Chapter 26: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation

We have seen how money is transformed into capital; how surplus-value is made through capital, and how more capital is made from surplus-value. But the accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value; surplus-value presupposes capitalist production; capitalist production presupposes the availability of considerable masses of capital and labour-power in the hands of commodity producers. The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn around in a never-ending circle, which we can only get out of by assuming a primitive accumulation (the 'previous accumulation' of Adam Smith*) which precedes capitalist accumulation; an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure.

This primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote about the past. Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal élite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential. Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort finally had nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority who, despite all their labour, have up to now nothing to sell but themselves, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly, although they have long ceased to work. Such insipid childishness is every day preached

*'The accumulation of stock must, in the nature of things, be previous to the division of labour' (Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Bk II, Introduction).

to us in the defence of property. M. Thiers, for example, still repeats it with all the solemnity of a statesman to the French people, who were once so full of wit and ingenuity. But as soon as the question of property is at stake, it becomes a sacred duty to proclaim the standpoint of the nursery tale as the one thing fit for all age-groups and all stages of development. In actual history, it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part. In the tender annals of political economy, the idyllic reigns from time immemorial. Right and 'labour' were from the beginning of time the sole means of enrichment, 'this year' of course always excepted. As a matter of fact, the methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic.

In themselves, money and commodities are no more capital than the means of production and subsistence are. They need to be transformed into capital. But this transformation can itself only take place under particular circumstances, which meet together at this point: the confrontation of, and the contact between, two very different kinds of commodity owners; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to valorize the sum of values they have appropriated by buying the labour-power of others; on the other hand, free workers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour. Free workers, in the double sense that they neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production, as would be the case with self-employed peasant proprietors. The free workers are therefore free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own. With the polarization of the commodity-market into these two classes, the fundamental conditions of capitalist production are present. The capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labour. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale. The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore,

is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as 'primitive' because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital.

The economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former.

The immediate producer, the worker, could dispose of his own person only after he had ceased to be bound to the soil, and ceased to be the slave or serf of another person. To become a free seller of labour-power, who carries his commodity wherever he can find a market for it, he must further have escaped from the regime of the guilds, their rules for apprentices and journeymen, and their restrictive labour regulations. Hence the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-labourers appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and it is this aspect of the movement which alone exists for our bourgeois historians. But, on the other hand, these newly freed men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.

The industrial capitalists, these new potentates, had on their part not only to displace the guild masters of handicrafts, but also the feudal lords, who were in possession of the sources of wealth. In this respect, the rise of the industrial capitalists appears as the fruit of a victorious struggle both against feudal power and its disgusting prerogatives, and against the guilds, and the fetters by which the latter restricted the free development of production and the free exploitation of man by man. The knights of industry, however, only succeeded in supplanting the knights of the sword by making use of events in which they had played no part whatsoever. They rose by means as base as those once used by the Roman freedman to make himself the master of his *patronus*.

The starting-point of the development that gave rise both to the wage-labourer and to the capitalist was the enslavement of the worker. The advance made consisted in a change in the form of this servitude, in the transformation of feudal exploitation into capitalist exploitation. To understand the course taken by this change, we do not need to go back very far at all. Although we

come across the first sporadic traces of capitalist production as early as the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries in certain towns of the Mediterranean, the capitalist era dates from the sixteenth century. Wherever it appears, the abolition of serfdom has long since been completed, and the most brilliant achievement of the Middle Ages, the existence of independent city-states, has already been on the wane for a considerable length of time.

In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as levers for the capitalist class in the course of its formation; but this is true above all for those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs. Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classic form.[1]

1. In Italy, where capitalist production developed earliest, the dissolution of serfdom also took place earlier than elsewhere. There the serf was emancipated before he had acquired any prescriptive right to the soil. His emancipation at once transformed him into a 'free' proletarian, without any legal rights, and he found a master ready and waiting for him in the towns, which had been for the most part handed down from Roman times. When the revolution which took place in the world market at about the end of the fifteenth century had annihilated northern Italy's commercial supremacy, a movement in the reverse direction set in. The urban workers were driven *en masse* into the countryside, and gave a previously unheard-of impulse to small-scale cultivation, carried on in the form of market gardening.

Chapter 27: The Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land

In England, serfdom had disappeared in practice by the last part of the fourteenth century. The immense majority of the population[1] consisted then, and to a still larger extent in the fifteenth century, of free peasant proprietors, however much the feudal trappings might disguise their absolute ownership. In the larger seigniorial domains, the old bailiff, himself a serf, was displaced by the free farmer. The wage-labourers of agriculture were partly peasants, who made use of their leisure time by working on the large estates, and partly an independent, special class of wage-labourer, relatively and absolutely few in numbers. The latter were also in practice peasants, farming independently for themselves, since, in addition to their wages, they were provided with arable land to the extent of four or more acres, together with their cottages. Moreover, like the other peasants, they enjoyed the right to exploit the common land, which gave pasture to their cattle, and furnished them with timber, fire-wood, turf, etc.[2] In all countries

1. 'The petty proprietors who cultivated their own fields with their own hands, and enjoyed a modest competence ... then formed a much more important part of the nation than at present. If we may trust the best statistical writers of that age, not less than 160,000 proprietors who, with their families, must have made up more than a seventh of the whole population, derived their subsistence from little freehold estates. The average income of these small landlords ... was estimated at between £60 and £70 a year. It was computed that the number of persons who tilled their own land was greater than the number of those who farmed the land of others' (Macaulay, *History of England*, 10th edn, London, 1854, Vol. 1, pp. 333, 334). Even in the last third of the seventeenth century, four-fifths of the English people were agriculturalists (loc. cit., p. 413). I quote Macaulay, because as a systematic falsifier of history he minimizes facts of this kind as much as possible.

2. We must never forget that even the serf was not only the owner of the piece of land attached to his house, although admittedly he was merely a tribute-paying owner, but also a co-proprietor of the common land. 'The peasant' (in Silesia) 'is a serf.' Nevertheless these serfs possess common lands. 'It has not yet been possible to persuade the Silesians to partition the common

of Europe, feudal production is characterized by division of the soil amongst the greatest possible number of sub-feudatories. The might of the feudal lord, like that of the sovereign, depended not on the length of his rent-roll, but on the number of his subjects, and the latter depended on the number of peasant proprietors.[3] Thus although the soil of England, after the Norman conquest, was divided up into gigantic baronies, one of which often included some 900 of the old Anglo-Saxon lordships, it was strewn with small peasant properties, only interspersed here and there with great seigniorial domains. Such conditions, together with the urban prosperity so characteristic of the fifteenth century, permitted the development of that popular wealth Chancellor Fortescue depicted so eloquently in his *De laudibus legum Angliae*, but they ruled out wealth in the form of capital.

The prelude to the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production was played out in the last third of the fifteenth century and the first few decades of the sixteenth. A mass of 'free' and unattached proletarians was hurled onto the labour-market by the dissolution of the bands of feudal retainers, who, as Sir James Steuart correctly remarked, 'everywhere uselessly filled house and castle'.* Although the royal power, itself a product of bourgeois development, forcibly hastened the dissolution of these bands of retainers in its striving for absolute sovereignty, it was by no means the sole cause of it. It was rather that the great feudal lords, in their defiant opposition to the king and Parliament, created an incomparably larger proletariat by forcibly driving the peasantry from the land, to which the latter had the same feudal title as the lords themselves, and by usurpation of the common lands. The rapid expansion of wool manufacture in Flanders and the corresponding rise in the price of wool in

lands, whereas in the *Neumark* there is scarcely a village where this partition has not been implemented with very great success' (Mirabeau, *De la monarchie prussienne*, London, 1788, Vol. 2, pp. 125–6).

3. Japan, with its purely feudal organization of landed property and its developed small-scale agriculture, gives a much truer picture of the European Middle Ages than all our history books, dictated as these are, for the most part, by bourgeois prejudices. It is far too easy to be 'liberal' at the expense of the Middle Ages.

*James Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, Dublin, 1770, p. 52.

England provided the direct impulse for thes eevictions. The old nobility had been devoured by the great feudal wars. The new nobility was the child of its time, for which money was the power of all powers. Transformation of arable land into sheep-walks was therefore its slogan. Harrison, in his *Description of England, prefixed to Holinshed's Chronicles*, describes how the expropriation of small peasants is ruining the country. 'What care our great incroachers?' The dwellings of the peasants and the cottages of the labourers were razed to the ground or doomed to decay. 'If,' says Harrison, 'the old records of euerie manour be sought . . . it will soon appear that in some manour seventeene, eighteene, or twentie houses are shrunk . . . that England was neuer less furnished with people than at the present . . . Of cities and townes either utterly decaied or more than a quarter or half diminished, though some one be a little increased here or there; of townes pulled downe for sheepe-walks, and no more but the lordships now standing in them . . . I could saie somewhat.'* The complaints of these old chroniclers are always exaggerated, but they faithfully reflect the impression made on contemporaries by the revolution in the relations of production. A comparison between the writings of Chancellor Fortescue and Thomas More reveals the gulf between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. As Thornton rightly says, the English working class was precipitated without any transitional stages from its golden age to its iron age.†

Legislation shrunk back in the face of this immense change. It did not yet stand at that high level of civilization where the 'wealth of the nation' (i.e. the formation of capital and the reckless exploitation and impoverishment of the mass of the people) figures as the *ultima Thule*‡ of all statecraft. In his history of Henry VII Bacon says this: 'Inclosures at that time' (1489) 'began to be more frequent, whereby arable land, which could not be manured§ without people and families, was turned into pasture, which was easily rid by a few herdsmen; and tenancies for years, lives, and at will, whereupon much of the yeomanry lived, were turned into demesnes. This bred a decay of people, and, by consequence, a decay of towns, churches, tithes, and the like . . . In remedying of

*William Harrison, *Description of England*, Chapter 19, 'Of Parks and Warrens', ed. G. Edelen, Ithaca, N.Y., 1968, pp. 257–8.

†W. T. Thornton, op. cit., p. 185.

‡'uttermost limit'.

§i.e. cultivated.

this inconvenience the king's wisdom was admirable, and the parliament's at that time ... They took a course to take away depopulating inclosures, and depopulating pasturage.'* An Act of Henry VII, 1489, c. 19, forbade the destruction of all 'houses of husbandry' possessing 20 acres of land. By another Act, 25 Henry VIII [c. 13], this law was renewed. It recites, among other things, that 'many farms and large flocks of cattle, especially of sheep, are concentrated in the hands of a few men, whereby the rent of land has much risen, and tillage has fallen off, churches and houses have been pulled down, and marvellous numbers of people have been deprived of the means wherewith to maintain themselves and their families.' The Act therefore ordains the re-building of the decayed farmsteads, and fixes a proportion between corn land and pasture land, etc. The same Act recites that some owners possess 24,000 sheep, and limits the number to be owned to 2,000.[4] The cries of the people and the legislation directed, for 150 years after Henry VII, against the expropriation of the small farmers and peasants, were both equally fruitless. Bacon, without knowing it, reveals to us the secret of their lack of success. 'The device of King Henry VII,' says Bacon, in the twenty-ninth of his *Essays, Civil and Moral*, 'was profound and admirable, in making farms and houses of husbandry of a standard; that is, maintained with such a proportion of land unto them as may breed a subject to live in convenient plenty and no servile condition, and to keep the plough in the hands of the owners and not mere hirelings.'[5] What the capitalist system demanded was

4. In his *Utopia*, Thomas More speaks of the curious land where 'sheep ... swallow down the very men themselves' (*Utopia*, tr. Robinson, ed. Arber, London, 1869, p. 41).

5. Elsewhere, Bacon discusses the connection between a free, well-to-do peasantry, and good infantry. 'This did wonderfully concern the might and mannerhood of the kingdom to have farms as it were of a standard sufficient to maintain an able body out of penury, and did in effect amortise a great part of the lands of the kingdom unto the hold and occupation of the yeomanry or middle people, of a condition between gentlemen, and cottagers and peasants ... For it hath been held by the general opinion of men of best judgment in the wars ... that the principal strength of an army consisteth in the infantry or foot. And to make good infantry it requireth men bred, not in a servile or indigent fashion, but in some free and plentiful manner. Therefore, if a state run most to noblemen and gentlemen, and that the husbandmen and plough-

*F. Bacon, *The Reign of Henry VII, Verbatim Reprint from Kennet's 'England'*, ed. 1719, London, 1870, p. 307.

the reverse of this: a degraded and almost servile condition of the mass of the people, their transformation into mercenaries, and the transformation of their means of labour into capital. During this transitional period, legislation also strove to retain the four acres of land by the cottage of the agricultural wage-labourer, and forbade him to take lodgers into his cottage. In the reign of Charles I, in 1627, Roger Crocker of Fontmill was condemned for having built a cottage on the manor of Fontmill without four acres of land attached to the same in perpetuity. As late as 1638, in the same reign, a royal commission was appointed to enforce the implementation of the old laws, especially the law referring to the four acres of land. Even Cromwell forbade the building of a house within four miles of London unless it was endowed with four acres of land. As late as the first half of the eighteenth century, complaint is made if the cottage of the agricultural labourer does not possess an adjunct of one or two acres of land. Nowadays the labourer is lucky if it is furnished with a small garden, or if he may rent a few roods of land at a great distance from his cottage. 'Landlords and farmers,' says Dr Hunter, 'work here hand in hand. A few acres to the cottage would make the labourers too independent.'[6]

The process of forcible expropriation of the people received a new and terrible impulse in the sixteenth century from the Reformation, and the consequent colossal spoliation of church property. The Catholic church was, at the time of the Reformation, the feudal proprietor of a great part of the soil of England. The dissolution of the monasteries, etc., hurled their inmates into the proletariat. The estates of the church were to a large extent given away to rapacious royal favourites, or sold at a nominal price to speculating farmers and townsmen, who drove out the

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men be but as their workfolks and labourers, or else mere cottagers (which are but hous'd beggars), you may have a good cavalry, but never good stable bands of foot . . . And this is to be seen in France, and Italy, and some other parts abroad, where in effect all is noblesse or peasantry . . . insomuch that they are inforced to employ mercenary bands of Switzers and the like, for their battalions of foot; whereby also it comes to pass that those nations have much people and few soldiers' (F. Bacon, op. cit., p. 308).

6. Dr Hunter, op. cit., p. 134. 'The quantity of land assigned' (under the old laws) 'would now be judged too great for labourers, and rather as likely to convert them into small farmers' (George Roberts, *The Social History of the People of the Southern Counties of England in Past Centuries*, London, 1856, pp. 184–5).

old-established hereditary sub-tenants in great numbers, and threw their holdings together. The legally guaranteed property of the poorer folk in a part of the church's tithes was quietly confiscated.[7] '*Pauper ubique jacet*'* cried Queen Elizabeth, after a journey through England. In the forty-third year of her reign it finally proved necessary to recognize pauperism officially by the introduction of the poor-rate. 'The authors of this law seem to have been ashamed to state the grounds of it, for' (contrary to traditional usage) 'it has no preamble whatever.'[8] The poor-rate was declared perpetual by 16 Charles I, c. 4, and in fact only in 1834 did it take a new and severer form.[9] These immediate results

7. 'The right of the poor to share in the tithe, is established by the tenour of ancient statutes' (Tuckett, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 804–5).

