

of labour. All this, however, relates only to the progress of the productivity of labour in the production of use-values.\*

Capital and surplus value do not appear until *exchange* and *money* have developed, and until an increased average productivity of labour is used no longer so as to enable *the whole of society* to achieve a saving in labour-time but so as to ensure for *one part of society* the products of this increased productivity, by subjecting the rest of society to a heavier burden of work. Capital is the culmination of the history of the appropriation of the social surplus product by one part of society at the expense of another, and not the culmination of the history of the saving of human labour accomplished for the benefit of human society as a whole.

Appropriation of the surplus value produced during the process of production assumes the existence of a market economy and the sale of commodities produced by producers who do not own the products of their labour. Surplus value, in this sense, is the *monetary form of the social surplus product*. In a society producing use values, the social surplus product which a possessing class appropriates is appropriated directly, either in the form of labour (*corvée*) or of products (land rent, tribute). In a society producing commodities, the social surplus product appropriated by the possessing class is indirectly appropriated, in the form of money, by the sale of commodities, from the results of which sale the costs of maintaining labour and the other costs of production have been deducted.

Like petty commodity production, capital developed originally within the pores of a society which was first and foremost engaged in producing use values. Surplus value appeared and developed in a society in which the social surplus product essentially retained the form of use-values. The entire history of capital, from its origins to its apotheosis in the capitalist mode of production, is the history of the slow disintegration of this fundamentally non-market economy, through the effect of trade, of usury, of money, of capital and of surplus value. Capital is embodied, in a non-trading society and in contrast to the old-established possessing classes, in a new class, the bourgeoisie. Capital is only a new social relation between producers and owners of capital, a relation which replaces the old social relations between small commodity producers, on the one hand, and

\* It could be objected that this is merely a matter of definition. If so, it would be necessary to find *another expression* to indicate capital and surplus value which arise from commodity production and the circulation of money. The confusion consists in the simultaneous use of the same term, capital, for every technique of growth in the productivity of labour, on the one hand, and for specific social relations, based on exploitation, on the other. Etymology meets economics here, moreover, since it says that the word "capital" means originally only a *sum of money which is to be invested so as to earn interest*.<sup>46</sup>

between peasant producers and those who take the surplus product of agriculture, on the other.

### *The law of uneven development*

The study of the origin and development of economic categories is necessarily a study of economic history, and an analysis of the economy of those peoples of our own day which have remained at stages of historical evolution long since left behind in the capitalist world. It actually isolates "pure" forms which in real life are combined, or have more or less degenerated. To reduce economic history to a series of "stages" or to the successive appearance of "categories" is to make it excessively mechanical, to the point of rendering it unrecognizable. But to eliminate from historical study any allusion to successive stages of economic organisation and any reference to the progressive appearance of these "categories" is to make it merely incomprehensible.

Marxism has often been compared to Darwinism, and the evolution of societies to that of species. Like any other comparison, this one includes points of resemblance and of difference. In biology, too, however, a *dialectical* conception of evolution is gradually taking the place of the mechanical, unilateral and linear conception.\* The Marxist conception of economic and social change has no place for any fatalism or automatism. No phase of social organisation "must" necessarily succeed another.

Alongside linear progress there is progress by leaps. Economic evolution can lead to blind alleys or age-long stagnations, especially through excessive adaptation to a specific environment; that seems to have happened with the agricultural peoples of South-East Asia.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Marxism would not be dialectical if it did not recognise, alongside societies which are progressing (from the standpoint of the average productivity of labour), societies in marked regression.<sup>48</sup>

The law of uneven development, which some have wished to restrict in application to the history of capitalism alone, or even merely to the imperialist phase of capitalism, is thus a universal law of human history. Nowhere in the world has there been a straight-line progressive evolution, starting from the first stages of fruit-gathering and ending with the most advanced capitalist (or socialist) industry. The peoples which reached the highest level of development of productive forces at the stage of food-gathering, hunting and fishing—the

\* The idea of a straight-line progress from the anthropoid apes up to the emergence of man has now been dropped. Today it is supposed either that the anthropoid apes and man have similar-like ancestors in common, or that man is descended from an anthropoid ape less specialised than any of those that exist today. Thus, there has been progress combined with stagnation, retardation or proterogenesis.<sup>49</sup>

