

The Slavery of Our Time

by Leo Tolstoy

Introduction

Almost fifteen years ago, the census taken in Moscow evoked in me a series of thoughts and sentiments, which I, as well as I could, expressed in a book, entitled *What Shall We Do Then*. Toward the end of last year, the year 1899, I had occasion once more to reflect upon the same questions, and the answers at which I arrived were the same. It seems to me that in these fifteen years I have been able to reflect more calmly and at greater length again upon the subject that was discussed in the book, *What Shall We Do Then*, in connection with the now existing and popular doctrines. I now offer my readers new proofs, which bring us to the same answers as before. I think that these arguments may be useful to people who are sincerely striving after an elucidation of their position in society and to a clear determination of the moral obligations that arise from this position, and so I print them.

The fundamental idea, both of that book and of the present article, is the rejection of violence.¹ This rejection I learned and came to understand from the Gospel, where it is most clearly expressed in the words, “An eye for an eye,” that is, you have been taught to use violence against violence, but I teach you to offer the other cheek, and to endure violence instead of offering it. I know that these great words, thanks to the frivolously perverse and mutually concordant interpretations of the liberals and of the church, will, for the majority of so-called cultured people, be the cause why they will not read the article, or why they will read it with a bias. Nonetheless, I place these words at the head of the present article.

I cannot keep people who call themselves enlightened from regarding the Gospel teaching as an obsolete guidance of life, which was long ago outlived by humanity. It is my business to point out the source from which I drew the knowledge of the truth that is still far from being understood by all men, and which alone can free people from their calamities. And this I am doing.

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¹ Transcriber’s note – Having read the previous work, I find this statement surprising. *What Shall We Do Then* does expound upon the idleness of the upper classes at the expense of the lower classes, but says little about the use of violence in relation to it, and so was deemed unworthy of transcription for www.nonresistance.org. In final answer to his own question, Tolstoy made no mention of violence when he wrote:

So these are the answers that I found for myself in reply to the question, what we shall do? The first: not to lie to myself, no matter how distant my path of life may be from that true path which reason opens to me, and not to be afraid of the truth. The second: to renounce the consciousness of my righteousness, my prerogatives, and my privileges in comparison with other men, and to recognize myself guilty. The third: to fulfill that eternal, indisputable law of man to labor with my whole being and to struggle with Nature for the purpose of supporting my own life and that of other men.

A weigher serving on the Moscow-Kazán Railway, with whom I am acquainted, told me, in a conversation that I had with him, that peasants who load freight on his scales work for thirty-six hours in succession. In spite of my full confidence in the truthfulness of my interlocutor, I could not believe him. I thought that he was either mistaken, or was exaggerating, or that I had not understood him correctly.

But the weigher went on to give me such details about the conditions under which this work takes place that no room for doubt was left. According to his story, there are 250 such freight-hands on the Moscow-Kazán Road. They are divided into parties of five and work by contract, receiving from one ruble to one ruble and fifteen kopeks per thousand puds² of freight loaded or unloaded.

They come in the morning, work a day and a night unloading, and in the morning, immediately after the end of the night, start to load up and work for another day. Thus they sleep but one night in forty-eight hours. Their work consists in throwing out and taking away bales weighing seven, eight, and even ten puds. Two men hoist the bales on the shoulders of the other three, and these carry the load. By such labor they earn one ruble per day, out of which they have to feed themselves. They work continuously, without holidays.

The weigher's story was so circumstantial that it was impossible to doubt it, but I nonetheless decided to verify it, and so went to the freight station. Upon finding my acquaintance at the freight station, I told him that I had come to look at what he had told me.

"Nobody to whom I tell it is willing to believe it," I said.

Without answering me, the weigher turned to someone in the shed. "Nikita, come here!"

Out of the door stepped a tall, slim laborer in a torn coat.

"When did you begin working?"

"When? Yesterday morning."

"Where were you during the night?"

"Where else, but at the unloading?"

"Did you work at night?" I asked this time.

"Of course, I worked."

"And when did you come here today?"

"In the morning – what a question!"

"And when will you get through with your work?"

"When they discharge me – then shall I get through."

Four more laborers, out of a party of five, came up to us. They were all without fur coats, in torn undercoats, although it was sixteen degrees Celsius below zero. I asked them about the details of their work, evidently puzzling them with my interest in what to them was so simple and natural a thing as thirty-six hours' work.

They were all villagers, for the most part my countrymen, from the Government of Túla. There were also some from Orél and others from Vorónezh. They live in Moscow in hired rooms, some with their families, but for the most part alone. Those who live alone send their earnings home. They board singly with their landlords. Their board comes to ten rubles per month, and they eat meat at all times without keeping the fasts.

They are at work, not thirty-six hours in succession, but always more, because they lose more than half an hour in going from their quarters and coming back. Besides, they are frequently

² Transcriber's note – One pud is about 16.4 kilograms.

kept at work for more than the set time. With such thirty-seven hours' work in succession, they earn twenty-five rubles per month, out of which they have to pay for their board.

In reply to my question as to why they do such convict labor, they answered, "What else shall we do?"

"But why work thirty-six hours in succession? Can't you arrange it in such a way as to work by relays?"

"That's what we are told to do."

"But why do you consent?"

"We consent, because we have to make a living. If you do not want to – go! If you are an hour late, you get your discharge – and march! There are ten other men who are ready to take your place."

The laborers were all young people. Only one of them was older, somewhere above forty. They all had emaciated, careworn faces and weary eyes, as though they had been drinking. The slim laborer with whom I had first begun to speak struck me more especially by this strange weariness of his look. I asked him whether he had not had something to drink that day.

"I do not drink," he answered, as people who really do not drink always answer without thinking. "And I do not smoke, either," he added.

"And do the others drink?" I asked.

"Yes, they do. They bring it here."

"It is no light work. It will give you strength, all the same," said a middle-aged laborer. This laborer had had some liquor on that day, but he did not show it at all.

After some further talk with the laborers, I went to take a look at the unloading.

After passing between long rows of all kinds of merchandise, I came to some laborers who were slowly moving a loaded car. The laborers are obliged to shift of the cars and clear the platforms from snow without any remuneration, as I later learned. It even says so in their contract. These laborers were as ragged and as emaciated as those with whom I talked. When they had rolled the car up to the place wanted, and stopped, I went up to them and asked them when they had begun working, and when they had had their dinner.

I was told that they had begun to work at seven o'clock and had just had their dinner.

"We had to have dinner after work was through – they did not let us go."

"And when will they let you go?"

"Any time. It may be as late as ten o'clock," replied the laborers, as though priding themselves on their endurance in work.

Seeing my interest in their condition, the laborers surrounded me. Apparently taking me for a supervisor, and speaking several at a time, they informed me that the quarters where at times they could warm themselves or fall asleep for an hour, between the day and the night work, were narrow. This evidently formed their chief grievance. They all expressed great dissatisfaction with the crowded quarters.

"Some hundred men gather there, and there is no place to lie down. It is crowded even under the benches," several voices said, with dissatisfaction. "Look at it yourself. It is not far from here."

The quarters were crowded indeed. In the room, which was about twenty feet square, about forty men could find places on the benches.

Several laborers followed me into the room, and all of them, interrupting one another, angrily complained of the crowded condition of the quarters. "There is even no place to lie down under the benches," they said.

At first it seemed strange to me that all these men carried ten-pud weights on their backs for the period of thirty-seven hours, in a cold of sixteen below zero and without fur coats. They

were not allowed to go to dinner and supper when it was time to, but when it so pleased the authorities. In general, they were in an infinitely worse state than the dray-horses, and yet they complain of nothing but the crowded condition of their warming-place. At first this seemed strange to me, but when I reflected on their condition, I understood what an agonizing experience it must be for these men, who do not get enough sleep and are frozen, when, instead of resting and warming themselves, they crawl over a dirty floor under the benches, and there feel only weaker and more tired in the close, infected atmosphere.

No doubt, they only painfully feel the whole terror of their thirty-seven hours' work in this agonizing hour of a vain attempt at sleeping. Their work ruins their lives, and so they are more especially provoked by this seemingly unimportant circumstance, the crowded condition of the quarters. After watching several of their parties at work and speaking with some of the laborers, and hearing one and the same thing from all of them, I went home, fully convinced that what my acquaintance told me was the truth.

It was true that for money, which gives nothing but their sustenance to men who consider themselves free, these men find it necessary to hire themselves out for work to which, in the times of serf law, not one serf-owner, even the most cruel, would have sent out his slaves. Why, not even a hack-owner would send out his horse, because his horse cost money, and it is not profitable to shorten the life of a costly animal by means of thirty-seven hours of the hardest kind of work.

2

It is not merely cruel, but even unprofitable, to make men work for thirty-seven hours in succession without any sleep. Arid yet such unprofitable exploitation of human lives is taking place all about us without interruption.

Opposite the house in which I live there is a factory of silk articles, which has all the latest technical improvements. In it live and work about three thousand women and seven hundred men. Just as I am sitting here, in my house, I hear the continuous rumble of machinery, and I know what this rumble means, for I have been there. Three thousand women stand for twelve hours at the looms, amidst a deafening noise, winding, unwinding, and spinning silk threads for the production of silk stuffs. All the women, with the exception of those who have just come from the villages, have an unhealthy appearance. The majority of them lead a very incontinent and immoral life. Nearly all the married and unmarried women send their children either into the country or into a foundling house immediately after childbirth, where eighty per cent of these children perish. The mothers, not to lose their places, go back to work one or two days after childbirth.

Thus, in the period of twenty years that I have known this, tens of thousands of young, healthy women have been ruining their lives and those of their children in order to produce velvet and silk stuffs.

Yesterday I met a young beggar of a powerful build, whose spine was curved and who was walking with crutches. He had been working with a wheelbarrow when he lost his balance and injured himself internally. He spent what he had on doctors and curing-women, and has been these eight years begging and without a home, and murmurs against God for not sending death to him.

How many such ruined lives there are, which we either know nothing of, or, if we know, do not notice, thinking that it is right as it is!

I know laborers at the furnaces in a Tula iron foundry, who, to have every second Sunday free, work twenty-four hours in succession. I have seen these laborers. They all drink liquor to

brace themselves, and, just like those freight-handlers at the railroad, are rapidly losing not only the interest, but even the capital of their lives. And what about the wasting of the lives of those men who are employed in admittedly injurious labor: the compositors, who poison themselves with lead dust, the workmen in mirror factories, in card, match, sugar, tobacco, and glass factories, the miners, and the privy-cleaners?

The statistical data of England say that the average length of the lives of the men of the higher classes is fifty-five years, but that the duration of the lives of workmen in unhealthy professions is twenty-nine years.

It would seem that, knowing this (it is impossible not to know this), we, the men who use the labor that costs so many human lives, if we are not beasts, could not for a moment remain at peace. And yet, we, well-to-do, liberal, humane people, who are very sensitive, not only to the sufferings of men, but of animals as well, continue to employ this labor, try to become richer and richer, use more and more of such labor, and remain completely at peace.