8. William Cobbett, *A History of the Protestant 'Reformation'*, para. 471.

9. The 'spirit' of Protestantism may be seen from the following, among other things. In the south of England certain landed proprietors and well-to-do farmers put their heads together and propounded ten questions as to the right interpretation of the Elizabethan Poor Law. These they laid before a celebrated jurist of that time, Sergeant Snigge (later a judge under James I), for his opinion. 'Question 9 – Some of the more wealthy farmers in the parish have devised a skilful mode by which all the trouble of executing this Act might be avoided. They have proposed that we shall erect a prison in the parish, and then give notice to the neighbourhood, that if any persons are disposed to farm the poor of this parish, they do give in sealed proposals, on a certain day, of the lowest price at which they will take them off our hands; and that they will be authorised to refuse to any one unless he be shut up in the aforesaid prison. The proposers of this plan conceive that there will be found in the adjoining counties, persons, who, being unwilling to labour and not possessing substance or credit to take a farm or ship, so as to live without labour, may be induced to make a very advantageous offer to the parish. If any of the poor perish under the contractor's care, the sin will lie at his door, as the parish will have done its duty by them. We are, however, apprehensive that the present Act will not warrant a prudential measure of this kind; but you are to learn that the rest of the freeholders of the county, and of the adjoining county of B, will very readily join in instructing their members to propose an Act to enable the parish to contract with a person to lock up and work the poor; and to declare that if any person shall refuse to be so locked up and worked, he shall be entitled to no relief. This, it is hoped, will prevent persons in distress from wanting relief, and be the means of keeping down parishes' (R. Blakey, *The History of Political Literature from the Earliest Times*, London, 1855, Vol. 2, pp. 84–5). In Scotland, the abolition of serfdom took place some centuries later than in England. Fletcher of Saltoun declared as late as 1698, in the Scottish Parliament, 'The number of beggars in Scotland is reckoned at not less than 200,000. The only remedy that I, a republican on principle, can suggest, is to restore the old state of serfdom, to make slaves of all those

* 'The poor man is everywhere in subjection' (Ovid, *Fasti*, Bk I, verse 218).

of the Reformation were not its most lasting ones. The property of the church formed the religious bulwark of the old conditions of landed property. With its fall, these conditions could no longer maintain their existence.[10]

Even in the last few decades of the seventeenth century, the yeomanry, the class of independent peasants, were more numerous than the class of farmers. They had formed the backbone of Cromwell's strength, and, on the admission of Macaulay himself, stood in favourable contrast to the drunken squires and their servants, the country clergy, who had to marry their masters' cast-off mistresses. By about 1750 the yeomanry had disappeared,[11] and so, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, had the last trace of the common land of the agricultural labourer. We leave on one side here the purely economic driving forces behind the agricultural revolution. We deal only with the violent means employed.

After the restoration of the Stuarts, the landed proprietors carried out, by legal means, an act of usurpation which was effected everywhere on the Continent without any legal formality. They abolished the feudal tenure of land, i.e. they got rid of all its obligations to the state, 'indemnified' the state by imposing taxes on the peasantry and the rest of the people, established for

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who are unable to provide for their own subsistence.' Eden (op. cit., Bk I, Ch. 1, pp. 60–61) says: 'The decrease of villeinage seems necessarily to have been the era of the origin of the poor. Manufactures and commerce are the two parents of our national poor.' Eden, like our Scottish republican on principle, is only wrong on this point: not the abolition of villeinage, but the abolition of the property of the agricultural labourer in the soil made him a proletarian, and eventually a pauper. In France, where the expropriation was effected in another way, the Ordinance of Moulins, 1571, and the Edict of 1656, correspond to the English Poor Laws.

10. Mr Rogers, although he was at the time Professor of Political Economy in the University of Oxford, the very centre of Protestant orthodoxy, emphasized the pauperization of the mass of the people by the Reformation in his preface to the *History of Agriculture.*

11. *A Letter to Sir T. C. Bunbury, Bart., on the High Price of Provisions. By a Suffolk Gentleman*, Ipswich, 1795, p. 4. Even that fanatical advocate of the system of large farms, the author of the *Inquiry into the Connection between the Present Price of Provisions, and the Size of Farms, etc.*, London, 1773 [J. Arbuthnot], says on p. 139: 'I most lament the loss of our yeomanry, that set of men who really kept up the independence of this nation; and sorry I am to see their lands now in the hands of monopolizing lords, tenanted out to small farmers, who hold their leases on such conditions as to be little better than vassals ready to attend a summons on every mischievous occasion.'

themselves the rights of modern private property in estates to which they had only a feudal title, and, finally, passed those laws of settlement which had the same effect on the English agricultural labourer, *mutatis mutandis*, as the edict of the Tartar Boris Godunov had on the Russian peasantry.*

The 'glorious Revolution' brought into power, along with William of Orange,[12] the landed and capitalist profit-grubbers. They inaugurated the new era by practising on a colossal scale the thefts of state lands which had hitherto been managed more modestly. These estates were given away, sold at ridiculous prices, or even annexed to private estates by direct seizure.[13] All this happened without the slightest observance of legal etiquette. The Crown lands thus fraudulently appropriated, together with the stolen Church estates, in so far as these were not lost again during the republican revolution, form the basis of the present princely domains of the English oligarchy.[14] The bourgeois capita-

12. On the private morality of this bourgeois hero, among other things: 'The large grant of lands in Ireland to Lady Orkney, in 1695, is a public instance of the king's affection, and the lady's influence... Lady Orkney's endearing offices are supposed to have been – *foeda labiorum ministeria*.'* (In the Sloane Manuscript Collection, at the British Museum, No. 4224. The manuscript is entitled: *The Character and Behaviour of King William, Sunderland, etc., as Represented in Original Letters to the Duke of Shrewsbury from Somers, Halifax, Oxford, Secretary Vernon, etc.* It is full of *curiosa*.)

13. 'The illegal alienation of the Crown Estates, partly by sale and partly by gift, is a scandalous chapter in English history... a gigantic fraud on the nation' (F. W. Newman, *Lectures on Political Economy*, London, 1851, pp. 129–30). [Added by Engels to the fourth German edition:] For details as to how the present large landed proprietors of England came into their possessions, see *Our Old Nobility. By Noblesse Oblige* (N. H. Evans), London, 1879.

14. Read for example Edmund Burke's pamphlet† on the ducal house of Bedford, whose offshoot was Lord John Russell, the 'tomtit of liberalism'.‡

*'Base services performed with the lips'.

†This was the pamphlet produced by Burke in 1796, entitled *A Letter from the Right Honourable Edmund Burke to a Noble Lord, on the Attacks Made upon Him and His Pension, in the House of Lords, by the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale, Early in the Present Session of Parliament.* In it he turned on his former Whig allies, from whom he had parted over the question of the war with France, and demonstrated that the Russells had wrested from the English people a 'quite incredible' number of estates over the centuries.

‡Cobbett compared Lord John Russell with a tom-tit 'endeavouring to put all right with the old oak of the British Constitution by picking at a nest of

*This was the Edict of 1597, by which peasants who had fled from their lords could be pursued for five years and forcibly returned to them when caught.

lists favoured the operation, with the intention, among other things, of converting the land into a merely commercial commodity, extending the area of large-scale agricultural production, and increasing the supply of free and rightless proletarians driven from their land. Apart from this, the new landed aristocracy was the natural ally of the new bankocracy, of newly hatched high finance, and of the large manufacturers, at that time dependent on protective duties. The English bourgeoisie acted quite as wisely in its own interest as the Swedish burghers, who did the opposite: hand in hand with the bulwark of their economic strength, the peasantry, they helped the kings in their forcible resumption of crown lands from the oligarchy, in the years after 1604 and later on under Charles X and Charles XI.

Communal property – which is entirely distinct from the state property we have just been considering – was an old Teutonic institution which lived on under the cover of feudalism. We have seen how its forcible usurpation, generally accompanied by the turning of arable into pasture land, begins at the end of the fifteenth century and extends into the sixteenth. But at that time the process was carried on by means of individual acts of violence against which legislation, for a hundred and fifty years, fought in vain. The advance made by the eighteenth century shows itself in this, that the law itself now becomes the instrument by which the people's land is stolen, although the big farmers made use of their little independent methods as well.[15] The Parliamentary form of the robbery is that of 'Bills for Inclosure of Commons', in other words decrees by which the landowners grant themselves the people's land as private property, decrees of expropriation of the people. Sir F. M. Eden refutes his own crafty special pleading, in which he tries to represent communal property as the private

15. 'The farmers forbid cottagers to keep any living creatures besides themselves and children, under the pretence that if they keep any beasts or poultry, they will steal from the farmers' barns for their support; they also say, keep the cottagers poor and you will keep them industrious, etc., but the real fact, I believe, is that the farmers may have the whole right of common to themselves' (*A Political Inquiry into the Consequences of Enclosing Waste Lands*, London, 1785, p. 75).

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animalculae seated in the half-rotten bark of one of the meanest branches'. This apt characterization of Russell's efforts at parliamentary reform between 1813 and 1830 was adopted by Marx as the keynote for his article 'Lord John Russell' in the *New York Daily Tribune* of 28 August 1855.

property of the great landlords who have taken the place of the feudal lords, when he himself demands a 'general Act of Parliament for the enclosure of Commons' (thereby admitting that a parliamentary *coup d'état* is necessary for their transformation into private property), and moreover calls on the legislature to indemnify the expropriated poor.[16]

While the place of the independent yeoman was taken by tenants at will, small farmers on yearly leases, a servile rabble dependent on the arbitrary will of the landlords, the systematic theft of communal property was of great assistance, alongside the theft of the state domains, in swelling those large farms which were called in the eighteenth century capital farms,[17] or merchant farms,[18] and in 'setting free' the agricultural population as a proletariat for the needs of industry.

The eighteenth century, however, did not yet recognize as fully as the nineteenth the identity between the wealth of the nation and the poverty of the people. Hence the very vigorous polemic, in the economic literature of that time, on the 'enclosure of commons'. From the mass of material that lies before me, I give a few extracts chosen for the strong light they throw on the circumstances of the time. 'In several parishes of Hertfordshire,' writes one indignant person, 'twenty-four farms, numbering on the average 50 to 150 acres, have been melted up into three farms.'[19] 'In Northamptonshire and Leicestershire the enclosure of common lands has taken place on a very large scale, and most of the new lordships, resulting from the enclosure, have been turned into pasturage, in consequence of which many lordships have not now 50 acres ploughed yearly, in which 1,500 were ploughed formerly. The ruins of former dwelling-houses, barns, stables, etc.' are the sole traces of the former inhabitants. 'An hundred houses and families have in some open field villages . . . dwindled to eight or ten . . . The landholders in most parishes that have been enclosed only fifteen or twenty years, are very few in comparison of the

16. Eden, op. cit., Preface [pp. xvii, xix].

17. *Two Letters on the Flour Trade, and the Dearness of Corn. By a Person in Business*, London, 1767, pp. 19–20.

18. *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Present High Price of Provisions*, London, 1767, p. 111, note. This good book, published anonymously, was written by the Rev. Nathaniel Forster.

19. Thomas Wright, *A Short Address to the Public on the Monopoly of Large Farms*, 1779, pp. 2, 3.

numbers who occupied them in their open-field state. It is no uncommon thing for four or five wealthy graziers to engross a large enclosed lordship which was before in the hands of twenty or thirty farmers, and as many smaller tenants and proprietors. All these are hereby thrown out of their livings with their families and many other families who were chiefly employed and supported by them.'[20] It was not only land that lay waste, but often also land that was still under cultivation, being cultivated either in common or held under a definite rent paid to the community, that was annexed by the neighbouring landowners under pretext of enclosure. 'I have here in view enclosures of open fields and lands already improved. It is acknowledged by even the writers in defence of enclosures that these diminished villages increase the monopolies of farms, raise the prices of provisions, and produce depopulation . . . and even the enclosure of waste lands (as now carried on) bears hard on the poor, by depriving them of a part of their subsistence, and only goes towards increasing farms already too large.'[21] 'When,' says Dr Price, 'this land gets into the hands of a few great farmers, the consequence must be that the little farmers' (previously described by him as 'a multitude of little proprietors and tenants, who maintain themselves and families by the produce of the ground they occupy by sheep kept on a common, by poultry, hogs, etc., and who therefore have little occasion to purchase any of the means of subsistence') 'will be converted into a body of men who earn their subsistence by working for others, and who will be under a necessity of going to market for all they want . . . There will, perhaps, be more labour, because there will be more compulsion to it . . . Towns and manufactures will increase, because more will be driven to them in quest of places and employment. This is the way in which the engrossing of farms actually operates. And this is the way in which, for many years, it has been actually operating in this kingdom.'[22] He sums up the effect of the enclosures in this way: 'Upon the whole, the circumstances of the lower ranks of men

20. Rev. Addington, *Inquiry into the Reasons for or against Inclosing Open Fields*, London, 1772, pp. 37–43 passim.

21. Dr R. Price, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 155–6. Forster, Addington, Kent, Price and James Anderson should be read and compared with the miserable prattle of the sycophantic MacCulloch, in his catalogue *The Literature of Political Economy*, London, 1845.

22. Price, op. cit., p. 147.

are altered in almost every respect for the worse. From little occupiers of land, they are reduced to the state of day-labourers and hirelings; and, at the same time, their subsistence in that state has become more difficult.'[23] In fact, the usurpation of the common lands and the accompanying revolution in agriculture had such an acute effect on the agricultural labourers that, even according to Eden, their wages began to fall below the minimum between 1765 and 1780, and to be supplemented by official Poor Law relief. Their wages, he says, 'were not more than enough for the absolute necessaries of life'.

Let us hear for a moment a defender of enclosures and an opponent of Dr Price. 'Nor is it a consequence that there must be depopulation, because men are not seen wasting their labour in the open field . . . If, by converting the little farmers into a body of men who must work for others, more labour is produced, it is an advantage which the nation' (to which, of course, the people who have been 'converted' do not belong) 'should wish for . . . the produce being greater when their joint labours are employed on one farm, there will be a surplus for manufactures, and by this means

23. Price, op. cit., p. 159. We are reminded of ancient Rome. 'The rich had got possession of the greater part of the undivided land. They were confident that, in the conditions of the time, these possessions would never be taken back again from them, and they therefore bought some of the pieces of land lying near theirs, and belonging to the poor, with the acquiescence of the latter, and the rest they took by force, so that now they were cultivating widely extended domains, instead of isolated fields. Then they employed slaves in agriculture and cattle-breeding, because the free men had been taken away from labour to do military service. The possession of slaves brought great gains to them, in that the slaves, on account of their exemption from military service, could multiply without risk and therefore had great numbers of children. Thus the powerful men drew all wealth to themselves, and the whole land swarmed with slaves. The Italians, on the other hand, were always decreasing in number, worn down as they were by poverty, taxation, and military service. Even in times of peace, they were doomed to complete inactivity, because the rich were in possession of the soil, and used slaves instead of free men to cultivate it' (Appian, *The Roman Civil Wars*, Bk I, Ch. 7). This passage refers to the time before the Licinian Law.* Military service, which hastened to so great an extent the ruin of the Roman plebeians, was also the chief means by which, as in a forcing-house, Charlemagne brought about the transformation of free German peasants into serfs and bondsmen.

*The Licinian Law, passed in 367 B.C., was an attempt to remedy these inequalities. Appian says it provided that 'nobody should hold more than 500 *jugera* of public land, or pasture on it more than 100 cattle or 500 sheep' (*The Roman Civil Wars*, Bk. I, Ch. 8).

manufactures, one of the mines of the nation, will increase, in proportion to the quantity of corn produced.'[24]

The stoical peace of mind with which the political economist regards the most shameless violation of the 'sacred rights of property' and the grossest acts of violence against persons, as soon as they are necessary in order to lay the foundations of the capitalist mode of production, is shown by Sir F. M. Eden, who is, moreover, Tory and 'philanthropic' in his political colouring. The whole series of thefts, outrages and popular misery that accompanied the forcible expropriation of the people, from the last third of the fifteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, leads him merely to this 'comfortable' concluding reflection: 'The due proportion between arable land and pasture had to be established. During the whole of the fourteenth and the greater part of the fifteenth century, there was 1 acre of pasture to 2, 3, and even 4 of arable land. About the middle of the sixteenth century the proportion was changed to 2 acres of pasture to 2, later on, to 2 acres of pasture to 1 of arable, until at last the just proportion of 3 acres of pasture to 1 of arable land was attained.'

By the nineteenth century, the very memory of the connection between the agricultural labourer and communal property had, of course, vanished. To say nothing of more recent times – have the agricultural population received a farthing's compensation for the 3,511,770 acres of common land which between 1801 and 1831 were stolen from them and presented to the landlords by the landlords, through the agency of Parliament?