Eskimos, and, above all, the Indians of the North-West coast of America—did not invent agriculture. This first appeared in the well-watered valleys of Abyssinia, Anatolia, Afghanistan, Transcaucasia, and North-Western India.<sup>49</sup> But it was not there, either, that agriculture gave birth to civilisation, which is the child of irrigation.\*

Agricultural civilisation reaches its most advanced phase in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China. It was not however, in these countries, but rather in Greece, at Rome, at Byzantium, and in mediaeval Europe (Italy and Flanders) that the progress of the productivity of labour culminated in the most advanced forms of crafts and trade within the framework of petty commodity production. And for petty commodity production to produce the industrial revolution and the capitalist mode of production, we have to move still further north, to England, a country which had long remained backward as regards crafts and trade, and which in the seventeenth century was still far from being the richest in the world or in Europe. Nor was it in Great Britain or in any other advanced capitalist country that capitalism was first overthrown, but in Russia, a typical backward country at the beginning of the twentieth century. May we venture a prophecy and say that it will not be in Russia, either, though this was the first country to introduce a planned economy based on socialisation of the chief means of production, that we shall first see the emergence of a completed socialist society, with the withering away of classes, commodities, money and the state?

\* Gordon Childe, too, insists on the absence of any identical succession of stages passed through by the peoples in the neolithic epoch. "Evolution and differentiation go hand in hand" he concludes; but he also mentions a number of instances of convergence.<sup>50</sup> Is not evolution as a combination of differentiation and convergence an eminently dialectical idea?

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## THE CONTRADICTIONS OF CAPITALISM

*Capital thirsting for surplus-value*

The owner of slaves distributed food among them and in return took the entire product of their labour. The feudal lord took the products of the unpaid work which his serfs were obliged to render him in the form of labour services. The capitalist buys the worker's labour-power for a wage which is less than the new value produced by this worker. In each of these varying forms the possessing classes take for themselves the social surplus product, the product of the surplus labour of the producers.

The contract made at Liège in 1634 between Antoine de Jelly, master-weaver, and Nicolas Cornélis, states bluntly that the latter will be paid "half of what he makes, the other half being the master's profit."\*

The wage-worker creates new value while he expends his labour-power to produce commodities in his employer's factory. At a certain moment he will have produced new value exactly equivalent to what he receives as his wages. If he were to stop working at that moment he would not have produced any surplus value. But the employer does not mean that to happen. He does not want to do a favour, he wants to do business. He does not buy labour-power in order to keep it alive, he buys it as he buys any other commodity, in order to realise its use-value.<sup>2</sup> And the use-value of labour-power, from the capitalist's standpoint, is precisely its capacity to create surplus-value, to provide surplus labour over and above the labour needed to produce the equivalent of the wage paid for it. In order to be hired by an employer, a worker must work longer than is needed to produce this equivalent. In doing this he will create new value for which he will be paid nothing. He is creating surplus value, which is the difference between the value created by labour-power and the value of labour-power itself.

\* Apologists for slavery did not fail to stress the analogy between this daily, weekly or monthly alienation of a man's labour-power and the alienation for life that is slavery: "It is not essentially repugnant to justice and reason that a man should surrender to another, even for his whole lifetime, the labour that every day a workman pledges to his employer, his master, provided that the inalienable [...] rights of man are safeguarded," wrote in 1742 the Dutch captain Elias Joannes.<sup>1</sup>

The capitalist's aim is to accumulate capital, to capitalise surplus value. The very nature of the circulation of money implies this aim. Industrial capital pursues this aim of accumulation even more, much more insatiably than usurer's capital or merchant capital. It produces for a free and anonymous market, *dominated by the laws of competition*. A capitalist is not alone in offering his products on this market to possible customers. Under the rule of competition, each industrialist tries to grab as large a share of the market as possible. To succeed, however, he must reduce his prices. There is only one way to reduce selling prices without threatening profit: to reduce the cost of production, the value of commodities, to curtail the labour-time socially necessary for producing them, to produce more commodities in the same length of time.

"Last year already the expansion of the enterprise, which took only a few months, enabled us to maintain the profit on our cement business at the expected level, despite the fact that competition considerably cut down the price of cement. This experience has confirmed us in our decision to make up for the increasing decline in prices which we foresee by an increase in the amount we produce," was proudly proclaimed by the annual report of a German cement-works in the nineteenth century.