Having, for example, learned of the thirty-seven-hour work of the freight-handlers and of their bad quarters, we will immediately send a well-paid inspector there and will not allow any work above twelve hours, leaving the third of the laborers who are deprived of their income to live as they please. We will even compel the railroad to build commodious and ample quarters for the laborers, and then we shall receive and transport goods by this road and receive a salary, dividends, and rentals from houses and land with absolutely calm consciences. And, upon learning that women and girls, who live in the silk factory far away from their families and amidst temptations, are ruining themselves and their children, and that the greater part of the laundresses who iron our starched shirts and of the compositors who set up entertaining books for us grow consumptive, we shall only shrug our shoulders and say that we are very sorry that this is so, but that we are unable to do anything to prevent this, and we shall continue with an easy conscience to purchase silk stuffs, to wear starched shirts, and to read the newspapers in the morning. We are very much concerned about the resting spells of commercial clerks, still more about the overexertion of our children in the gymnasias, strictly forbid the draymen to overload their horses, and even arrange the slaughtering of the animals in the slaughterhouses so that the animals shall suffer as little as possible. What a remarkable fog shrouds us the moment we touch on those millions of laborers who on all sides slowly and often painfully kill themselves with that work which we use for our conveniences and pleasures!

3

This remarkable fog that the people of our circle suffer from may be explained only by the fact that, when people act badly, they always invent such a world-conception for themselves that their evil deeds may not appear as evil, but as the consequences of invariable laws that are beyond their power. In antiquity such a world-conception consisted in the existence of God's inexplicable and invariable will, which for some determined a low position and work, and for others a high position and the enjoyment of the goods of life.

A vast number of books have been written and an endless number of sermons have been delivered upon the theme of this world-conception. This theme was worked out from the most disparate points of view. It was proved that God created different kinds of men – slaves and masters – and that both ought to be satisfied with their situation. Then it was proved that the slaves would be better off in the world to come. Then it was made clear that, although the slaves were slaves and must remain such, their situation would not be bad if their masters were merciful toward them. Then, after the liberation of the slaves, the last explanation was that wealth was

entrusted to some people that they might use part of it for good acts, and that in this case the wealth of some and the poverty of the others did not represent anything bad.

These explanations satisfied both the poor and the rich, especially the latter, for a long time. But the time came when these explanations became insufficient, especially for those who began to understand their condition of poverty. New explanations were then needed, and just at that time these new explanations made their appearance. These appeared in the form of the science of political economy, which asserts that it has found the laws according to which labor and the use of its products are distributed among men. These laws, according to the doctrine of this science, consist in the distribution and use of labor depending on supply and demand, capital, interest, wages, prices, and profit, and in general on invariable laws which condition men's economical activity.

There were, in a short time, just as many books and pamphlets written and lectures delivered on this theme as there had been on the previous theme, and even now they incessantly write mountains of books and pamphlets and deliver lectures on the same subject. All these books and lectures are just as misty and incomprehensible as the theological treatises and sermons, and, like the theological treatises, they attain their end: to give an explanation of the existing order of things such as would make it possible for one set of men to be at rest, to not work, and to enjoy the labors of other men.

They did not take the condition of the men of the whole world during all its historical existence as a model of the general order, but only the condition of men in small England as it existed under exceptional conditions at the end of the last and the beginning of the present century. They did not in the least interfere with the recognition of the truth of the propositions arrived at by the investigators of this science, even as endless disputes and differences of its leaders could not produce any agreement as to how to understand rentals, increased valuation, and profit. And they do not interfere with such recognition at the present time. There is but one fundamental proposition of this science that is recognized by all: that human relations are not conditioned by what men consider good or bad, but by what is advantageous to the people who are already in an advantageous position.

What has been accepted as an indubitable truth is that, if there are bred a large number of robbers and thieves in society, who take from the laboring people the products of their labor, this is not due to the fact that the robbers and thieves act badly, but is due to unchangeable economic laws, which may be changed only by a slow evolution. This has been determined by science, and so, according to the doctrine of this science, the men who belong to the class of the robbers, thieves, or abettors, who enjoy the fruits of their robbery and stealing, may calmly continue to enjoy what they have stolen and taken by violence.

Though the majority of the men of our world do not know these soothing explanations of science, just as many former men did not know the details of the theological explanations that justified their position. They nonetheless know that this explanation exists, that the learned and wise men have incontrovertibly proved that the existing order of things is just what it ought to be, and that, therefore, we may calmly live in this order of things without trying to change it.

It is only in this way that I am able to explain that remarkable blindness in which the good people of our society find themselves, people who sincerely wish the animals well, but with an easy conscience feast on the lives of their brothers.

The theory that God wills that one set of men should rule another eased men's consciences for a long time. But this theory, in justifying the cruelties of men, carried these cruelties to the utmost limits, and thus provoked opposition and doubts as to its truthfulness.

In the same manner, the theory that economic evolution takes place according to inevitable laws, in consequence of which one set of men must hoard capital while others must work all their lives to increase this capital, is beginning now to provoke certain doubts, especially amidst simple men who are not stultified by science. This hoarding of capital provokes an ever greater cruelty of one set of men against all others while they prepare themselves for the promised socialization of the tools of production.

For example, you see the freight-handlers, who are ruining their lives by their work of thirty-seven hours' duration, or the women in the factory, or the laundresses, or the compositors, or all those millions of people who live under grievous, unnatural conditions of monotonous, stultifying slave labor. You naturally ask, "What has brought these people to such a state, and how can they be liberated from it?" Science answers you that these men are in such a state because the railroad belongs to such and such a company, the silk factory to such and such a master – all the plants, factories, printing offices, and laundries belong to capitalists. Science says that their situation will improve when the working people attain a shortening of the workday, an increase in wages, and passage of all the implements of production into their hands. This will be accomplished by uniting into unions and cooperative societies, by means of strikes, and, through participation in the government, by exerting an ever-greater influence upon their masters and the government. Then all will be well; but now everything is going the way it ought to, and there is no need of changing anything.

This answer cannot help but appear very strange to unlearned men, particularly to unlearned Russians. In the first place, ownership of the implements of production by capitalists does not offer any explanation to the freight-handlers, or to the women, or to the many millions of other workers who suffer from hard, unhealthy, stultifying labor. The implements of production in agriculture that belong to the laborers who are now living at the railroad have not been seized by the capitalists at all. These laborers have land, horses, ploughs, harrows, and everything needed for the cultivation of the soil. The women who work in the factory are not driven to this work because the implements of production have been taken from them. On the contrary, they generally go away from home against the will of the elder members of the family, though their work is very much needed there, and though the family has all the implements of production. Millions of laborers are in the same condition, both in Russia and in other countries. Thus, the cause of the wretched condition of the working people can by no means be found in the seizure of the implements of production by the capitalists. The cause must be found in what drives them out of the village. In the second place, neither the shortening of the workday, nor the increase in wages, nor the promised socialization of the implements of production can in any way free the working people from this state, even in that distant future when science promises them that liberation.

All that cannot improve their condition because the wretchedness of the position of the people working upon the railroad, or in the silk factory, or in any other factory or plant does not consist in a greater or lesser number of working hours. (The farmers work, while quite satisfied with their lot, as much as eighteen hours a day and thirty-six hours in succession.) It does not consist in the small pay, or in the railroad or factory not belonging to them, but in the fact that the working people are obliged to work under injurious, unnatural, and frequently dangerous and

pernicious conditions, in city barracks that are full of temptations and immorality, doing slave work for other people.

The hours of work have been reduced recently and the pay has been increased, but this reduction of the hours of labor and increase of pay have not improved the condition of the working people if we do not consider their more luxurious habits – a watch and chain, silk kerchiefs, tobacco, wine, meat, beer, and so forth – but their real welfare: their health their morality, and, above all, their freedom.

In the factory of silk articles with which I am acquainted, twenty years ago mainly men worked there for fourteen hours a day and earned fifteen rubles clear a month, which they generally sent home to their families in the country. Now it is mostly women who work there. They work eleven hours a day and earn sometimes as much as twenty-five rubles per month, or more than fifteen rubles clear. They generally do not send the earnings home, but spend them here, chiefly on dresses, drunkenness, and debauchery. The reduction of hours of labor only increases the time passed by them at the inns.

The same, in a greater or lesser measure, takes place in all the factories and plants. Everywhere, their health is injured as compared with those doing agricultural work, in spite of the reduction of the hours of labor and the increase of pay. The average length of life is diminished and morality is lost. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise, when we consider how they are removed from the conditions most conducive to morality and family life, and from free, healthy, varied, sensible agricultural labor.

It may be, as some economists assert, that with the reduction of hours of labor, the increase of wages, and the improvement of sanitary conditions in the factories, the health of the working people and their morality is improved as compared with the condition in which the factory hands used to be formerly. It may be even that of late and in certain localities the condition of the working people in the factories has, in external conditions, been better than the condition of the rural population. But this is true for only some localities, and is due to the government and society doing, under the influence of the propositions of science, everything that can be done for the deterioration of the rural population and for the improvement of the condition of the factory hands.

If the condition of the factory hands is better than the condition of rural laborers in certain localities – and only in external conditions – this only proves that it is possible to reduce a life to wretchedness through all kinds of oppression, and that there does not exist so unnatural and bad a condition but that a man can adapt himself to it and remain in it for several generations. The wretchedness of the condition of the factory hand and of the city workman in general does not consist in his working long and getting little for it, but in his being deprived of the natural conditions of life in the midst of nature, being deprived of liberty, and being obliged to do monotonous slave work for another.

And so, the answer to the questions as to why factory and city laborers are in a wretched state, and how to help them, cannot consist in the fact that the capitalists have seized the implements of production. The reduction of the hours of labor, the increase of wages, and the socialization of the implements of production will not improve the position of the working people. The answer to these questions must consist in identifying the causes which have deprived the laborers of the natural conditions of life amidst nature and which have driven them into the slavery of the factories, and in identifying the means for liberating the working people from the necessity of passing from a free life in the country to a life of slavery in the factories.

Thus the question as to why the working people in the cities are in a wretched state includes, first of all, the question as to what are the causes which drove these people away from the

country, where they or their ancestors lived and could live and still live with us in Russia, and what it is that against their will has been driving them into the factories and plants.

If there are such working people, as in England, Belgium, and Germany, who for several generations have been living in factories, even these do not do so of their own free will, but because their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents were obliged for some reason to change their agricultural life, which they liked, for a life in the city and in the factories, which presented itself to them as hard. The rural population was at first forcibly dispossessed of its land, says Karl Marx, driven out, and reduced to the state of vagrancy. Then, by force of cruel laws, they were tortured with tongs, hot iron, and scourges for the purpose of making them submit to the demands of private labor. And so the question as to how to liberate the working people from their wretched condition would seem naturally to reduce itself to the question as to how to remove those causes which have driven them from that condition which they have regarded as good and have driven them into a condition which they have regarded as bad.

But economic science, though it in passing points out the causes which have driven the laborers away from the land, does not busy itself with the removal of these causes. Instead, it turns all its attention only to the amelioration of the condition of the working people in the existing factories and plants. It assumes that the condition of the working people in these plants and factories is something unchangeable, something that must by all means remain for those who are already in the factories, and something that must become the condition of those who have not yet left the villages and agricultural labor.

Economic science has become convinced that all the rural laborers must inevitably pass through the condition of the city workers in the factories. This is so, despite the fact that all the sages and poets of the world have always looked only to the conditions of agricultural labor for the realization of the ideal of human happiness. This is so, despite the fact that all working people with uncorrupted habits have always preferred agricultural labor to any other; despite the fact that work in the factories is always unhealthy and monotonous, while agricultural work is most healthy and varied; despite the fact that agricultural labor is always free – that the laborer alternates between work and rest at his will – while work in the factory, even though it all should belong to the working people, is always slavish and dependent on machines; and despite the fact that factory work is secondary, while agricultural is basic, so that without it no factories could exist. Despite all that, economic science asserts that the country people not only do not suffer from changing the country for the city, but even wish for it themselves and strive for it.