The last great process of expropriation of the agricultural population from the soil is, finally, the so-called 'clearing of estates', i.e. the sweeping of human beings off them. All the English methods hitherto considered culminated in 'clearing'. As we saw in the description of modern conditions given in a previous chapter, when there are no more independent peasants to get rid of, the 'clearing' of cottages begins; so that the agricultural labourers no longer find on the soil they cultivate even

24. [J. Arbuthnot,] *An Inquiry into the Connection between the Present Price of Provisions, etc.*, pp. 124, 129. Here is a similar argument, but with an opposite tendency: 'Working-men are driven from their cottages and forced into the towns to seek for employment; but then a larger surplus is obtained, and thus capital is augmented' ([R. B. Seeley,] *The Perils of the Nation*, 2nd edn, London, 1843, p. xiv.)

the necessary space for their own housing. But what 'clearing of estates' really and properly signifies, we learn only in the Highlands of Scotland, the promised land of modern romantic novels. There the process is distinguished by its systematic character, by the magnitude of the scale on which it is carried out at one blow (in Ireland landlords have gone as far as sweeping away several villages at once; but in the Highlands areas as large as German principalities are dealt with), and finally by the peculiar form of property under which the embezzled lands were held.

The Highland Celts were organized in clans, each of which was the owner of the land on which it was settled. The representative of the clan, its chief or 'great man', was only the titular owner of this property, just as the Queen of England is the titular owner of all the national soil. When the English government succeeded in suppressing the intestine wars of these 'great men', and their constant incursions into the Lowland plains, the chiefs of the clans by no means gave up their time-honoured trade as robbers; they merely changed its form. On their own authority, they transformed their nominal right to the land into a right of private property, and as this came up against resistance on the part of their clansmen, they resolved to drive them out openly and by force. 'A king of England might as well claim to drive his subjects into the sea,' says Professor Newman.[25] This revolution, which began in Scotland after the last rising of the followers of the Pretender,* can be followed through its first phases in the writings of Sir James Steuart[26] and James Anderson.[27] In the eighteenth century the Gaels were both driven from the land and forbidden to emigrate, with a view to driving them forcibly to

25. F. W. Newman, op. cit., p. 132.

26. Steuart says: 'If you compare the rent of these lands' (he erroneously includes in this economic category the tribute paid by the taksmen* to the chief of the clan) 'with the extent, it appears very small. If you compare it with the numbers fed upon the farm, you will find that an estate in the Highlands maintains, perhaps, ten times as many people as another of the same value in a good and fertile province' (op. cit., Vol. 1, Ch. 16, p. 104).

27. James Anderson, *Observations on the Means of Exciting a Spirit of National Industry, etc.*, Edinburgh, 1777.

*The taksmen were the immediate subordinates of the laird, or chief, of the clan. They were the actual holders of the land, the 'tak', and paid a nominal sum to the laird in recognition of his suzerainty.

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*The rising of 1745–6 in favour of the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart.

Glasgow and other manufacturing towns.[28] As an example of the method used in the nineteenth century,[29] the 'clearings' made by the Duchess of Sutherland will suffice here. This person, who had been well instructed in economics, resolved, when she succeeded to the headship of the clan, to undertake a radical economic cure, and to turn the whole county of Sutherland, the population of which had already been reduced to 15,000 by similar processes, into a sheep-walk. Between 1814 and 1820 these 15,000 inhabitants, about 3,000 families, were systematically hunted and rooted out. All their villages were destroyed and burnt, all their fields turned into pasturage. British soldiers enforced this mass of evictions, and came to blows with the inhabitants. One old woman was burnt to death in the flames of the hut she refused to leave. It was in this manner that this fine lady appropriated 794,000 acres of land which had belonged to the clan from time immemorial. She assigned to the expelled inhabitants some 6,000 acres on the sea-shore – 2 acres per family. The 6,000 acres had until this time lain waste, and brought in no income to their owners. The Duchess, in the nobility of her heart,

28. In 1860 some of the people who had been expropriated by force were exported to Canada under false pretences. Others fled to the mountains and neighbouring islands. They were followed by the police, came to blows with them and escaped.

29. 'In the Highlands of Scotland,' says Buchanan, in his commentary on Adam Smith, published in 1814, 'the ancient state of property is daily subverted ... The landlord, without regard to the hereditary tenant' (this too is a wrongly applied category in this case) 'now offers his land to the highest bidder, who, if he is an improver, instantly adopts a new system of cultivation. The land, formerly overspread with small tenants or labourers, was peopled in proportion to its produce, but under the new system of improved cultivation and increased rents, the largest possible produce is obtained at the lea t possible expense; and the useless hands being, with this view, removed, the population is reduced, not to what the land will maintain, but to what it will employ ... The dispossessed tenants ... seek a subsistence in the neighbouring towns, etc.' (David Buchanan, *Observations on, etc., A. Smith's Wealth of Nations*, Edinburgh, 1814, Vol. 4, p. 144). 'The Scotch grandees dispossessed families as they would grub up coppice-wood, and they treated villages and their people as Indians harassed with wild beasts do, in their vengeance, a jungle with tigers ... Man is bartered for a fleece or a carcase of mutton, nay, held cheaper ... Why, how much worse is it than the intention of the Moguls, who, when they had broken into the northern provinces of China, proposed in council to exterminate the inhabitants, and convert the land into pasture. This proposal many Highland proprietors have effected in their own country against their own countrymen' (George Ensor, *An Inquiry Concerning the Population of Nations*, London, 1818, pp. 215–16).

actually went so far as to let these waste lands at an average rent of 2s. 6d. per acre to the clansmen, who for centuries had shed their blood for her family. She divided the whole of the stolen land of the clan into twenty-nine huge sheep farms, each inhabited by a single family, for the most part imported English farm-servants. By 1825 the 15,000 Gaels had already been replaced by 131,000 sheep. The remnant of the original inhabitants, who had been flung onto the sea-shore, tried to live by catching fish. They became amphibious, and lived, as an English writer says, half on land and half on water, and withal only half on both.[30]

But the splendid Gaels had now to suffer still more bitterly for their romantic mountain idolization of the 'great men' of the clan. The smell of their fish rose to the noses of the great men. They scented some profit in it, and let the sea-shore to the big London fishmongers. For the second time the Gaels were driven out.[31]

Finally, however, part of the sheep-walks were turned into deer preserves. Everyone knows that there are no true forests in England. The deer in the parks of the great are demure domestic cattle, as fat as London aldermen. Scotland is therefore the last refuge of the 'noble passion'. 'In the Highlands,' reports Somers in 1848, 'new forests are springing up like mushrooms. Here, on one side of Gaick, you have the new forest of Glenfeshie; and there on the other you have the new forest of Ardverikie. In the same line you have the Black Mount, an immense waste also recently erected. From east to west – from the neighbourhood of

30. When the present Duchess of Sutherland entertained Mrs Beecher Stowe, authoress of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with great magnificence in London to show her sympathy for the Negro slaves of the American republic – a sympathy she prudently forgot, along with her fellow-aristocrats, during the Civil War, when every 'noble' English heart beat for the slave-owners – I gave the facts about the Sutherland slaves in the *New York Tribune*.* (Some extracts from this were printed by Carey in *The Slave Trade*, Philadelphia, 1853, pp. 202–3.) My article was reprinted in a Scottish newspaper, and it called forth a nice polemic between that newspaper and the sycophants of the Sutherlands.

31. Interesting details on this fish trade will be found in Mr David Urquhart's *Portfolio, New Series*. Nassau W. Senior, in his posthumous work, already quoted, describes 'the proceedings in Sutherlandshire' as 'one of the most beneficent clearings since the memory of man' (op. cit., p. 282).

*'The Duchess of Sutherland and Slavery', *New York Daily Tribune*, 9 February 1853. This article was published in almost identical form on 12 March 1853 in the Chartist *People's Paper*, from where it is reprinted in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Articles on Britain*, Moscow, 1971, pp. 143–9.

Aberdeen to the crags of Oban – you have now a continuous line of forests; while in other parts of the Highlands there are the new forests of Loch Archaig, Glengarry, Glenmoriston, etc. Sheep were introduced into glens which had been the seats of communities of small farmers; and the latter were driven to seek subsistence on coarser and more sterile tracts of soil. Now deer are supplanting sheep; and these are once more dispossessing the small tenants, who will necessarily be driven down upon still coarser land and to more grinding penury. Deer-forests[32] and the people cannot co-exist. One or other of the two must yield. Let the forests be increased in number and extent during the next quarter of a century, as they have been in the last, and the Gaels will perish from their native soil ... This movement among the Highland proprietors is with some a matter of ambition ... with some love of sport ... while others, of a more practical cast, follow the trade in deer with an eye solely to profit. For it is a fact, that a mountain range laid out in forest is, in many cases, more profitable to the proprietor than when let as a sheep-walk ... The huntsman who wants a deer-forest limits his offers by no other calculation than the extent of his purse ... Sufferings have been inflicted in the Highlands scarcely less severe than those occasioned by the policy of the Norman kings. Deer have received extended ranges, while men have been hunted within a narrower and still narrower circle ... One after one the liberties of the people have been cloven down ... And the oppressions are daily on the increase ... The clearance and dispersion of the people is pursued by the proprietors as a settled principle, as an agricultural necessity, just as trees and brushwood are cleared from the wastes of America or Australia; and the operation goes on in a quiet, business-like way, etc.'[33]

32. The deer-forests of Scotland do not contain a single tree. The sheep are driven from, and then the deer driven to, the naked hills, and this is then called a deer-forest. Not even timber-planting and real forest culture.

33. Robert Somers, *Letters from the Highlands; or the Famine of 1847*, London, 1848, pp. 12–28 passim. These letters originally appeared in *The Times*. The English economists of course explained the famine of the Gaels in 1847 by referring to – over-population. At all events, they were 'pressing' on their food supply. The 'clearing of estates', or as it is called in German, '*Bauernlegen*', made its influence felt in Germany especially after the Thirty Years' War, and, as late as 1790, led to peasant revolts in Electoral Saxony. *Bauernlegen* was particularly prevalent in the eastern part of Germany. In most of the Prussian provinces, Frederick II for the first time secured property rights for the peasants. After the conquest of Silesia, he forced the landowners

to rebuild huts, barns, etc. and to provide the peasants with cattle and implements. He wanted soldiers for his army, and taxpayers for his treasury. For the rest, the pleasant life led by the peasant under Frederick's financial system and his governmental hotch-potch of despotism, bureaucracy and feudalism may be seen from the following quotation from his admirer Mirabeau: 'Flax represents one of the greatest sources of wealth for the peasant of North Germany. Unfortunately for the human race, this is only a resource against misery and not a means towards well-being. Direct taxes, forced labour services, obligations of all kinds, crush the German peasant, especially as he still has to pay indirect taxes on everything he buys . . . and to complete his ruin he dare not sell his produce where and as he wishes; he dare not buy what he needs from the merchants who could sell it to him at a cheaper price. He is slowly ruined by all these factors, and when the direct taxes fall due, he would find himself incapable of paying them without his spinning-wheel; it offers him a last resort, while providing useful occupation for his wife, his children, his maids, his farm-hands, and himself; but what a painful life he leads, even with this extra resource! In summer, he works like a convict with the plough and at harvest; he goes to bed at nine o'clock and rises at two to get through all his work; in winter he ought to be recovering his strength by sleeping longer; but he would run short of corn for his bread and next year's sowing if he got rid of the products that he needs to sell in order to pay the taxes. He therefore has to spin to fill up this gap . . . and indeed he must do so most assiduously. Thus the peasant goes to bed at midnight or one o'clock in winter, and gets up at five or six; or he goes to bed at nine and gets up at two, and this he does every day of his life except Sundays. These excessively short hours of sleep and long hours of work consume a person's strength, and hence it happens that men and women age much more in the country than in the towns' (Mirabeau, op. cit., Vol. 3, pp. 212 ff.). In March 1866, eighteen years after the publication of the work of Robert Somers quoted above, Professor Leone Levi gave a lecture before the Society of Arts on the transformation of sheep-walks into deer-forests, in which he depicted the further progress in the devastation of the Scottish Highlands. He says, among other things: 'Depopulation and transformation into sheep-walks were the most convenient means for getting an income without expenditure . . . A deer-forest in place of a sheep-walk was a common change in the Highlands. The landowners turned out the sheep as they once turned out the men from their estates, and welcomed the new tenants – the wild beasts and the feathered birds . . . One can walk from the Earl of Dalhousie's estates in Forfarshire to John o' Groats, without ever leaving forest land . . . In many of these woods the fox, the wild cat, the marten, the pole-cat, the weasel and the Alpine hare are common; whilst the rabbit, the squirrel and the rat have lately made their way into the country. Immense tracts of land, much of which is described in the statistical account of Scotland as having a pasturage in richness and extent of very superior description, are thus shut out from all cultivation and improvement, and are solely devoted to the sport of a few persons for a very brief period of the year.' The London *Economist* of 2 June 1866 says, 'Amongst the items of news in a Scotch paper of last week, we read . . . "One of the finest sheep farms in Sutherlandshire, for which a rent of £1,200 a year was recently offered, on the expiry of the existing lease this year, is to be converted into a deer-forest." Here we see the modern instincts of feudalism . . . operating

The spoliation of the Church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the theft of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of ruthless terrorism, all these things were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, incorporated the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians.

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pretty much as they did when the Norman Conqueror ... destroyed thirty-six villages to create the New Forest ... Two millions of acres ... totally laid waste, embracing within their area some of the most fertile lands of Scotland. The natural grass of Glen Tilt was among the most nutritive in the county of Perth. The deer-forest of Ben Aulder was by far the best grazing ground in the wide district of Badenoch; a part of the Black Mount forest was the best pasture for black-faced sheep in Scotland. Some idea of the ground laid waste for purely sporting purposes in Scotland may be formed from the fact that it embraced an area larger than the whole county of Perth. The resources of the forest of Ben Aulder might give some idea of the loss sustained from the forced desolations. The ground would pasture 15,000 sheep, and as it was not more than one-thirtieth part of the whole forest ground in Scotland ... (the amount of pasture lost can be imagined). All that forest land is totally unproductive ... It might just as well have been submerged under the waters of the North Sea ... Such extemporized wildernesses or deserts ought to be put down by the decided interference of the Legislature.'

Chapter 28: Bloody Legislation against the Expropriated since the End of the Fifteenth Century. The Forcing Down of Wages by Act of Parliament

The proletariat created by the breaking-up of the bands of feudal retainers and by the forcible expropriation of the people from the soil, this free and rightless* proletariat could not possibly be absorbed by the nascent manufactures as fast as it was thrown upon the world. On the other hand, these men, suddenly dragged from their accustomed mode of life, could not immediately adapt themselves to the discipline of their new condition. They were turned in massive quantities into beggars, robbers and vagabonds, partly from inclination, in most cases under the force of circumstances. Hence at the end of the fifteenth and during the whole of the sixteenth centuries, a bloody legislation against vagabondage was enforced throughout Western Europe. The fathers of the present working class were chastised for their enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers. Legislation treated them as 'voluntary' criminals, and assumed that it was entirely within their powers to go on working under the old conditions which in fact no longer existed.

In England this legislation began under Henry VII.

Henry VIII, 1530: Beggars who are old and incapable of working receive a beggar's licence. On the other hand, whipping and imprisonment for sturdy vagabonds. They are to be tied to the cart-tail and whipped until the blood streams from their bodies, then they are to swear on oath to go back to their birthplace or to where they have lived the last three years and to 'put themselves to labour'. What grim irony! By 27 Henry VIII [c. 25] the previous statute is repeated, but strengthened with new clauses. For the second arrest for vagabondage the whipping is to be repeated and half the ear sliced off; but for the third relapse the

* Here, as elsewhere in this context, Marx uses the word *'vogelfrei'*, literally 'as free as a bird', i.e. free but outside the human community and therefore entirely unprotected and without legal rights.

offender is to be executed as a hardened criminal and enemy of the commonweal.

