

COMMUNISM AND THE ALTERNATIVE

BY

ARTHUR J. PENTY

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

COMMUNISM is presenting a grave challenge not only to our social order but also to our religious faith. Whatever their final verdict may be, Christians ought to be facing that challenge much more seriously than they are at present doing. The Press is therefore issuing a number of volumes, written from different points of view, to help Christian people to assess both the truth and the error of the Communist doctrine and way of life.

“Let us remember we should not
disregard the experience of the ages.”

ARISTOTLE: *Politics*.

“The road to anarchy doth go,
This to the grim mechanic state.”

A. E.: *The Iron Age*.

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COMMUNISM AND THE ALTERNATIVE

CHAPTER I

THE RELIGION OF COMMUNISM

IT IS CUSTOMARY to approach Communism as an economic theory, and if we have regard to its historical origins, it is right to do so. Yet if it is an economic theory it is one with definite moral and religious implications. In the course of its history its center of gravity has moved from economics to religion, at any rate in Russia. To understand, therefore, Russian Communism, which is essential if we are to understand Communism as a political and revolutionary world force, it must be approached primarily as a religion. Without doubt Russian Communism is characterized by an extreme obsession of economics, yet according to the distinguished Russian exile, Professor Nicholas Berdyaev, who, as an ex-Marxist, has written with great insight into the psychology of Russian Communism, it can only be finally comprehended as a religion striving to take the place of Christianity. Only upon this assumption, he says, is it possible to explain the passionate tone of anti-religious propaganda and persecution in Soviet Russia which has no respect for liberty of conscience or the claims of the human personality.

“It is the religion of the kingdom of this world, the last and final denial of the other world, of every kind of spirituality. That is precisely the reason why this very materialism becomes spiritual and mystical. The Communist State is quite different from the ordinary lay secularized State. It is a sacred, ‘theocratic’ State, which takes over the functions that belong to the church. It forms men’s souls, gives them an obligatory creed, demands their whole soul, exacts from them not only ‘what is Caesar’s,’ but even ‘what is God’s.’ It is most important to grasp this pseudo-theocratic nature of the Communist State. Its whole structure is determined

by it. It is a system of extreme social monism, in which there is no distinction between State, society and church.”¹

It is the possession of this violent religious or anti-religious impulse that distinguishes Russian Communism from the Socialism of the West. Socialists in this and other industrialized countries are to a great extent atheists, but they are moved by a hatred of capitalism rather than by hatred of religion. This is also ostensibly the case with Russian Communism. But Marxist Communism was in Russia grafted upon Nihilism, which had a definitely anti-religious origin, which fact, together with the further one that the Nihilists were for long persecuted by the Tsarist Government, formed its temper. Dostoyevsky, who had an excellent understanding of Russian revolutionaries, saw that Nihilism was not primarily a political but a religious question, the question of God, of immortality and the radical reconstruction of life and society. And seeing its perils he struggled all his life against it.

“The Nihilism of the [18-] sixties had already brought forth the main themes that operate and triumph in the Bolshevik Revolution; hatred of all religion, mysticism, metaphysics and pure art, as things which deflect energy from the creation of a better social order; substitution of social utilitarianism for all absolute morality; exclusive domination of natural science and political economy, together with suspicion of the humanities; recognition of the laborers, workmen and peasants as the only true men; oppression of interior personal life by the social principle and social utility; the Utopia of a perfect social structure. Perfection in life to be attained not by changing man, but by changing society. It is understood first and foremost as freedom from suffering and the advent of happiness.”²

Russian Communism is then not to be explained apart from Nihilism, upon which it was grafted and had its roots. But there are roots below roots. Berdyaev insists we do not finally explain the Russian Revolution until we have grasped the significance of the Messianic idea, the sense of a worldwide vocation that has possessed the soul of Russia ever since the fifteenth century, when Constantinople was captured by the Turks. From that time the Russian nation regarded itself as the only true depository of the Orthodox faith and dreamed of a time when it would demonstrate it before the world. The religious schism of the seventeenth century, which resulted in a third of the population leaving the Orthodox Church, did not destroy this sense of Messianic mission but added a new element. It became associated in the mind of the sects with the idea of Christian Communism, the realization of the Kingdom of God upon Earth. Viewed in relation to this background, Bolshevism appears as the completion of an historical process, being

¹ *The Russian Revolution*, by Nicholas Berdyaev, p. 88.

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

at the same time a continuation of and a reaction against the Christian Communism of the sects. It was this traditional belief in a Messianic mission joining hands with the Messianic impulse of Marxist Communism that made the Revolution so irresistible. The economic determinism of Marx could not have done it. A doctrine by which all human life is determined by economic processes is, to say the least, depressing and could inspire nobody. No, it was not the rational but the irrational element in Marx that supplied the driving force. It was his idea of the Messianic vocation of the proletariat that made the revolution triumphant.



But Bolshevism is not only a religion, it is also a culture; and a culture whose starting-point is suspicion and hostility to all the cultural traditions of the past, on the assumption that all such cultures are in their essence bourgeois and tainted. It is characterized by a determination to invent new forms of culture which shall be in harmony with the aspiration of Bolshevism based on belief in the dictatorship of the proletariat, worship of machinery, mass production and materialist philosophy.

An Austrian writer, René Fülöp-Müller, has put us all in his debt by writing an exhaustive book on the subject. He directs attention to the complete reversal of all hitherto accepted values that accompanied the triumph of Bolshevism.

“It is not the development of the soul that can lead humanity to a true rebirth, but that end is rather to be reached through the mechanical, external and purely cumulative combination of all individuals by means of organization . . . Everything that divides the many from each other, that fosters the illusion of the individual importance of man, especially the soul, hinders the higher evolution, and must consequently be destroyed. The glorious external man is henceforth to take the place of the inner man, organization is to be substituted for the soul. For only the mechanically organized has reality, strength and permanence, mechanism alone is reliable; only the collective man, freed from the evil of the soul, mechanically united by external interests with all others, is strong. To him alone belongs the empire of the future; only he will be able to reign therein, in the millennium.”³

Fülöp-Müller maintains that this attitude is peculiarly Russian. The Russian, he says, has never been able to visualize the ultimate development of humanity except in a collective form; and he despises all personal values, and finally individuality itself. Nevertheless it is related to the teachings of Marx and the idea of the Revolution; for the notion that social salvation must come through the dictatorship of the proletariat involves the denial of the significance of personality. When Pokrovski, the historian of the Revolution, wanted to describe for the proletarian

³ *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, by René Fülöp-Müller, p. 2.

masses the significance of Lenin for the revolutionary development of humanity, he did not insist upon the greatness of his individual achievement, but did his best to explain him away on the grounds that personalities do not make history but are the instruments through which history works.

The lengths to which the non-significance of personality have been carried are almost unbelievable. One example most suffice. In the first year of the Revolution there arose poets of inspiration, full of revolutionary ardor. But the celebrity they attained was not acceptable to the mediocrities, who replied with the theory that, since the social structure of Russia is based upon the principle of collectivity, it was inconsistent to recognize individual poets. A collective humanity demanded a collective poetry, and the conclusion was drawn that Bolshevik poetry and literature should be entirely impersonal. Thereafter poems were published under the authorship of groups of poets. By a “Group of Twenty-Three,” a “Group of Fourteen Poets,” or “The Poets’ Circle of the Village of Reason,” and so on. The end of it all was that the level of attainment sank so low that nobody wanted to read the stuff. The State Publishing Office had to confess that there was no demand for proletarian poetry among the workers.⁴

Now this may be an extreme instance of what has gone on in Russia since the Revolution. It is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Bolshevik position, and in justice to Lenin and Trotsky it should be said they would have nothing to do with this nonsense; nor for that matter with the break with tradition, realizing that there were elements in the old culture which would help to make the new. Trotsky insists that “a work of art should be judged by its own laws, that is by the laws of art,”⁵ and he gives artists their due as specially gifted persons. None the less it is important to recognize that the suppression of talent flows from the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for this dictatorship inevitably leads to the apotheosis of mediocrity and the hatred of all superiorities. The exceptional man in Russia today, the man who thinks, is persecuted if he comes to conclusions which differ from those held by the official Bolsheviks. In order to establish a standard of Bolshevik orthodoxy the universities were purged of all who would not conform, while books were removed from the public libraries when considered unorthodox. Even the physical sciences were subject to strict control for fear that experimental research might produce evidence suggestive of the existence of a spiritual world. The Bolsheviks are definitely hostile to the great contemporary discoveries of science because they are unfavorable to a belief in materialism. Einstein and Planck are dismissed as representatives of bourgeois science – even of clericalism.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter VIII.

⁵ *Literature and Revolution*.

It is manifest that all this has nothing to do with the scientific spirit. But it is in mechanization rather than in science that the Bolsheviks put their trust. They are romantics about machinery. The simplest objects of technology have become sacred religious paraphernalia and fetishes for them. Mechanization, rationalized industry, the complete automaton awakens in them a kind of religious ecstasy which suggests, as an American writer has pointed out, that machinery is akin to magic. It determines their attitude towards culture. With us machinery is defended entirely on utilitarian grounds – that it raises the standard of living and reduces drudgery. Critics may point out that this is theory rather than practice in that machinery, as it is actually used, increases rather than lessens drudgery by reducing the amount of interesting work, while any increase in the standard of living for which it is responsible is far from evenly distributed, and is to be offset by the general economic insecurity it has brought into existence. Hence doubts may justifiably be entertained as to whether machinery on the whole has not done more harm than good. But in any case the advocates of mechanical production agree with their critics that the interests of life and culture should come first and that any tendency for mechanism to invade life is to be deplored as an undesirable attendant symptom. Only our modernists are so crazy as to suggest that life and culture should accommodate themselves to the machine, that mechanization should be artificially extended from the factory to life.

But Bolshevik Russia is modernist through and through. So far from regretting the tendency of machinery to encroach upon life, the Bolsheviks welcome it on the assumption that machinery can do no wrong. They look forward to a time when the last human remnants will be sloughed off and replaced by mechanism. Thus they have turned means into ends. Machinery which is only to be justified as a means to an end has in the hands of the Bolsheviks come to be believed in as an end in itself, while the validity of the real ends of life which machinery is supposed to serve have not so much been lost sight of as denied. A nation of robots may or may not be the Bolshevik ideal, but it is the end towards which Russia appears destined to move.

Art is not mechanism. It differs from it as poetry differs from logic. For this reason art and culture do not take root and develop spontaneously under a system of machine production, as is the case with handicraft. As the robot is a slave, he may not become a creative artist like the handicraftsman. Because of this, art and culture are exotic in a society given over to machine production. If they exist at all they must be imported. The Bolsheviks act on this assumption, consciously or unconsciously. But instead of making the deduction which should be made from this fact, namely, that the use of machinery should be restricted in order that art and culture may flourish naturally, they set about to invent a new art and culture that shall accord with the machine. The result is crazy. Their architecture, inspired

by this idea, is like nothing on Earth. The geometric theater, the “noise” orchestral music, in fact everything born of this idea is demented – a joyless art, the product of theory rather than any genuine aesthetic emotion.

But all Bolshevick art is not like this. In spite of all their efforts to dehumanize and despiritualize life and art they have not been entirely successful. There are hard facts in life which cannot be denied, and these facts in certain departments of artistic activity have saved them in spite of their theories. A building may be like nothing on Earth, but a statue must bear some resemblance to a man, and a pageant must make use of men. Perhaps because of this, Bolshevism is seen at its best in its pageantry. The May Day festivals are great events. If one may judge from photographs, they are worth seeing. In this department the artistic dictators enjoy great opportunities. Their schemes are on a grandiose scale, seeking to surpass the great festivals organized by the Egyptians, the Roman Emperors, the princes of the Renaissance and the leaders of the French Revolution.

To enable these schemes to be carried out the State treasury made every conceivable sacrifice; or at any rate it did in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, for Stalin had all along been opposed to the expenditure of public money in such ways, and when he succeeded in establishing his dictatorship the expenditure was cut down. Stalin is a man without any intellectual or aesthetic interests, and the new men he promoted are equally pedestrian. They have no interest whatsoever in culture apart from such things as technology and hygiene – if such things can be called culture at all. Stalin banished Trotsky and removed Lunacharsky from his post as Commissar of Education, and with their disappearance a different atmosphere came to prevail. As Chesterton says, speaking of the impact of Darwinism on Victorian rationalism, “all that was good in it shook and dissolved like dust. All that was bad in it abode and clung like clay. The magnificent emancipation evaporated; the mean calculation remained.”



In their faith, absolute in the sufficiency of machinery to create a true social order, the Bolsheviks are following in the footsteps of Marx, who taught that machinery is constructive as well as destructive, inasmuch as it not only destroyed old traditions but created new ones to take their place. And he supported this contention by adumbrating a materialist conception of history and society in which the Christian conception which sees the heart and mind of man as the active creative principle in the center, and the systems and institutions as its more visible expression, is replaced by one which denies the validity of any such internal spiritual approach, and attributes all social phenomena to external causes, particularly the forces of production, in response to the stimuli of which he

contends man builds up the social order, government, religion, philosophy, art and science; or in other words the material production is the groundwork, while the corresponding political, religious, philosophical and scientific systems are the superstructure; and they are so related that the superstructure is nothing more than the psychical reflex and effect of the material conditions of society.