5

No matter how unjust the assertion of the men of science is that the good of humanity must consist in that which is profoundly repulsive to human sentiment – in monotonous, slavish labor in factories – the men of science have inevitably been led to the necessity of this obviously unjust assertion, just as the theologians were inevitably led to the obviously unjust assertion that slaves and masters are types of different beings, and that the inequality of their conditions in this world will be requited in the world to come. The cause of this obviously unjust assertion is that the men who have been establishing the propositions of science have belonged to the well-to-do classes, and have been so accustomed to those advantageous conditions amidst which they live that they do not even admit the idea that society could exist outside these conditions.

But the conditions of life to which the men of the well-to-do classes have become accustomed consist in the abundant production of various objects necessary for their comforts, and in pleasures that are obtained only thanks to the now existing factories and plants and the present labor structure. And so, in discussing the amelioration of the working people's

condition, the men of science, who belong to the well-to-do classes, always assume only an amelioration such that the production of the factories will remain the same, so that the comforts of life which they will enjoy will also remain the same.

In demanding a complete transference of the implements of production to the working people, even the most advanced men of science, the socialists, assume that the production of the same or nearly the same articles as at present will be continued in the same or similar factories with the present division of labor. According to their conception, there will only be this difference: then it will not be they alone, but also everybody else, who will enjoy those comforts which they are now enjoying all by themselves. They have a dim idea that with the socialization of the implements of labor, they themselves, the men of science and, in general, the men of the ruling classes, will have a share in the work, but for the most part in the shape of managers, scholars, and artists. But they are silent as to who will make white lead with muzzles on their faces, and who will be the stokers, the miners, and the privy-cleaners. Or, they assume that all these things will be so perfected that even work in the sewers and underground will be pleasant occupations. Thus they present to themselves a utopian concept of economic life, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.

According to their theory, the working people, having all united into unions and societies, and having been educated in solidarity, will finally, by means of unions, strikes, and participation in parliaments, arrive at the possession of all the implements of production, including the land. Then they will feed so well, will dress so well, and will enjoy such amusements on Sundays that they will prefer life in the city, amidst stones and chimneys, to the life in the expanse of the country, amidst plants and domestic animals, and will prefer monotonous machine work, done according to the whistle, to varied, healthful, and free agricultural labor.

Though this assumption is as improbable as the assumption of the theologians concerning heaven, which the working people will enjoy in the world to come for having worked so painfully in this world, intelligent and cultured men of our circle nonetheless believe in this strange doctrine, just as former learned and intelligent people used to believe in a heaven for the working people in the world to come.

The learned and their disciples – people of the well-to-do classes – believe in this because they cannot help believing in it. They are confronted with a dilemma. Either they must see that everything which they enjoy, from the railroad to matches and cigarettes, is produced by their brothers' labor, costing many human lives, and that they are very dishonest people for enjoying this labor instead of participating in it, or they must believe that everything takes place according to invariable laws of economic science for the general welfare. This sums up that inner psychological cause that compels the men of science – wise and cultured, but not enlightened men – to assert such an obvious untruth with assurance and insistence: that it is better for the good of the laborers to abandon their happy and healthy life amidst nature and to go to ruin their bodies and souls in factories and plants.

6

But even if we admit the obviously unjust assertion, which is contrary to all the properties of human nature, that it is better for people to live and work in factories and cities, doing mechanical slave work, than to live in the country, doing free manual labor, the very ideal toward which this economic evolution leads contains such an internal contradiction that it can in no way be disentangled. This ideal holds that the working people, having become the masters of all the implements of production, will enjoy all those comforts and pleasures which are now enjoyed only by well-to-do people. All will be well dressed and housed and fed, will walk over

an asphalt pavement under electric lights, will attend concerts and theatres, read newspapers and books, will go out driving in motor-cars, and so forth. But for all men to use certain articles, it is necessary to redistribute the manufacture of desirable articles and to determine how much time each workingman is to work. But how is this to be determined?

Statistical data may determine (very imperfectly at that) men's needs in a society that is fettered by capitalism, competition, and want, but no statistical data will show how many and what articles are necessary for the gratification of the needs of a society in which the implements of production will belong to society itself – a society in which men will be free. It will be absolutely impossible to determine the needs in such a society, because the needs in such a society will always be infinitely greater than the possibility of gratifying them. Everyone will desire to have everything that the rich now have, and so there is no possibility of determining the quantity of articles needed by such a society.

Besides, how can people be made to agree to produce articles which some of them will consider necessary, while others will consider them unnecessary or even quite harmful?

If it shall be found that, for the gratification of the needs of society, it will be necessary for every person to work six hours a day, who will compel a man in a free society to work these six hours when he knows that some of the hours are used for the production of articles which he considers unnecessary and even harmful?

There is no doubt that, with the present structure of society, they produce extremely complicated and varied articles with a great economy of forces, thanks to machines and, above all, to the division of labor. These articles are made to the highest degree of perfection, their production is advantageous to the capitalists, and we find their use very convenient and agreeable. But the fact that these articles are, in themselves, well made with a small waste of energy, and that we ourselves find them indispensable does not prove that free people would voluntarily produce the same articles. There is no doubt that Krupp makes beautiful cannon in a short time and in an artistic manner with the present division of labor, that N... similarly produces colored silk stuffs, that S... makes perfumes, smooth cards, and face powder (which saves the complexion), and that Popov distills delicious whiskey. This is very advantageous, both for the proprietors of the establishments where they are produced and for their consumers. But cannon, perfume, and whiskey are desirable for those who want to conquer the Chinese markets, or like drunkenness, or are interested in the preservation of their complexions, and there will always be some people who will find the production of these articles injurious. And, to say nothing of such articles, there will always be some people who will find that exhibitions, academies, beer, and meat are unnecessary and even harmful. How are these men to be compelled to take part in the production of such articles?

But even if people shall find a means for having all men agree to manufacture certain articles – though there can be no such means except compulsion – in a free society, without capitalistic production, competition, or supply and demand, who will determine upon what articles the forces are chiefly to be directed? Who will decide what is to be produced first, and what later? Are they first to build a Siberian road and fortify Port Arthur, and then lay out a highway through the counties, or vice versa? Which is to be provided for first, electric lights or the irrigation of the fields? And then again, there is the insoluble question in connection with the freedom of the working people as to who shall do this or that work. Obviously, it will be most pleasant for all people to busy themselves with the sciences or with drawing, rather than to be a stoker or a privy-cleaner. How can people be made happy in this distribution?

No statistical data will answer these questions. There can only be a theoretical solution to these questions, a solution such that there will be men to whom the power will be given to manage it all. One set of men will decide these questions, and other men will obey them.

But, in addition to the question of the division and direction of production and the choice of work in the socialization of the implements of production, there also appears the chief question as to the degree of the division of labor that may be established in a society organized on socialistic principles. The present division of labor is conditioned by the wants of the working people. A workman agrees to live all his life underground, or all his life to produce one-hundredth part of a certain article, or all his life to monotonously swing his arms amidst a rumble of machines, only because without that he will not have any means of support. But a workman who shall be in possession of the implements of production, and who, therefore, will not be suffering want, will have to be compelled to enter into labor conditions which dull and kill all their mental capacities and under which people work now. The division of labor is unquestionably very advantageous and proper for certain people, but if men are free, the division of labor is possible only to a certain narrow limit, which has long ago been crossed in our society.

If one peasant prefers to ply the shoemaker's trade, while his wife attends to the loom, and another peasant ploughs, and a third peasant works in the smithy, and all of them, having acquired exceptional agility in their work, later exchange their products, such a division is advantageous for all of them, and free people will naturally thus divide their labor among themselves. But a division of labor under which a mechanic produces one-hundredth part of an article for his entire life, or a stoker in a foundry works in a temperature of sixty degrees Celsius or in noxious gases which choke him, is disadvantageous, because, while producing the most trifling articles, it ruins the most precious article, a man's life. Consequently, the division of labor that now exists can exist only under compulsion. Rodbertus says that the division of labor unites humanity communistically. That is true, but it is only labor that is divided by the free will of the people that unites humanity. If people decide to build a road and one man digs, another hauls rock, a third breaks rock, and so forth, such a division of labor unites men. But suppose that a strategic railway, or an Eiffel tower, or all those foolish things with which the Paris Exposition is full, are built independent of and contrary to the desire of the working people. If one laborer is compelled to mine the ore, another to haul coal, a third to smelt this ore, and a fourth to cut down trees and square them, none of them having the slightest idea of the purpose of the articles prepared by them, such a division of labor not only does not unite them, but, on the contrary, disunites them.

And so, if people will be free in the socialization of the implements of labor, they will accept only such a division of labor that the good of this division will be greater than the evil that it will cause the laborer. And since every man naturally sees his good in the expansion and diversity of his activity, the now existing division of labor will naturally be impossible in a free society. As soon as the present division of labor shall be changed, there will also be diminished (to a very great extent) the very production of those articles which we now use, and which, it is assumed, all society will use in the socialistic state.

The assumption that there will be the same abundance of articles, after the socialization of the implements of production, as is now produced under the compulsory division of labor, is like the assumption that there would remain, after the liberation of the serfs, the same domestic orchestras, gardens, rugs, lace, and theatres that used to be produced by the serfs before their liberation. Thus, the assumption that, with the realization of the socialistic ideal, all men will be free and, at the same time, will enjoy almost everything that the well-to-do classes now enjoy, contains an obvious inner contradiction.

The same attitude is being exhibited as was prevalent in the times of the serf law. As then, the majority of the serf-owners, though recognizing the condition of the serfs as not entirely good, proposed only such changes for its improvement as would not impair the chief advantage of the landed proprietor. In the same way, the men of the well-to-do classes, though recognizing the condition of the working people as not quite good, now propose only such measures for its improvement as do not impair the advantageous position of the men of the well-to-do classes. Under the serf law, a well-disposed proprietor talked of paternal power and, like Gógol, advised the proprietors to be good and to care for their serfs. But he would not even admit the idea of the emancipation, which presented itself to him as harmful and dangerous. So also now, the majority of the well-to-do people of our time advise the masters to care more for the good of their workmen, but equally do not even admit the idea of such a change of the economic structure of life as would make the working people entirely free.

Just as then the advanced liberals, recognizing the condition of the serfs to be unchangeable, demanded of the state to limit the masters' power and sympathized with the agitation of the serfs, so now the liberals of our time, recognizing the existing order as invariable, demand of the government to limit the capitalists and manufacturers, and sympathize with the unions, the strikes, and the agitation of the working people in general. And just as then the most advanced people demanded the emancipation of the serfs, but left them in dependence on the landowners, or on corvées and taxes, so now the most advanced men demand the liberation of the working people from the capitalists and the socialization of the implements of production, but leave the working people in dependence on the present distribution and division of labor, which, in their opinion, must remain invariable. The teaching of economic science, which is followed without a comprehension of its details by all the well-to-do people who consider themselves enlightened and advanced, at a superficial glance appears liberal, even radical, in that it contains attacks upon the rich classes of society. But in its essence, this teaching is in the highest degree conservative, coarse, and cruel. In one way or another the men of science, and with them all the well-to-do classes, want by all means to retain the now existing distribution and division of labor, which make it possible to produce the large quantity of articles used by them. The men of science, and with them all the men of the well-to-do classes, call the existing economic structure civilization, and they see in this civilization – the railways, telegraphs, telephones, photographs, x-rays, clinics, exhibitions, and, above everything else, all the appliances of comfort – something so sacred that they do not even admit the idea of changes that may destroy all or even a small part of it. Everything may, according to the teaching of that science, be changed, except what they call civilization. Meanwhile, it becomes more and more evident that this civilization can exist only by compelling the workingmen to work. But the men of science are so convinced that this civilization is the highest good that they boldly say the very opposite of what the jurists used once to say. Instead of “*Fiat justitia, pereat mundus,*” they now say, “*Fiat cultura, pereat justitia.*”³ They not only say so, but even act so. Everything may be changed in practice and in theory, except civilization – except all that which takes place in foundries and factories and, above all things, is sold in shops.

