the use of the rich, and secures the factories and the expensive machines to the rich. If one asks oneself how it is that the working people, who form the army and from whom everything is taken which they need, attack themselves, their fathers and brothers, one sees that the cause of it is that the drafted or enlisted soldiers are, by means of methods specially adapted for the purpose, instructed in such a way that they lose everything human and are turned into unconscious instruments of murder, ever submissive to their superiors. When, finally, one asks oneself why people, seeing such deception, continue to enter the army or to pay taxes to hire an army, one sees that the cause of it lies in the doctrine, which is instilled, not only upon those who are taken into the army, but also upon all men alike: a doctrine according to which military service is a good and praiseworthy cause, and murder in war is innocent.

Thus the fundamental cause of everything is the doctrine that is inculcated upon the people.

From this come poverty, and debauchery, and hatred, and punishments, and murder.

What is this doctrine?

This doctrine is called Christian, and consists in the following. There is a God, who six thousand years ago created the world and the man Adam. Adam sinned, and God punished all men for this, and then sent His Son, just such a God as the Father, down upon earth to have Him hanged there! This very hanging serves to men as a means of redemption from their punishment for Adam's sin.

If people believe in this, they will be forgiven Adam's sin; if they do not, they will be punished cruelly. The proof of all this being true is found in the fact that all this was revealed to men by that same God, about whose existence we have learned from those same men who preach all that. To say nothing of the different variations in this fundamental doctrine, in accordance with the different denominations, the general practical deduction from it in all the denominations is the same: that men must believe in what is preached to them and must obey the existing authorities.

It is this doctrine that forms the fundamental cause of the deception, according to which people, considering military service to be useful and good, enter the army, and, being turned into machines without a will, oppress themselves. If there are unbelievers among the deceived, these unbelievers do not believe in anything else, and, in consequence, since they have no point of support, submit, like the believers, to the general current, although they see the deception. And so, to destroy the evil from which men suffer, we need, not the liberation of the land, nor the abolition of the taxes, nor the nationalization of the implements of production, nor even the overthrow of the existing government, but the destruction of that false doctrine, called Christian, in which the men of our time are brought up.

7

At first it seems strange to people who know the Gospel how it was possible for Christianity, which preaches the sonhood to God, spiritual freedom, the brotherhood of men, the abolition of all violence, and the love of our neighbors to have degenerated into this strange doctrine, called Christian, which preaches blind obedience to the authorities, and murder whenever the authorities demand it. But when one stops to think of the process by means of which Christianity has entered into the world, one sees that it could not have been otherwise.

When pagan sovereigns such as Constantine, Charlemagne, and Vladimir accepted Christianity, which was swaddled in pagan forms, and baptized their nations into it, it did not even occur to them that the teaching which they accepted disrupted their regal power, the army, and the state itself – all that without which life could not be imagined by all those who were the first to accept and introduce Christianity. The destructive force of Christianity at first was not at all perceptible to men. On the contrary, they thought that Christianity supported their power.

But the longer the Christian nations existed, the clearer and clearer the essence of Christianity became, and the more obvious became the danger with which Christianity threatened the pagan order. The more this danger became obvious, the more carefully did the ruling classes try to subdue and, if possible, to put out the fire, which they unconsciously brought into the world together with Christianity. They used every possible means for this: forbidding the translation and reading of the gospels, slaying all those who pointed out the true meaning of the Christian teaching, hypnotizing the masses by means of the solemnity and splendor of surroundings, and, above all, substituting shrewd and refined interpretations of the Christian tenets. As these means were used, Christianity changed more and more, and finally became a doctrine that had in itself nothing dangerous to the pagan order of things, and even justified the pagan order from an apparently Christian point of view. There even appeared Christian rulers, a Christ-loving army, Christian wealth, Christian courts, and Christian punishments.

The ruling classes did the same in relation to Christianity that physicians do in relation to infectious diseases. They worked out a culture of harmless Christianity, which, when inoculated, makes the real Christianity innocuous. This ecclesiastic Christianity is such that it inevitably either repels sensible people, presenting itself to them as a terrible insipidity, or, being adopted by men, removes them from true Christianity to such an extent that they no longer see its real significance and even look upon its true significance with hostility and fury.

It is this innocuous, false Christianity, which from a sense of self-preservation has been worked out through the ages among the ruling classes. The masses are inoculated with it and, as a consequence of its doctrine, men calmly commit acts that are harmful to themselves and to their neighbors. These acts are even directly immoral and incompatible with the demands of conscience, the most important of which, from its practical consequences, is the entrance into the army and the readiness to commit murder.

The harm of this innocuous, false Christianity consists chiefly in that it prescribes nothing and forbids nothing. All the ancient teachings – like the Law of Moses and the Law of Manu – give

rules that demand or forbid certain acts. Such also are the Buddhist and the Muslim religions. The ecclesiastic faith, on the other hand, gives no rules whatever except verbal confession and the recognition of dogmas, fasts, holy sacraments, prayers – and for these excuses have even been invented for the rich). It permits everything, even what is contrary to the lowest demands of morality. Everything is allowed according to this ecclesiastic faith. It is allowed to own slaves (in Europe and in America the church has been the defender of slavery). It is allowed to acquire wealth that is gotten through the labor of our oppressed brothers. It is not only allowed to be rich amid Lazaruses who crawl under the tables of the feasting, but it is even good and laudable to do so, if one-thousandth is contributed for churches and hospitals. The church gives its blessing to the forcible defense of wealth against the needy, to the imprisonment of men in solitary cells, to chaining them up, to fastening them to wheelbarrows, and to executing them. It is allowed to commit debauchery during one's whole youth, and then to call one such debauchery marriage and get the church's permission for it. It is allowed to get a divorce and again be married. It is possible, above all, to kill, not only in one's own defense, but also in defense of one's apples, and as a punishment. Above all else, it is right and laudable to kill in war by command of the authorities. The church not only permits, but even commands it.