The neatest answer to this theory was given by Mr. Christopher Dawson when he said the spiritual is dependent on the material in the same sense that a man of genius is dependent on his dinner; but that the spiritual life is no more the creation of material conditions than men of genius are made by good dinners. The thing that led Marx astray was his indefensible habit of reading the present into the past. He saw that modern society was at the mercy of its machines, that the impact of machinery had changed its spiritual and intellectual atmosphere. To this extent he was right, for there can be no doubt that the impact of machinery has exercised a revolutionary influence on the spiritual and intellectual life of society; the growth of Modernism in every department of thought and activity is evidence of that fact. It would not be true to ascribe its growth entirely to the impact of machinery on our social traditions, for other influences have been at work. Yet in the main Modernism is the consequence of the reaction of mechanization on thought; if indeed Modernism can be called thought at all, for it is really thought in dissolution. "Modernism is a thawing and liquefaction of everything that was hard and permanent in the world, a going to slush of all values." And as such it is the natural consequence of the dissolution of old ties, and the atmosphere of expectancy and credulity that has accompanied the advance of machinery. While therefore Marx was right in recognizing that machinery was destroying old traditions, he has no valid grounds for affirming it would create new ones to take their place – at any rate, unless the cinema is to be accepted as a substitute for the stage and the tin tabernacle for the cathedral. The new traditions that have come into existence serve only the surface of life. They are no substitutes for the old, whose place remains empty, and because of this they most lack that quality which is the very essence of tradition, namely, permanence.⁶ Not Marx but Ruskin saw the truth.

Granted, however, that the productive forces of our day have exercised a great influence upon our thought and traditions, it does not follow that all ages have been similarly influenced. Because society today is at the mercy of its machines it does not follow that pre-industrial society was at the mercy of the tools of the craftsman, because as in the days of handicraft the volume of production was almost stationary it was incapable of exercising economic pressure. But once power-machinery arrived the situation changed, for machinery is coercive. Machinery

⁶ For a fuller treatment of this issue see the author's *Post-Industrialism* (Geo. Allen & Unwin).

tends to enslave the minds and bodies of those who use it, because it must be kept in commission or the overhead expenses will eat up the profits. The machine must be fed, and to feed it the management must think ahead. They must study market conditions in order to buy at the right price, and arrangements must be made to ensure that supplies of raw material arrive at regular intervals. Workers must be engaged to tend the machines, travellers to get orders, and transport organized to distribute the product. The result is that those who employ machinery have very little time or energy left to think of anything else. And this evil increases as competition is increased and industry organized on a larger scale. As machinery multiplies the number of commodities beyond the point at which natural demand is satisfied, advertising is resorted to in order to increase demand, to create new wants, or to induce people to buy from this firm rather than that. And advertising in turn corrupts newspapers and influences thought by the encouragement it gives to the growth of big newspapers which seek to gain their ends by mass suggestion rather than by appeals to reason. Thus in a thousand ways the impact of machinery molds the thought of the age. But this is a modern thing. It did not happen in pre-machine days and it is a violation of the laws of evidence to refuse to make the distinction.

The materialist conception of history gains credence because industrialism has emptied life of its contents by undermining the great traditions of the past. It is true it offers an explanation of considerable patches of history. It provides the clue to the later history of Greece and Rome, and it is true of modern Europe and America; for in the decline of any civilization the material factor comes to predominate, owing to the fact that as a civilization increases in complexity the average man tends to lose his grip on reality, and unable any longer to steer a straight course, he comes to play for safety and surrender to the current. But this is not true of civilizations that are yet young. And for this reason the materialist conception fails completely to explain history as a whole, and only the reading of the present into the past could have given birth to such a monstrous theory.

On the material side Marx saw very clearly what was taking place in society, and for this reason he is worthy of study. But he never understood that the material is only one half of the problem, and finally the less important half. This explains why, though he succeeded in predicting the trend of industrial development up to a certain point with a considerable degree of accuracy, the deductions he made from what he saw are anything but trustworthy. His errors follow naturally from the materialist approach, which fails to take into account psychological reactions. Approaching social development entirely from the point of view of material conditions, he failed to see that the external material development he traced had been accompanied by a progressive spiritual deterioration, inasmuch as simultaneously with the concentration upon material things religion and art lost

their hold upon men. And because of this blindness Marx's predictions are proving to be finally wrong, for, with the decline of the spiritual, man loses control of the material; he ends by finding himself at the mercy of the machines he has invented.

CHAPTER II

COMMUNISM IN PRACTICE

COMMUNISM means communion, commonness, mutual participation. It implies sharing, mutual aid, having all things in common, and as such has been the eternal dream of mankind. It is associated with the Christian tradition. The members of the Early Church at Jerusalem practised Communism, and ever since there have been sects who regarded its practice as an essential part of the Christian life. But the Greek, Roman and English churches have alike discountenanced it except for religious communities who live under a strict discipline. The question of Communism found a place in the discussion of the mediaeval schoolmen, who finally threw overboard Plato's idea of *common property and private use* in favor of Aristotle's idea of *private property and common use*, which they considered more suitable for the workaday world where men do not live under a discipline, or are not sustained by the apocalyptic beliefs which upheld the sects. A modified form of Communism – as exemplified by the corporate life of the mediaeval cities – was, they thought, more practicable, since by steering a middle course between the extremes of Communism and individualism it was more in accord with the nature of the average man, who cannot for long live on the high moral plane which the practice of pure Communism demands.

Discussing the relative means of Communism and private property, St. Thomas Aquinas concludes that private property is necessary and according to nature for three reasons:

“Firstly because everyone is more solicitous about procuring what belongs to himself alone than that which is common to all, since each, shunning labor, leaves to another what is the common burden of all, as happens with a multitude of servants. Secondly, because human affairs are conducted in a more orderly fashion if each has his own duty of procuring a certain thing, while there would be confusion if each produced things haphazard. Thirdly, because in this way the peace of men is better preserved, for each is content with his own. Whence we see that strife more frequently arises among those who hold a thing in common and undividedly. The other office which is man's concerning exterior things is the use

of them; and with regard to these a man ought not to hold exterior things as his own, but common to all, that he may portion them out readily in time of need.”¹

When we understand what Communism really means, the name is a misnomer when applied to the Russian system; for the Russian system today is not Communist but State Capitalist on a basis of class warfare. It is State Capitalist because it is oligarchical and bureaucratic, and it goes without saying that no system can be Communist, oligarchical and bureaucratic at the same time. In Russia people today do not hold things in common but individually. Money is used, and if the worker has no money he can no more get goods in Russia than he can in any other country. Taxes are levied and the wage system obtains. What is more, different rates of pay are paid corresponding to different degrees of responsibility, for skilled and unskilled, light and heavy work, and capacity for output. Piecework rates obtain, while the system of promotions carrying with it increase in earnings is in full blast in every enterprise.

We know also that the establishment of pure Communism was the aim of the Bolsheviki when they acceded to power. “The direct barter of manufactured products for foodstuffs and other necessities of life, which was made inevitable by the complete collapse of the entire economic organization, the deficiency of manufactured articles, and the difficulties of transport, were not regarded as a temporary necessity, but hailed as the beginning of a Socialist economy system which dispensed with currency. ‘We are approaching,’ Zinoviev declared, ‘the complete abolition of money. We are making the wages of labor a payment of kind; we are introducing free trains; we already possess free education, free dinners, even if of a poor quality, free housing and free lighting.’ According to a decree of April 30th, 1920, wages were to be paid wholly in kind. The public services – telephone, water, canals, gas, electricity, and the provision of fuel and housing – would be free to all workers and members of the staff in national factories, also to invalids and the families of men serving in the Red Army. The system of rationing cards was constantly extended, and it was hoped that the supply of commodities would finally be provided by the State and its organizations. As early as 1919 resolutions were passed in favor of replacing a financial system based on currency by the development and firm establishment of taxation in kind. On February 3rd, 1921, it was decided to abolish all money payments of taxes.”²

Corroborative testimony of the fact that the establishment of pure Communism had been the aim of Bolshevik policy is to be found in the speech which Lenin delivered in 1921 when he outlined the New Economic Policy. He tells us that they

¹ *New Things and Old in St. Thomas Aquinas*, by J. H. C. O’Neill, p. 253.

² *Bolshevism, Theory and Practice*, by Waldemar Gurian, pp. 129-130.

had attempted to bring about an immediate transition to Communist production and distribution by means of a system of requisitions and the wholesale issue of paper currency which aimed at the abolition of the use of money. But the experiment was not a success. The requisitions in the villages and the attempt at immediate Communist construction in the towns threatened to bring industry to a standstill. The towns could not supply the villages with manufactured goods and the peasants refused to hand over their grain voluntarily. Force therefore was used to victual the towns. The peasants retaliated by reducing the acreage under cultivation. They refused to produce anything in excess of their own requirements, while they slaughtered and ate their cattle, reserving only such livestock as was necessary to carry on their farms. This went on until the drought of 1921 brought famine, when a million perished of hunger and the workers quitted the factories *en masse*, and returned to their villages in search of food. Some idea of how bad conditions were is to be gleaned from the fact that by 1921 production of cereals had fallen to 36 per cent., cattle to 66 per cent., and production in industry to 15 per cent. of pre-war standards.

Meanwhile, though currency was depreciated to a hitherto unheard of extent – it took millions of rubles to buy a meal – it still continued to be used. The Bolsheviks found they could not abolish it, and for this reason: that only under the most primitive conditions is exchange possible without the use of money. Civilization, differentiation of occupation, specialization in the crafts and arts, city life and foreign trade all came about as a consequence of the introduction of currency. In attempting therefore to abolish the use of money, while simultaneously attempting not only to maintain but to raise the standard of civilization, the Bolsheviks attempted the impossible; and because of this, of the famine and the failure of their other measures, the attempt to effect an immediate transition to Communism was abandoned in 1921 in favor of the New Economic Policy which made the establishment of State Capitalism the immediate objective of Bolshevik activity, on the assumption that the transition from Capitalism to Communism was only possible by passing through an intermediate stage of Socialist accountancy and control. The whole of society, according to Lenin, was to be an office or a factory doing the same work and receiving the same wages. Registration and supervision were the chief things needed to bring the first phase of the Communist social order into being and prepare for its proper functioning. At the same time private trading, which, though illegal, had been carried on all along, was made legal; an agricultural tax was substituted for requisitions in the villages, and concessions were offered to foreign capitalists.

The New Economic Policy saved the Bolshevik régime. As a result of the removal of the ban upon private trading, production in industry in three years rose to something like 50 per cent. of normal, while corresponding increases took place

in agriculture. There were no two opinions about the success of private trade. It had come to dominate the retail trade and it was beginning to amass sufficient capital to gain a foothold in wholesale trade. This did not please the Bolsheviki. The admission of private trading had saved them; but though they had compromised they had no intention of relinquishing their goal, and as they had come to feel that private trade could not continue to expand without private Capitalism getting the upper hand again, they determined to strangle it. Accordingly it happened that a few months after Lenin's death, which took place in January, 1924, his policy was reversed, and a war upon private trade was inaugurated. The Bolsheviki began by closing 250,000 shops and by imposing crushing taxation on private traders, with the result that they created such a commercial desert in the provinces that in a few months the policy was again reversed and private trade was again encouraged. But a few months later the permission was again withdrawn and those who had availed themselves of it were punished as capitalists and profiteers.

This act marks a definite turning-point in the history of the Revolution. It brought the peasants into collision with the Government as never before. The peasants were deeply involved in private trade. In consequence, the manifest injustice of the Government in punishing those who had availed themselves of their permission to trade destroyed once and for ever the confidence of the peasants in the good faith of the Government, and this fact has exercised a decisive influence on Bolshevik policy ever since. Immediately it led to the peasants curtailing their production of grain and further reducing their livestock, and as a consequence the cities began to receive food in ever-diminishing quantities. Hunger again began to stalk the towns. To avert catastrophe, the Bolsheviki again resorted to forcible requisitions of grain, only this time they paid for what they took. But as the prices they gave were lower than those the peasants could get from private dealers the estrangement was increased and the production of food declined further. It was to find a remedy for this desperate situation that in 1928 the Bolsheviki inaugurated their policy of Collective Farms as the only way of overcoming the resistance of the peasants. They hoped by this means to bring the country into line with the towns, to break up the old village economy and replace it by industrialized agriculture on State Capitalist lines. It was a bold challenge, and as was recognized at the time, it was an open question whether it would be successful. We know today it has failed. So far from the collectivization of agriculture having put the food supply of the country on a sure and stable basis, the situation is worse than ever. The cities are experiencing today (1933) a food shortage as serious as that of 1921. And what is worse, there is no obvious remedy. Stalin's attempt to save the situation by repeating Lenin's policy of encouraging

private trade was a miserable failure. The peasants remember too well the fate of those who took the Government at their word in 1924 to be caught again.