But I think that enlightened men, who profess the Christian law of brotherhood and love of their neighbors, ought to say the very opposite:

³ Transcriber's note – Instead of “Let there be justice, though the world perishes,” they now say, “Let there be culture, though justice perishes.”

“It is all very nice to have electric illumination, telephones, expositions, and all the Arcadian Gardens with their concerts and shows, and all the cigars, and matchboxes, and suspenders, and motors; but may they go to perdition, and not only they, but also the railways and all the calico and cloth factories in the world, if for their production it is necessary that ninety-nine percent of men should be in slavery and should perish by the thousand in factories which are necessary for the production of these articles. If, to light London or St. Petersburg with electricity, or to erect the structures of an exhibition, or to produce beautiful dyes, or to get beautiful stuffs woven quickly and in great quantity, it is necessary that the smallest number of lives should perish or be ruined (and statistics show us how many of them perish), then let London and St. Petersburg be lighted by gas or oil, let there be no exhibitions, and let there be no dyes or stuffs so long as there shall be no slavery and the ruin of human lives resulting from it.”

Truly enlightened people will always prefer to return to travelling on horseback and even to digging the ground with sticks and hands, rather than travel on railways, which regularly kill so many people each year, only because the owners of the roads find it more profitable to pay damages to the families of the killed than to build the roads in such a way that they will not kill so many people, as is the case in Chicago. The motto of truly enlightened men is not “*Fiat cultura, pereat justitia.*” but “*Fiat justitia, pereat cultura.*”⁴

But civilization, the useful civilization, will not be destroyed. People will never have any occasion to return to digging the ground with sticks and lighting up their houses with chips. Not in vain has humanity with its servile structure made such great progress in the technical arts.

If men shall come to understand that it is not right for their pleasure to exploit the lives of their brothers, they will find out how to apply all the discoveries of mechanics in such a way as not to ruin the lives of their brothers, will know how to arrange life in such a way as to use all the perfected instruments for the subjugation of nature they can use, without retaining their brothers in slavery.

8

Let us imagine a man from an entirely foreign country, who has no idea about our history and our laws, and let us show him our life in all its manifestations and ask him what chief difference he observes in the manner of life of the men of our world. The chief difference in the manner of life of the men to which he will point will be that some – a small number of men – with clean white hands are well fed, clothed, and housed, work very little and at something easy, or not at all, and only amuse themselves, wasting on these amusements millions of hard working days of other men; while others, always dirty and poorly clad, poorly housed, and poorly fed, with dirty, callus-covered hands, work without cessation from morning until evening, at times through the nights, for those who do not work, but amuse themselves all the time.

If it is hard to draw as sharp a line between the slaves and the slave-owners of the present time as the one which separated the former slaves from the slave-owners, and if among the slaves of our time there are such as are only temporarily slaves and later become slave-owners, or such as at the same time are slaves and slave-owners, this mingling of the two at their points of contact does not weaken the truth of the proposition that all the men of our time are divided into slaves and masters, just as definitely as, in spite of the twilight, the twenty-four hours are divided into day and night.

If a slave-owner of our time has not an Ivan whom he can send into a privy to clean out his excrements, he has three rubles that are so much wanted by hundreds of Ivans that he can choose

⁴ Transcriber’s note – “Let there be justice, though culture perishes.”

any one out of a hundred Ivans and appear as a benefactor to him, because he has chosen him out of the whole number and has permitted him to climb into the cesspool.

The slaves of our time are not merely all those factory and foundry hands who, to exist, are obliged to sell themselves into the full possession of the masters of factories and foundries. Such slaves are also nearly all those farmers who, without rest, work in other people's fields, taking other people's corn to other people's granaries, or who work their own fields, only to be able to pay interest on inextinguishable debts to the bankers. Just such slaves are all those numerous lackeys, cooks, chambermaids, janitors, coachmen, bath servants, waiters, and so forth, who all their lives perform duties that are most improper to a human being and contrary to their own natures.

Slavery exists in full force, but we do not recognize it, just as at the end of the eighteenth century people did not recognize the slavery of serfdom. The men of that time believed that the state of the people who were obliged to work the land of their masters and to obey them was a natural, inevitable condition of life, and did not call that state slavery. The same is true among us: the men of our time regard the state of the workingmen as a natural, inevitable economic condition, and do not call this state slavery.

The men of Europe slowly began to see at the end of the eighteenth century that the condition of the peasants who were in the full power of their masters was bad, unjust, and immoral, though formerly it had seemed to be a natural and inevitable form of economic life, and they demanded a change. So now, the people of our time are beginning to understand that the state of the working people, which formerly used to be regarded as absolutely legal and normal, is not such as it ought to be, and demands a change.

The slavery of our time is now precisely in the same phase in which the serf law was in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, and serfdom in Russia and slavery in America were in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The slavery of the working people of our time is just beginning to be recognized by the advanced men of our society, but the majority of people are still fully convinced that there is no slavery among us.

The men of our time are supported in this wrong idea of their condition by the circumstance that we have just abolished slavery in Russia and America. In reality, the abolition of serfdom and slavery was only the abolition of an obsolete, useless form of slavery, and the substitution for it of a more substantial form of slavery that embraced a greater number of slaves than formerly. The abolition of serfdom and slavery was very much like what the Crimean Tartars did with their captives, when they decided to cut open the soles of their feet and fill the rents with chopped bristles. After performing this operation upon them, they took off their fetters and chains. Though the abolition of serfdom in Russia and slavery in America did away with the older form of servitude, it was, indeed, accomplished only when the bristles in the soles had created ulcers, and there was an absolute certainty that the captives would not run away even without fetters and chains, and would go on working. (The Northerners in America boldly demanded the abolition of the old slavery, because a new, the financial slavery, had already obviously taken possession of the people, while the Southerners did not yet see the obvious signs of the new slavery and so did not care to abolish the old slavery.)

With us, in Russia, serfdom was abolished only when all the land was already taken up. If land was given to the peasants, taxes were imposed upon them to take the place of the land slavery. In Europe, the taxes that kept the people in slavery were abolished only when the people were deprived of the land, made unaccustomed to agricultural labor, and placed in complete dependence on the capitalists by means of an infection from city needs. It was only then that the corn taxes were abolished in England. Now they are beginning to abolish the taxes on the laborers in Germany and in other countries, transferring them to the rich, only because the

majority of the people are in the power of the capitalists. One means of enslavement is abolished only when another has already taken its place. There are several such means. If not one, another, a third means, or several together keep the people in servitude, putting them in such a condition that a few men have full power over the labors and lives of a greater number of men. The chief cause of the wretched condition of the people consists in this enslavement of the greater part of the people by a smaller part. For this reason, the means for ameliorating the condition of working people must consist, in the first place, in recognizing the fact that slavery exists among us, not in any transferred, metaphorical sense, but in the simple and direct sense of the word – a slavery that keeps one part of men, the majority, in the power of the other, the minority; in the second place, having recognized this condition, in finding the causes of the enslavement of one set of men by others; and, in the third place, having found these causes, in destroying them.

9

In what, then, does the slavery of our time consist? What forces enslave one class of men to another? If we ask all the working people, in Russia, in Europe, and in America, both in the factories and in all kinds of hired occupations in the cities and the villages, what it is that has compelled them to choose the condition in which they are? They will all say that they were brought to it either by having no land on which they could and would wish to live and work (all Russian working men and many European ones will say so), or by the taxes, both direct and indirect, that are demanded of them, which they are not able to pay unless they work for others. Or, again, they will say that they are kept in the factories by the temptations of more luxurious habits, which they have acquired and which they cannot gratify except by selling their labor and their freedom.

The first two conditions, the lack of land and the taxes, drive the men into conditions of servitude, and the third, the unsatisfied increased needs, entices them into these conditions and retains them there.

It is possible to imagine, according to Henry George's project, the emancipation of the land from the right of personal ownership, and thus the destruction of the first cause which drives people into slavery: the lack of land. We can equally imagine the abolition of the taxes and their transference to the rich, as is actually done in some countries. But with the present economic structure, it is impossible to imagine such a state that amidst the rich people there would not establish themselves more and more luxurious, frequently harmful habits of life. These habits would by degrees, as inevitably and as irrepressibly as the water is taken up by the dry earth, pass over to the working classes and would become so necessary that the working people would be prepared to sell their freedom in order to gratify them.

Thus this third condition, in spite of its arbitrariness, in spite of the apparent ability of a man not to submit to the temptations, and in spite of the fact that science does not at all recognize it as a cause of the wretched condition of the workingmen, forms the most permanent and most ineffaceable cause of slavery. Living near the rich, the working people are always infected by new needs and gain the possibility of always gratifying these needs, but only in proportion to the hard labor they give for this gratification. Thus the working people of England and America, though occasionally receiving ten times as much as is needed for their support, continue to be the same slaves that they were formerly.

These three causes, according to the explanation of the working people themselves, produce the slavery in which they are. The history of the enslavement of the working people and the reality of their condition confirm the justice of this explanation.

All the working people are brought to their present state and are retained in it by these three causes. These causes, acting upon people from various sides, are such that not one man can get away from their enslavement. A farmer, who has at his command no land whatsoever or only an insufficient amount of it, will always be compelled to give himself into permanent or temporary slavery to him who owns the land, if he wants to be able to gain his sustenance from the land. If he in one way or another acquires as much land as he needs to be able to support himself upon it with his labor, taxes will be demanded of him in a direct and an indirect way such that he will be obliged again to sell himself into slavery to be able to pay them.

But if, to free himself from the slavery of the land, he shall stop working the land and, living on somebody else's land, shall begin to ply some trade, exchanging his products for commodities needed by him, on the one hand the taxes, and on the other the competition of the capitalists who produce the same articles as he does, but with improved implements, will compel him to sell himself into permanent or temporary slavery to the capitalists. But if, working for a capitalist, he should be able to establish free relations with him, such as would not necessitate his giving up his freedom, the habits of the new needs inevitably acquired by him will compel him to do so.

Thus the workingman will, in one way or another, always be in the slavery of those men who possess the taxes, the land, and the commodities needed for the gratification of his needs.