Thus the root of all is in the false doctrine.

Let the false doctrine be destroyed, and there will be no army. And if there is no army, all the acts of violence will naturally be destroyed, together with the oppression and corruption that are now practiced on the nations. But so long as men shall be brought up in the pseudo-Christian teaching, which permits everything, including murder, the army will be in the hands of the minority. This minority will always make use of this army for the purpose of depriving the masses of the products of their labor and, what is still worse, for the corruption of the masses, because without the corruption of the masses it could not take away from them the products of their labors.

8

The root of all the wretchedness of the masses lies in that false doctrine which is taught to them under guise of Christianity.

And so it would seem to be obvious that the duty of every man who has freed himself from the religious deception and who wishes to serve the masses in words and deeds is to help the deceived men to free themselves from that deception, which is the cause of their wretched condition. It would seem that, besides the general duty of every moral man to arraign the lies and profess the truth which he knows, everyone who wishes to serve the masses cannot help but wish out of sympathy to free his brothers from the deception which causes them all kinds of unhappiness, and in which they abide. These same people, who are free from the deception, are independent and have been educated at the expense of the working classes, and for this reason alone are obliged to serve them, but fail to see this.

“The religious teaching is not important,” say these people. “It is a matter for each man’s conscience. What is important and necessary is the political, social, and economic structure of society, and all the efforts of men who wish to serve the masses should be directed to this. But the religious teachings are all of no importance, and, like all superstitions, they will disappear in their time.”

Thus speak the educated people. Wishing to serve the masses, some of them enter the service of the government, the army, the clergy, or the parliament and try, without arraigning the religious deception of the masses. They try to improve the external forms of the life of the deceived masses by their participation in the governmental activity. Others, the revolutionists, who just as little touch upon the beliefs of the masses, enter into a struggle with the governments, trying to take possession of the power by the same means of deception and violence that are practiced by the governments. Others again, the socialists, establish labor-unions, societies, and strikes, assuming that the condition of the masses can be ameliorated, in spite of their remaining in the same error of superstition and ignorance that is produced by the false doctrine. But none of them hinder the dissemination of the false religion, on which all the evil is based, and when the necessity for it arises, they even perform those religious rites which they consider to be false.

They themselves take the oath, take part in divine services and solemnities which stultify the masses, and do not interfere with the instruction given to their own children and to those of others in what is called religion, that very lie on which the enslavement of the masses is based. This failure to comprehend in what lies the main cause of the evil (and the cultured people could and should more than any others help destroy this false doctrine), the failure to comprehend to what all their efforts ought more particularly to be directed, and the deviation of their efforts upon false paths are the chief causes why the existing structure of life is persistently maintained, even though it is obviously false and pernicious, and in spite of its well-recognized incompatibility.

All the calamities of our world are due to the concealment of true Christian teaching, which corresponds to the demands of our time, and the preaching of false doctrine in its place.

If only the men who want to serve God and their neighbors comprehended that humanity is not advanced by animal demands, but by spiritual forces! If only they understood that the chief spiritual force that moves humanity is religion – that is, the determination of the meaning of life! If only they understood the distinction between good and evil, and between what is important and unimportant! If only men understood that, they would see at once that the fundamental cause of the calamities of humanity at present does not lie in external material causes – not in political, nor in economic conditions, but in the distortion of the Christian religion. It lies in the substitution of a collection of senseless, immoral insipidities and blasphemies, called ecclesiastic faith, for the truths needed by humanity and corresponding to its present age. What is not good is considered good by ecclesiastic faith, what is unimportant is considered important, and vice versa, what is good is considered bad and what is important is considered unimportant.

If only the best, the independent people, who sincerely wish to serve the masses, understood that it is impossible by any external measures to improve the condition of a man who considers it bad to eat meat on Friday, good to punish a guilty man with death, important to show proper respect for an image or for the emperor, and unimportant to swear to do the will of other people or to learn to commit murder. If only men understood that no parliaments, strikes, unions, consumers' and producers' leagues, inventions, schools, universities, academies, or revolutions can be of any essential value to people with a false religious world-conception. Then all the forces of the best people would naturally be directed upon the cause, and not upon the effect – not upon state activity, revolutions, or socialism, but upon the arraignment of the false religious doctrine and the establishment of the true teaching.

If men would only act thus, all the political, economical, and social questions would solve themselves naturally, as they ought to be solved, and not as we foretell or prescribe.

All these questions will, naturally, not be solved at once and according to our wish, as we are accustomed to arrange the lives of other people, caring only that these lives should externally resemble what we want them to be (precisely what all the governments are doing). Instead, these questions will certainly be solved only if the religious world-view of the people shall be changed, and they will be solved the more quickly, the more we shall apply our forces, not to the effects, but to the causes of the phenomena.

But the arraignment of false religion and the assertion of true religion are very distant and slowly achieved goals, we are told. Whether they are distant or slow, they are the only means, and without them all other means will be ineffective.

As I look at the structure of human life, which is contrary to reason and to feeling, I ask myself, "Need it be so?"

And the answer at which I arrive is, that it need not be so.

It need not be, it must not be, and it will not be.

But it will not be, not when men shall in one way or another reconstruct their relations, but only when men shall stop believing in the lie in which they are brought up, and shall believe in the highest truth, which was revealed nineteen hundred years ago, and which is clear, simple, and accessible to their reason.

Yásnaya Polyána, October 14, 1900

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Leo Tolstoy
Must It Be So?
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