The reason for the failure of collectivization is not far to seek. By means of coercion the Bolsheviks succeeded in the space of four years in merging the extraordinary total of twenty-five million families – over 60 per cent. of the rural population – in the Collective Farms. But though the Bolsheviks, because of the pressure they were able to exercise, were successful in driving the peasants into the Collective Farms, they could not secure their goodwill. The disparity between the ambitious theoretical planning and the meagerness of practical results may be partly accounted for by the poor training of most of the managers of the hastily organized Collective Farms, partly by the fact that the peasants did not know how to use the tractors and other machinery, but the main cause of failure was that the peasants, hating them, became apathetic and indifferent, if it did not lead them to commit sabotage. They disliked the Collective Farms as things sinister and impersonal, which undermined their independence and left them without a motive in life; while they deeply resented not only the methods which had been employed to force them to join, but the double-dealing of the Bolsheviks who had secured their support for overthrowing the Provisional Government by promising them the land, and then when firmly seated in the saddle proceeded to take it away.

The peasant is not the natural Communist as Kropotkin and his generation of revolutionists believed, but an individualist. The industrious and thrifty peasants prefer to work individually because they consider that they are entitled to enjoy the fruits of their own labor and object to Communism on the grounds that when labor is combined there is no justice or equality, inasmuch as the drunkards and malingerers design to live at the expense of the more industrious. In consequence of this quite understandable attitude the peasants began to sort themselves out again after the Revolution, and there came into existence a comparatively well-to-do class of peasants known as Kulaks. They were not as a rule much better off than their neighbors. They might possess an extra cow or horse or two and employ a laborer. Still such differences violated the principles of equality, and this fact brought them into collision with the Government, who declared war upon them. The peasants were given the choice of entering the Collective Farms or being persecuted. Those who resisted, as did some of the Kulaks, were stripped of their possessions and sent into exile to work in mines and lumber camps. It was a fatal policy, not only because it robbed agriculture of its most capable and industrious workers, but because as the movement spread the Kulaks who awaited their doom retaliated by killing off their livestock, while other peasants who joined the Collective Farms as often as not killed their cattle for food rather than add them to the collective stock. The result has been that it is estimated there is not in Russia today (1933) more than a third of the cattle there was in 1928 when collectivization

began; and in 1928 there was only about half of what there was before the war. No wonder the shortage of meat and dairy produce in the towns is chronic. "Cattle," says a recent resolution, "is the blackest spot in the entire agricultural situation."

The collectivization of agriculture was a part of the Five Year Plan which before all things was propaganda to stimulate the people, to maintain their morale by giving them a vision of a glorious future to keep their minds off present troubles. On this side it was a great success until it became evident that its promises were not going to be fulfilled. In other respects it was a gigantic effort to transform the entire social and economic structure by strengthening the foundations of industry, by rendering the Soviet Union permanently independent of the importation of foreign machines and manufactured articles. The theory was that the people were to forgo immediate advantages for the sake of the future, to make sacrifices until the Plan was completed. A disproportionate percentage of labor was to be devoted to the construction of factories, railways, power stations and lines, dams, office buildings, the increased output of raw materials and other things to be described as plant, while a small percentage only was to be employed in the production of goods required for immediate consumption, and there would be an enormous increase in the standard of living. There would be enough for all and to spare. The millennium would have arrived.

It is common knowledge today that these expectations have not been fulfilled. Leaving aside for the moment the outstanding facts that at the end of the Plan and fifteen years of Communist experiment the people of Russia, which under the old regime was one of the world's granaries, have not enough to eat – food having risen to famine prices, while real wages are only about a third of what they were at the beginning of the Plan, and that unemployment is rife, to what extent has the plan succeeded in fulfilling its original intentions? Well, in the first place it is to be said that not only has the Plan on the whole been put through, but the period of its execution was shortened from five to four and a quarter years – it began in October, 1928, and was completed on December 31st, 1932; in the next, factories, railways, dams, etc., have been built, mainly with the help of foreign engineers. Nevertheless as a practical test of "planned economics" it has manifestly failed, for its development has not been symmetrical. While on some fronts, to use the favorite Bolshevik phrase, great advances have been made, on others there have been ignominious defeats; and its weakest sectors are precisely those upon which the success of the whole experiment ultimately depended.

The Plan is full of gaps and failures. There is not only failure to produce sufficient food, but to produce sufficient steel and coal and to anticipate the demands of transport. The railways are both ill-organized and hopelessly inadequate. The development of industry placed a load on them infinitely greater than was anticipated. The lines get blocked, with the result, it is said, that 30 per

cent of all fish caught goes bad owing to delays, and a similar state of affairs exists in regard to fruit, vegetables and milk; and this in a country where food supplies are, apart from such difficulties, terribly short. The shortage of food reacts upon industry, where the output per man is steadily declining, and this for the simple reason that men cannot work who are insufficiently fed. This in turn tends to disorganize industry. It resulted in tens of thousands of workers forsaking the factories weekly in search of some other industrial center where they hope to find food more plentiful. "It would," said Stalin, "be hard to find an enterprise where the staff of workers does not change at least 30 or 40 per cent. in the course of a half-year, or even in one quarter." To put a stop to this great fluidity of labor, which no doubt is to an equal extent accounted for by the monotonous and deadly jobs brought into existence by mass production, Stalin in July, 1931, called for labor conscription, and in February last (1933) he got it, reviving the system of passports which was such a hated institution of the Tsarist regime.

Instead, therefore, of the workers finding an earthly paradise at the end of the Plan, things are worse than ever. Whether they will be any better off at the end of the Second Five Year Plan, which began on January 1st and which is to specialize in the manufacture of goods for immediate consumption, remains to be seen. But it seems to me not unlikely that industrialization in Russia under the Bolsheviks will prove to be just as much a will-o'-the-wisp as it has been under Capitalism elsewhere. The reason for my scepticism is to be found in the fact that apart from the psychological difficulties which the policy of class warfare and the handling of the peasants has created, to plan successfully on such a vast scale demands that man be omniscient, which he certainly is not. The weakness of the large scale industry is that the bigger it gets the more unmanageable it becomes. It is only necessary to be acquainted with one fact to realize that the whole system must eventually break down by its own weight. Ordchonikidse, the President of the Economic Council, complained that he was being so snowed under by letters and telegrams as to be incapable of any practical work. No fewer than 84,000 inquiries are addressed to him every day. Yet so far from there being any prospect of this deluge of paper diminishing in the future, it must, with every increase of State enterprise and national industry, tend to increase. Thus paradoxically the more responsibility is thrust upon the shoulders of the Economic Council the more incapable of action it becomes. Such is the Nemesis of centralized administration.

When the Bolsheviks seized power, one of their slogans was "Down with the Bureaucracy," yet under their auspices a new bureaucracy has come into existence infinitely more ubiquitous, inefficient and oppressive than the old. The Bolsheviks are determined not only to keep all political but all industrial power in their own hands, and so they find themselves not only committed to bureaucracy but to its indefinite expansion. And as a consequence Russia today is cursed with a plague of

officials which is literally strangling the life out of society and industry. The Bolsheviki are fully alive to this peril. Yet the more they fight against it the worse the evil becomes. This follows naturally from the fact that the more the individual bureaucrat is criticized the more he is on the defensive, and the more he is on the defensive the more he seeks to escape responsibility by avoiding decisions. The individual bureaucrat in Russia today is always under the direction of someone. He is always under the control of a committee, a board, and also the mass of workers under him. He is always being checked up, ratified, corrected, vetoed. No wonder that under such circumstances he comes to play for safety, the shortest route to which is to evade responsibility, especially when we remember that to make a mistake is to expose himself to the charge of sabotage, the penalty for which may be death. Yet the more the individual bureaucrat seeks to evade responsibility the more he promotes the growth of bureaucracy and of red tape.

There are other reasons for believing the Bolshevik experiment will fail in the end. The terrific speed at which development has been pushed forward has been a source of unending trouble and is fatal alike to efficiency and permanence. It is not necessary to believe in Capitalism to realize that whatever its defects it is infinitely more efficient than Bolshevism. Large scale industry under Capitalism was a comparatively slow growth. Its development at each stage was conditioned by the technical and administrative ability at its disposal. But in Russia there is no such careful adjustment of means and ends. According to all reports, breakdowns of machinery due to lack of mechanical aptitude of the workers, and disorganization due to a shortage of competent administrators – the latter in large measure due to the fact that positions in the bureaucracy are reserved for members of the Communist Party, who as often as not have no qualifications for the posts they occupy – are the order of the day. The quality of production is execrable and extremely costly, being often as much as five times as high as under Capitalism. Thus the attempt to jump from a very primitive to a very advanced technique without passing through the intermediate stages is seen to bring endless evils in its train; and it may reasonably be doubted whether Russia's industrial development is really an asset to the community. Rationalization may reduce the costs of production when used by cold-blooded calculators, but it is not likely to do so when accompanied by raptures, and promoted by people intoxicated by power, who are carried away by a mystic enthusiasm that outruns their means and capacity. And now when this folly has at length brought its inevitable fruit in breakdowns and dislocations, the Government is seeking to escape from the impossible situation in which it finds itself by shifting responsibility for failure from its own shoulders to those of its agents, whom it accuses of sabotage; and wholesale deportations, exiles and shootings are taking place to provide the scapegoats which the occasion demands.

There may be room for difference of opinion as to where Russia is heading. But of one thing we may be certain – it is not heading for Communism. For with every new development the ideal of Communism recedes more and more into the background and it will continue to do so. Materialist Communism is a contradiction in terms. Communism is a spiritual idea. It is only possible with people who put spiritual things first. But though in a sense the Bolsheviks are spiritually minded, it is an inverted spirituality. They are guilty of the sin of idolatry, for they have transferred to material objects the qualities which inhere in the spiritual. And though they have chosen to ignore the spiritual and intellectual incompatibility of that worship with the ideal of Communism, experience proves they cannot escape its consequences in practice. The worship of materialism appears to be carrying them where in the past it has carried all its votaries; not to Communism but to the Servile State, if it has not already done so. Alternatively the system may dissolve in anarchy. Indeed it is not improbable that the famine conditions which now prevail may precipitate it.

CHAPTER III

THE CLASS WAR

WE HAVE SEEN that industrialism cannot be made to serve the ends of Communism. But the incompatibility between Communism and industrialism is as nothing to the opposition between Communism and class warfare, which are most demonstrably mutually exclusive policies. How anyone can imagine a policy of class warfare could be used to bring about Communism is a mystery. Marx's obtuseness on this point can only be explained on the assumption that his concentration on economics completely blinded him to the psychological implications of his position.

According to the Christian conception, evil resides finally in men rather than in institutions; no society can be better than its individual members. There are good men and bad men in all classes, and the problem of statesmanship is so to order the social, political, and economic arrangements of society that evil is kept in subjection – “to enable good men to live among bad,” as it is defined in the preamble of a seventh century code of laws. Politics, unlike religion, must reckon with men as they are, not with men as they might be. But when idealists began to deny the existence of original sin, to assume that man was by nature perfect, and that evil had its origin entirely in institutions, a way was opened for the emergence of the doctrine of class warfare; for if the root of evil is to be found in institutions rather than in men, the warfare between good and evil is easily identified with classes rather than men.

This appears to be the origin of the theory of the Class War. Class warfare has occurred at intervals throughout history. It has been an element in every popular rising. But in the past its influence was ephemeral because unsupported by any theory; it tended to evaporate once it had achieved expression. Class warfare in the modern world, however, is quite a different matter, for the affirmation of Marx that it is the dynamic law of history has exalted it into a religion, to the spread of which men devote their lives.

Marx first adumbrated the idea in the Communist Manifesto (1848) which he wrote in collaboration with Engels. According to the theory therein enunciated, all human history, past and present, has been the history of class struggles. Oppressors

and oppressed carried on perpetual warfare, sometimes masked, sometimes open and acknowledged; and the warfare always ended in a revolutionary change in the whole structure of society, or else in the common ruin of the contending parties.

This is the central idea of the Manifesto. A slight acquaintance with history should be sufficient to show that Marx did not know what he was talking about, that he was, to use a colloquialism, “talking out of his hat.” For if it be true that class warfare has played the part in history which Marx affirms, then frankly it is impossible to explain how civilization ever came into existence. We know by experience that class warfare exercises a disintegrating influence on civilization; we may be equally sure it did not create it. To be sure there has at all times been a certain amount of friction between classes as between individuals. But this does not prove friction to have been the normal relationship – friends have been known to quarrel – still less does it prove it to be the dynamic law of history and development. It may or may not be a necessary accompaniment of constructive effort, but in any case the friction is itself destructive. And it is important to make this distinction. The things that get recorded are for the most part the things that go wrong – the crimes, follies and misfortunes of men. “Vice is news, virtue isn’t” once said Mr. Wickham Steed. But no one with any judgment or sense of proportion imagines that because such things are the things mostly recorded they were the only things that happened. Yet Marx is guilty of this error. He mistakes the exceptions for the rule. And because of this, his treatment of history is as protesque and preposterous as a history of marriage would be that was compiled from the records of Divorce Courts, which carefully took note of all unhappy marriages and denied the existence of happy ones because they were not supported by documentary evidence.