Edward VI: A statute of the first year of his reign, 1547,* ordains that if anyone refuses to work, he shall be condemned as a slave to the person who has denounced him as an idler. The master shall feed his slave on bread and water, weak broth and such refuse meat as he thinks fit. He has the right to force him to do any work, no matter how disgusting, with whip and chains. If the slave is absent for a fortnight, he is condemned to slavery for life and is to be branded on forehead or back with the letter S; if he runs away three times, he is to be executed as a felon. The master can sell him, bequeath him, let him out on hire as a slave, just as he can any other personal chattel or cattle. If the slaves attempt anything against the masters, they are also to be executed. Justices of the peace, on information, are to hunt the rascals down. If it happens that a vagabond has been idling about for three days, he is to be taken to his birthplace, branded with a red hot iron with the letter V on the breast, and set to work, in chains, on the roads or at some other labour. If the vagabond gives a false birthplace, he is then to become the slave for life of that place, of its inhabitants, or its corporation, and to be branded with an S. All persons have the right to take away the children of the vagabonds and keep them as apprentices, the young men until they are 24, the girls until they are 20. If they run away, they are to become, until they reach these ages, the slaves of their masters, who can put them in irons, whip them, etc. if they like. Every master may put an iron ring round the neck, arms or legs of his slave, by which to know him more easily and to be more certain of him.[1] The last part of this statute provides that certain poor people may be employed by a place or by persons who are willing to give them food and drink and to find them work. Slaves of the parish of this kind were still to be found in England in the mid nineteenth century under the name of 'roundsmen'.

Elizabeth, 1572:† Unlicensed beggars above 14 years of age are to be severely flogged and branded on the left ear unless some-

1. The author of the *Essay on Trade, etc.*, 1770, says: 'In the reign of Edward VI indeed the English seem to have set, in good earnest, about encouraging manufactures and employing the poor. This we learn from a remarkable statute which runs thus: "That all vagrants shall be branded, etc." ' (p. 5).

*An Act for the Punishing of Vagabonds, 1 Edward VI, c. 3.

†An Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds, 14 Elizabeth I, c. 5.

one will take them into service for two years; in case of a repetition of the offence, if they are over 18, they are to be executed, unless someone will take them into service for two years; but for the third offence they are to be executed without mercy as felons. Similar statutes: 18 Elizabeth, c. 13, and another of 1597.[2]

James I: Anyone wandering about and begging is declared a rogue and a vagabond. Justices of the peace in Petty Sessions are authorized to have them publicly whipped and to imprison them for six months for the first offence, and two years for the second. While in prison they are to be whipped as much and as often as the justices of the peace think fit ... Incorrigible and dangerous rogues are to be branded with an R on the left shoulder

2. Thomas More says in his *Utopia*: 'Consequently, in order that one insatiable glutton and accursed plague of his native land may join field to field and surround many thousand acres with one fence, tenants are evicted. Some of them, either circumvented by fraud or overwhelmed by violence, are stripped even of their own property, or else, wearied by unjust acts, are driven to sell. By hook or by crook the poor wretches are compelled to leave their homes – men and women, husbands and wives, orphans and widows, parents with little children and a household not rich but numerous, since farm work requires many hands. Away they must go, I say, from the only homes familiar and known to them, and they find no shelter to go to. All their household goods which would not fetch a great price if they could wait for a purchaser, since they must be thrust out, they sell for a trifle. After they have soon spent that trifle in wandering from place to place, what remains for them but to steal and be hanged – justly, you may say! – or to wander and beg. And yet even in the latter case they are cast into prison as vagrants for going about idle when, though they most eagerly offer their labour, there is no one to hire them.' Out of these poor fugitives, of whom Thomas More says that they were forced to steal, '72,000 great and petty thieves were put to death,' in the reign of Henry VIII (Holinshed, *Description of England*, Vol. 1, p. 186).* In Elizabeth's time, 'rogues were trussed up apace, and there was not one year commonly wherein three or four hundred were not devoured and eaten up by the gallowes' (Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church of England during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign*, 2nd edn, 1725, Vol. 2). According to this same Strype, in Somersetshire in one year 40 persons were executed, 35 robbers burnt in the hand, 37 whipped and 183 discharged as 'incorrigible vagabonds'. Nevertheless, he is of the opinion that this large number of prisoners does not comprise 'even a fifth of the actual criminals, thanks to the negligence of the justices and the foolish compassion of the people', and that the other counties of England were not better off in this respect than Somersetshire, while some were even worse off.

*This is in fact the *Description of England* by William Harrison (referred to earlier), Ch. 11, 'Of Sundry Kinds of Punishments Appointed for Malefactors', p. 193.

and set to hard labour, and if they are caught begging again, to be executed without mercy. These statutes were legally binding until the beginning of the eighteenth century; they were only repealed by 12 Anne, c. 23.

There were similar laws in France, where by the middle of the seventeenth century a kingdom of vagabonds (*royaume des truands*) had been established in Paris. Even at the beginning of the reign of Louis XVI, the Ordinance of 13 July 1777 provided that every man in good health from 16 to 60 years of age, if without means of subsistence and not practising a trade, should be sent to the galleys. The Statute of Charles V for the Netherlands (October 1537), the first Edict of the States and Towns of Holland (10 March 1614) and the *Plakaat* of the United Provinces (26 June 1649) are further examples of the same kind.

Thus were the agricultural folk first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded and tortured by grotesquely terroristic laws into accepting the discipline necessary for the system of wage-labour.

It is not enough that the conditions of labour are concentrated at one pole of society in the shape of capital, while at the other pole are grouped masses of men who have nothing to sell but their labour-power. Nor is it enough that they are compelled to sell themselves voluntarily. The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance. The constant generation of a relative surplus population keeps the law of the supply and demand of labour, and therefore wages, within narrow limits which correspond to capital's valorization requirements. The silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker. Direct extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases. In the ordinary run of things, the worker can be left to the 'natural laws of production', i.e. it is possible to rely on his dependence on capital, which springs from the conditions of production themselves, and is guaranteed in perpetuity by them. It is otherwise during the historical genesis of capitalist production. The rising bourgeoisie needs the power of the state, and uses it to 'regulate' wages, i.e. to force them into the limits

suitable for making a profit, to lengthen the working day, and to keep the worker himself at his normal level of dependence. This is an essential aspect of so-called primitive accumulation.

The class of wage-labourers, which arose in the latter half of the fourteenth century, formed then and in the following century only a very small part of the population, well protected in its position by the independent peasant proprietors in the countryside and by the organization of guilds in the towns. Masters and artisans were not separated by any great social distance either on the land or in the towns. The subordination of labour to capital was only formal, i.e. the mode of production itself had as yet no specifically capitalist character. The variable element in capital preponderated greatly over the constant element. The demand for wage-labour therefore grew rapidly with every accumulation of capital, while the supply only followed slowly behind. A large part of the national product which was later transformed into a fund for the accumulation of capital still entered at that time into the consumption-fund of the workers.

Legislation on wage-labour, which aimed from the first at the exploitation of the worker and, as it progressed, remained equally hostile to him,[3] begins in England with the Statute of Labourers issued by Edward III in 1349. The Ordinance of 1350 in France, issued in the name of King John, corresponds to it. The English and French laws run parallel and are identical in content. Where these labour-statutes aim at a compulsory extension of the working day, I shall not return to them, as we discussed this point earlier (in Chapter 10, Section 5).

The Statute of Labourers was passed at the urgent insistence of the House of Commons. A Tory says naïvely: 'Formerly the poor demanded such *high* wages as to threaten industry and wealth. Next, their wages are so *low* as to threaten industry and wealth equally and perhaps more, but in another way.'[4] A tariff of wages was fixed by law for town and country, for piece-work and day-

3. 'Whenever the legislature attempts to regulate the differences between masters and their workmen, its counsellors are always the masters,' says Adam Smith.* 'The spirit of the laws is property,' says Linguet.†

4. [J. B. Byles,] *Sophisms of Free Trade. By a Barrister*, London, 1850, p. 206. He adds maliciously: 'We were ready enough to interfere for the employer, can nothing now be done for the employed?'

*Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Vol. 1, Edinburgh, 1814, p. 142.

†S.-N.-H. Linguet, *Théorie des lois civiles, ou principes fondamentaux de la société*, Vol. 1, London, 1767, p. 236.

work. The agricultural labourers were to hire themselves out by the year, the urban workers were to do so 'on the open market'. It was forbidden, on pain of imprisonment, to pay higher wages than those fixed by the statute, but the taking of higher wages was more severely punished than the giving of them (similarly, in Sections 18 and 19 of Elizabeth's Statute of Apprentices, ten days' imprisonment is decreed for the person who pays the higher wages, but twenty-one days for the person who receives those wages). A statute of 1360 increased the penalties and authorized the masters to extort labour at the legal rate of wages by using corporal punishment. All combinations, contracts, oaths, etc. by which masons and carpenters reciprocally bound themselves were declared null and void. Workers' combinations are treated as heinous crimes from the fourteenth century until 1825, the year of the repeal of the laws against combinations. The spirit of the Statute of Labourers of 1349 and its offshoots shines out clearly in the fact that while the state certainly dictates a maximum of wages, it on no account fixes a minimum.

In the sixteenth century, as we know, the condition of the workers became much worse. The money wage rose, but not in proportion to the depreciation of money and the corresponding rise in the prices of commodities. Real wages therefore fell. Nevertheless, the laws for keeping them down remained in force, together with the ear-clipping and branding of those 'whom no one was willing to take into service'. By 5 Elizabeth, c. 3 (the Statute of Apprentices), the justices of the peace were given the power to fix certain wages and to modify them according to the time of the year and the current prices of commodities. James I extended these labour regulations to weavers, spinners and indeed to all other possible categories of worker.[5] George II extended

5. From a clause in the statute 2 James I, c. 6, we see that certain clothiers took it upon themselves, in their capacity of justices of the peace, to dictate the official tariff of wages in their own workshops. In Germany, especially after the Thirty Years' War, statutes for keeping down wages are met with frequently. 'The shortage of servants and labourers was very troublesome to the landed proprietors in the depopulated districts. All villagers were forbidden to let rooms to single men and women; all the latter were to be reported to the authorities and thrown into prison if they were unwilling to become servants, even if they were employed at any other work, such as sowing seeds for the peasants at a daily wage, or even buying and selling corn (*Kaiserliche Privilegia und Sanctiones für Schlesien*, I, 125). For a whole century the decrees of the German princelings contain bitter and repeated complaints about the wicked and impertinent rabble, which will not reconcile itself to its

the laws against combinations of workers to all manufactures.*

In the period of manufacture properly so called, the capitalist mode of production had become sufficiently strong to render legal regulation of wages as impracticable as it was unnecessary; but the ruling classes were unwilling to be without the weapons of the old arsenal in case some emergency should arise. Hence, even in the eighteenth century, 7 George I, c. 13, forbade a daily wage higher than 2s. 7½d. for journeymen tailors in and around London, except in cases of general mourning; 13 George III, c. 68, handed over to the justices of the peace the task of regulating the wages of silk-weavers; in 1796 it required two judgements of the higher courts to decide whether the orders made by justices of the peace as to wages also held good for non-agricultural workers; and in 1799 Parliament confirmed that the wages of mining workers in Scotland should continue to be regulated by a statute of Elizabeth and two Scottish Acts of 1661 and 1671. How completely the situation had been transformed in the meantime is proved by a hitherto unheard-of occurrence in the House of Commons. There, where for more than 400 years laws had been made for the maximum beyond which wages absolutely must not rise, Whitbread in 1796 proposed a legal minimum wage for agricultural labourers. Pitt opposed this, but conceded that the 'condition of the poor was cruel'. Finally, in 1813, the laws for the regulation of wages were repealed. They became an absurd anomaly as soon as the capitalist began to regulate his factory by his own private legislation, and was able to make up the wage of the agricultural labourer to the indispensable minimum by means of the poor-rate. The provisions of the statutes of labourers as to contracts between master and workman, regarding giving notice and the like, which allow only a civil action against the master

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harsh conditions, and will not be content with its wage as laid down by law. The individual landowners are forbidden to pay more than the state has fixed by a tariff. And yet the conditions of service were at times better after the war than 100 years later; the farm servants of Silesia had meat twice a week in 1652, whereas even in our century there are districts where they have it only three times a year. Moreover, wages after the war were higher than in the succeeding centuries' (G. Freytag).*

*G. Freytag, *Neue Bilder aus dem Leben des deutschen Volkes*, Leipzig, 1862, pp. 35–6.

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*By 22 George II, c. 27.

who breaks his contract, but permit, on the contrary, a criminal action against the worker who breaks his contract, are still in full force at this moment.*

The barbarous laws against combinations of workers collapsed in 1825 in the face of the threatening attitude of the proletariat. Despite this, they disappeared only in part. Certain pretty survivals of the old statutes did not vanish until 1859. Finally, the Act of 29 June 1871 purported to remove the last traces of this class legislation by giving legal recognition to trade unions.† But another Act, of the same date ('An act to amend the criminal law relating to violence, threats and molestation'),‡ in fact re-established the previous situation in a new form. This Parliamentary conjuring-trick withdrew the means the workers could use in a strike or lock-out from the common law and placed them under exceptional penal legislation, the interpretation of which fell to the manufacturers themselves in their capacity of justices of the peace. Two years earlier, the same House of Commons, and the same Mr Gladstone, in the customary honourable fashion, had brought in a bill for the removal of all exceptional penal le islation against the working class. But it was never allowed to go beyond the second reading, and the matter was drawn out in this way until at length the 'great Liberal party', by an alliance with the Tories, found the courage to turn decisively against the very proletariat that had carried it into power. Not content with this betrayal, the 'great Liberal party' allowed the English judges, ever ready to wag their tails for the ruling classes, to exhume the earlier laws against 'conspiracy' and apply them to combinations of workers. It is evident that only against its will, and under the pressure of the masses, did the English Parliament give up the laws against strikes and trade unions, after it had itself, with shameless egoism, held the position of a permanent trade union of the capitalists against the workers throughout five centuries.

During the very first storms of the revolution, the French bourgeoisie dared to take away from the workers the right of association they had just acquired. By a decree of 14 June 1791, they declared that every combination by the workers was 'an assault on liberty and the declaration of the rights of man',

* Until the passing of the Employers and Workmen Act in 1875 (38 and 39 Victoria, c. 90).

† Trade Union Act, 34 and 35 Victoria, c. 31.

‡ Criminal Law Amendment Act, 34 and 35 Victoria, c. 32.

punishable by a fine of 500 livres, together with deprivation of the rights of an active citizen for one year.[6] This law, which used state compulsion to confine the struggle between capital and labour within limits convenient for capital, has outlived revolutions and changes of dynasties. Even the Terror left it untouched. It was only struck out of the Penal Code quite recently. Nothing is more characteristic than the pretext for this bourgeois *coup d'état*. 'Granting,' says Le Chapelier, the *rapporteur* of the Committee on this law, 'that wages ought to be a little higher than they are . . . that they ought to be high enough for him that receives them to be free from that state of absolute dependence which results from the lack of the necessaries of life, and which is almost a state of slavery,' granting this, the workers must nevertheless not be permitted to inform themselves about their own interests, nor to act in common and thereby lessen their 'absolute dependence', 'which is almost a state of slavery', because by doing this they infringe 'the liberty of their former masters, who are the present *entrepreneurs*', and because a combination against the despotism of the former masters of the corporations is – guess what! – a restoration of the corporations abolished by the French constitution![7]

6. Article I of this law runs: 'As the abolition of any form of association between citizens of the same estate and profession is one of the foundations of the French constitution, it is forbidden to re-establish them under any pretext and in any form, whatever this might be.' Article IV declares that if 'citizens belonging to the same profession, craft, or trade have joint discussions and make joint decisions with the intention of refusing together to perform their trade or insisting together on providing the services of their trade or their labours only at a particular price, then the said deliberations and agreements . . . shall be declared unconstitutional, derogatory to liberty and the declaration of the rights of man, etc.'; this is made a felony, therefore, just as in the old statutes of labourers. (*Révolutions de Paris*, Paris, 1791, Vol. 3, p. 523.)