10

The German socialists have called the aggregate of conditions that subject the laborers to the capitalists the iron law of labor wages, meaning by the word "iron" that this law is something invariable. But there is nothing invariable in these conditions. These conditions are only the consequences of human enactments concerning taxes, concerning land, and, above all things, concerning commodities for the gratification of needs, that is, concerning property. But enactments are established and abolished by men. Thus it is not any iron, sociological laws, but enactments that establish men's slavery. In the given case, the slavery of our time is very clearly and very definitely produced, not by any elementary iron law, but by human enactments concerning land, taxes, and property. There exists an enactment that any amount of land may be possessed by private individuals and may pass from person to person by inheritance, bequest, or sale. There exists another enactment that every man must pay the taxes that are demanded of him without murmuring. And there exists a third enactment that any quantity of articles, no matter in what way they were acquired, forms the inalienable property of those men who own them. Slavery exists as a consequence of these enactments.

These enactments are so habitual to us that they appear to be natural conditions of human life, just as, in antiquity, the laws about serfdom and slavery appeared to be natural. We do not doubt their necessity and justice, and we do not see anything irregular in them. But, as there came the time when men, seeing the pernicious consequences of serfdom, began to doubt the justice and necessity of the enactments which asserted it, so now, when the pernicious consequences of the present economic structure are obvious, one comes involuntarily to doubt the justice and necessity of the enactments concerning land, taxes, and property, which produce these results.

Just as enlightened men formerly questioned whether it is right that men should belong to others and that these men should not have anything of their own, but should give all the products of their labor to their owners, so we should presently question whether it is right that people should not be able to use the land that is considered to be the property of other men. We should question whether it is right that men should give to others, in the shape of taxes, those portions of

their labor which are demanded of them. And we should question whether it is right that people should not be permitted to use articles that are considered to be the property of others.

Is it right that men should not use the land, when it is considered to be the property of men who do not work it?

It is said that this law was established because ownership of the land is an indispensable condition for the success of agriculture. If there did not exist private property, which passes down by inheritance, people would be driving one another away from the land seized, and no one would work or improve the plot of land on which he sits.

Is this true?

The answer to this question is given by history and by the present state of affairs. History says that the ownership of land has by no means originated in the desire to secure the possession of the land, but in the appropriation of the common land by the conquerors and its distribution among those who served the conquerors. Thus the establishment of the ownership of land did not have for its aim the encouragement of agriculture. Now the present state of affairs shows us the groundlessness of the assertion that the ownership of land secures to the farmers the conviction that they will not be deprived of the land which they work. In reality, the very opposite takes place everywhere. The right of the ownership of the land, which the large owners have enjoyed more than anyone else, has had the effect that the vast majority of the farmers are now in the condition of men who work somebody else's land, from which they may be arbitrarily driven by those who do not work it. Thus the existing right of the ownership of the land is by no means a protection of the farmer's right to the use of that labor which he puts on the land, but, on the contrary, a means for taking from the farmers the land which they work and for transferring it to those who do not work it. It is in no way a means for the encouragement of agriculture, but it is, on the contrary, a means for deteriorating it.

Concerning taxes, it is asserted that men must pay them because they are established by common, though tacit, consent, and are used for public needs and the good of all.

Is that true?

The answer to this question is given by history and by the present state of affairs. History says that taxes have never been established by common consent, but, on the contrary, always as a consequence of certain men having gained power over other men by conquest or other means, and having imposed tribute upon them, not for public needs, but for themselves. The same thing is done even at the present time. The taxes are collected by those who have the power to do so. If a part of this tribute, called taxes and imposts, is now used for public works, these public works are for the most part harmful, rather than useful, to the majority of men.

Thus, for example, one-third of the people's income is taken away from the people in Russia, but for the chief need – the people's education – only one-fiftieth of the whole income is used, and this, too, for education that stultifies and harms the people rather than doing them any good. The remaining forty-nine fiftieths are used for things that are useless or injurious for the people, such as the arming of soldiers, strategic roads, fortresses, prisons, the maintenance of the clergy and the courts, salaries for military and civil officials – that is, for the support of those men who aid in the seizure of the money from the people.

The same thing takes place, not only in Persia, Turkey, and India, but also in all the Christian, constitutional governments and democratic republics. The money is taken from the masses of the people (not as much as is needed, but as much as can be taken from them) and, quite independently of the consent of the taxed (everybody knows how the parliaments are made up and how little they represent the will of the people), it is not used for the common good, but for what the ruling classes deem best: for the war in Cuba and the Philippines, for the seizure and retention of the wealth of the Transvaal, and so forth. Thus the explanation given that people

must pay taxes because they are established by common consent and are used for the common good is as untrue as the other assertion that the ownership of land was established for the purpose of encouraging agriculture.

Is it right that people should not use articles that they want for the gratification of their needs if these articles are the property of other men? It is asserted that the right of ownership of acquired articles was established for the purpose of securing the workingman against the seizure of the products of his labor by anyone else.

Is that true?

We need only look at what is going on in our world, where such ownership is protected with especial care, to convince ourselves to what extent the actuality of our life does not confirm this explanation. In consequence of the right of ownership of acquired articles, there is in our society taking place precisely what this right intends to avoid. All the articles that have been produced by the working people are, in proportion as they are produced, constantly taken away from those who produce them.

Thus the assertion that the right of ownership secures to the working people the possibility of enjoying the products of their labor is obviously still more unjust than the justification of the ownership of land, and is based on the same sophism. At first the working people are unjustly and violently deprived of the products of their labor, and then the laws are enacted, according to which these products, which were unjustly and violently seized from the working people, are recognized as an inalienable possession of the usurpers.

The ownership of a factory, for example, which is acquired by a series of deceits and rascalities committed against the working people, is considered to be a product of labor and is called a sacred ownership. But the lives of those working people, who perish in working in this factory, and their labor are not considered to be their property, but are, as it were, considered to be the property of the manufacturer, if he, exploiting the want of the working people, has bound them in a manner which is regarded as legal.

Millions of kilograms of corn collected by means of usury and a series of exactions from the peasants are considered to be the property of the merchant. But the corn raised by the peasants on the land is considered to be the property of another man, if this man has received the land as an inheritance from his grandfather and great-grandfather, who took it away from the people. It is said that the law equally protects the property of the owner of a factory, the capitalist, the landowner, the factory hand, and the agricultural laborer. The equality of the capitalist and the laborer is the same as the equality of two fighters, when the hands of one are bound, while a gun is put into the hands of the other, and equal conditions are strictly observed for both in the fight.

Thus, all the explanations of the justice and indispensableness of those three enactments which produce slavery are as incorrect as were the explanations of the justice and indispensableness of the former serfdom. All three enactments are nothing but the establishment of that new form of slavery which has taken the place of the older slavery. Formerly, the establishment of enactments so that men might buy and sell people and own them, and might compel them to work, *was* slavery. Now, the establishment of enactments so that men cannot use land that is considered to be the property of another, must pay the taxes demanded of them, and cannot use the articles that are considered to be somebody else's property, *is* the slavery of our time.

The slavery of our time is due to three enactments: concerning land, concerning taxes, and concerning property. And so all the attempts of men who wish to improve the condition of the working people are of necessity, though unconsciously, directed at these three enactments.

Some abolish the taxes that weigh upon the working people by transferring them to the rich. Others propose to do away with the right of ownership of the land, and attempts have been made at realizing this in New Zealand and in one of the States of America. (An approach to it is also the limitation of the right to dispose of the land in Ireland.) Others again, the socialists, assuming the socialization of the implements of labor, propose the taxing of incomes and inheritances, and the limitation of the rights of the capitalist speculators. It would seem that those very enactments which produce slavery are being abolished, and that we may expect the abolition of slavery itself on this path. But we need only look more closely at the conditions under which the abolition of these enactments is proposed and accomplished in order to become convinced that all practical and theoretical projects for the improvement of the working men's condition are only the substitution of other enactments that establish new forms of slavery. Thus, for example, those who do away with the taxes levied on the poor by transferring them from the poor to the rich must necessarily retain the enactments about the ownership of land, implements of production, and other commodities to which the whole burden of taxation is transferred. But the retention of the enactments about land and property, by freeing the working people from the taxes, turns them over into slavery to the landowners and capitalists. And those who, like Henry George and his followers, do away with the enactments about ownership propose new enactments about a compulsory land rent. But the compulsory land rent will inevitably establish a new form of slavery, because a man, obliged to pay the rent, or single tax, will be compelled at every failure of crops and at every misfortune to borrow money from him who has it, and will again fall into slavery. And those who, like the socialists, do away with the enactments about the ownership of land and the implements of production, retain the enactments about the taxes, and, besides, are obliged to introduce enactments about compelling men to work – they again establish slavery in its primitive form.

Thus, in one way or another, all the practical and theoretical abolitions of one set of enactments which produce slavery of one kind have so far always been followed by new enactments which produce slavery of another, a new kind. What is taking place is very much like what a jailer does, when he changes the chains from the neck to the arms, or from the arms to the legs, or when he takes them off, but fastens the bolts and bars. All the ameliorations for the working people so far proposed have consisted of nothing else.

The enactments about the masters' right to force the slaves to do work have given way to enactments about the ownership of the whole land by the masters. The enactments about the ownership of the whole land by the masters have given way to enactments about taxes, the establishment of which is in the power of the masters. The enactments about taxes have given way to the strengthening of the right to own articles of use and implements of labor. The enactments about the right to own land, articles of use, and implements of production are now to be abandoned for enactments about compulsory labor.

The primitive form of slavery was the direct compulsion to work. Having made the whole circle of the different latent forms – ownership of land, taxes, ownership of articles of use and implements of production – slavery now returns to its primitive form, though in a changed aspect: to the direct compulsion to work.

Therefore, it is obvious that the abolition of one of the enactments which produces the slavery of our day – either of the taxes, or of the ownership of land, or of the ownership of

articles of use and implements of production – will not destroy slavery, but will only abolish one of its forms, which will immediately give way to another, as was the case with the abolition of personal slavery – serfdom – for taxes. The abolition of even all three enactments together will not destroy slavery, but will only provoke a new, still unknown form of slavery, which even now is slowly manifesting itself in the enactments which reduce the freedom of the working people, limit the working hours, working age, condition of health of the workers, mandate obligatory school attendance, reserve a certain percentage to provide for the old and the maimed, require factory inspections, govern cooperative societies, and so forth. All these are nothing but advance enactments that are preparing a new, still unexperienced form of slavery.

Thus it becomes obvious that the essence of slavery does not lie in those three enactments on which it is now based, and not even in any kind of enactments, but in the fact that there are enactments, that there are men who are able to establish enactments which are advantageous for them, and that, so long as men shall have this power, there will be slavery.

Formerly, it was advantageous for people to have direct slaves, and so they established the enactment about the personal slavery. Then it became advantageous to have land as property, to collect taxes, to retain acquired property, and corresponding enactments were made. Now it is advantageous for people to retain the existing distribution and division of labor, and enactments are introduced such as would compel people to work with the existing distribution and division of labor. And so, the fundamental cause of slavery is enactments, and the fact that there are men who are able to introduce them.

12

What, then, are enactments, and what gives men the power to establish them?

There exists a whole science that is more ancient, more deceptive, and hazier than political economy, and its servants have, in the course of the centuries, written millions of books (which for the most part contradict one another) in order to answer this question. But the aim of this science, as of political economy, does not consist in explaining what is and what ought to be, but in proving that that which is ought to be as it is. Thus, we are able to find very many discussions about right, about object and subject, about the idea of the state, and so forth in this science. These subjects are obscure, not only to the students, but also to the teachers of this science, and there is no lucid answer to the question as to what an enactment is.