Marx failed to distinguish between class divisions which originated in exploitation, like those of Capitalism, and those which were designed to prevent it by ensuring the performance of function as is the case with the Guilds; and this confusion renders his sweeping generalizations entirely worthless. What could be more ridiculous than his attempt to explain feudalism as an economic institution, than the phrase “The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the machine-gun with the industrial capitalist.” It would be just as true to say, “The battle-axe gives you society with the feudal lord; the machine-gun with the industrial capitalist,” and as idiotic; for it fails equally to explain why feudalism came into existence, persisted for centuries, and ended its life in the Crusades. That there were abuses in connection with feudalism no one will deny, but to present such abuses as the essence of the institution is a gross violation of the laws of evidence. Only ignorance or a total incapacity to discriminate where his emotions were engaged could have led Marx so to misrepresent the facts of history. There are good men and bad men in all classes. Everybody knows it. Yet instead of accepting

this fact as the basis of their social theories, reformers have, from an early date, proceeded upon the assumption that only virtue is to be found among the poor and only vice among the rich. The Marxist idea of class warfare carries this false assumption to its dramatic conclusion; he stages the idea.

It would take a volume to controvert in detail all the misstatements of fact and errors of judgment that go to the making of the Manifesto. And I must content myself with controverting in detail one such misstatement; namely, that slavery came to an end because of successful slave revolts. So far from this being true I hope to show that the very opposite was the case. Slavery in the Pagan world did not come to an end because of any uprising from below, but because of the growth of humanitarian sentiment in the upper strata of Roman society, and it was the same with the abolition of slavery in the modern world. The slave revolts, of which there were a thousand in Antiquity, were without exception suppressed. Marx therefore has no right to say that the history of all human society has been “the history of class struggles that invariably ended in a revolutionary change in the whole structure of society or in the common ruin of the contending parties”; and he was either entirely ignorant of or wilfully misrepresented the facts.

Let us begin by considering the abolition of slavery in the Roman world. During the first century of the Empire there had been growing up, as a consequence, first of the influence of the Stoic philosophy, and later that of Christianity, a feeling that after all a slave was a human being and had some claim to be treated as such. This resulted, in the Antonine period, in legislation which limited the right of a master over his slave in several ways, ordaining, among other things, that if cruelty were proved against a master he should be obliged to sell his slave. The final abolition of slavery was due to the influence of Christianity, which effected a change of spirit that gradually dissolved the old order. The Church did not encourage the slaves to revolt, but it did wage constant war against slavery, which by the fourth century was a doomed institution; it also gave a fervid encouragement to manumission.

“Under Constantine the ceremony of manumission, which gave the slave freedom, assumed the position of a religious act, and it was among Christians generally carried out with the assistance of the clergy. Eastertide, or some Church festival, was very frequently chosen as the date on which this act of mercy was performed, although following the wise and thoughtful practice of the Church, which never rudely swept away an immemorial custom, however gravely it disapproved of it, manumission was never preached as an inescapable duty. Public Christian feeling at a very early date, however, held that this act of grace was an effectual method of expiating sins. Saint Melania, a very wealthy patrician lady who occupied a prominent place on the canvas which contained the portraits of the famous group of women, more or less influenced by St. Jerome, in the first quarter

of the fifth century, is reported to have given freedom to as many as 8,000 slaves; other rich personages, well known in Christian circles, in the fourth and fifth centuries, are distinguished as having manumitted as many as 5,000, 1,850, 1,400, etc., of their slaves. A striking custom was preserved in some of the churches in France as late as the thirteenth century in commemoration of the ancient religious act of enfranchisement. When slavery had virtually ceased to exist, on certain high festivals a number of pigeons were solemnly freed from captivity, there being no slaves left to set at liberty.”¹

Now let us turn to the modern world. The abolition of slavery in the British, French, and Dutch Colonies and in several of the South American States during the last century did not come about because of any successful slave revolt, but was a voluntary act on the part of the various governments concerned and was a consequence of the Anti-Slavery agitation led by Wilberforce. Its abolition in the United States in 1864 was a consequence of the Civil War, and the same wave of humanitarian sentiment also led to the emancipation of the serfs in Russia in 1861. Yet it was during this wave of emancipation that Marx formulated his theory that an enslaved class only achieves emancipation by pursuing a policy of class warfare. What is even more remarkable is that in spite of all contemporary evidence to the contrary, the theory should have become widely accepted among Socialists. *Das Kapital* became known in Germany and other parts of the Continent as the Bible of the working class. Yet Rathenau tells us that the practical effect of the acceptance of this gospel by reformers in Germany was to cause an enormous increase in the spirit of reaction by putting the possessing class on the defensive.² It is amazing in politics what can be got over. The more a theory claims to be scientific, the less apparently it need accord with the facts. The decisive thing in its fortune appears to be that it shall in some way correspond to the psychological temper or sentiment of a group or sectional interest. Granted that, its objective truth does not appear to matter – most people apparently being quite ready to accept as true anything they would like to believe, and will exalt anyone into an authority who makes himself an apologist of what they imagine to be their interests. Adam Smith became accepted as the father of political economy because he made himself the apologist of a vicious system already in existence. Marx was exalted into an equal authority among revolutionaries because he justified class warfare, and told the proletariat that to them belonged the empire of the future.

I said that class warfare was merely destructive; it is fatal to constructive effort because it is fatal to objective thinking. Construction demands careful adjustment. It calls for careful handling and discrimination. But men who are dominated by the

¹ *The Golden Age of the Church*, by H. D. M. Spence-Jones [Protestant], p. 225.

² *In Days to Come*, by Walther Rathenau, p. 58.

class war ideology do not discriminate and resent criticism. They cannot distinguish between the friendly critic and the traitor. This explains why there is no finesse about class war policy, why it is crude in the last degree. Bolshevism is cursed with this temper, which defeats its own ends. Because they are unable to discriminate the Bolsheviks see conspiracies everywhere; and because they see conspiracies everywhere they never consider themselves at liberty to put an end to class warfare. The Bolsheviks worship machinery. Scientists, engineers and technicians are held by them in the highest esteem, as the bearers of the loftiest wisdom, prophets of the “noblest revelations.” Yet this veneration did not prevent them from persecuting them at the time of the Revolution as members of the bourgeoisie. In three years over four hundred Russian scientists died of cold and hunger as a result of starvation rations, much below those of the working class, and but for the intervention of Gorky none would have been alive to assist in the policy of industrialization. Indeed the shortage of technical skill in Russia is in a large measure accounted for by the short-sightedness of the Bolsheviks during the Revolution. But while the Bolsheviks nowadays make use of scientists and other members of the intelligentsia they are suspect, and never allowed to command. And life is no joke under the repressive hand of the proletariat, the class without background, culture, tradition or political experience. Since it got the upper hand “there remains no outward finesse in Russia and but scant courtesy, save towards foreigners, who are always treated with special consideration. Efforts are being made to infuse refinement into the proletarian, and he is not an inept pupil. But he has so much to unlearn. He cannot recast his soul overnight. He cannot brush away old habits like lumps of mud from a garment. He is still woefully lacking in the elements of good behavior. He is still addicted to the vilest language in the world and to alcoholism. Alas, what a ghoulish drinker he is! He still has no respect, not to say reverence, for human individuality. He is still rough and callous and reckless in his treatment of others, especially non-proletarians. Where else in the world is there to be seen such constant arguing and wrangling as in Russia! In street cars, in shops, in offices, everywhere, with the exception of places in the command of the old intelligentsia, there is constant bickering and brandishing of fists. Even Gorky when he visited Russia in the summer of 1929 was openly chagrined at the spirit of sullenness he observed in the land. Much of this surliness in Russian life is an incident of the class struggle – which is ever aflame, but even more is it the result of the domination of the proletarian, who, after all, is a man without breeding.”³

The proletariat enjoys certain privileges; among others, the privilege of venting its spleen. But in any larger political sense the dictatorship of the proletariat does not exist. What does exist is the dictatorship of the Communist Party, which is

³ *Humanity Uprooted*, by Maurice Hindus, p. 181.

exercised in the name of the proletariat. The Party interferes in every department of political and industrial life, while it monopolizes publicity; no other voice is allowed to be heard. The Press is muzzled. The constitution of the Soviet Republic is democratic so far as industrial workers (proletarians) and peasants are concerned, for the bourgeoisie have no political or civil rights. Yet it is only in theory that it is democratic, for in practice the Party fixes up and arranges everything. The Party prepares lists of candidates and electors alike. The electors must accept by acclamation the lists presented to them. Only unimportant candidates may be rejected. State and Party are so closely identified, that all the political institutions are nothing more than machinery by which the Party imposes its will and directs development. Yet the Communist Party is no longer supreme, for it in its turn is at the mercy of the dictatorship of Stalin, which is a very different thing from the dictatorship of Lenin, because Stalin has not got Lenin's gift of combining strict party discipline with free discussion among the leaders.

Commenting on Stalin's dictatorship Herr Scheffer, who as representative of the *Berliner Tageblatt* spent seven years in Russia, says:

"Stalin has crippled the active forces of leadership in Russia, and how greatly the structure of power has been altered since Lenin's time! It may be the majority of the Party have been following Stalin for years against their better judgment – if not a majority, a large part certainly; and the higher we go in the hierarchy the less the confidence in Stalin grows. Everything has come automatically to center on Stalin's personality. When Lenin died in 1924 a poweryul group was already governing the country in his stead. It was not a unified group – far from it; but its members managed somehow to get on with one another, and the Party looked up to them – Trotsky was still a popular hero. All that is now gone. The Party from the top to the bottom is under a dictatorship; and it fears the dictator as much as the remnant of the bourgeoisie fears him; for Party members all the way up to the top are watched no less closely by the OGPU than the bourgeoisie are watched. Lenin's system was far different from all this. Lenin knew the value of individuality. Stalin's disciplinary system will last the lifetime of Stalin – that is the price it must pay for having come into existence at all.

"Yet who in the wide world is paying attention to such vital things, though they may change the face of Europe at a moment's notice? The Soviet régime is more fragile than it was in 1922. It is balanced entirely on the legs of Stalin. And Stalin might disappear at any moment – whether through death or a victory of his opponents. But his departure in any event would mark a terrible, perhaps a fatal crisis in Bolshevism. Who is available to hold the reins of Russia as tight as he is holding them? What will become of this frightfully artificial and frightfully strained fabric, the moment he releases control? When the scramble for power which he has concentrated in his own hands begins, a reaction against the

overstraining of the past years will be inevitable in all the strata of the Russian population.”⁴

Trotsky maintains that in the final period of his life Lenin had already perceived the danger of a Stalin dictatorship, and had even gone so far as to sever personal relations with him. Yet it was finally in the nature of things that the Communist Party should find itself in the grip of such a dictatorship, for having arrogated to itself all power within the State it was inevitable that a time should come when it, in its turn, should be dictated to by the one of its members who most loved power for its own sake. The end of this process of evolution will in all probability be the assumption of all power by the OGPU, if it has not already done so.

The OGPU is the organization of the secret police. It is an instrument of terrorism and compulsion which was originally in the hands of the party leaders, nowadays of Stalin. It continues the work of CHEKA, a terrorist organization set up by Lenin in the early days of the Revolution to suppress speculation, sabotage and counter-revolutionary activities. It has its own special army, distinct from the Red Army and independent of its general staff, while it has its own separate prisons, distinct from those of the regular courts, which are under the exclusive control of its agents. It employs secret agents to spy on the whole of the public life, controls and watches all branches of the administration, especially Bolshevik diplomatic representatives, sparing not its own members, even those in its highest command. It is competent to make arrests and impose the most severe penalties, including the penalty of death. Its tribunals are conducted in secret and it executes its own sentences. It is not obliged to publish the charge or the result of its investigations, or to specify the reasons for its verdict. The public prosecutor of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union has the office of supervising its activities to secure their legality. But his jurisdiction is purely theoretical. The OGPU enjoys plenary jurisdiction; it does what it likes, for no one, unless it be Stalin, is in a position to interfere; and it is as active today as ever. In consequence no one any longer feels safe. The heavy hand of the OGPU may fall and smite anyone. Should this happen, the individual has no redress, for to protest against injustice is to be guilty of a counter-revolutionary act, and is punished as such. The supreme rule of the judge is not to secure impartial justice for the individual in accordance with definite legal prescriptions and by a procedure which safeguards the accused by definite guarantees of a fair trial, but is admittedly to protect the interests of the proletarian state, and this, as we have seen in the case of the recent trial of six English engineers at Moscow, may mean anything.