7. Buchez and Roux, *Histoire parlementaire*, Vol. 10, pp. 193–5 passim.

Chapter 29: The Genesis of the Capitalist Farmer

Now that we have considered the forcible creation of a class of free and rightless proletarians, the bloody discipline that turned them into wage-labourers, the disgraceful proceedings of the state which employed police methods to accelerate the accumulation of capital by increasing the degree of exploitation of labour, the question remains: where did the capitalists originally spring from? For the only class created directly by the expropriation of the agricultural population is that of the great landed proprietors. As far as the genesis of the farmers is concerned, however, we can so to speak put our finger on it, because it is a slow process evolving through many centuries. The serfs, as well as the free small-scale proprietors, held land under very different tenures, and were therefore emancipated under very different economic conditions.

In England, the first form of the farmer is the bailiff, himself a serf. His position is similar to that of the *villicus* in ancient Rome, only in a more limited sphere of action. During the second half of the fourteenth century he is replaced by a farmer, whom the landlord provides with seed, cattle and farm implements. The farmer's condition is not very different from that of the peasant, but he exploits more wage-labour. Soon he becomes a *métayer*, a share-cropper. He advances one part of the agricultural stock, the landlord the other. The two divide the total product in proportions determined by contract. This form disappears quickly in England, and gives place to the form of the farmer properly so called, who valorizes his own capital by employing wage-labourers, and pays a part of the surplus product, in money or in kind, to the landlord as ground rent.

During the fifteenth century the independent peasant, and the farm-labourer working for himself as well as for wages, enriched themselves by their own labour; and as long as this was the case,

both the farmer's circumstances and his field of production remained mediocre. But the agricultural revolution which began in the last third of the fifteenth century, and continued during the bulk of the sixteenth (excepting, however, its last few decades), enriched him just as quickly as it impoverished the mass of the agricultural folk.[1] The usurpation of the common lands allowed the farmer to augment greatly his stock of cattle, almost without cost, while the cattle themselves yielded a richer supply of manure for the cultivation of the soil.

A further factor, of decisive importance, was added in the sixteenth century. At that time the contracts for farms ran for a long time, often for ninety-nine years. The progressive fall in the value of the precious metals, and therefore of money, brought golden fruit to the farmers. Apart from all the other circumstances discussed above, it lowered wages. A portion of the latter was now added to the profits of the farm. The continuous rise in the prices of corn, wool, meat, in short of all agricultural products, swelled the money capital of the farmer without any action on his part, while the ground rent he had to pay diminished, since it had been contracted for on the basis of the old money values.[2] Thus he grew

1. Harrison, in his *Description of England*, says: 'although peradventure £4 of old rent be improved to £40, £50, or £100, yet will the farmer . . . think his gains very small toward the end of his term if he have not six or seven years' rent lying by him.'*

2. On the influence of the depreciation of money in the sixteenth century on the different classes of society, see *A Compendious or Briefe Examination of Certayne Ordinary Complaints, of Divers of Our Country Men in These Our Days*, By W. S., Gentleman, London, 1581. The dialogue form of this work led people for a long time to ascribe it to Shakespeare, and it was re-published under his name as late as 1751. Its author is William Stafford. In one place the knight reasons as follows:

'Knight: You, my neighbour, the husbandman, you Maister Mercer, and you Goodman Cooper, with other artificers, may save yourself metely well. For as much as all things are dearer than they were, so much do you arise in the pryce of your wares and occupations that ye sell agayne. But we have nothing to sell whereby we might advance ye price there of, to countervaile those things that we must buy agayne.' In another place the knight asks the doctor: 'I pray you, what be those sorts that ye meane. And first, of those that ye thinke should have no losset hereby? Doctor: I mean all those that live by buying and selling, for as they buy deare, they sell thereafter. Knight: What is the next sort that ye say would win by it? Doctor: Marry, all such as have takings of fearmes in their owne manurance [cultivation] at the old rent,

*Chapter 12, 'Of the Manner of Building and Furniture of Our Houses', p. 202.

rich at the expense both of his labourers and his landlords. No wonder, therefore, that England, at the end of the sixteenth century, had a class of capitalist farmers who were rich men in relation to the circumstances of the time.[3]

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for where they pay after the olde rate they sell after the newe – that is, they paye for theire lande good cheape, and sell all things growing thereof deare. Knight: What sorte is that which, ye sayde should have greater losse hereby, than these men had profit? Doctor: It is all noblemen, gentlemen, and all other that live either by a stinted rent or stypend, or do not manure [cultivate] the ground, or doe occupy no buying and selling.'

3. In France, the *régisseur*, or steward, who collected the dues for the feudal lords during the earlier part of the Middle Ages, soon became an *homme d'affaires*, or man of business, who by means of extortion, cheating and so on swindled his way into the position of capitalist. The *régisseurs* were themselves sometimes men of quality. For instance: 'This is the account given by M. Jacques de Thoraisse, knight, and lord of a manor near Besançon, to the lord who administers the accounts at Dijon for his highness the Duke and Count of Burgundy, of the rents appurtenant to the above-mentioned manor, from the 25th day of December 1359 to the 28th day of December 1360' (Alexis Monteil, *Traité de matériaux manuscrits de divers genres d'histoire*, Vol. 1, Paris, 1835, pp. 234–5). It is already evident here how in all spheres of social life the lion's share falls to the middleman. In the economic domain, for example, financiers, stock-exchange speculators, merchants and shopkeepers skim the cream; in questions of litigation the lawyer fleeces his clients; in politics the representative is more important than the voters, the minister more important than the sovereign; in religion God is pushed into the background by the 'mediator',* and the latter is again shoved back by the priests, who are the inevitable mediators between the good shepherd and his flock. In France, as in England, the great feudal territories were divided into innumerable small homesteads, but under conditions incomparably more unfavourable for the people. During the fourteenth century arose the 'farms' (*fermes* or *terriers*). Their number grew constantly, far beyond 100,000. They paid rents varying from one-twelfth to one-fifth of the product in money or in kind. These farms were fiefs, sub-fiefs etc. (*fiefs, arrière-fiefs*) according to the value and extent of the domains, many of which only contained a few acres (*arpents*). But all these *terriens* (farmers) had rights of jurisdiction to some degree over those who dwelt on the soil; there were four grades. The oppression suffered by the agricultural folk under all these petty tyrants will be understood. Monteil says that there were once 160,000 courts in France, whereas today 4,000 tribunals (including local courts) are sufficient.

* In Christian theology, Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man.

Chapter 30: Impact of the Agricultural Revolution on Industry. The Creation of a Home Market for Industrial Capital

The intermittent but constantly renewed expropriation and expulsion of the agricultural population supplied the urban industries, as we have seen, with a mass of proletarians standing entirely outside the corporate guilds and unfettered by them; a fortunate circumstance which makes old A. Anderson* (not to be confused with James Anderson) express a belief in the direct intervention of Providence, in his *History of Commerce*. We must still pause a moment on this element of primitive accumulation. The thinning-out of the independent self-supporting peasants corresponded directly with the concentration of the industrial proletariat, in the way that Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire explained the condensation of cosmic matter at one place by its rarefaction at another.[1] But this was not the only consequence. In spite of the smaller number of its cultivators, the soil brought forth as much produce as before, or even more, because the revolution in property relations on the land was accompanied by improved methods of cultivation, greater co-operation, a higher concentration of the means of production and so on, and because the agricultural wage-labourers were made to work at a higher level of intensity,[2] and the field of production on which they worked for themselves shrank more and more. With the 'setting free' of a part of the agricultural population, therefore, their former means of nourishment were also set free. They were now transformed into material

1. In his *Notions de philosophie naturelle*, Paris, 1838.

2. A point that Sir James Steuart emphasizes.*

*In *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, Dublin, 1770, Bk I, Ch. 16.

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*Adam Anderson (1692–1765), Scottish historian of commerce. He wrote only one book, *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce*, 2 vols., London, 1764. For forty years he was a clerk in a London business house.

elements of variable capital. The peasant, expropriated and cast adrift, had to obtain the value of the means of subsistence from his new lord, the industrial capitalist, in the form of wages. And the same thing happened to those raw materials of industry which depended on indigenous agriculture. They were transformed into an element of constant capital.

Suppose, for example, that one part of the Westphalian peasantry, who, at the time of Frederick II, all span flax, are forcibly expropriated and driven from the soil; and suppose that the other part, who remain behind, are turned into the day-labourers of large-scale farmers. At the same time, large establishments for flax-spinning and weaving arise, and in these the men who have been 'set free' now work for wages. The flax looks exactly as it did before. Not a fibre of it is changed, but a new social soul has entered into its body. It now forms a part of the constant capital of the master manufacturer. Formerly it was divided among a mass of small producers, who cultivated it themselves and span it with their families in small portions. Now it is concentrated in the hands of one capitalist, who sets others to spin and weave it for him. The extra labour expended in flax-spinning was realized formerly in extra income to numerous peasant families, or perhaps, in the time of Frederick II, in taxes *pour le roi de Prusse.** Now it is realized in profit for a few capitalists. The spindles and looms, formerly scattered over the face of the countryside, are now crowded together in a few great labour-barracks, together with the workers and the raw material. And spindles, looms and raw material are now transformed from means for the independent existence of the spinners and weavers into means for commanding[3] them and extracting unpaid labour from them. You cannot tell from looking at the large factories and the large farms that they have originated from the combination of many small centres of production, and have been built up by the expropriation of many small independent producers. Nevertheless, unprejudiced observers did not allow themselves to be deceived. In the time of

3. 'I will allow you,' says the capitalist, 'to have the honour of serving me, on condition that, in return for the pains I take in commanding you, you give me the little that remains to you' (J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'économie politique*, Geneva, 1760, p. 70).

*'For the King of Prussia'. In other words, for a man who will give nothing in return. Here, of course, the literal sense is also intended.

Mirabeau, the 'lion of the revolution',* the great factories were still called *manufactures réunies*, or workshops thrown into one, as we speak of fields thrown into one. Says Mirabeau: 'We only pay attention to the large-scale factories, in which hundreds of men work under a director, and which are commonly called *manufactures réunies.* Those where a very large number of workers work in isolation and on their own account are hardly considered worthy of a glance. They are put entirely into the background. This is a very great mistake, as the latter alone form a really important component of the national wealth... The combined workshop (*fabrique réunie*) will prodigiously enrich one or two *entrepreneurs*, but the workers will only be journeymen, paid more or less [according to circumstances], and will not have any share in the success of the undertaking. In the isolated workshop (*fabrique séparée*), on the contrary, no one will become rich, but many workers will be comfortable. The number of hard-working and economical workers will grow, because they will see in good conduct, and in activity, a means of substantially improving their situation, and not of obtaining a small increase of wages that can never be of any importance for the future, and whose sole result is to place men in the position to live a little better, but only from day to day ... The isolated, individual workshops, for the most part combined with the cultivation of smallholdings, are the only free ones.'[4] The expropriation and eviction of a part of the agricultural population not only set free for industrial capital the workers, their means of subsistence and the materials of their labour; it also created the home market.

In fact, the events that transformed the small peasants into wage-labourers, and their means of subsistence and of labour into material [*sachliche*] elements of capital, created, at the same time, a home market for capital. Formerly, the peasant family produced means of subsistence and raw materials, which they themselves

4. Mirabeau, op. cit., Vol. 3, pp. 20–109 passim. The fact that Mirabeau considers the separate workshops to be more economical and more productive than the 'combined' ones, and sees in the latter merely artificial and exotic products of intensive government cultivation, can be explained by the contemporary position of a large part of the Continental manufactures.

*This is the younger Mirabeau (Honoré-Gabriel-Victor Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau, 1749–91), who played a great part in the early years of the French Revolution.

for the most part consumed. These raw materials and means of subsistence have now become commodities; the large-scale farmer sells them, he finds his market in the manufactures. Yarn, linen, coarse woollen stuffs – things whose raw materials had been within the reach of every peasant family, had been spun and woven by the family for its own use – are now transformed into articles of manufacture, the markets for which are found precisely in the country districts. Previously a mass of small producers, working on their own account, had found their natural counterpart in a large number of scattered customers; but now these customers are concentrated into one great market provided for by industrial capital.[5] Thus the destruction of the subsidiary trades of the countryside, the process whereby manufacture is divorced from agriculture, goes hand in hand with the expropriation of the previously self-supporting peasants and their separation from their own means of production. And only the destruction of rural domestic industry can give the home market of a country that extension and stability which the capitalist mode of production requires.

Still, the manufacturing period, properly so called, does not succeed in carrying out this transformation radically and completely. It will be remembered that manufacture conquers the domain of national production only very partially, and always rests on the handicrafts of the towns and the domestic subsidiary industries of the rural districts, which stand in the background as its basis. If it destroys these in one form, in particular branches at certain points, it resurrects them again elsewhere, because it needs them to some extent for the preparation of raw material. It produces, therefore, a new class of small villagers who cultivate the soil as a subsidiary occupation, but find their chief occupation in industrial labour, the products of which they sell to the manufacturers directly, or through the medium of merchants. This is

5. 'Twenty pounds of wool converted unobtrusively into the yearly clothing of a labourer's family by its own industry in the intervals of other work – this makes no show; but bring it to market, send it to the factory, thence to the broker, thence to the dealer, and you will have great commercial operations, and nominal capital engaged to the amount of twenty times its value ... The working class* is thus amerced to support a wretched factory population, a parasitical shop-keeping class, and a fictitious commercial, monetary, and financial system' (David Urquhart, op. cit., p. 120).

*By 'working clas ' Urquhart means those people who work on the land.

one cause, though not the chief one, of a phenomenon which at first puzzles the student of English history. From the last third of the fifteenth century we find continual complaints, only interrupted at certain intervals, about the encroachment of capitalist farming in the country districts and the progressive annihilation of the peasantry. On the other hand, we always find that this peasantry turns up again, although in diminished number, and in a progressively worse situation.[6] The chief cause is this: England is at certain epochs mainly a corn-growing country, at others mainly a cattle-breeding country. These periods alternate, and the alternation is accompanied by fluctuations in the extent of peasant cultivation. A consistent foundation for capitalist agriculture could only be provided by large-scale industry, in the form of machinery; it is large-scale industry which radically expropriates the vast majority of the agricultural population and completes the divorce between agriculture and rural domestic industry, tearing up the latter's roots, which are spinning and weaving.[7] It therefore also

6. Cromwell's time forms an exception. As long as the Republic lasted, the mass of the English people of all levels rose from the degradation into which they had sunk under the Tudors.

7. Tuckett knew that the large-scale wool industry had sprung, with the introduction of machinery, from manufacture proper and from the destruction of rural or domestic manufactures (Tuckett, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 139-44). 'The plough, the yoke, were the invention of gods, and the occupation of heroes; are the loom, the spindle, the distaff, of less noble parentage? You sever the distaff and the plough, the spindle and the yoke, and you get factories and poor-houses, credit and panics, two hostile nations, agricultural and commercial' (David Urquhart, op. cit., p. 122). But now along comes Carey, and accuses England, surely not without reason, of trying to turn every other country into a purely agricultural nation, whose manufacturer is to be England. He asserts that Turkey has been ruined in this way, because 'the owners and occupants of land have never been permitted by England to strengthen themselves by the formation of that natural alliance between the plough and the loom, the hammer and the harrow' (*The Slave Trade*, p. 125). According to him, Urquhart himself is one of the chief agents in the ruin of Turkey, because he made free-trade propaganda there in the English interest. The joke here is that Carey (who is, incidentally, an abject servant of the Russians)* wants to prevent the process of separation between agriculture and domestic industry by means of that very system of protection which accelerates it.

*This passage alludes to the controversy of the 1850s between pro-Turks (such as Urquhart) and pro-Russians over responsibility for the outbreak of the Crimean War, and more generally over the possibility of reforming the Ottoman Empire.

conquers the entire home market for industrial capital, for the first time.[8]

8. The philanthropic English economists, such as Mill,* Rogers, Goldwin Smith, Fawcett, etc., and liberal manufacturers like John Bright & Co., ask English landed proprietors, as God asked Cain about Abel, 'Where are our thousands of freeholders gone?' But where do *you* come from, then? From the destruction of those freeholders. Why don't you go further, and ask where the independent weavers, spinners and handicraftsmen have gone to?