According to this science, an enactment is an expression of the will of the whole people. But since there are always more men who violate the enactments (or who wish to violate them but do not do so from fear of the punishments imposed for the non-fulfillment of the enactments) than those who wish to fulfill them, it is evident that the enactments can in no sense be understood as the expression of the will of the whole people.

There exist, for example, enactments about not destroying telegraph-posts, about showing respect to certain persons, about the obligation for every man to do military service or be a juror, or about not carrying certain objects beyond a certain line, or about not using land that is considered to be the property of another, or about not making any monetary tokens, or about not using articles that are considered to be the property of someone else.

All these enactments and many others are extremely varied and may have the most varied motives, but not one of them expresses the will of the whole people. There is but one common feature to all these enactments: that if a man will not fulfill them, those who established them will send armed men, and the armed men will beat, deprive of liberty, and even kill him who does not fulfill them.

If a man does not wish to give the portion of his labor demanded of him in the form of taxes, armed men will come and take from him what is demanded. If he offers resistance, they will beat him, deprive him of liberty, or even kill him. The same thing will be done with a man who will use land that is regarded as somebody else's property. The same thing will happen to a man who will make use of articles considered to be the property of someone else, which he needs for the gratification of his needs or for work. Armed men will come, will take from him what he has taken, and, if he offers resistance, will beat him, deprive him of liberty, or even kill him. The same thing will happen to a man who will not show respect to that which enactments say must be respected, and to him who will not comply with the demand to become a soldier, and to him who will make monetary tokens. For every non-fulfillment of established enactments, those who do not fulfill them will be punished. They will be subjected to personal injury, to the loss of liberty, and even to being killed at the hands of those men who have established these enactments. Very many constitutions have been invented, beginning with the English and the American and ending with the Japanese and the Turkish, by which people are led to believe that all the enactments established in their state are established by their own will. But all men know that not only in despotic, but also in assumedly free countries such as England, America, and France, the enactments are established, not by the will of all men, but only by the will of those who have the power, and so they always are such as are advantageous for those who have the power – be they many, a few, or even one man. And the enactments are always and everywhere executed by the same means by which men have always and everywhere been compelled to do the will of others: by means of personal injury, loss of liberty, and murder. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise.

It cannot be otherwise because the enactments are the demand for the fulfillment of certain rules, but people cannot be compelled to fulfill certain rules – to do what is wanted of them – except by subjecting them to personal injury, loss of liberty, and capital punishment. If there are enactments, there has to be the power that can make men fulfill them. There is but one power that can compel men to fulfill these rules, which amount to the will of other men: violence. Not simple violence, which is used by men against one another in moments of passion, but organized violence, which is consciously employed by men who have power in order to compel other men to fulfill rules which are always established by them to achieve their own purposes.

Therefore, the essence of the enactments is not at all the subject or object of right, not the idea of the state, not the aggregate will of the people, and not similar indefinite and confused conditions. Their essence is that there are men who, in control of organized violence, are able to compel people to do their will. Thus a definite, comprehensible, and indisputable definition of enactments is this: enactments are rules established by men who are in control of organized violence, for the non-fulfillment of which those who do not fulfill them are subjected to personal injury, the loss of liberty, and even capital punishment.

In this definition is contained the answer to the question as to what gives men the power to establish enactments. What gives them the power to establish enactments is the same power that secures the execution of the enactments: organized violence.

13

The cause of the wretched condition of the working people lies in slavery. The cause of slavery lies in the enactments. But the enactments are based on organized violence. Consequently, the amelioration of men's condition is possible only with the destruction of organized violence.

But organized violence is the government, and is it possible to live without any government? Without government there will be chaos and anarchy, all the progress of civilization will perish,

and men will return to their pristine savagery. “ Just touch the existing order of things and the destruction of government will produce the greatest calamities, riots, pillage, and murder. In the end, all the bad will rule and the good will be enslaved by them.” We are generally told this, not only by those for whom this order of things is advantageous, but also by those for whom it is obviously disadvantageous and who are so used to it that they cannot imagine life without any governmental violence. But, to say nothing of the fact that the riots, pillage, and murder, at the end of which will come the kingdom of the evil and the enslavement of the good, have existed so far and exist now, the supposition that the violation of the existing order will produce troubles and disorder does not prove that this order is good.

“Just put your hand on the existing order, and the greatest calamities will result.”

Just touch one brick out of a thousand bricks placed in a slender column that is several yards in height, and all the bricks will fall down and break. But the fact that the displacement of one brick will destroy such a column and all the bricks does not at all prove that it is sensible to retain the bricks in an unnatural and unsuitable position. On the contrary, it proves that the bricks should not be kept in such a column, but should be placed in such a way as to remain firm and allow being used without destroying the whole structure. The same is true with the present political structure. The political structure is very artificial and very frail, and the fact that the slightest push destroys it does not prove that it is indispensable. On the contrary, it shows that, if it ever was necessary, it is now entirely unnecessary, and therefore harmful and dangerous.

It is harmful and dangerous because all the evil that exists in society is not only not diminished and mended, but also strengthened and confirmed with this structure. It is strengthened and confirmed, because it is either justified and clothed in attractive forms, or concealed.

All the well being of the people as presented to us in the so-called well-managed states, which are governed through force, is nothing but seeming – a fiction. Everything that can impair the external decency – all the hungry, sick, and monstrously corrupt – are hidden away in places where they cannot be seen, but their not being seen does not prove that they do not exist. On the contrary, there are the more of them, the more they are concealed, and the crueler to them are those who produce them. It is true, every violation and every cessation of the governmental activity of organized violence will impair such external decency of life, but these violations will not produce a disorganization of life, but will only reveal the one that has been concealed and will make it possible to mend it.

Men have thought and believed until recently, until the end of the present century, that they cannot live without any government. But life goes on, and the conditions of life and people’s views change. The efforts of government are directed toward retaining people in this childish condition, in which it seems easier for an injured man when he has somebody to complain to. But in spite of these efforts, workmen in Europe and Russia are more and more coming out of their childhood and beginning to understand the true conditions of their life.

“You tell us that without you we shall be vanquished by the neighboring nations, or by the Japanese or Chinese,” the people of the masses now say, “ but we read the newspapers and know that no one is threatening us with war. Only you, the rulers, for some reasons that are unknown to us, enrage one another. Then, under the pretext of defending your nations, you ruin us with taxes for the support of fleets, armaments, and strategic railways, which are needed only for your ambition and vanity. You start wars with one another, as you have just now done with the peace-loving Chinese. You say that you protect the landed property for our good, but your protection has resulted in all the land passing over into the hands of non-working companies, bankers, and rich men, while we, the vast majority of the people, are landless and in the power of those who do not work. You do not protect landed property with your laws, but instead take it away from

those who work. You say that you ensure to each man the products of his labor, whereas you do the very opposite. All people who produce costly articles are, thanks to your supposed protection, put in such a condition that they can never get the value of their labor, and that their whole lives are dependent on the non-working people and on their power.”

Thus, the people of the end of our century are beginning to understand matters and to talk. This awakening from the lethargy in which the governments held them is taking place in a rapidly increasing progression. Within the last five or six years the public opinion of the masses, not only in the cities, but also in the villages, not only in Europe, but also in Russia, has strikingly changed.

We are told that without the governments we shall not have those cultural, educational, and social establishments which all need. But why assume this? Why think that non-governmental people will not be able to arrange their lives for themselves as well as the governmental people arrange them?

We see, on the contrary, that in the most varied circumstances of life, people in our time arrange their lives for themselves incomparably better than they are arranged by the men who govern them. People establish all kinds of public enterprises – labor unions, cooperative societies, railway companies, collectives, and syndicates – without any interference from the government, and frequently in spite of the government’s interference. If levies are needed for public works, why do we think that free people will not be able to collect the necessary means and to establish everything that is established with the taxes, but voluntarily and without violence? Why must we think that there cannot be any courts without violence? The judgment of men in whom the litigants have confidence has always existed and always will exist, and does not need violence. We have been so corrupted by a long slavery that we cannot imagine a government without violence. But that is not true. The Russian Communes, when settling in distant regions where our government does not interfere with their life, arrange their own levies, courts, and police. And they always prosper, so long as governmental violence does not interfere with their management. Even so, there is no reason for the assumption that people are unable to distribute the use of the land among themselves by common agreement.

I have known of people – the Ural Cossacks – who have lived without recognizing the ownership of land, and the prosperity and order in their whole society have been such as do not exist in the society in which the ownership of land is protected by violence. I know of Communes at the present time that exist without recognizing the right of separate individuals to own land. The protection given to the ownership of land by means of governmental violence not only fails to remove the struggle for the ownership of land, but also, on the contrary and for the most part, strengthens it and brings it about.

If landed property were not protected, and so made to rise in value, people would not crowd in one place but would settle on free land, of which there is still so much on the globe. But now there is taking place an incessant struggle for the ownership of land, and this struggle is waged with those instruments which the government offers with its enactments. The victory in this struggle is always obtained, not by those who work the land, but by those who take part in the governmental violence.

The same is true in relation to articles produced by labor. Articles that are actually produced by man’s labor, and which are necessary for life, are always protected by custom, public opinion, and a sense of justice and reciprocity, and are in no need of protection by means of violence.

Tens of thousands of hectares of forestland belonging to one owner must be protected by violence, while thousands of people nearby have no fuel. The same protection is needed for plants and factories where several generations of workmen have been plundered. Still more must such protection be given to millions of kilograms of corn belonging to one owner who has been

waiting for a famine, so that he can to sell it at an inflated price to the starving population. But not a man, even the most corrupt (unless he is a rich man or a government official), will take the crops that a farmer has raised with his own labor to supports himself. Nor will anyone take the cow that he has raised, which supplies the milk for his children, or the plough, scythe, or spade that he has made and used. Even if there should be found a man who would nonetheless take from another the articles produced and needed by him, that man would provoke such indignation against himself in all men who live under the same conditions that he would hardly find such an act advantageous for himself. But if that man is so immoral that he will nonetheless do so, he will do the same under the most stringent protection of property by means of violence. We are generally told, "Try to destroy the right to own land and articles of labor, and not one man will care to work, since he is not assured that they will not take from him what he has produced." The very opposite ought to be said. The protection offered to the right to hold illegal property by means of violence, such as is offered at the present time, has, if not completely destroyed, at least considerably weakened in men the natural consciousness of justice in relation to the use of articles. It has destroyed men's relation to the natural and inborn right of property, without which humanity could not live, and which has always existed in society.

And so there is no foundation for the supposition that men will not be able to arrange their lives without organized violence. Of course, it can be said that horses and oxen cannot live without the exercise of violence over them by rational beings – men. But why must men live with violence being exerted over them, not by some higher beings, but by men themselves? Why must men submit to the violence of those men who are in power at a given time? What proves that these men are wiser than those men against whom the violence is exerted?

Their allowing themselves to exert violence against people proves that they are not only not wiser, but even less wise than those who submit to them. The Chinese examinations for the posts of mandarins, as we know, do not secure the wisest and best men for the power. Just as little is this secured by heredity, by all the systems of rank promotions, or by elections in the European states. On the contrary, those who get into power are generally less conscientious and less moral men than others.

We are asked, "How can men live without governments, that is, without violence?" We ought, on the contrary, to ask, "How can men – rational beings – live, recognizing violence and not rational agreement as the inner force of their lives?"

One or the other is true. Either men are rational beings, or they are not. If they are irrational beings, they are all irrational and there is no reason why some should enjoy the right to exert violence while others do not enjoy this right, proving that the violence exerted by the governments has no justification. But if men are rational beings, their relations must be based on reason and not on the violence of men who have accidentally seized the power, and therefore the violence of the government again has no justification.