Thus the wheel has come full circle. When terrorism was first practiced by the Bolsheviks it was to overcome opposition, and it was emphatically understood to

⁴ *Seven Years in Soviet Russia*, by Paul Scheffer, pp. 355-6.

be an emergency measure whose operation was to be temporary. But it is easier to start than to stop such forms of activity. And so it has come about that as a result of their doctrinaire spirit and unenlightened policy all the evils the Bolsheviki set out to combat recur in another form. Bureaucracy, the secret police and the hated passport system, all of which they were determined to abolish, are back and more ubiquitous than ever. Liberty has entirely disappeared, equality is theoretical, while instead of fraternity there is mutual suspicion and distrust. Thus the class war policy is seen to defeat its own ends. Instead of realizing Utopia it has brought into existence a tyranny equal to any that existed in the past; and only idealists without any sense of reality are blind to the failure. The older Bolsheviki are, I am told, already disillusioned men.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL EVOLUTION

SO FAR we have discussed only those things in Communism that are peculiar to itself, which are its own special property. But behind the theory of Communism there are certain ideas or assumptions it shares with the modern world in general which it is important to examine, for, by conditioning thought, they not only play into the hands of Communists but stand in the way of any solution of our own problem.

One of these is the belief in the general truth of Social Evolution. I say general truth because there is not one theory of social evolution but several – each writer on the subject having considered himself at liberty to interpret the idea in his own way; and Marx is no exception to this rule. Yet in spite of such differences due to the different political outlook of various interpreters, all theories of Social Evolution have certain things in common. They all subscribe to a certain classification of history; they all assume that the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern age has been one of continuous improvement; they all accept the change as inevitable; and they all assume the idea of Social Evolution has scientific validity.

Now these assumptions are entirely unfounded, inasmuch as so far from Social Evolution having scientific validity it is nothing more than an unproved and changing hypothesis masquerading as a scientific fact. This will become apparent as the story unfolds. It will be convenient to begin by examining the classification of history common to all theories of Social Evolution.

According to this classification, which as far as I know is also accepted by all economic historians, our industrial history is divided into four periods, which are termed respectively, the Family system, the Guild system, the Domestic system, and the Factory system. These four systems are presented as four successive stages through which industry has passed in its evolution to its present stage of imperfection. Such a division of history might be defended if employed by the general historian who is concerned to describe the prevailing characteristics of

successive periods of history, but it is indefensible when used by economic historians, whom we have a right to demand shall be scientific rather than empirical in their treatment of facts. As a matter of fact, the Domestic system does not develop out of the Guild system as this theory supposes, but directly out of the Family system as did the Guild system. The Guild system and the Domestic system existed side by side in the Middle Ages as two rival systems of industry with different moral intentions. The Guild system was a system of industrial regulation designed to uphold a high standard of commercial morality by the suppression of a lower one, and as such was communal in spirit, the legitimate successor of the Family system. The Domestic system, on the contrary, was frankly a system of exploitation, capitalistic and individualistic in spirit. It made its appearance in rural areas as the Feudal system fell into decay and gradually undermined the position of the Guilds in the towns, eventually replacing them. To present, therefore, the Domestic system as the successor of the Guild system is grossly unscientific, for it did not develop out of it but destroyed it. And this puts a different complexion on the whole story; the progress becomes a decline; the improvement a disimprovement.

The treatment of the Guild system by economic historians is grossly misleading and has a lot to do with the confusion of political thought today. They present the conflict of interests between masters and journeymen that made its appearance in the latter days of the Guilds as a defect inherent in their constitution, instead of being what it actually was, a consequence of the economic pressure exerted from without by the rise of the system of capitalist exploitation which they have chosen to designate as the Domestic system. There can be little doubt that the later regulations of the Guilds, which were regarded as tyrannical and of which we hear in the fourteenth century, were brought about by the desire of the masters to protect themselves against the rising capitalist industry in rural areas. At an earlier date it had been possible for every journeyman in the Guilds to look forward to a day when he would be able to set up in business on his own account as a master. But in the fourteenth century the monopoly of the Guilds was being threatened by the competition of rural capitalist industry, which was not subject to regulation, and the Guild masters, finding the market for their work declining, began to frame regulations, not with an eye to the interests of the crafts as a whole, which in the new circumstances was beyond their power, but solely to protect their own individual interests. Such undoubtedly was the origin of the grievances of the journeymen for which they obtained redress in 1336 whereby, on becoming apprentices, they were made to swear upon oath not to set up in business in the towns without the consent and license of the masters, warders and fellowship of their Guild upon pain of forfeiting their freedom and like penalty. The persistent misrepresentation of the Guilds in economic history appears to be traceable, in the

first instance, to the fact that early economic historians were invariably Liberals to whom the monopolies and regulations of the Guilds were anathema because they conflicted with the principles of *laissez-faire*, and it has been continued by Socialist economists because such misrepresentation could be used to support their theory that industry should be organized by the State. It is always well before accepting any theory of history to inquire into the political faith of the historian.

If I have succeeded in showing that the classification of economic history assumed by social evolutionists and economic historians is unscientific, I have shown that existing interpretations of the idea of Social Evolution are indefensible, but I have not got rid of the idea of Social Evolution which is that of economic determinism – the assumption that what has happened is the only thing that could have happened, that economic development is based upon the operation of some objective natural law and is not subject to the will of man. Yet we have only to go a little more deeply into the subject to discover that this assumption is entirely unfounded. We saw that the Guilds were destroyed by the rise of capitalist industry allowed to develop in rural areas. But why was capitalist industry allowed to develop in rural areas? Why were not Guilds organized to regulate industry in rural areas as it was regulated in the cities? The answer is that in the couple of centuries that elapsed between the organization of the Guilds in the cities and the decay of feudalism which opened a path for the development of industry in rural areas, Roman law had been revived or, at any rate, was being studied, and its study by reviving ideas of economic individualism undermined the moral sanctions on which the Mediæval economic order rested. Thus we see that economic development does not obey any inherent laws of its own, but is the expression of the heart and mind of the community, changing in obedience to changes in the motive power in the center. English economic history would have been different if Roman law had not been revived. It would have been different if the laws of inheritance had favored small property instead of large, if Henry VIII had not taken a fancy to Anne Boleyn, if Charles I had not been such an ass, if Adam Smith had never lived, and it would have been different if Puritanism had never arisen. All these things exercised decisive influences upon economic development, and there are thousands of other things which have altered its course, and which might have happened differently. The attempt, therefore, to present economic history as something inevitable is seen to be without foundation. The very idea of Social Evolution becomes preposterous.

But if the theory of Social Evolution is entirely untenable, what, it may be asked, is the secret of its power? How did it come about that a theory built upon such false assumptions could so successfully impose itself upon the national mind? The answer is that it was not imposed; it grew. In the middle of the last century, when the idea of Social Evolution began to emerge, evolution was in the air. The

problems of geology and biology had yielded, or were supposed to yield, to its approach. To most people it seemed reasonable to suppose that if the idea of evolution had proved to be valid in other departments of inquiry it should be equally valid in regard to the development of society. But though the prestige of science had much to do with the acceptance of the idea of Social Evolution it is not finally the secret of its power, which is to be found in the fact that Social Evolution is the successor to the theory of Natural Law or the Law of Nature, with which it is necessary we should make our acquaintance.

Though the ideas associated with the Law of Nature form an integral part of democratic thought, as a theory it has so completely dropped out of the political consciousness that it is difficult for us to realize that it once had power to move the world. It exercised an influence on European social and political thought from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century that it is difficult to exaggerate, for during that period its sanction was sought for every idea of reform while it was associated with every popular rising from the Peasants' Revolt to the French Revolution. Yet it was never at any time a theory resting upon ascertained fact, but a hypothesis formulated for the purpose of distinguishing between the ideal and the actual, the natural and the conventional, which each writer interpreted as suited his convenience; and because of this, it was during the centuries a changing hypothesis, adapting itself to changing mental and social conditions. It gradually changed from a theory which, in the hands of the Stoics, among whom it first originated, postulated a natural condition of society prior to the formation of states in which men were free and equal and the principles of justice obtained, to one in the eighteenth century, when it reached its final form, which postulated the existence of a power in society capable, by its own internal volition, of maintaining a social and economic equilibrium which would assert itself in proportion as governments abandoned all attempts to direct the course of social and economic development. It is easy to see how this latter conception, which incidentally gave rise to the theory of Free Trade and *laissez-faire*, should also lead to the idea of Social Evolution; for if it be true that a power does exist capable of producing such an equilibrium, then the various systems and institutions of society are no longer to be regarded as manifestations of the human spirit, as the more visible expression of the heart and mind of man, but as consequences of the blind workings of economic law that operates independent of the human will. Man from being the motive force of social activity becomes the passive spectator of an economic development over which he has persuaded himself he has no control. Thus the idea of Social Evolution is seen to have continuity with the Law of Nature, and it is this fact that led people to believe it had scientific validity – most people supposing the Law of Nature from which it derives to be a scientific concept resting upon ascertained

fact, instead of being what actually is the case – a purely philosophic and speculative theory without any scientific basis whatsoever.

Social Evolution then develops out of the theory of a social equilibrium which came to be associated with the Law of Nature. It is easy to understand how this conception of the nature of society arose. History exhibits a series of actions and reactions, alternating movements backwards and forwards, to right and left, expansions and contractions, from authority to liberty, from the spiritual to the material and back again. On first acquaintance these alternating movements suggest the existence of some objective natural law of compensation which enables society to preserve its equilibrium. But that is only a superficial judgment. When we look below the surface we make the discovery that these alternating movements do not arise because of any such external law but because of the instability of human nature. If people were sinless, clear-headed and perfectly balanced in their natures no such alternating movements would take place. Society would pursue a perfectly straight course; progress would be continuous in one direction only, as was popularly supposed to be the case. That this does not happen is due to the fact that human nature is unstable, that people are neither sinless, clear-headed nor balanced in their natures, and because of such weaknesses exhibit a tendency to run to extremes. In consequence it invariably happens that when society runs to excess in one direction counter-movements arise which move in the opposite, and the equilibrium of society is preserved. But such movements do not arise because of some objective law of compensation, but because certain people, realizing the perils to which society is exposed by over-development or excess in one direction, plan to create movements to undo the mischief, which, moving in the opposite direction, will restore the equilibrium; or in other words, recognizing the need of society to preserve its equilibrium, they deliberately set to work to restore the balance because it has been upset. And they do this because, believing society to be a work of art rather than a work of nature, it must obey the laws of art rather than nature.

Looking at the modern problem in this light it is manifest that our great need is to break the spell that binds us to the wheels of progress and Social Evolution; for not until it is broken shall we be able to think freely on the social question, we shall not believe in our capacity to resist the encroachments of industrialism, much less to direct the course of events. And because of this we shall continue to look in the wrong direction for the solution of our problems. If Social Evolution were true, it would follow that any evils which exist today are finally nothing more than maladjustments incidental to an age of transition, and that the remedy is to be found in carrying existing economic tendencies to their logical and inhuman conclusion; in the creation of a type of society fundamentally different from anything that existed in the past, as Communism and Socialists believe, and it

would be vain to attempt to combat this tendency. But if, on the contrary, we know that Social Evolution is not true, that it has no scientific basis whatsoever, we shall begin to think differently. We shall begin to understand that it is not by going forward to the unknown but by going back to tradition that a solution will be found. For only by going back can the equilibrium of society be restored, and to restore it is the only way of averting catastrophe.



There is plenty of evidence that this reaction is now in process of germination. Modernism is bankrupt spiritually, morally, intellectually and politically, and because of this a reaction towards tradition can only be a matter of time. Meanwhile the only reason why Modernists remain in the saddle is because Traditionalists have for so long been on the defensive that they have lost the habit of attack. They do not realize the strength of their position.

CHAPTER V

INTERNATIONALISM AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

WE HAVE SEEN that Social Evolution is a myth without any scientific basis whatsoever. Another of these myths is the notion that the society of the future will be organized on an international basis. It is an idea entirely devoid of substance, for even if the suspicions and jealousies which today separate nations could be removed, it would remain an unrealizable model.

Internationalism, like Communism, is one of the eternal dreams of mankind. It has one of its roots in the almost universal desire to put an end to war and another in the aspirations of culture. It is rightly felt that culture should be international. There is no lack of thinkers today who accept that point of view. They are in rebellion against that false view of history and culture that gained currency during the last century which sought to identify culture with national aspirations. Such an ideal is false because it denies the common parentage of all cultures, while it is inimical to progress because, as Mr. Christopher Dawson has shown, new cultures arise from the cross-fertilization of existing cultures.¹ Any effort, therefore, to identify the aims of culture with national aspirations, to regard the national culture as a unique and original achievement that owes nothing to the culture of other nations, to refuse to recognize common spiritual foundations, is to be deprecated as an anti-social and anti-cultural ideal, which, as experience has taught us, leads to divisions and rivalries, and which if unchecked will involve the nations of the Earth in a common ruin.