*The context would suggest John Stuart Mill, not James Mill.

Chapter 31: The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist

The genesis of the industrial[1] capitalist did not proceed in such a gradual way as that of the farmer. Doubtless many small guild-masters, and a still greater number of independent small artisans, or even wage-labourers, transformed themselves into small capitalists, and, by gradually extending their exploitation of wage-labour and the corresponding accumulation, into 'capitalists' without qualification. In the period when capitalist production was in its infancy things often happened as they had done in the period of infancy of the medieval town, where the question as to which of the escaped serfs should be master and which servant was in great part decided by the earlier or later date of their flight. The snail's pace of advance under this method by no means corresponded with the commercial requirements of the new world market, which had been created by the great discoveries of the end of the fifteenth century. But the Middle Ages had handed down two distinct forms of capital, which ripened in the most varied economic formations of society, and which, before the era of the capitalist mode of production, nevertheless functioned as capital – usurer's capital and merchant's capital.

'At present, all the wealth of society goes first into the possession of the capitalist . . . he pays the landowner his rent, the labourer his wages, the tax and tithe gatherer their claims, and keeps a large, indeed the largest, and a continually augmenting share, of the annual produce of labour for himself. The capitalist may now be said to be the first owner of all the wealth of the community, though no law has conferred on him the right to this property . . . this change has been effected by the taking of interest on capital . . . and it is not a little curious that all the law-givers of Europe endeavoured to prevent this by statutes, viz., statutes against

1. 'Industrial' here as opposed to 'agricultural'. In the strict sense the farmer is just as much an industrial capitalist as the manufacturer.

usury ... The power of the capitalist over all the wealth of the country is a complete change in the right of property, and by what law, or series of laws, was it effected?'[2] The author should have reminded himself that revolutions are not made with laws.

The money capital formed by means of usury and commerce was prevented from turning into industrial capital by the feudal organization of the countryside and the guild organization of the towns.[3] These fetters vanished with the dissolution of the feudal bands of retainers, and the expropriation and partial eviction of the rural population. The new manufactures were established at sea-ports, or at points in the countryside which were beyond the control of the old municipalities and their guilds. Hence, in England, the bitter struggle of the corporate towns against these new seed-beds of industry.

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. Hard on their heels follows the commercial war of the European nations, which has the globe as its battlefield. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes gigantic dimensions in England's Anti-Jacobin War, and is still going on in the shape of the Opium Wars against China, etc.

The different moments of primitive accumulation can be assigned in particular to Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England, in more or less chronological order. These different moments are systematically combined together at the end of the seventeenth century in England; the combination embraces the colonies, the national debt, the modern tax system, and the system of protection. These methods depend in part on brute force, for instance the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the state, the concentrated and organized force of society, to hasten, as in a hothouse, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of

2. *The Natural and Artificial Rights of Property Contrasted*, London, 1832, pp. 98–9. Author of this anonymous work: Thomas Hodgskin.

3. Even as late as 1794, the small cloth-makers of Leeds sent a deputation to Parliament, with a petition for a law to forbid any merchant from becoming a manufacturer (Dr Aikin, op. cit. [pp. 564–5]).

production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power.

W. Howitt, a man who specializes in being a Christian,* says of the Christian colonial system, 'The barbarities and desperate outrages of the so-called Christian race, throughout every region of the world, and upon every people they have been able to subdue, are not to be paralleled by those of any other race, however fierce, however untaught, and however reckless of mercy and of shame, in any age of the earth.'[4] The history of Dutch colonial administration – and Holland was the model capitalist nation of the seventeenth century – 'is one of the most extraordinary relations of treachery, bribery, massacre, and meanness'.[5] Nothing is more characteristic than their system of stealing men in Celebes, in order to get slaves for Java. Man-stealers were trained for this purpose. The thief, the interpreter and the seller were the chief agents in this trade, the native princes were the chief sellers. The young people thus stolen were hidden in secret dungeons on Celebes, until they were ready for sending to the slave-ships. An official report says: 'This one town of Macassar, for example, is full of secret prisons, one more horrible than the other, crammed with unfortunates, victims of greed and tyranny fettered in chains, forcibly torn from their families.' In order to get possession of Malacca, the Dutch bribed the Portuguese governor. He let them into the town in 1641. They went straight to his house and assassinated him, so as to be able to 'abstain' from paying the £21,875 which was the amount of his bribe. Wherever they set foot, devastation and depopulation followed. Banjuwangi, a province of Java, numbered over 80,000 inhabitants in 1750 and only 18,000 in 1811. That is peaceful commerce!

4. William Howitt, *Colonisation and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in All Their Colonies*, London, 1838, p. 9. There is a good compilation on the treatment of slaves in Charles Comte, *Traité de la législation*, 3rd edn, Brussels, 1837. This stuff ought to be studied in detail, to see what the bourgeois makes of himself and of the worker when he can model the world according to his own image without any interference.

5. Thomas Stamford Raffles, late Lieut.Gov. of that island, *The History of Java*, London, 1817 [Vol. 2, pp. 190–91].

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*William Howitt (1792–1879), a prolific writer on many topics, was a leading Spiritualist in the 1860s, and published numerous accounts of spiritual experiences he claimed to have undergone.

The English East India Company, as is well known, received, apart from political control of India, the exclusive monopoly of the tea trade, as well as of the Chinese trade in general, and the transport of goods to and from Europe. But the coasting trade round India and between the islands,* as well as the internal trade of India, was the monopoly of the higher officials of the Company. The monopolies of salt, opium, betel and other commodities were inexhaustible mines of wealth. The officials themselves fixed the price and plundered the unfortunate Hindus at will. The Governor-General took part in this private traffic. His favourites received contracts under conditions whereby they, cleverer than the alchemists, made gold out of nothing. Great fortunes sprang up like mushrooms in a day; primitive accumulation proceeded without the advance of even a shilling. The trial of Warren Hastings swarms with such cases. Here is an instance. A contract for opium was given to a certain Sullivan at the moment of his departure on an official mission to a part of India far removed from the opium district. Sullivan sold his contract to one Binn for £40,000; Binn sold it the same day for £60,000, and the ultimate purchaser who carried out the contract declared that he still extracted a tremendous profit from it. According to one of the lists laid before Parliament, the Company and its officials obtained £6,000,000 between 1757 and 1766 from the Indians in the form of gifts. Between 1769 and 1770, the English created a famine by buying up all the rice and refusing to sell it again, except at fabulous prices.[6]

The treatment of the indigenous population was, of course, at its most frightful in plantation-colonies set up exclusively for the export trade, such as the West Indies, and in rich and well-populated countries, such as Mexico and India, that were given over to plunder. But even in the colonies properly so called, the Christian character of primitive accumulation was not belied. In 1703 those sober exponents of Protestantism, the Puritans of New England, by decrees of their assembly set a premium of £40 on every Indian scalp and every captured redskin; in 1720, a premium

6. In the year 1866 more than a million Hindus died of hunger in the province of Orissa alone. Nevertheless, an attempt was made to enrich the Indian treasury by the price at which the means of subsistence were sold to the starving people.

* i.e. the East Indian islands.

of £100 was set on every scalp; in 1744, after Massachusetts Bay had proclaimed a certain tribe as rebels, the following prices were laid down: for a male scalp of 12 years and upwards, £100 in new currency, for a male prisoner £105, for women and children prisoners £50, for the scalps of women and children £50. Some decades later, the colonial system took its revenge on the descendants of the pious pilgrim fathers, who had grown seditious in the meantime. At English instigation, and for English money, they were tomahawked by the redskins. The British Parliament proclaimed bloodhounds and scalping as 'means that God and Nature had given into its hand'.

The colonial system ripened trade and navigation as in a hothouse. The 'companies called Monopolia' (Luther)* were powerful levers for the concentration of capital. The colonies provided a market for the budding manufactures, and a vast increase in accumulation which was guaranteed by the mother country's monopoly of the market. The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there. Holland, which first brought the colonial system to its full development, already stood at the zenith of its commercial greatness in 1648. It was 'in almost exclusive possession of the East Indian trade and the commerce between the south-east and the north-west of Europe. Its fisheries, its shipping and its manufactures surpassed those of any other country. The total capital of the Republic was probably greater than that of all the rest of Europe put together'.† Gülich forgets to add that by 1648 the people of Holland were more over-worked, poorer and more brutally oppressed than those of all the rest of Europe put together.

Today, industrial supremacy brings with it commercial supremacy. In the period of manufacture it is the reverse: commercial supremacy produces industrial predominance. Hence the preponderant role played by the colonial system at that time. It was the 'strange God' who perched himself side by side with the old divinities of Europe on the altar, and one fine day threw them all overboard with a shove and a kick. It proclaimed the making of profit as the ultimate and the sole purpose of mankind.

*See above, p. 424.

†G. von Gülich, *Geschichtliche Darstellung des Handels, der Gewerbe und des Ackerbaus der bedeutendsten handeltreibenden Staaten unsrer Zeit*, Vol. 1, Jena, 1830, p. 371.

The system of public credit, i.e. of national debts, the origins of which are to be found in Genoa and Venice as early as the Middle Ages, took possession of Europe as a whole during the period of manufacture. The colonial system, with its maritime trade and its commercial wars, served as a forcing-house for the credit system. Thus it first took root in Holland. The national debt, i.e. the alienation [*Veräusserung*]* of the state – whether that state is despotic, constitutional or republican – marked the capitalist era with its stamp. The only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into the collective possession of a modern nation is – the national debt.[7]

Hence, quite consistently with this, the modern doctrine that a nation becomes the richer the more deeply it is in debt. Public credit becomes the *credo* of capital. And with the rise of national debt-making, lack of faith in the national debt takes the place of the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which there is no forgiveness.

The public debt becomes one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation. As with the stroke of an enchanter's wand, it endows unproductive money with the power of creation and thus turns it into capital, without forcing it to expose itself to the troubles and risks inseparable from its employment in industry or even in usury. The state's creditors actually give nothing away, for the sum lent is transformed into public bonds, easily negotiable, which go on functioning in their hands just as so much hard cash would. But furthermore, and quite apart from the class of idle *rentiers* thus created, the improvised wealth of the financiers who play the role of middlemen between the government and the nation, and the tax-farmers, merchants and private manufacturers, for whom a good part of every national loan performs the service of a capital fallen from heaven, apart from all these people, the national debt has given rise to joint-stock companies, to dealings in negotiable effects of all kinds, and to speculation: in a word, it has given rise to stock-exchange gambling and the modern bankocracy.

At their birth the great banks, decorated with national titles, were only associations of private speculators, who placed themselves by the side of governments and, thanks to the privileges

7. William Cobbett remarks that in England all public institutions are designated as 'royal'; in compensation, however, there is the 'national' debt.

* Alienation by sale.

they received, were in a position to advance money to those governments. Hence the accumulation of the national debt has no more infallible measure than the successive rise in the stocks of these banks, whose full development dates from the founding of the Bank of England in 1694. The Bank of England began by lending its money to the government at 8 per cent; at the same time it was empowered by Parliament to coin money out of the same capital, by lending it a second time to the public in the form of bank-notes. It was allowed to use these notes for discounting bills, making advances on commodities and buying the precious metals. It was not long before this credit-money, created by the bank itself, became the coin in which the latter made its loans to the state, and paid, on behalf of the state, the interest on the public debt. It was not enough that the bank gave with one hand and took back more with the other; it remained, even while receiving money, the eternal creditor of the nation down to the last farthing advanced. Gradually it became the inevitable receptacle of the metallic hoard of the country, and the centre of gravity of all commercial credit. The writings of the time (Bolingbroke's, for instance) show what effect was produced on their contemporaries by the sudden emergence of this brood of bankocrats, financiers, *rentiers*, brokers, stock-jobbers, etc.[8]

Along with the national debt there arose an international credit system, which often conceals one of the sources of primitive accumulation in this or that people. Thus the villainies of the Venetian system of robbery formed one of the secret foundations of Holland's wealth in capital, for Venice in her years of decadence lent large sums of money to Holland. There is a similar relationship between Holland and England. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Holland's manufactures had been far outstripped. It had ceased to be the nation preponderant in commerce and industry. One of its main lines of business, therefore, from 1701 to 1776, was the lending out of enormous amounts of capital, especially to its great rival England. The same thing is going on today between England and the United States. A great deal of capital, which appears today in the United States without any birth-certificate, was yesterday, in England, the capitalized blood of children.

8. 'If the Tartars were to flood into Europe today, it would be a difficult job to make them understand what a financier is with us' (Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, Vol. 4, p. 33, London, 1769).

As the national debt is backed by the revenues of the state, which must cover the annual interest payments etc., the modern system of taxation was the necessary complement of the system of national loans. The loans enable the government to meet extraordinary expenses without the taxpayers feeling it immediately, but they still make increased taxes necessary as a consequence. On the other hand, the raising of taxation caused by the accumulation of debts contracted one after another compels the government always to have recourse to new loans for new extraordinary expenses. The modern fiscal system, whose pivot is formed by taxes on the most necessary means of subsistence (and therefore by increases in their price), thus contains within itself the germ of automatic progression. Over-taxation is not an accidental occurrence, but rather a principle. In Holland, therefore, where this system was first inaugurated, the great patriot, De Witt, extolled it in his *Maxims** as the best system for making the wage-labourer submissive, frugal, industrious . . . and overburdened with work. Here, however, we are less concerned with the destructive influence it exercises on the situation of the wage-labourer than with the forcible expropriation, resulting from it, of peasants and artisans, in short, of all the constituents of the lower middle class. There are no two opinions about this, even among the bourgeois economists. Its effectiveness as an expropriating agent is heightened still further by the system of protection, which forms one of its integral parts.

The great part that the public debt and the fiscal system corresponding to it have played in the capitalization of wealth and the expropriation of the masses, has led many writers, like Cobbett,† Doubleday‡ and others, to seek here, incorrectly, the fundamental cause of the misery of the people in modern times.

The system of protection was an artificial means of manufacturing manufacturers, or expropriating independent workers, of capitalizing the national means of production and subsistence,

*P. de la Court, *Political Maxims of the State of Holland (1669)*, English translation, London, 1743, Part I, Ch. 24, p. 92: 'All the said ways of raising money will excite the commonalty to ingenuity, diligence, and frugality.'

†In a pamphlet published in London in 1817, entitled: 'Paper against Gold: containing the history and mystery of the Bank of England, the funds, the debt, the sinking fund . . . and shewing that taxation, pauperism, poverty, misery, and crimes ever must increase with a funding system'.