14

The slavery of men is due to enactments, and enactments are established by the governments, and so the liberation of men from slavery is possible only through the abolition of the governments.

But how are the governments to be destroyed?

All the attempts at destroying the governments by means of violence have so far everywhere and always led to the overthrown governments being replaced by new, frequently more cruel governments than those which they superseded.

To say nothing of the attempts already made at destroying the governments by means of violence, the now imminent destruction of the violence of the capitalists through the socialization of the implements of production and the new economic structure, must, according to the theory of the socialists, be produced through a new organized form of violence, and this must be retained. Thus the attempts at destroying violence with violence have not led men to their emancipation from violence, and consequently from slavery. And they will obviously not lead to that emancipation in the future.

Nor can it be otherwise.

Violence is exerted by one class of men against another (outside of outbursts of vengeance and anger) for no other purpose than to compel people against their wish to do the will of other men. But the necessity of doing the will of other men against one's wish is slavery. And so, as long as there shall be any violence, intended for the purpose of compelling people to do the will of other men, there will be slavery.

All the attempts at abolishing slavery by means of violence are like the extinguishing of fire with fire, or the damming of water with water, or the filling of one ditch with dirt taken out from another ditch. And so, the means for the emancipation from slavery, if it exists at all, must consist, not in the establishment of a new form of violence, but in the destruction of what produces the possibility of governmental violence. But the possibility of governmental violence, as of any violence exerted by a small number of men against a large number, has always depended upon the small number being armed while the majority is unarmed, or the small number being better armed than the majority.

Thus have things been done in the case of every conquest. Thus have nations been vanquished by the Greeks, the Romans, the knights, and Cortés, and thus are people now vanquished in Africa and Asia, and thus do all the governments in time of peace hold their subjects in subjection. As in antiquity, even so now, one set of men rules another only because some are armed, while the others are not.

In ancient times, the warriors with their leaders fell upon defenseless inhabitants and vanquished and plundered them. All of them, according to the part they took, their bravery, and their cruelty, divided up the booty, and it was obvious to every warrior that the violence practiced by him was advantageous for him. But now the armed men, who are for the most part taken from among the workingmen, go against defenseless people, strikers, rioters, or inhabitants of foreign countries, and vanquish and plunder them (that is, compel them to give up their labor), not for themselves, but for those who do not even take part in the subjugation.

The only difference between conquerors and governments is this. The conquerors attacked defenseless inhabitants with their warriors and, in case of their resistance, carried out their threats of tortures and murders. But the governments, in case of resistance, do not themselves practice tortures and murder on the defenseless inhabitants, but cause this to be done by deceived and specially bestialized men, who are taken from among the very masses which they oppress. Thus the former violence was practiced through personal efforts – through the bravery, cruelty, and agility of the conquerors themselves – while the present violence is practiced through deception.

It was formerly necessary to arm oneself and to offer armed violence to be freed from the violence of armed men. Now, when the masses are not vanquished through direct violence, but through deception, all that is needed for the destruction of the violence is the arraignment of the deception that makes it possible for a small number of men to exert violence against a larger number.

The deception through which this is accomplished consists in the small number of ruling men, who have received their power from their predecessors, as established by the conquerors, saying to the majority, "There are many of you, you are stupid and uneducated, and you are not

able to govern yourselves, nor to arrange your own public affairs. And so we take this care upon ourselves. We will defend you against foreign enemies, establish and maintain domestic order among yourselves, judge among you, establish and guard the public institutions for you, and will in general care for your well-being. For all that, you shall fulfill the few demands that we will make upon you. Among them is the demand that you turn over into our control a small portion of your incomes and that you yourselves enter the army, which is necessary for your safety and for your government.”

Most men agree to this, not because they have weighed the advantages or the disadvantages of these conditions (they never have a chance to do this), but because they find themselves under these conditions from the time of their birth. If doubts arise in these men as to the necessity of all that, every man, thinking of himself alone, is afraid to suffer in case of a refusal to fulfill these conditions, and hopes to make use of these conditions for his own advantage. They agree to this, assuming that the transference of a small portion of their possessions to the government, and their agreement to do military service, cannot injure their lives very much. But the moment the money and the soldiers are in the power of the governments, these governments, instead of fulfilling the obligation taken upon themselves of defending their subjects against foreign enemies and establishing their prosperity, do everything they can to irritate the neighboring nations and provoke wars. They not only fail to contribute to the domestic prosperity of their nations, but also ruin and corrupt them.

In *The Thousand and One Nights* there is a story about a traveler who, having been brought to an uninhabited island, finds an old man with dried up legs sitting on the ground on the bank of a brook. The old man asks the traveler to take him on his shoulders and carry him across the brook. The traveler agrees to do this. But, the moment the old man seats himself on his shoulders, he winds his legs tightly around the traveler’s neck and does not let go of him. Having taken possession of the traveler, the old man orders him about as he pleases, plucks and eats fruits from the trees without giving anything to the one who carries him, and in every other way scorns the traveler.

The same is done to the nations that have given money and soldiers to the governments. With the money the governments buy guns and hire, or prepare through education, irresponsible, bestialized military chiefs. But the chiefs, by means of artful methods of stultification, which were worked out through the ages and are called discipline, prepare a disciplined army out of the men who are taken into the army. This discipline consists in the men undergoing the instruction and following it for a certain time while completely deprived of everything that is precious to a man – deprived of rational freedom. These men become submissive, machine-like implements of murder in the hands of their organized hieratic authorities.

There is good reason why the kings, emperors, and presidents esteem discipline so highly, fear the violation of it so much, and consider their most important business to be inspections, maneuvers, parades, ceremonial marches, and similar foolish things. They know that all these things maintain discipline, and on discipline alone is based, not only their power, but also their existence. The disciplined army is the means with which they can commit the greatest malefactions through other people’s hands, and the ability to do so subjugates the people.

In this disciplined army lies the essence of the deception, in consequence of which the governments of modern times dominate the nations. When this unwilling implement of violence and murder is in the power of a government, the whole nation is in its power. The government no longer lets go of it, and not only ruins it, but also scorns it, impressing it with loyalty and even veneration for the government by means of a pseudo-religious and patriotic education. And it is this venerated government that keeps the nation in slavery and torments it.

Consequently, the only means for the destruction of the governments is not violence, but the arraignment of this deception. It is necessary for the people to understand that, in the first place, there is no need to defend the nations against one another amidst the Christian world. All the hostilities between nations are provoked only by the governments themselves. The armies are needed only to keep a small number of ruling men in power, but are not needed by the nations, to which they are even extremely harmful, in that they serve as an implement for the enslavement of men. In the second place, it is necessary for men to understand that that discipline which is so highly esteemed by the governments is the greatest crime a man can commit – an obvious proof of the criminality of the aims of the governments. Discipline is the destruction of reason and of liberty in man, and cannot have any other purpose than merely the preparation for the commission of such malefactions as not one man will commit in his normal condition. For a defensive national war it is unnecessary, as has lately been proved by the Boer War. All that it is needed for (and William II demonstrated it is needed chiefly for) is to commit the greatest of crimes: fratricide and patricide.

The terrible old man who was sitting on the traveler's shoulders acted in precisely the same manner. He laughed at him, knowing that so long as he was sitting on his shoulders, the traveler was in his power.

It is this terrible deception, by means of which a small number of evil men, in the form of the governments, dominate the nations, and not only ruin them, but even commit the most injurious of all deeds, corrupting them for generations from their very childhood, which must be laid open, in order that the destruction of the governments and of the slavery resulting from them may be made possible.

The German writer, Eugen Schmitt, who edited the newspaper *Ohne Staat* in Budapest, printed in it an article, true and bold not only in expression, but also in thought. In it, he said that the governments, in justifying their existence by saying that they provide a certain amount of security for their subjects, do not differ in this from a Calabrese bandit who imposes a tax upon all those who want to travel safely over the highways. Schmitt was tried for this, but the jury found him innocent.

We are so hypnotized by the governments that such a comparison seems to be an exaggeration, a paradox, or a jest. But it is no paradox or jest. In fact, the comparison is incorrect, because the activity of all the governments is much more inhuman and, above all things, much more harmful than the activity of the Calabrese bandit. The bandit for the most part robs the rich, while the governments for the most part rob the poor, while they protect the rich, who help them in their crimes. The bandit, in doing what he does, risks his life, while the governments risk nothing and build all their deeds on lying and deceit. The bandit does not forcibly take anybody into his band, while the governments generally draft their soldiers by force. All those who pay tribute to the bandit receive equal security, while in the state a man receives more security, and even more reward, the more he takes part in the organized deception. The emperor, king, or president is the most secure (he is always surrounded by a guard of protection), and he spends the greatest amount of money, which is collected from the subjects who are burdened with taxes. Then, in proportion with their greater or lesser participation in the governmental crimes, come the commanders-in-chief, ministers, chiefs of police, governors, and so on, down to the policemen, who are least protected and who receive the least salary. But he who does not take part in the governmental crimes at all, refusing to serve, to pay taxes, or to have anything to do with the court, is subjected to violence, as one is subjected to it by the robbers. The bandit does not intentionally corrupt people, while the governments corrupt whole generations of children and adults for the attainment of their purposes by false religious and patriotic doctrines. Above all things, not even the cruelest bandit – not even Sténka Rázin or

Cartouche - can compare in cruelty, heartlessness, and refinement of tortures with sovereigns famous for their cruelty, such as John the Terrible, Louis XI, the Elizabeths, and so forth. The cruelest bandit cannot even compare with the present constitutional and liberal governments, with their solitary cells, disciplinary battalions, pacifications of riots, and slaughters in wars.

We must bear ourselves toward the governments as toward the churches: either with awe or with disgust. So long as a man has not come to understand what the government is, just as he does not understand what the church is, he cannot help but look with awe upon these institutions. So long as they guide him, he must, for the sake of his egoism, imagine that he is guided by something original, great, and sacred. But the moment he comes to understand that what guides him is nothing original or sacred, and that it is only the deception of evil men who have used it for their personal purposes under the guise of guidance, he cannot help but immediately experience disgust for these men.

It is this that men must feel in relation to the governments, if they have come to understand their meaning. People must understand that their participation in the criminal activity of the governments, whether by giving up part of their labors in the form of money, or by a direct participation in military service, is not an indifferent act, such as people generally take it to be. Instead, besides the harm done to him and to his brothers by this act, it is also a participation in the crimes that are incessantly committed by all the governments, and a preparation for new crimes, for which the governments are always ready when they maintain a disciplined army.

The time for a relation of awe to the governments, in spite of the whole hypnotization that the governments employ for the maintenance of their position, is passing more and more. And it is time for men to understand that the governments are not only useless, but also injurious and immoral institutions in the highest degree, in which an honest and self-respecting man cannot and must not take part, and the advantages of which he cannot and must not enjoy.

As soon as men shall come to understand this, they will naturally stop taking part in those acts by giving the governments soldiers and money. As soon as most men shall stop doing that, the deception that enslaves men will destroy itself.

Only in this way can men be freed from slavery.

15

“But these are all general reflections. Whether they are just or unjust, they are inapplicable to life.” I hear this objection from people who are accustomed to their position and who do not consider it possible or desirable to change it.

“Tell me, what is actually to be done? How is society to be built up?” The men of the well-to-do classes generally say this.