So far, so good. In so far as internationalism means common understanding, respect for national characteristics, together with a recognition of the cultural traditions that are our common possession, it is justified. But economic internationalism is a different matter. It does not follow that because internationalism recommends itself as a cultural ideal that it is either desirable or possible as an economic arrangement, as has been hastily assumed; and the best

¹ *Progress and Religion.*

proof of this is that so far from commercial intercourse between nations inaugurating an era of peace and goodwill, as in the middle of the last century it was thought it would, it has made each one the cut-throat rival of the rest, and brought the world within measurable distance of a general war of extermination; to complete what the Great War failed to do. Yet in spite of all evidence to the contrary, social idealists still believe that a solution of world problems can only be found in the direction of economic internationalism and that any movement in the direction of national self-sufficiency is retrograde – a base surrender of idealism to expediency.

But are there real grounds for any such assumptions? It is in the first place to be said that Free Trade, to which all internationalists pin their faith, is not the harmless dove it is supposed to be, since so far from it being a pacifist weapon, it has throughout its history been a fruitful cause of wars. It would not be true, perhaps, to ascribe all the little wars we were engaged in during the last century to Free Trade; for undoubtedly the ultimate cause was our acceptance of the quantitative standard of production, which obliged us to be forever searching for new markets in which to dispose of our surplus goods. Yet Free Trade is not to be altogether acquitted from blame; not only because Free Traders accept the quantitative standard, but because if it was not the chief culprit it was accessory after the fact. The pretext used in all such wars was the right of one nation to have access to the markets of another. And this flows naturally from the Free Trade position, because just in proportion as a nation leaves its home markets unprotected it is driven to find markets for its own products elsewhere. Hence it is while no foreign nation had reason to quarrel with us for pursuing a policy of free imports, we have been brought into collision with other nations because they refused to adopt the same policy; and we did not hesitate to force Free Trade upon other nations where we thought it could be done with impunity, as was the case with Asiatic and African peoples.

Let me give a couple of illustrations to show that Free Trade does not promote goodwill between nations. The Treaty of Commerce with France of 1786, because of the nominal duties that were imposed, has been always claimed by Free Trade historians as a victory for the principles of Free Trade, yet Arthur Young in his *Travels in France* tells us that its effect on French manufactures was at the time so devastating that it caused bitter feeling against this country. Speaking of conversations he had with manufacturers at Lille, he says, "I nowhere met with more violence of sentiment relative to this treaty, than here; the manufacturers will not speak of it with any patience; they wish for nothing but war; they may be said to pray for one, as the only way of escaping from that ideal ruin which they are all sure must flow from the influx of English fabrics to rival their own." And there is reason to believe that it did lead to war, for it was repudiated in 1793 when the

Convention declared war against England. On the other hand there is no necessary connection between Protection and aggressive nationalism, as is demonstrated by the fact that China, which of all nations in the world was the most exclusive in its economic policy, was the most pacific. It is well to remember that it was in the interests of Free Trade that we picked a quarrel with that country. That Protectionist nations in the modern world have at times been aggressive is because they have used Protection to create an internal manufacturing power and commerce as the basis of an extended foreign trade, instead of pursuing policies of self-sufficiency which is the corollary of the principle of Protection. Another corollary of Protection is the regulation of internal prices – or in other words, a fixed price system. Also it is because in the modern world that external Protection has been combined with internal Free Trade that it has so often led to political corruption. But if it were made a rule that any industry which sought the protection of a tariff should consent to a control of prices, there would be no room left for corruption.

It is important to be clear in our minds about these things; for though we have abandoned a policy of free imports we have done so entirely for reasons of expediency, still cherishing universal Free Trade as an ideal. In this respect our conduct is on all fours with that of other nations. They all adopted Protection for reasons of expediency and they all accept universal Free Trade as an ideal, failing entirely to realize it is a chimera, an economic impossibility. This is easily proved because universal Free Trade assumes conditions that never did and never can exist. It assumes between countries an equality of productive power and natural resources, the same price levels, and a mobility of capital that are nowhere to be found. In their absence it comes about that when two or more countries are united by Free Trade, that one which has a superiority of productive power and natural resources tends to impoverish those which suffer from an inferiority; it grows richer while they become poorer.

This explains why, in spite of the fact that from the time of Adam Smith until thirty years after the repeal of the Corn Laws the main current of Continental opinion flowed in the direction of Free Trade, not only European nations but the whole world eventually turned away from Free Trade. They turned away from it because as their industries were being destroyed by the superior cheapness of British manufacturers they had to choose between loyalty to an unworkable theory and economic disintegration, which would have overtaken them all if they had not resorted to Protection. And the justification of their action is to be found in the fate of two countries – Ireland and India – who did not enjoy fiscal autonomy, and in consequence had to follow Free Trade policies at the behest of this country, with the result that their native industries were entirely destroyed by the competition of British manufactures.

In each of these countries the problem of poverty has been enormously intensified by this compulsory Free Trade, which left behind it a legacy of hatred that led to the rise of nationalist movements to overthrow British rule. The notion that Free Trade was the secret of Victorian prosperity is entirely without foundation. It was due instead to our virtual monopoly of machinery in nearly every branch of manufacture, in consequence of which our industries did not stand in the need of protection. The proof of this is that Protectionist countries enjoyed corresponding periods of prosperity during the process of industrialization.

Nothing could be more fatuous than the ordinary political debates on the respective merits of Free Trade and Protection, where neither side reasons from principles, but attempts to maintain its position by comparing the standard of living in this country with that of others – Free Traders always insisting that as a result of Protection Continental nations had to accept a lower standard of living than obtains in this country, while Protectionists pointed to the example of the United States to prove the contrary – because fiscal policy is only one of several factors that determine the standard of living in any country. The lower standard of living on the Continent (assuming such to be the case) may be explained by the relative inferiority of their supplies of raw material and their great expenditure on armaments; while the higher standard of the United States can be explained by the wealth of natural resources of the country and the low expenditure on armaments; to consider only two among the many factors that affect the standard of living. Such comparisons are valueless. The real issue is whether a country was better off or not after it adopted Protection than before. And on this issue the evidence is conclusive in favor of Protection. The prosperity of the United States, Germany, and other countries followed and did not precede their adoption of Protection; and the reason for this is that with Protection came greater economic stability, which at the same time provided more employment and reduced the costs of production. Free Trade, on the contrary, is a source of industrial demoralization and disorganization by reason of the uncertainty that accompanies it. It is a penny wise and pound foolish policy.

In view of the fatuous nature of such debates it is not surprising that the whole subject should have fallen into contempt among the intelligentsia, who nowadays regard the whole question at the best as merely a secondary issue. Nevertheless they are mistaken. The subject only appears fatuous because the real issues are never discussed. When we make their acquaintance we make the discovery that the issue between Free Trade and Protection is, in its logical implications, the most fundamental issue with which politics are concerned. For it not only raises the issues as to whether national policy should be directed towards internationalism or self-sufficiency, but whether industry should be regulated or not. This may sound strange today when it is customary to identify the issue with policy towards foreign

trade, but it would not have appeared strange to Cobden and his predecessors, to whom Free Trade meant not only all we mean by a policy of free imports, but all we mean by *laissez-faire*. The popular idea that Free Trade dates from the agitation which ended in the repeal of the Corn Laws is not true. On the contrary, that repeal was but the culminating point of a struggle between two conceptions of society that had been waged since the fourteenth century, one of which took its stand on the general validity of tradition and the other placed its faith in an abstract speculative theory. Theory was victorious, and we are paying the penalty of that victory today, and we shall continue to pay until we return to tradition.

When we are familiar with these things we understand why impotence should have overtaken the League of Nations. Committed to an ideal of universal Free Trade, it is not only committed to an unrealizable ideal, but to one the pursuit of which is much more calculated to encourage warfare and mutual national suspicions than to diminish them. It stands to reason that nations which pursue policies of national self-sufficiency will have less reason to quarrel with one another than those who follow international policies; while nations with normal and mixed economics will better understand each other than nations of specialists.²

² For a fuller treatment of this subject see the author's *Protection and the Social Problem* (Methuen & Co.).

CHAPTER VI

IMMEDIATE MEASURES

THE FIRST STEPS towards social reconstruction have already been taken. They were taken when we were forced off the Gold Standard and broke with Free Trade in 1931. But nothing short of desperate necessity could have induced us to take them, for our eyes were turned in the wrong direction – the false prosperity of the Victorian era having completely blinded us to economic reality. If there is not in existence any law of nature to correct a failing social and economic equilibrium, nature, at any rate, gives us warnings which, if we listen to them, will set our feet on the right path. The crisis of August, 1931, was one of these warnings. We listened to it to the extent of doing what was at the moment expedient, but we still cling to universal Free Trade as an ideal, and therein lies our peril. For as we have seen, it is an ideal entirely divorced from reality. Not until we accept the implications of Protection and pursue a policy of national self-sufficiency and regulated industry shall we recover direction.

One of the implications of such a policy is to revive our agriculture.¹ This is necessary not only because until agriculture is revived we shall be without a foundation upon which to rebuild the social structure, but because as our foreign trade is declining, and will continue to do so,² and our income from foreign investments is rapidly disappearing, the time is not far distant when we shall be unable to pay for the food we import to keep our population alive, which in these days amounts to about £350 millions a year. Unless, therefore, in the meantime we produce all the food we possibly can, we shall before long be faced with a serious

¹ The best treatment of this subject I know of is to be found in Mr. Montague Fordham's two books, *The Rebuilding of Rural England* (Hutchinson & Co.) and *British Trade and Agriculture* (Geo. Allen & Unwin). The latter, more recently published, is an excellent introduction to economics in general.

² To explain exactly why this is so is a long story. I have dealt with it in *Means and Ends* (Faber & Faber), to which the reader is referred.

food shortage, not to say famine. The efforts which Mr. Walter Elliott, the Minister of Agriculture, is nowadays making to rescue the farming community from bankruptcy are reassuring, suggesting that the Government has at last awakened to the peril, for it is the first time within living memory that the problems of agriculture have been taken seriously. But it does not necessarily follow that after having put the existing house in order he will be allowed to proceed to the next stage, and remove the danger of famine by making this country as self-supporting as possible, for there are powerful vested interests in food importation who may be relied upon to do all in their power to defeat such a policy.

This is no mere theory, for they are already at work attempting to queer the pitch of a possible revival of agriculture. The line they are taking up is that, as it is impossible for wheat to be grown in this country as cheaply as it can be grown in the wheat belt of the United States and Canada, agriculturalists in this country should specialize on stock and dairy farming. It is an argument to which there is no answer from a strictly commercial point of view. But it is not valid if we approach the question from the point of view of the nation, because it assumes we shall always be in a position to pay for the food we import, which there is no reason to suppose will be the case. It takes five times as much land to produce food in the form of meat as it does in the form of wheat and other cereals. When we consider this fact in relation to our population, it is evident that it is only by growing cereals that we can ensure an adequate food supply. For this reason it is important that we grow cereals even though it should cost us more than to import them, since only if we are self-supporting can we be sure of surviving the crises that are ahead. But when all things are taken into consideration, it would not cost us more, for by growing all the food we can we should escape two heavy liabilities. We should not have to support such a large army of unemployed – it is estimated a million additional men could be employed on the land – and we could reduce our expenditure on the navy. For it is to safeguard our food supplies that we need such a big one (another reason why Free Trade is not pacifist). The cost of these things should be added to that of the food we import; and when we add them we make the discovery that the expenses we are involved in through importing food enormously exceed the savings. Incidentally, this is one of the reasons why the cost of living has gradually risen under Free Trade since it was permitted to destroy our agriculture. The cheap food fetish is an illusion which makes food very expensive, and the logical end of it is famine.

The popular idea that we could only produce a tithe of the food we consume is not supported by agricultural authorities. Opinion varies as to exactly how much could be grown, but all authorities agree that we could produce at least 80 per cent. Sir Charles Fielding, the Director-General of Food Supplies during the War, who has made an elaborate investigation of the subject, expresses the opinion, in his

book *Food*, that we could in case of necessity feed ourselves; which opinion is indisputable on the assumption that we changed our diet to the extent of eating less meat and more cereals. All countries which become over-populated tend to substitute cereals for meat.

There are other reasons why the revival of agriculture is the next step to be taken. It would not only rectify our trade balance and put us entirely out of danger, but by providing a greatly enlarged home market it would react to promote a revival of industry. Then in addition it would make an increased distribution of purchasing power as advocated by the Douglasites, which so far as I can see is necessary to prevent industry from coming to a standstill, a practical proposition. At the present time this is impracticable, for it is evident that until agriculture is revived any increase in purchasing power would be disastrous. The dole today constitutes a drain because as most of it is spent on food, and our food is mostly imported, it means that most of the money so distributed goes out of the country. But in proportion as our agriculture is revived and our industries protected this ceases to be true. Assuming we could succeed in growing all the food we require, the drain would then amount to the cost of the raw material used in the manufacture of commodities purchased by dole receivers, which would be slight. If we produced all our own food and imported no raw material for commodities purchased by dole receivers, we could then increase the amount given in doles to the extent of equating consumption with production, and its incidence would not be felt, for the increase in consumption would react to revive trade, which in turn would react to reduce the number of the unemployed. So paradoxically it comes to this: granted self-sufficiency, an increase in the amount of the dole up to the point at which consumption equates with production would not increase but decrease the burden it places on the community by the stimulus it would give to a revival of trade.