‡Thomas Doubleday, *A Financial, Statistical, and Monetary History of England from 1688*, London, 1847.

and of forcibly cutting short the transition from a mode of production that was out of date to the modern mode of production. The European states tore each other to pieces to gain the patent of this invention, and, once they had entered into the service of the profit-mongers, they did not restrict themselves to plundering their own people, indirectly through protective duties, directly through export premiums, in the pursuit of this purpose. They also forcibly uprooted all industries in the neighbouring dependent countries, as for example England did with the Irish woollen manufacture. On the Continent of Europe the process was much simplified, following the example of Colbert. The original capital for industry here came in part directly out of the state treasury. 'Why,' cries Mirabeau, 'why go so far to seek the cause of the manufacturing glory of Saxony before the war? One hundred and eighty millions of debts contracted by the sovereigns!'[9]

Colonial system, public debts, heavy taxes, protection, commercial wars, etc., these offshoots of the period of manufacture swell to gigantic proportions during the period of infancy of large-scale industry. The birth of the latter is celebrated by a vast, Herod-like slaughter of the innocents. Like the royal navy, the factories were recruited by means of the press-gang. Though Sir F. M. Eden is indifferent to the horrors of the expropriation of the agricultural population from the soil, from the last third of the fifteenth century up to his own time; though he shows great self-satisfaction in congratulating his country on this process, which was 'essential' in order to establish capitalist agriculture and 'the due proportion between arable and pasture land'; despite this, he does not show the same economic insight into the necessity of child-stealing and child-slavery for the transformation of manufacturing production into factory production and the establishment of the true relation between capital and labour-power. He says: 'It may, perhaps be worthy the attention of the public to consider, whether any manufacture, which, in order to be carried on successfully, requires that cottages and workhouses should be ransacked for poor children; that they should be employed by turns during the greater part of the night and robbed of that rest which, though indispensable to all, is most required by the young; and that numbers of both sexes, of different ages and dispositions, should be collected together in such a manner that the contagion of example

9. Mirabeau, op. cit., Vol. 6, p. 101.

cannot but lead to profligacy and debauchery; will add to the sum of individual or national felicity?'[10]

'In the counties of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and more particularly in Lancashire,' says Fielden, 'the newly-invented machinery was used in large factories built on the sides of streams capable of turning the water-wheel. Thousands of hands were suddenly required in these places, remote from towns; and Lancashire, in particular, being, till then, comparatively thinly populated and barren, a population was all that she now wanted. The small and nimble fingers of little children being by very far the most in request, the custom instantly sprang up of procuring apprentices (!) from the different parish workhouses of London, Birmingham, and elsewhere. Many, many thousands of these little, hapless creatures were sent down into the north, being from the age of 7 to the age of 13 or 14 years old. The custom was for the master' (i.e. the child-stealer) 'to clothe his apprentices and to feed and lodge them in an "apprentice house" near the factory; overseers were appointed to see to the works, whose interest it was to work the children to the utmost, because their pay was in proportion to the quantity of work that they could exact. Cruelty was, of course, the consequence ... In many of the manufacturing districts, but particularly, I am afraid, in the guilty county to which I belong (Lancashire), cruelties the most heart-rending were practised upon the unoffending and friendless creatures who were thus consigned to the charge of master-manufacturers; they were harassed to the brink of death by excess of labour ... were flogged, fettered and tortured in the most exquisite refinement of cruelty; ... they were in many cases starved to the bone while flogged to their work and ... even in some instances ... were driven to commit suicide ... The beautiful and romantic valleys of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lancashire, secluded from the public eye, became the dismal solitudes of torture, and of many a murder. The profits of manufacturers were enormous; but this only whetted the appetite that it should have satisfied, and therefore the manufacturers had recourse to an expedient that seemed to secure to them those profits without any possibility of limit; they began the practice of what is termed "night-working", that is, having tired one set of hands, by working them throughout the day, they had another set ready to go on working throughout the night; the day-set getting

10. Eden, op. cit., Vol. 1, Bk II, Ch. 1, p. 421.

into the beds that the night-set had just quitted, and in their turn again, the night-set getting into the beds that the day-set quitted in the morning. It is a common tradition in Lancashire, that the beds *never get cold*.'[11]

With the development of capitalist production during the period of manufacture, the public opinion of Europe lost its last remnant of shame and conscience. The nations bragged cynically of every infamy that served them as a means to the accumulation of capital. Read, for example, the naïve commercial annals of the worthy A. Anderson.* Here it is trumpeted forth as a triumph of English statesmanship that, at the Peace of Utrecht, England extorted from the Spaniards, by the Asiento Treaty, the privilege of being allowed to ply the slave trade, not only between Africa and the English West Indies, which it had done until then, but also between Africa and Spanish America. England thereby acquired the right to supply Spanish America until 1743 with 4,800 Negroes a year. At the same time this threw an official cloak over British smuggling. Liverpool grew fat on the basis of the slave trade. This was its method of primitive accumulation. And even to the present day, the Liverpool 'quality' have remained the Pindars of the slave

11. John Fielden, op. cit., pp. 5–6. On the earlier infamies of the factory system, cf. Dr Aikin (1795), op. cit., p. 219, and Gisborne, *Enquiry into the Duties of Men*, 1795, Vol. 2. When the steam-engine transplanted the factories from the waterfalls of the countryside into the centres of the towns, the 'abstemious' profit-monger found his childish material ready to hand, without having to bring slaves forcibly from the workhouses. When Sir R. Peel (father of the 'minister of plausibility') brought in his bill for the protection of children, in 1815, Francis Horner, luminary of the Bullion Committee and intimate friend of David Ricardo, said in the House of Commons: 'It is notorious, that with a bankrupt's effects, a gang, if he might use the word, of these children had been put up to sale, and were advertised publicly as part of the property. A most atrocious instance had been brought before the Court of King's Bench two years before, in which a number of these boys, apprenticed by a parish in London to one manufacturer, had been transferred to another, and had been found by some benevolent persons in a state of absolute famine. Another case more horrible had come to his knowledge while on a [Parliamentary] Committee . . . that not many years ago, an agreement had been made between a London parish and a Lancashire manufacturer, by which it was stipulated, that with every twenty sound children one idiot should be taken.' [Horner's speech of 6 June 1815.]

*See above, p. 908.

trade,* which – as noted in the work by Dr Aikin we have just quoted – 'has coincided with that spirit of bold adventure which has characterized the trade of Liverpool and rapidly carried it to its present state of prosperity; has occasioned vast employment for shipping and sailors, and greatly augmented the demand for the manufactures of the country'.† In 1730 Liverpool employed 15 ships in the slave trade; in 1751, 53; in 1760, 74; in 1770, 96; and in 1792, 132.

While the cotton industry introduced child-slavery into England, in the United States it gave the impulse for the transformation of the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery into a system of commercial exploitation. In fact the veiled slavery of the wage-labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal.[12]

Tantae molis erat‡ to unleash the 'eternal natural laws' of the capitalist mode of production, to complete the process of separation between the workers and the conditions of their labour, to transform, at one pole, the social means of production and subsistence into capital, and at the opposite pole, the mass of the population into wage-labourers, into the free 'labouring poor', that artificial product of modern history.[13] If money, according to

12. In 1790 there were in the English West Indies ten slaves to one free man, in the French fourteen to one, and in the Dutch twenty-three to one (Henry Brougham, *An Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers*, Edinburgh, 1803, Vol. 2, p. 74).

13. The expression 'labouring poor' is found in English legislation from the moment when the class of wage-labourers becomes noticeable. This term is used in opposition, on the one hand, to the 'idle poor', beggars etc., and, on the other, to those workers who are not yet plucked fowl but rather the possessors of their own means of labour. From the statute book the expression passed into political economy, and was handed down by Culpeper, J. Child, etc to Adam Smith and Eden. After this, one can estimate the good faith of the 'execrable political cantmonger' Edmund Burke, when he called the expression 'labouring poor' – 'execrable political cant'. This sycophant, who, in the pay of the English oligarchy, played the part of romantic opponent of

*Pindar (522–442 B.C.) was a Greek lyric poet famous above all for his triumphal odes to the victors in the Olympic games; hence here the Liverpool bourgeoisie continues to celebrate its own triumphs in the era of the slave trade.

†Aikin, op. cit., p. 339.

‡The full quotation is *'Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem'* ('So great was the effort required to found the Roman race'), from Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk 1, line 33.

Augier,[14] 'comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek,' capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.[15]

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the French Revolution, just as, in the pay of the North American colonies at the beginning of the troubles in America, he had played the liberal against the English oligarchy, was a vulgar bourgeois through and through. 'The laws of commerce are the laws of Nature, and therefore the laws of God' (E. Burke, op. cit., pp. 31–2). No wonder then that, true to the laws of God and Nature, he always sold himself in the best market! A very good portrait of this Edmund Burke, during his liberal time, is to be found in the writings of the Rev. Mr Tucker, who, though a parson and a Tory, was, apart from that, an honourable man and a competent political economist. In face of the infamous moral cowardice that prevails today, and believes so devoutly in 'the laws of commerce', it is our duty to brand again and again the Burkes of this world, who only differ from their successors in one thing – talent!

14. Marie Augier, *Du crédit public*, Paris, 1842, p. 265.

15. 'Capital is said by a Quarterly Reviewer to fly turbulence and strife, and to be timid, which is very true; but this is very incompletely stating the question. Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum. With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 per cent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 per cent certain will produce eagerness; 50 per cent positive audacity; 100 per cent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both. Smuggling and the slave-trade have amply proved all that is here stated' (T. J. Dunning, op. cit., pp. 35, 36).

Chapter 32: The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation

What does the primitive accumulation of capital, i.e. its historical genesis, resolve itself into? In so far as it is not the direct transformation of slaves and serfs into wage-labourers, and therefore a mere change of form, it only means the expropriation of the immediate producers, i.e. the dissolution of private property based on the labour of its owner. Private property, as the antithesis to social, collective property, exists only where the means of labour and the external conditions of labour belong to private individuals. But according to whether these private individuals are workers or non-workers, private property has a different character. The innumerable different shades of private property which appear at first sight are only reflections of the intermediate situations which lie between the two extremes.

The private property of the worker in his means of production is the foundation of small-scale industry, and small-scale industry is a necessary condition for the development of social production and of the free individuality of the worker himself. Of course, this mode of production also exists under slavery, serfdom and other situations of dependence. But it flourishes, unleashes the whole of its energy, attains its adequate classical form, only where the worker is the free proprietor of the conditions of his labour, and sets them in motion himself: where the peasant owns the land he cultivates, or the artisan owns the tool with which he is an accomplished performer.

This mode of production presupposes the fragmentation of holdings, and the dispersal of the other means of production. As it excludes the concentration of these means of production, so it also excludes co-operation, division of labour within each separate process of production, the social control and regulation of the forces of nature, and the free development of the productive forces of society. It is compatible only with a system of pro-

duction and a society moving within narrow limits which are of natural origin. To perpetuate it would be, as Pecqueur rightly says, 'to decree universal mediocrity'.* At a certain stage of development, it brings into the world the material means of its own destruction. From that moment, new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society, forces and passions which feel themselves to be fettered by that society. It has to be annihilated; it is annihilated. Its annihilation, the transformation of the individualized and scattered means of production into socially concentrated means of production, the transformation, therefore, of the dwarf-like property of the many into the giant property of the few, and the expropriation of the great mass of the people from the soil, from the means of subsistence and from the instruments of labour, this terrible and arduously accomplished expropriation of the mass of the people forms the pre-history of capital. It comprises a whole series of forcible methods, and we have only passed in review those that have been epoch-making as methods of the primitive accumulation of capital. The expropriation of the direct producers was accomplished by means of the most merciless barbarism, and under the stimulus of the most infamous, the most sordid, the most petty and the most odious of passions. Private property which is personally earned, i.e. which is based, as it were, on the fusing together of the isolated, independent working individual with the conditions of his labour, is supplanted by capitalist private property, which rests on the exploitation of alien, but formally free labour.[1]

As soon as this metamorphosis has sufficiently decomposed the old society throughout its depth and breadth, as soon as the workers have been turned into proletarians, and their means of labour into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, the further socialization of labour and the further transformation of the soil and other means of production into socially exploited and therefore communal means of production takes on a new form. What is now to be expropriated is not the self-employed worker, but the capitalist who exploits a large number of workers.

1. 'We are in a situation which is entirely new for society ... we are striving to separate every kind of property from every kind of labour' (Sismondi, *Nouveaux Principes d'économie politique*, Vol. 2, p. 434).

*C. Pecqueur, *Théorie nouvelle d'économie sociale et politique*, Paris, 1842, p. 435.

This expropriation is accomplished through the action of the immanent laws of capitalist production itself, through the centralization of capitals. One capitalist always strikes down many others. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by a few, other developments take place on an ever-increasing scale, such as the growth of the co-operative form of the labour process, the conscious technical application of science, the planned exploitation of the soil, the transformation of the means of labour into forms in which they can only be used in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialized labour, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and, with this, the growth of the international character of the capitalist régime. Along with the constant decrease in the number of capitalist magnates, who usurp and monopolize all the advantages of this process of transformation, the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.

The capitalist mode of appropriation, which springs from the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of its proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labour itself.

The transformation of scattered private property resting on the personal labour of the individuals themselves into capitalist private property is naturally an incomparably more protracted, violent and difficult process than the transformation of capitalist private

property, which in fact already rests on the carrying on of production by society, into social property. In the former case, it was a matter of the expropriation of the mass of the people by a few usurpers; but in this case, we have the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people.[2]

2. 'The advance of industry, whose involuntary but willing promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the workers, due to competition, with their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of large-scale industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products for itself. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable ... Of all the classes which confront the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and disappear in the face of large-scale industry, the proletariat is its most characteristic product. The lower middle classes, the small manufacturers, the shopkeepers, the artisans, the peasants, all these fight against the bourgeoisie in order to save from extinction their existence as parts of the middle class ... they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history' (Karl Marx and F. Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, London, 1848, pp. 11, 9) [English translation: Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, Pelican Marx Library, pp. 79, 77].

Chapter 33: The Modern Theory of Colonization[1]

Political economy confuses, on principle, two different kinds of private property, one of which rests on the labour of the producer himself, and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others. It forgets that the latter is not only the direct antithesis of the former, but grows on the former's tomb and nowhere else.

In Western Europe, the homeland of political economy, the process of primitive accumulation has more or less been accomplished. Here the capitalist regime has either directly subordinated to itself the whole of the nation's production, or, where economic relations are less developed, it has at least indirect control of those social layers which, although they belong to the antiquated mode of production, still continue to exist side by side with it in a state of decay. To this ready-made world of capital, the political economist applies the notions of law and of property inherited from a pre-capitalist world, with all the more anxious zeal and all the greater unction, the more loudly the facts cry out in the face of his ideology.

It is otherwise in the colonies. There the capitalist regime constantly comes up against the obstacle presented by the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself instead of the capitalist. The contradiction between these two diametrically opposed economic systems has its practical manifestation here in the struggle between them. Where the capitalist has behind him the power of the mother country, he tries to use force to clear out of the way the modes of production and appropriation which rest on the personal labour of the independent producer. The same interest which, in

1. We are dealing here with true colonies, i.e. virgin soil colonized by free immigrants. The United States is, economically speaking, still a colony of Europe. Apart from this, old plantations where the abolition of slavery has completely revolutionized earlier relationships also belong here.

the mother country, compels the sycophant of capital, the political economist, to declare that the capitalist mode of production is theoretically its own opposite, this same interest, in the colonies, drives him 'to make a clean breast of it', and to proclaim aloud the antagonism between the two modes of production. To this end he demonstrates that the development of the social productivity of labour, co-operation, division of labour, application of machinery on a large scale, and so on, are impossible without the expropriation of the workers and the corresponding transformation of their means of production into capital. In the interest of the so-called wealth of the nation, he seeks for artificial means to ensure the poverty of the people. Here his apologetic armour crumbles off, piece by piece, like rotten touchwood.

It is the great merit of E. G. Wakefield to have discovered, not something new *about* the colonies,[2] but, *in* the colonies, the truth about capitalist relations in the mother country. Just as the system of protection originally[3] had the objective of manufacturing capitalists artificially in the mother country, so Wakefield's theory of colonization, which England tried for a time to enforce by Act of Parliament, aims at manufacturing wage-labourers in the colonies. This is what he calls 'systematic colonization'.

First of all, Wakefield discovered that, in the colonies, property in money, means of subsistence, machines and other means of production does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if the essential complement to these things is missing: the wage-labourer, the other man, who is compelled to sell himself of his own free will. He discovered that capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things.[4] A Mr Peel, he complains, took with him from England to the Swan River district of Western Australia means of subsistence and of production to

2. Wakefield's few insights into the nature of modern colonization are fully anticipated by Mirabeau *père*, the Physiocrat,* and even much earlier by English economists.

3. Later, it became a temporary necessity in the international competitive struggle. But whatever its motive, the consequences remain the same.

4. 'A negro is a negro. In certain relations he becomes a slave. A mule is a machine for spinning cotton. Only in certain relations does it become capital. Outside these circumstances, it is no more capital than gold is intrinsically money, or sugar is the price of sugar . . . Capital is a social relation of production. It is a historical relation of production' (Karl Marx, 'Lohnarbeit und Kapital', *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, No. 266, 7 April 1849) [English translation, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp. 159–60].