The men of the well-to-do classes are so much used to their role of slave-owners that, when the amelioration of the workingmen’s condition is under discussion, they feel themselves in the position of the landed proprietors. They immediately begin to discuss all kinds of projects for the management of their slaves, but it does not even occur to them that they have no right whatever to dispose of other men, and that, if they really mean to do good to men, the one thing they can and must do is to stop doing the evil that they are doing now. The evil that they are doing is very definite and clear. The evil that they are doing is not only using the compulsory labor of slaves and refusing to renounce this exploitation, but also taking part themselves in the establishment and maintenance of this compulsory labor. It is this that they must stop doing.

But the working people are so corrupted by the compulsory slavery that it appears to most of them that, if their condition is bad, the fault is with their masters, who pay them too little and own the implements of production. It does not even occur to them that their bad condition is due

to themselves alone, and that, if they actually desire the amelioration of their condition and of that of their brothers, and not each his own advantage, the chief thing they should do is to stop doing evil. But the evil they do consists in wishing to improve their material condition by those very means by which they are brought into slavery. And so, the workingmen sacrifice their human dignity and liberty and accept degrading, immoral positions, or work at producing useless and injurious articles, to be able to gratify those habits which they have acquired. But more importantly, they support the governments, take part in them with their taxes and direct service, and thus enslave themselves.

For men's condition to improve, both the well-to-do classes and the laborers must understand that it is impossible to improve men's condition by preserving their own advantage, and that such improvement is not without sacrifices. Therefore, if people really want to improve the condition of their brothers, and not their own, they must be prepared, not only for the change of the whole structure of life to which they are used, and to the loss of those advantages which they have been enjoying, but also for a tense struggle, not with the governments, but with themselves and their families. And they must be prepared for persecutions for not fulfilling the demands of the government.

Consequently, the answer to the question as to what should be done is very simple, and not only definite, but also in the highest degree and always and for every man practicable and easy to implement. However, it is not such as is expected by those who, like the men of the well-to-do classes, are fully convinced that they are called, not to mend themselves (they are good as it is), but to teach others and provide for them. It is also not as expected by the working people, who are convinced that it is not they who are to blame for their bad condition, but only the capitalists, and that this condition can be changed only by taking away from the capitalists what they enjoy, and by making it possible for all men to enjoy those pleasures of life which the capitalists alone enjoy at present. This answer is quite definite, practicable, and easy to implement because it invites to activity the only person over whom each has a real, legal, and undoubted power: oneself. If a man – be he slave or slaveholder – really wishes to improve, not his condition alone but the condition of all men, he must himself stop doing that evil which produces his slavery and the slavery of his brothers. And, in order not to do that evil which produces his wretchedness and the wretchedness of his brothers, he must, in the first place, neither voluntarily nor by compulsion take part in governmental activities. He not take upon himself the calling of a soldier, field-marshal, minister, collector of taxes, deputy, elder, juror, governor, or member of parliament, or accept any other office that is connected with violence. In the second place, such a man must not voluntarily pay any direct or indirect taxes to the government, and must equally not make use of any money that is collected as taxes, either in the form of a salary, pension, or reward, nor make use of any governmental institutions that are supported by forcibly collected taxes. In the third place, a man who wishes to contribute, not to his own welfare alone, but to the amelioration of men's condition, must not turn to governmental violence, either for the protection of the ownership of land or other objects, or for his own security or the security of his friends. And he must own the land, as well as all other products of other people's or his own labor, only to the extent to which no demands of other people are brought forward in regard to these articles.

I shall be told, "But such an activity is impossible. To refuse all participation in governmental affairs means to renounce life. A man who will refuse to do military service will be imprisoned. A man who will not pay his taxes will be subjected to penalties, and the taxes will be levied on his property. A man who will refuse to enter the service of the government, without having any other means of existence, will perish with his family from hunger. The same thing will happen to a man who will refuse the governmental protection of his property and

person. And it is quite impossible not to use articles that are burdened with taxes and not to use the governmental institutions, since often it is articles of prime necessity that are taxed. It is similarly impossible to get along without governmental institutions such as the post-office and roads.”

It is quite true that it is hard for a man of our time to renounce every participation in governmental violence, but the fact that not every man is able to arrange his life such that he is not a participant in governmental violence to some degree does not by any means show that it is impossible to wean oneself away from it more and more. Not every man will have the strength to refuse to do military service (but there are and will be such), but it is in the power of every man not to enter military, police, judicial, or fiscal service of his own free will, and it is possible for him to prefer a less paying private activity to more profitable governmental service.

Not every man will have the strength to renounce his ownership of land (though there are some men who do so), but it is possible for every man, if he understands the criminality of such property, to limit its scope. Not every man will be able to renounce the possession of capital (there are men who do) and the use of articles protected by violence, but it is possible for every man, diminishing his needs, to make less and less use of articles that provoke the envy of other people. Not every person is able to give up a governmental salary (there are also those who prefer starving to a dishonest governmental position), but it is possible for every man to prefer a small salary to a larger one, if only the duties to be performed are less connected with violence. Not every person can renounce the use of the governmental schools (there are also those who do), but it is possible for every man to prefer a private school to a government school. And so, it is possible for every man to use articles that are burdened with duties and the institutions of the government less and less.

Between the existing order of things, which is based on coarse violence, and the ideal of life, which consists in a communion of men that is based on rational consent as established by custom, there is an endless number of steps over which humanity has incessantly walked. The approach to this ideal is accomplished only in proportion as men are freed from participation in violence, from using it, and from the habit of it. We do not know and we cannot foresee, much less prescribe, as the so-called learned men do, in what way this gradual weakening of the governments and the emancipation of men from them is to come about. We do not even know what forms human life will assume as it is gradually emancipated from governmental violence. Presently, men take part in the violence of the governments and, making use of it, pretend to be struggling against it, and try to destroy the old violence by inventing a new form of violence. But once men have understood the criminality and harmfulness of the government’s activity, they will try not to make use of it or part in it, and then, indubitably, their lives will be very different from what they are presently, and more in agreement with legitimate life and good conscience.

Above all else, the present structure of life is bad – all men agree to that. The cause of the bad condition of their lives and of the slavery they suffer from lies in the violence of the governments. To destroy governmental violence there exists but one means: people’s refusal to take part in violence. Consequently, whether it is hard for people to refrain from participation in governmental violence, or not, and whether the beneficent results of such a refusal will appear soon, or not, such questions are superfluous, because there is but this one means, and no other, for freeing men from slavery.

But to what extent and when the substitution, sanctioned by custom, of rational and free consent for violence will be realized in every society and in the whole world – that will depend on the strength and lucidity of people’s consciences and on the number of separate individuals who have attained to such a state of conscience. Every one of us is an individual, and every one

of us may be a participant in the common movement of humanity by a more or less clear consciousness or beneficent purpose, and he may be an opponent to this movement. Every man has the choice, either to go against God's will, by building the frail house of his perishable deceptive life on the sand, or to join the eternal, undying movement of the true life according to God's will.

But maybe I am mistaken, and it is necessary to make quite different deductions from the history of humanity, and humanity does not march from violence to emancipation. Maybe it is possible to prove that violence is a necessary factor of progress, that the state with its violence is indispensable to social life, and that men will be worse off if governments, property, and the protection of security are done away with.

Even if that is so and that all the preceding arguments are wrong, besides the general considerations about the life of humanity, every man has also the question of his personal life. In spite of all reflections concerning the general laws of life, a man cannot do what he recognizes not only as injurious, but also as bad.

Even if I am mistaken, every sincere and honest man of our time will answer, "It is very likely that the reflection that the state is a necessary form of the development of personality and that governmental violence is indispensable for the good of society may be deduced from history, and that these reflections are right. But murder is evil. I know that more certainly than all reflections. By demanding military service of me, or money for the hire and arming of soldiers, the purchase of cannon, and the armament of ironclads, you wish to make me a participant in murder. I not only do not want that, but am not even able to do that. Even so, I will not and cannot use the money that you have collected from the hungry under threat of murder, and I will not make use of the land and of the capital that you protect, because I know that you protect it only by means of murder.

"I was able to do all that so long as I did not understand the whole criminality of these matters. But the moment I came to see it, I was unable to stop seeing it, and I am no longer able to take part in these things.

"I know that we are all so bound up by violence and that it is hard to fully vanquish it, but I will nonetheless do what I can in order not to take part in it. I will not be its accomplice, and I will try not to use what is acquired and protected by murder.

"I have one life, and why should I act contrary to the voice of my conscience in this my brief life and become a participant in your abominable deeds? I will not do so.

"What will come of all that? I do not know. But I think that nothing bad can happen from my acting as my conscience commands me to act."

Thus must every honest and sincere man of our time reply to all the arguments about the indispensableness of governments and violence, and to every demand or invitation to take part in it.

Thus the highest judge, from whom there is no appeal, the voice of conscience, confirms for every man what he is led to by general considerations.

Epilogue

Upon reading the above essay, many will say, "Why, that is the old sermon again. On the one hand, it is about the destruction of the existing order without the substitution of another for it, and on the other, it is about non-acting. The governmental activity is not good, and likewise the activity of the landowner or enterprising man is not good. Similarly bad is the activity of the socialists and anarchistic revolutionaries. Every practical activity is bad, and what is good is

some kind of a moral, spiritual, indefinite activity, which reduces itself to absolute chaos and non-acting.” Thus, I know, many serious and sincere men will think and say.

What appears most confounding to men, in the absence of violence, is the unprotected condition of property, offering the chance for every man to take what he needs or wants from another with impunity. People who are accustomed to the protection of person and property by means of violence imagine that there will be constant disorder without this protection, and constant struggle of all against all.

I will not repeat what I have said in another place about this, that the protection of property by means of violence does not diminish, but increases disorder. But even if we admit that disorders may arise with the absence of protection, what are people to do who have come to understand the cause of those calamities from which they suffer?

If we understand that we are sick from intoxication, we cannot continue drinking and hope to improve our condition by drinking moderately, or continue drinking and take medicine that is prescribed to us by shortsighted physicians.

The same is true of diseases of society. If we have come to understand that one set of people does violence to other people, it is impossible to improve the condition of society by continuing to maintain the governmental violence that exists, or by introducing a new and revolutionary socialistic violence. That was possible so long as the fundamental cause of men’s calamities was not clearly discernible. But as soon as it becomes indubitably clear that men suffer from violence that is exerted by one class of men over another, it is no longer possible to improve the condition of men by continuing the old violence or introducing a new kind. Just as for an alcoholic patient there is but one means for his liberation – abstinence from liquor, the cause of the disease – so, too, there is but one means for the liberation of men from the bad structure of society. That means is abstinence from violence, which is the cause of calamities — abstinence from personal violence, abstinence from the propaganda of violence, and abstinence from every justification of violence.

Not only is this the only means for freeing men from their wretchedness, but its application is also necessary, because it coincides with the moral law of every separate individual of our time. If a man of our time has come to understand that every protection of person and property by means of violence is attained only by the threat of killing and by killing itself, he can no longer calmly use what is acquired through murder or the threat of killing, much less take part in murder or the threat of killing. Thus, what is demanded for the liberation of men from their calamities is also necessary for the gratification of the moral feeling of every individual. And so, there can no longer be any doubt for every separate individual that, both for the common good and for the fulfillment of the law of his life, he must not take part in violence, must not justify it, and must not make use of it.

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