I said that so far as I can see an increased distribution of purchasing power is the only way of preventing industry from coming to a standstill. My reason for believing this is that as automatic machinery tends increasingly to displace labor, apart from such a distribution, the discrepancy between production and consumption must widen until it brings collapse. But while I support such an increased distribution of purchasing power, I do so only as a measure of temporary economic expediency, with my eyes open, for I am well aware that there are grave objections to the proposal which are not to be explained away; one of which is that it involves labor conscription; for it is a certainty that if the national dividend were sufficient to put people in a position to live comfortably without working, the incentive to labor would be gone; the necessary work of the community would not get done. Douglasites were accustomed to deny this. But it is to be observed that Major Douglas himself is no longer prepared to do so, for in his *Scheme for*

Scotland he lays it down that dividends would only be paid to those who were willing to do any work that might be required of them, which is only another way of saying the same thing.³ Thus, the Leisure State to which Douglasites look forward turns out to be our old friend, the Servile State.

³ “For a period of five years after the initiation of this scheme, failure on the part of any individual to accept employment in whatever trade, business, or vocation he was classified in the last census, under conditions recognized as suitable to that employment (unless exempted on a medical certificate) will render such individual liable to suspension of benefit in respect to the national dividend.” – Draft Social Credit Scheme (for Scotland), by C. H. Douglas, *New English Weekly*, March 23, 1933.

CHAPTER VII

THE ALTERNATIVE TO COMMUNISM

WE HAVE SEEN that Communism is untenable in theory and mischievous in practice and have indicated some immediate measures that need to be taken. But if we are not to drift into Communism we must have some alternative theory for the reorganization of society that is as definite and fundamental as are the theories of Communism, for capitalist civilization cannot continue to function much longer. Misrepresentation and abuse, which appear to be the only stock-in-trade of most anti-Communists, is worse than useless, since so far from weakening the drift towards Communism it actually strengthens it by providing new arguments for its defenders.

The first requisite of such a theory is that it shall be based upon the principles of Christianity, not in the sentimental sense in which any proposal which professes to be for the good of mankind asks for the support of the churches, but in the sense that it is the civil equivalent of Christian theology; the logical implication of its teaching. Christianity, because it takes its stand on the spiritual nature of man, is the only principle capable of challenging the root assumptions of materialist Communism. The strength of Communism finally rests on the fact that the Communist is a man of principle, persuaded of the absolute truth of the materialist philosophy and conception of history. He takes his stand upon it without equivocation, and this gives him a driving force against which the ordinary secular reformer, who because of his denial of Christianity has nothing to appeal to but common sense and expediency, fights in vain. In consequence it will not be until those who are opposed to Communism take their stand as unequivocally upon the principles of Christianity as Communists do upon those of materialism that a force will be set in motion capable of successfully challenging it and restoring the lost equilibrium between the spiritual and material sides of life.

Christianity is both material and spiritual, but it is necessary to acknowledge the primacy of the spiritual. The corollary of this idea is a frank recognition of the fact that the redemption of society is primarily a religious question, and that politics is

finally a secondary form of activity. It is to this old conception that we must return, for as we have seen in the case of Russian Communism, the idolatry of politics, the assumption that political activity can determine man's entire being, leads to the grossest tyranny. It leads the State to demand not only what is Caesar's, but what is God's; and this leaves no room for liberty whatsoever, while in the end it leads to terrorism, because if man may not be brought into line by the forces of spiritual persuasion from within, he will need to be brought into line by coercion from without. From this it follows that any society which is to be a human society, which is to enjoy liberty and be progressive in the best sense of the word, should not be merged in a unitary State in which there is no distinction between State, Church and industry, but should live under a plurality of powers with a mixed economy since only by such an arrangement can the excesses of one power be corrected by another. The unitary State, because of the non-existence of any other power capable of restraining it, is inevitably self-destructive.

The second requisite of a reasonable society is a frank acceptance of human nature as it exists. Communism is an impossible ideal because it asks too much of human nature. It demands that the individual live on a higher moral plane than the average man is capable; that in a word he be "virtuous beyond his capacity." The Bolsheviks have found this out. They found that the Communist principle, "from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs," is a counsel of perfection and unrealizable in practice. The attempt to act on this principle led, as we saw, to a widespread demoralization that threatened to bring industry to a standstill. The equalitarian principle did not work because it destroyed personal interest and undermined the sense of responsibility. It could not provide the stimulus necessary for the worker to make himself efficient, while it led to carelessness in regard to equipment. In consequence the Bolsheviks were driven by the force of circumstances to make concessions to human nature as they found it, leading them eventually to institute different rates of pay for skilled and unskilled, for light and heavy work and for different degrees of responsibility, while it led them to resort to piecework where it could be applied as a means of speeding up production. In a word, the Bolsheviks found out that the criticism of the man-in-the-street – that Communism left human nature out of account – which they had dismissed with contempt, was after all true. In literature, science and art instinct for work may be sufficient to stir men to high attainments in spite of inadequate material rewards, because the work itself is interesting. But in the world of material development it is different. The work itself is not interesting and there is no kudos. In consequence, experience proves that unless the worker can be assured of material reward the incentive to activity and achievement will be lacking.

The attempt to establish Communism in the villages was no more successful than in the towns. The attempt to remake the peasant in the Communist image was

defeated by his passive resistance. The peasants disliked Communism because it gave no adequate encouragement to personal gain and initiative. Are we then to conclude as a result of the Russian experiment that Adam Smith was right after all, and that there is no way of organizing society and industry except on a basis of self-interest? No, that is not the deduction to be made, but that Communism and individualism are opposite forms of error which have their roots in a false conception of human nature. Adam Smith was heretical, not because he recognized the part which self-interest inevitably plays in the life of society, but because he promoted the idea that self-interest was a principle to which the regulation of society could be safely entrusted on the assumption that the self-regarding instincts of men would, if given free play, so balance and neutralize each other as to eventuate in an equilibrium of good. Thus he exaggerated one aspect of truth to the damage and denial of other aspects equally important, which is one form of heresy. The economic man of the so-called Classical economists, the man who is governed entirely by motives of enlightened self-interest, who always knows where his self-interest lies and acts upon it, is a mythical creature who never existed because self-interest is never finally enlightened. The average man is not like that. He pursues self-interest up to a certain point, but he is content when he has made a sufficiency, when he can provide for himself, his wife and family in reasonable comfort. He wants to enjoy, he can be moved by altruistic as well as by self-interested motives, but he is no more capable of living in a society which demands he be completely altruistic than he is capable of sacrificing himself completely to the pursuit of self-interests.

The frank recognition of this nature of the average man must be the foundation of any social theory capable of a successful application. Its recognition would link us up with the great sociological traditions of the past. To attempt to eliminate self-interest entirely is not expedient because it destroys the stimulus to work, and leads to apathy, indifference and demoralization. But to give it free play, to remove all restraints is equally dangerous because it places power in the hands of the most avaricious members of society, of men who have no respect for human individuality, who are callous in their treatment of others, who do not hesitate to rob, sweat or enslave their fellows in order to gratify their lust for power and riches. It results, as we have found out, in the grossest economic inequalities, injustices and insecurity, in a condition of things in which capital comes to belong to a relatively small class and the rest of the community is more or less at their mercy; which condition reacts to generate that spirit of class warfare which is our peril today. In these circumstances, the only rational thing to do is to steer a middle course between these extremes; to accept self-interest and to put a fence round it, to keep it within bounds, thus preventing the individual in the pursuit of his own interests from trespassing on the equal rights of others. This was the principle

underlying the Guilds in the Middle Ages. The Mediaevalists were equally suspicious of Communism and economic individualism. They objected to individualism because they recognized that a high standard of commercial morality could only be maintained on the assumption that laws existed to suppress a lower one; and they objected to Communism because while they were of the opinion that it might be suitable for a religious community whose members lived under a discipline, it could not be reconciled with the circumstances of industry or the claims of family life. In consequence they came to accept a modified form of Communism which we know as the Corporate life or the Corporate society. To this conception we must return, for it is the only type of society that has succeeded in reconciling the conflicting claims of collective and individual life. A society which conformed to these principles would be individualist in so far as it acknowledged the principle of private property, and Socialist in so far as it insisted upon a wide distribution of property, its control, and the regulation of currency and industry in the interests of society.



It is for such reasons that the Guild or Corporate Society is to be regarded as the type and exemplar of all rational social organization. It is the normal type of society. A society built upon such principles would be sustained by a balance of forces. It might or might not be progressive. But if it was progressive it would only remain normal so long as its various organs developed symmetrically or proportionately in such a way that the equilibrium was maintained at a higher level. Its manufactures would rest on a foundation of agriculture and as far as possible on home produced raw materials, and its commerce on a foundation of native manufactures. Its people would be held together by personal and human ties, in the family, the Guild, town and village. Prices and wages would be fixed on a just level, small scale industry would obtain, property would be more or less evenly distributed, while foreign trade would be limited to the exchange of surpluses and to such things as could not be produced at home; for it would be the policy of such a society to produce within its borders everything it possibly could, even if it did cost more than to import them, because it would recognize that the position of the individual member of society can only be secure on the assumption that his livelihood may not any day be destroyed by foreign competition; and security of livelihood is necessary to moral freedom and integrity of function. In a word, the ideal of the normal society would be that of self-sufficiency.¹

¹ I have not in this little book dealt with the political aspect of the question. But readers who would like to pursue the subject further are recommended to read *Fascism* by J. S. Barnes (Home University Library). The political principles there developed will be found to coincide largely with the economic principles here enunciated.

A society might remain normal though it made use of machinery, but only upon the assumption that its use was restricted where it conflicted with the permanent interests of society. It would not be allowed to disintegrate the social fabric as it is today. Such a society would obey the principle of Function, frankly recognizing that to function is the true end of man; and as such it would be the antithesis of the Leisure state with its ideal of subsidizing people not to function. But if the Normal Society is not to be identified with the Leisure state, neither is it to be identified with that equally undesirable thing – the Work state. It would be a State in which work was done leisurely.

Mention has been made of the Guilds. It is necessary for me to be more explicit as to what exactly I mean by them, because owing to the failure of the Building Guilds, that were organized to carry through housing schemes after the war, the idea of reviving the Guilds declined in popularity. The term Guild, in the modern world, has been very loosely used to describe any organization in which people have associated, and in this sense I suppose the Building Guilds may claim to have been Guilds. But in the Mediæval sense of the term, the Building Guilds were not Guilds at all but co-operative producing societies, and experience proves that co-operative production is always a doubtful experiment. When, therefore, I speak of reviving Guilds I must not be understood to refer to Producing Guilds but to regulative ones of the Mediæval type, which imposed over each industry an organization to regulate its affairs in much the same way that professional societies enforce a discipline among their members, with the difference that, in addition to upholding a standard of professional conduct, they would be concerned to promote a certain measure of economic equality among their members, in the same way that trade unions do today. Such Guilds would accept private industry, but would insist that all who were engaged in any industry should conform to its regulations, which would be concerned to maintain just and fixed prices and wages, the regulation of machinery and apprenticeship, to uphold a standard of quality in production, the prevention of adulteration and bad workmanship, to promote mutual aid, and other matters appertaining to the conduct of industry and the personal welfare of its members. Though such Regulative Guilds are identical in principle with the Mediæval Guilds, there is yet no technical difficulty that stands in the way of their establishment over industry today, for the principles to which it is proposed they should give application are finally nothing more than the enforcement of moral standards.



I said that under such Regulative Guilds just and fixed prices and wages should obtain. This is fundamental because unless prices and wages are fixed there can be

finally no economic stability. This is particularly the case in agriculture, where because of the uncertainty of harvests, production and consumption rarely balance; and the instability of agriculture reacts to promote industrial instability. In the absence of fixed prices, the producer exploits the consumer when there is a shortage and prices rise, and the consumer exploits the producer when there is a surplus and prices fall; with the result that the producer has a grievance when there is a surplus and the consumer when there is a shortage. Thus the inevitable accompaniment of unfixed prices is unrest and dissatisfaction, the creation of a temper of mutual suspicion and distrust that leads finally to class warfare. And prices must be just as well as fixed if they are to lead to economic stability; for if they are fixed too high they encourage over-production, and if too low they lead to under-production.