*In *L'Ami des hommes* (1756).

the amount of £50,000. This Mr Peel even had the foresight to bring besides, 3,000 persons of the working class, men, women and children. Once he arrived at his destination, 'Mr Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.'[5] Unhappy Mr Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English relations of production to Swan River!

For the understanding of the following discoveries of Wakefield, let us make two preliminary remarks: We know that the means of production and subsistence, while they remain the property of the immediate producer, are not capital. They only become capital under circumstances in which they serve at the same time as means of exploitation of, and domination over, the worker. But this, their capitalist soul, is so intimately wedded, in the mind of the political economist, to their material substance, that he christens them capital under all circumstances, even where they are its exact opposite. Thus it is with Wakefield. Further: he describes the splitting-up of the means of production into the individual property of many mutually independent and self-employed workers as equal division of capital. The political economist is like the feudal jurist, who used to attach the labels supplied by feudal law even to relationships which were purely monetary.

'If,' says Wakefield, 'all the members of the society are supposed to possess equal portions of capital . . . no man would have a motive for accumulating more capital than he could use with his own hands. This is to some extent the case in new American settlements, where a passion for owning land prevents the existence of a class of labourers for hire.'[6] So long, therefore, as the worker can accumulate for himself – and this he can do so long as he remains in possession of his means of production – capitalist accumulation and the capitalist mode of production are impossible. The class of wage-labourers essential to these is lacking. How then, in old Europe, was the expropriation of the worker from his conditions of labour brought about? In other words, how did capital and wage-labour come into existence? By a social contract of a quite original kind. 'Mankind have adopted a . . . simple contrivance for promoting the accumulation of capital,' which, of course, had dangled in front of them since the time of Adam as the ultimate and only goal of their existence, 'they have divided

5. E. G. Wakefield, *England and America*, Vol. 2, p. 33.
6. ibid., Vol. 1, p. 17.

themselves into owners of capital and owners of labour . . . This division was the result of concert and combination.'[7] In short: the mass of mankind expropriated itself in honour of the 'accumulation of capital'. Now one would think that this instinct of self-denying fanaticism would especially run riot in the colonies, the only places where the men and the conditions exist to turn a social contract from a dream into a reality. So why should 'systematic colonization' be called in to replace its opposite, spontaneous and unregulated colonization? Here is one reason: 'In the Northern States of the American Union, it may be doubted whether so many as a tenth of the people would fall under the description of hired labourers . . . In England . . . the labouring class compose the bulk of the people.'[8] Indeed, the drive to self-expropriation for the glory of capital exists so little in the case of working humanity, that slavery, according to Wakefield himself, is the sole natural basis of colonial wealth. His systematic colonization is a mere makeshift, resulting from the fact that he has free men, not slaves, to deal with. 'The first Spanish settlers in Saint Domingo did not obtain labourers from Spain. But, without labourers', (i.e. without slavery) 'their capital must have perished, or, at least, must soon have been diminished to that small amount which each individual could employ with his own hands. This has actually occurred in the last colony founded by Englishmen – the Swan River Settlement – where a great mass of capital, of seeds, implements, and cattle, has perished for want of labourers to use it, and where no settler has preserved much more capital than he can employ with his own hands.'[9]

We have seen that the expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil forms the basis of the capitalist mode of production. The essence of a free colony, on the contrary, consists in this, that the bulk of the soil is still public property, and every settler on it can therefore turn part of it into his private property and his individual means of production, without preventing later settlers from performing the same operation.[10] This is the secret both of the prosperity of the colonies and of their cancerous affliction – their resistance to the establishment of capital. 'Where land is

7. E. G. Wakefield, *England and America*, Vol. 1, p. 18.

8. ibid., pp. 42–4.

9. ibid., Vol. 2, p. 5.

10. 'Land, to be an element of colonization, must not only be waste, but it must be public property, liable to be converted into private property' (ibid., Vol. 2, p. 125).

very cheap and all men are free, where every one who so pleases can easily obtain a piece of land for himself, not only is labour very dear, as respects the labourer's share of the produce, but the difficulty is to obtain combined labour at any price.'[11]

In the colonies the separation of the worker from the conditions of labour and from the soil, in which they are rooted, does not yet exist, or only sporadically, or on too limited a scale. Hence the separation of agriculture from industry does not exist either, nor have any of the domestic industries of the countryside been destroyed. Whence then is to come the home market for capital? 'No part of the population of America is exclusively agricultural, excepting slaves and their employers who combine capital and labour in particular works. Free Americans, who cultivate the soil, follow many other occupations. Some portion of the furniture and tools which they use is commonly made by themselves. They frequently build their own houses, and carry to market, at whatever distance, the produce of their own industry. They are spinners and weavers, they make soap and candles, as well as, in many cases, shoes and clothes for their own use. In America the cultivation of land is often the secondary pursuit of a blacksmith, a miller or a shopkeeper.'[12] Where, among such curious characters, is the 'field of abstinence' for the capitalists?

The great beauty of capitalist production consists in this, that it not only constantly reproduces the wage-labourer as a wage-labourer, but also always produces a relative surplus population of wage-labourers in proportion to the accumulation of capital. Thus the law of supply and demand as applied to labour is kept on the right lines, the oscillation of wages is confined within limits satisfactory to capitalist exploitation, and lastly, the social dependence of the worker on the capitalist, which is indispensable, is secured. At home, in the mother country, the smug deceitfulness of the political economist can turn this relation of absolute dependence into a free contract between buyer and seller, between equally independent owners of commodities, the owner of the commodity capital on one side, the owner of the commodity labour on the other. But in the colonies this beautiful illusion is torn aside. There, the absolute numbers of the population increase much more quickly than in the mother country, because many workers enter the colonial world as ready-made adults,

11. ibid., Vol. 1, p. 247. 12. ibid., pp. 21–2.

and still the labour-market is always understocked. The law of the supply and demand of labour collapses completely. On the one hand, the old world constantly throws in capital, thirsting after exploitation and 'abstinence'; on the other, the regular reproduction of the wage-labourer as a wage-labourer comes up against the most mischievous obstacles, which are in part insuperable. And what becomes of the production of redundant wage-labourers, redundant, that is, in proportion to the accumulation of capital? Today's wage-labourer is tomorrow's independent peasant or artisan, working for himself. He vanishes from the labour-market – but not into the workhouse. This constant transformation of wage-labourers into independent producers, who work for themselves instead of for capital, and enrich themselves instead of the capitalist gentlemen, reacts in its turn very adversely on the conditions of the labour-market. Not only does the degree of exploitation of the wage-labourer remain indecently low. The wage-labourer also loses, along with the relation of dependence, the feeling of dependence on the abstemious capitalist. Hence all the inconveniences depicted so honestly, so eloquently and so movingly by our friend E. G. Wakefield.

The supply of wage-labour, he complains, is neither constant, nor regular, nor sufficient. 'The supply of labour is always, not only small, but uncertain.'[13] 'Though the produce divided between the capitalist and the labourer be large, the labourer takes so great a share that he soon becomes a capitalist . . . Few, even of those whose lives are unusually long, can accumulate great masses of wealth.'[14] The workers most emphatically refuse to let the capitalist abstain from paying for the greater part of their labour. It is of no assistance to him if he cunningly imports his own wage-labourers from Europe, with his own capital. They soon 'cease . . . to be labourers for hire; they . . . become independent land-owners, if not competitors with their former masters in the labour-market.'[15] Horror of horrors! The excellent capitalist has imported bodily from Europe, with his own good money, his own competitors! The end of the world has come! No wonder Wakefield laments the absence both of relations of dependence and feelings of dependence on the part of the wage-labourers in the colonies. On account of the high wages, says his disciple Merivale, there is in the colonies an urgent desire for cheaper and more sub-

13. E. G. Wakefield, *England and America*, Vol. 2, p. 116.
14. ibid., Vol. 1, p. 131. 15. ibid., Vol. 2, p. 5.

servient workers, for a class of people to whom the capitalist may dictate his terms, instead of having his terms dictated by them . . . In the old civilized countries the worker, although free, is by a law of nature dependent on the capitalist; in colonies this dependence must be created by artificial means.[16]

What now is the consequence of this regrettable state of affairs in the colonies, according to Wakefield? A 'barbarizing tendency of dispersion' of producers and of the wealth of the nation.[17] The fragmentation of the means of production among innumerable owners, working on their own account, annihilates, along with the centralization of capital, all the foundations of combined labour. Every lengthy undertaking, extending over several years and demanding the outlay of fixed capital, is prevented from being carried out. In Europe, capital does not hesitate for a moment, for the working class forms its living appendage, always present in excess, always at its disposal. But not in the colonies! Wakefield recounts the following exceedingly painful anecdote. He was talking with some capitalists of Canada and the state of New York, where moreover the wave of immigration often sticks,

16. Merivale, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 235–314 passim. Even that mild, free-trading, vulgar economist Molinari says this: 'In the colonies where slavery has been abolished without the compulsory labour being replaced with an equivalent quantity of free labour, there has occurred the opposite of what happens every day before our eyes. Simple workers have been seen to exploit in their turn the industrial *entrepreneurs*, demanding from them wages which bear absolutely no relation to the legitimate share in the product which they ought to receive. The planters were unable to obtain for their sugar a sufficient price to cover the increase in wages, and were obliged to furnish the extra amount, at first out of their profits, and then out of their very capital. A considerable number of planters have been ruined as a result, while others have closed down their businesses in order to avoid the ruin which threatened them. . . It is doubtless better that these accumulations of capital should be destroyed than that generations of men should perish' (how generous of M. Molinari) 'but would it not be better if both survived?' (Molinari, op. cit., pp. 51–2). M. Molinari, M. Molinari! What then becomes of the ten commandments, of Moses and the Prophets, of the law of supply and demand, if in Europe the '*entrepreneur*' can cut down the worker's 'legitimate share' and in the West Indies the workers can cut down the *entrepreneur*'s? And what, if you please, is this 'legitimate share', which, according to your own admission, the capitalist in Europe daily neglects to pay? Over yonder, in the colonies, where the workers are so 'simple' as to 'exploit' the capitalist, M. Molinari feels a powerful itch to use police methods to set on the right road that law of supply and demand which works automatically everywhere else.

17. Wakefield, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 52.

depositing a sediment of 'redundant' workers. 'Our capital,' says one of the characters in the melodrama, 'was ready for many operations which require a considerable period of time for their completion; but we could not begin such operations with labour which, we knew, would soon leave us. If we had been sure of retaining the labour of such emigrants, we should have been glad to have engaged it at once, and for a high price: and we should have engaged it, even though we had been sure it would leave us, provided we had been sure of a fresh supply whenever we might need it.'[18]

After Wakefield has contrasted English capitalist agriculture and its 'combined' labour with the scattered cultivation of American peasants, he unwittingly shows us the obverse of the medal. He depicts the mass of the American people as well-to-do, independent, enterprising and comparatively cultured, whereas 'the English agricultural labourer is a miserable wretch, a pauper ... In what country, except North America and some new colonies, do the wages of free labour employed in agriculture, much exceed a bare subsistence for the labourer? ... Undoubtedly, farm-horses in England, being a valuable property, are better fed than English peasants.'[19] But never mind, the wealth of the nation is once again, by its very nature, identical with the misery of the people.

How then can the anti-capitalist cancer of the colonies be healed? If men were willing to turn the whole of the land from public into private property at one blow, this would certainly destroy the root of the evil, but it would also destroy – the colony. The trick is to kill two birds with one stone. Let the government set an artificial price on the virgin soil, a price independent of the law of supply and demand, a price that compels the immigrant to work a long time for wages before he can earn enough money to buy land[20] and turn himself into an independent farmer. The

18. Wakefield, *England and America*, Vol. 2, pp. 191–2.

19. ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 47, 246.

20. 'It is, you add, a result of the appropriation of the soil and of capital that the man who has nothing but the strength of his arms finds employment and creates an income for himself ... but the opposite is true, it is thanks to the individual appropriation of the soil that there exist men who only possess the strength of their arms ... When you put a man in a vacuum, you rob him of the air. You do the same, when you take away the soil from him ... for you are putting him in a space void of wealth, so as to leave him no way of living except according to your wishes' (Colins, op. cit., Vol. 3, pp. 268–71).

fund resulting from the sale of land at a price relatively prohibitory for the wage-labourers, this fund of money extorted from the wages of labour by a violation of the sacred law of supply and demand, is to be applied by the government, in proportion to its growth, to the importation of paupers from Europe into the colonies, so as to keep the wage-labour market full for the capitalists. Under these circumstances, 'everything will be for the best in the best of all possible worlds'. This is the great secret of 'systematic colonization'. Under this plan, Wakefield exclaims triumphantly, 'the supply of labour *must* be constant and regular, because, first, as no labourer would be able to procure land until he had worked for money, all immigrant labourers, working for a time for wages and in combination, would produce capital for the employment of more labourers; secondly, because every labourer who left off working for wages and became a landowner, would, by purchasing land, provide a fund for bringing fresh labour to the colony.'[21] The land-price laid down by the state must of course be 'sufficient', i.e. it must be high enough 'to prevent the labourers from becoming independent landowners until others had followed to take their place'.[22] This 'sufficient price for the land' is nothing but a euphemistic circumlocution for the ransom which the worker must pay to the capitalist in return for permission to retire from the wage-labour market to the land. First, he must create for the capitalist the 'capital' which enables him to exploit more workers; then, at his own expense, he must put a 'substitute' in the labour-market, who is dispatched across the sea by the government, again at the worker's expense, for his old master, the capitalist.

It is extremely characteristic that the English government for years practised this method of 'primitive accumulation' prescribed by Mr Wakefield expressly for use in the colonies. The resulting fiasco was of course as ignominious as the fate of Peel's Bank Act.* The stream of emigration was simply diverted from the English colonies to the United States. Meanwhile, the advance of capitalist

21. Wakefield, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 192.
22. ibid., p. 45.

*Sir Robert Peel's Bank Act of 1844. The 'fiasco' referred to here is the suspension of the Act in November 1857 owing to the onset of the commercial crisis of that year. See *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 185.

production in Europe, accompanied by increasing government pressure, has rendered Wakefield's recipe superfluous. On the one hand, the enormous and continuous flood of humanity, driven year in, year out, onto the shores of America, leaves behind a stationary sediment in the East of the United States, since the wave of immigration from Europe throws men onto the labour-market there more rapidly than the wave of immigration to the West can wash them away. On the other hand, the American Civil War has brought in its train a colossal national debt and, with it, a heavy tax-burden, the creation of a finance aristocracy of the vilest type, and the granting of immense tracts of public land to speculative companies for the exploitation of railways, mines, etc. In short, it has brought a very rapid centralization of capital. The great republic has therefore ceased to be the promised land for emigrating workers. Capitalist production advances there with gigantic strides, even though the lowering of wages and dependence of the wage-labourer has by no means yet proceeded so far as to reach the normal European level. The shameless squandering of uncultivated colonial land on aristocrats and capitalists by the English government, so loudly denounced even by Wakefield, has, especially in Australia,[23] in conjunction with the stream of men attracted by the gold-diggings, and the competition from imported English commodities which affects everyone down to the smallest artisan, produced an ample 'relative surplus population of workers', so that almost every mail-boat brings ill tidings of a 'glut of the Australian labour-market', and prostitution flourishes there in some places as exuberantly as in the Haymarket in London.

However, we are not concerned here with the condition of the colonies. The only thing that interests us is the secret discovered in the New World by the political economy of the Old World, and loudly proclaimed by it: that the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property as well, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of that private property which rests on the labour of the individual himself; in other words, the expropriation of the worker.

23. As soon as Australia became her own law-giver, she naturally passed laws favourable to the settlers, but the squandering of the land, already accomplished by the English government, stands in the way. 'The first and main object at which the new Land Act of 1862 aims is to give increased facilities for the settlement of the people' (*The Land Law of Victoria*, by the Hon. C. G. Duffy, Minister of Public Lands, London, 1862 [p. 3]).