When prices are fixed and the level is just, money becomes *a common measure of value*; it bears a close relationship with the real values it is supposed to represent. All the problems of currency which often lead people to believe in the existence of a kind of economic witchcraft arise from the fact that so many people do not want to use money as a common measure of value, but to use it for the purpose of making more money. This anti-social desire, looked at askance in the Middle Ages, has become so general that most people today take it for granted that money is never so usefully employed as when it is used for this purpose. How false is this assumption is proved by the fact that this wrong use of money shares with the equally wrong use of machinery responsibility for the deadlock that has overtaken industry. This is easily proved. Money that is spent increases demand, while money which is invested increases supply. From this it follows that if a balance is to be maintained between demand and supply, part of the national income should be spent upon goods for final consumption and part invested in production; that is, part must be spent upon ends and part upon means; and both in their proper proportion. But when people begin to think that money is only usefully employed when it is used for the purpose of making more money, they begin to spend less than is desirable on goods for final consumption and to invest more than is desirable in productive enterprise, with the result that the balance between demand and supply is upset and competition is intensified. If they keep on investing their surplus income in new productive enterprises, a time comes when the potentialities of production become so enormous as to exceed the possibilities of demand. Then an economic deadlock, such as has overtaken modern industry, arrives, and it is safe to say it will continue until we make a break with that superstition known as "sound finance," which assumes that money is never so usefully employed as when it is used to make more money, and proceeds upon the assumption that there is no limit to the possibilities of compound interest. The

principles of “sound finance” have got us into this mess; it is a certainty they will never get us out of it.

For a long time the workings of this simple economic law was obscured for most people by the fact that it was possible for us to dump our surplus products, to which over-investment gave rise, in foreign markets. But this is no longer possible, because so many other countries have taken to industrial production, can supply their own needs, and are themselves in turn perplexed with a problem of surplus production. Their competition with us in the world market has resulted not only in a decline of our foreign trade, but by forcing each nation to raise its tariffs in order to recover in the home market what it has lost in the world market, it is promoting a reaction towards the ideal of national self-sufficiency. So truth is out at last. Production and consumption do not balance, because the notion that money ought to make more money has resulted in supply getting permanently ahead of demand.

A consequence of this idea is a general unwillingness of people to spend money on the arts and other things of permanent value. In former times this was not the case. Expenditure on the arts then was lavish. The great monuments of architecture of the past bear witness to that fact. Such expenditure reacted to keep economic arrangements in a healthy condition by acting as a safety valve; it cancelled surplus wealth instead of allowing it to accumulate as debt. But in these days, in spite of the fact that productive power has increased a hundredfold, less, instead of more money, is spent on the arts and other things of permanent value; and this is one of the reasons why machinery has been so grossly misapplied, because a refusal of people to spend money on the arts means in effect a refusal of people to make use of the advantages which machinery has to offer, and this naturally has resulted in widespread economic confusion; it has, so to say, corked up our economic life at both ends. And this brings me to the problem of machinery, the misuse of which, as I said, shares with the misuse of money responsibility for our present difficulties.



Reformers, obsessed with the problems of currency, are as a rule blind to the existence of any problem of machinery. They recognize that certain evils follow its present use, notably its tendency to promote economic insecurity by displacing labor, though incidentally it was only yesterday they recognized that. But they imagine that any evils to which its use has given rise are entirely the result of the reaction of the misuse of money on machinery. But can such a position be maintained? It is in the first place to be observed that Marx was of the opinion that the problem of machinery took precedence over the problem of money. It was, he contended, the evolution of machinery that determined the evolution of Capitalism

– not the reverse – and he supports this contention by affirming that the various phases of capitalist development in the industrial era are consequent upon the unrestricted use of machinery, and are not to be separated from it. Thus the tendency of Capitalism towards centralization is dependent upon the development of railways and telegraphs, which enable a central control to be exercised, while the legalization of the principle of limited liability, which has exercised such a decisive influence upon financial development, and gave rise to the problem of credit in its modern form, came about because large-scale production called for an amount of capital that private capitalists were unable to supply. And the opinion of Marx on this issue cannot be lightly dismissed because he was, as we saw, the only economist of the nineteenth century who succeeded in forecasting with any degree of accuracy the trend of industrial development. It is not necessary to be a Communist to recognize that here Marx was prophetic. Whether Marx's opinion is finally true or not, it is certainly true to say that machinery has influenced finance as much as finance has influenced machinery, and that the mistaken ambition of engineers and technicians to mechanize life and society has as much to do with our present difficulties as the superstitions of bankers.

Granted, then, that a separate problem of machinery exists, what is its nature? Well, the first and most obvious fact in connection with it is the economic one that it increases production and undermines consumption at the same time by displacing labor, and is to that extent responsible for the growth of the unemployed. This fact is admitted nowadays, so I may pass on to its most serious aspect, which is that it is disintegrating the fabric of civilization. It has destroyed the instincts proper to life in an organic community and has left only a mechanical relationship. It has almost entirely destroyed the arts, destroyed charm in work and turned it into hated toil, thwarted the major impulses that give value to human life, while its tendency is to forbid outlet to everything but itself, becoming thereby a cruel form of tyranny. The supposed advantages which follow mass production turn out to be illusory, for mass production involves standardization and levelling down outside the realm of mere material goods. It gives us not only cheap and nasty furniture, but films, newspapers, publicity in all its forms, and commercial fiction offering satisfaction at its lowest level. And last but not least, our excessive use of machinery has, as Walther Rathenau, the German industrialist who became Foreign Minister after the War and met his death by assassination, insists, deprived society of wise leadership. One consequence of the mechanization of industry, he says, is the demand that all shall conform. "Recalcitrancy is punished. If there should appear some man of the old type – warrior, explorer, handicraftsman, prophet – he is expelled from the working hive, or is degraded to the basest and

most undifferentiated service.”² In its earlier stages industrialism appeared to work because it found leaders by taking men over from the old regime. But as the old regime disappears the problem of leadership is seen to emerge. And this is as true of politics as of industry. Leaders of the old type who could command allegiance do not come to the front under the new conditions. They cannot pass through the machine, which does not promote the interests of men of character, but of putty-men capable of being pressed into any mold or twisted into any shape that mechanization demands. In consequence, leadership in politics and industry tends to pass into the hands of the second-rate, into the hands of men incapable of the big decisions which leadership demands. No doubt it is some dim perception of this truth that explains the revolt against leaders in the modern world. It is not the principle of leadership that is called in question, but leaders incapable of leading.

That things should have worked out like this is no accident. It follows from the quantitative standard, which is the essence of industrialism. If you produce in great quantities, you must, if you are to sell your products, take the world as you find it. You must accept the taste and standards of the average man as your standard. From this it follows that you exclude everything that is above the average. You begin by excluding standards of taste that are above the average and you end by excluding men who are above the average. But to exclude the best men is fatal to civilization, for deprived of leadership average men lose their way, and tend progressively to degenerate. Thus we see the theory of averages in politics, as in industry, leads ever to a lower level. It is because of this law that industrialism is self-destructive. It stands to reason that if it cannot produce leaders, it can have no future. No wonder it is in decay.

Once we understand what has happened, we realize that the modern dilemma has arisen because mechanization has been allowed to trespass outside of its legitimate province, which is to do the donkey-work of the world. We must insist that the interests of society, religion, life and culture come first, and that the use of machinery should be forbidden where it conflicts with them. Science, machinery, mechanization are good in a certain proportion as other things in life may be good in a certain proportion, but become evil when they are allowed to develop to such dimensions as to threaten the existence of all other forms of activity. In this connection, I would suggest the use of machinery be limited in the following directions:

- (1) The use of machinery should be restricted where it conflicts with the claims of personality – that is, it should not be allowed to turn men into robots.
- (2) It should not be allowed where it is injurious to health.
- (3) It should not be allowed to create economic disorders like unemployment.

² *In Days to Come*, by Walther Rathenau, p. 33.

(4) It should not be allowed where it conflicts with the claims of the crafts and arts.

(5) It should not be allowed to multiply commodities beyond the point at which natural demand is satisfied – that is, beyond the point at which sales need to be artificially stimulated by advertisements.

(6) It should not be allowed to trespass seriously upon the world's supply of irreplaceable raw material.

Conversely we should revive agriculture, handicraft, small workshops and small scale industry, for such revivals are the corollaries of a restriction of the use of machinery. Such revivals would restore the human scale of values, bring back a normal social life, give independence and make possible a widespread revival of the arts.

It will not be possible in the limited space at my disposal to develop these proposals in detail. Perhaps most people would agree that they are reasonable, and that if they had been enforced from the first, machinery would not be the menace in the world it has become. But while many people will agree in principle as to the desirability of such restrictions, they doubt the possibility of imposing them at this time of day, and without troubling to think further dismiss them from their minds as an impracticable dream. But is the proposal impracticable? It may be at the moment. But it does not follow it may not be practicable in the near future, for the public is becoming alarmed about machinery, and circumstances are combining to force action of some kind. All ideas sound impracticable when they are first advanced. But they become politically possible when a sufficient number of people have been persuaded of their truth and are prepared to act upon them. After all, it is a question of conviction and will. Such a proposal may seem impracticable today because most people do not realize its urgency. They imagine the social problem can be solved without interfering with machinery. But they will begin to think differently when they see the issues involved. When they come at last to realize that the problem of machinery is not any mere æsthetic question, but the question as to whether civilization is to survive or not, for it is nothing less. When they realize that, I doubt not the necessary resolution will be forthcoming.

The crux of the question is this. We cannot get a workable social theory without interfering with machinery, and unless we can get one we are lost. There can be no question about the conflict between machinery and civilization. Confronted by the social problem, two lines of thought and action are open to us. Either we demand a restriction of the use of machinery in order to preserve the integrity of social traditions, in the interests of what we are accustomed to regard as the permanent needs of human nature, or we accept the fact that its unrestricted use is disintegrating our traditions and attempt to devise new ones that shall accord with the machine. With the exception of Ruskin, all modern economic thinkers who

have attained any wide measure of popularity have chosen the latter path. Socialists, Communists, Douglasites, Technocrats are agreed that to accept the unrestricted use of machinery is the only practical policy to adopt. Machinery, they tell us, has come to stay, and that apparently is all they are prepared to say about it (a position as idiotic as it would be to say that money has come to stay as a reason for condoning its absence). Yet experience shows it to be a fatal policy. Intellectual sterility overtakes everybody who surrenders to the machine, because to surrender to the machine is to cut oneself off from the great stream of tradition and achievement. All such reformers discover finally that the attempt to devise a new form of society that shall accord with the machine is a barren quest. It leads them into a world of unreality in which theory becomes divorced from practice. The Bolsheviks are no exception to this rule, for if practice is not in their case divorced from theory, it is from reality; since from the start the Revolution partook of the nature of a collision between theorists fired with a new ideal and social and economic conditions of which they have no comprehension. Not comprehending them, they sought in vain to direct the course of events, until, exasperated by failure, they came to commit crimes of which it may be assumed they had no presentiment at the beginning.

When we realize these things, we see that everything turns on our capacity to break the spell which places our civilization at the mercy of machinery. The paralysis which has invaded every department of modern activity is to be traced to the fact that the mass of people are neither prepared to control machinery, nor to accept the implications of such a refusal, with the result that the conclusions of those economists who take the unrestricted use of machinery for granted are as unacceptable to them as are the conclusions of those who propose to restrict its use. No one is able to effect a reconciliation.

Such arguments, I trust, will carry weight with people accustomed to think, but I fear they may fail in their purpose with those who see in machinery an instrument for the increase of wealth, and can see nothing else. Such people see poverty around them and they assume that that is sufficient evidence that we have not too much machinery, though reflection suggests that if with productive power increased a hundredfold the masses of people are still in poverty, the existence of human beings on this planet before the introduction of machinery is a fact impossible of explanation. The trouble is that appearances will always be against a return to sanity, because when production increases beyond a certain point it creates gluts which upset distribution; and by upsetting distribution competition is increased, and unemployment and poverty are created. The widespread existence of such poverty in turn lends color to the demand for still more production, on the assumption that our primary trouble is an insufficiency of productive power, rather than the fact that by allowing production to run riot we have upset the system of

distribution. Our economic system is suffering from a kind of chronic indigestion consequent upon something that might aptly be called "industrial gluttony." For just as the glutton, because he eats too much, fails to profit by the food he consumes and comes to crave for more food, so we, because we produce too much, fail to profit by our vast production and call out for more production as the remedy.

I often think that the greatest obstacle to any solution of the social problem is the fact that we are obsessed by the problem of poverty, for this very obsession distorts our vision, preventing us from seeing the problem as a whole. To see it as a whole is to know that man does not live by bread alone, that he has a soul as well as body, and for the same reason it is only when we approach the social problem from the spiritual end that we can get any light on the material.



A Christian body recently passed a resolution in which it was affirmed that machinery is a gift from God. Apart from the fact that there is no authority for such a statement, and that anyone has just as much right to say it is of the Devil, such a statement is to be deprecated because it puts the whole subject outside of the sphere of discussion. Indeed, it is just this attitude of mind that is responsible for its gross misapplication. It is true to say that we shall never learn to think freely about machinery, which is a precedent condition of using it properly, until we are prepared, if need be, to abolish it; for not until we can approach the subject in such a spirit of intellectual detachment shall we be able to examine its problems dispassionately on their merits.

And there is another thing to be said. In spite of the commonly received opinion that we cannot abolish machinery, there is, as a matter of fact, nothing easier in the world. We have only to continue drifting and in a few years it will have abolished itself, by going out of commission because industry will have come to a standstill. The trouble is that we shall all be abolished at the same time. This is the peril that confronts us. There is no time to be lost.

THE END