In order to bring about such an increase in production, equipment must be improved, the process of production rationalised, the division of labour within the enterprise carried to a higher level. All of which demands an increase in capital. But the increase in capital can come, in the last analysis, only from an increase in the surplus-value capitalised. Under the lash of competition, the capitalist mode of production thus becomes the first mode of production in the history of mankind the essential aim of which appears to be *unlimited increase in production*, constant accumulation of capital by the capitalisation of the surplus value produced in the course of production itself.

The capitalist's thirst for surplus value is not the thirst for use-values and luxuries of the old possessing classes; only a limited part of surplus value is consumed unproductively in order to keep the capitalist alive. It is a thirst for surplus-value to capitalise, a thirst to accumulate capital: "... that whole system of appetites and values, with its deification of the life of snatching to hoard, and hoarding to snatch ..."<sup>8</sup>

There is nothing irrational or mystical in this thirst. The old possessing classes, who took the social surplus product essentially in the form of use-values, were assured of being able to go on doing this so long as the social edifice remained standing which had this particular form of exploitation as its foundation. They could be affected only by natural disasters, wars or social revolutions, disasters against which they tried to provide by constituting big reserves. The predominant

form in which capital first appears in history—usurer's and merchant capital—is characteristic of the same striving for *stability and security*. It is significant that the investments made by the bourgeois in the Middle Ages were calculated so as to guarantee stable incomes, regardless of fluctuations in money or prices.<sup>4</sup> The classical type of bourgeois in the historical epoch of the primitive accumulation of money capital, the miser, is haunted by this same thirst for security. It is not the *return* on his capital that he is worried about but its *existence*.

It is otherwise with the capitalist properly so called, the capitalist entrepreneur. Carrying on business for a market which is anonymous, unknown, undefined, his enterprises are dominated by risk and uncertainty. Today a deal has been successful, tomorrow another may fail to come off. It is not only the fact of competition, but the very fact of production which is *free from any overall social regulation*\* that gives capitalist enterprise this aspect of uncertainty and that compels the capitalist to try and make the maximum profit on each separate deal, in face of the permanent danger that hangs over his business as a whole.

The landowner, the small commodity producer, the purchaser of ground-rents, all find in the certainty of their incomes an adequate reason for keeping their activities within given *limits*. The uncertainty of capitalist profit implies, on the contrary, the need for a continuous *expansion* of business, an expansion which in turn depends on maximum accumulation of capital, maximum realisation of profits. Thus there emerges the image of the capitalist, of whose mediaeval ancestor Georges Espinas has drawn this masterly portrait:

"To achieve the biggest possible gain while paying out the least possible amount in wages; to make the producers supply as much as possible while paying them as little as he can get away with, or even robbing them within the same limits; to draw to himself, to breathe in, to suck up, as it were, all he can take of the money which ought to go to the small employers (the producers) for the work which he alone can obtain for them and which they carry out for him alone—this is obviously the constant aim of the efforts of the 'capitalist' entrepreneur to secure the biggest profit he can, even at the expense of the utmost harm to the people in his employment. He is like a spider, in the centre of his web. To apply this 'sweating' system all means are good in his eyes, and every circumstance is favourable; he

\* Such regulation existed for all the pre-capitalist crafts and even for the beginnings of the *Verlagsystem* (putting-out system) in several countries. In Carinthia and Styria in the middle of the fifteenth century "Duke Frederick III regulated afresh the way to be followed for iron, he fixed prices and taxes, restricted the number of forges and the amount of iron that each merchant could have, and laid down the terms of contracts (*Verträge*)."

knows how to take advantage of everything; he cheats on materials, he violates agreements and steals from wages; business means other people's money."<sup>6</sup>

#### *The lengthening of the working day*

Thirst for surplus-value is thirst for surplus labour, for unpaid labour over and above the labour that produces the equivalent value of the worker's means of life. In order to get more surplus labour the capitalists can, in the first place, lengthen the working day to the utmost without increasing the daily wage. If we suppose that a worker produces the equivalent of his wages in 5 hours, then lengthening his working day from 10 to 12 hours without any increase in wages will increase the surplus labour from 5 to 7 hours a day, or by 40 per cent. This way of increasing surplus-value is called *increasing absolute surplus value*.

In every society where the obtaining of use values remains the basic aim of production, for both the producers and the exploiters, a constant lengthening of the working day must appear absurd. The limitation of needs and of markets imposes a limit no less narrow upon production. So long as the slavery of ancient times remained patriarchal, on estates which were self-sufficient, the lot of the slaves was quite tolerable, and was really little different from that of the poor relations of the estate-owning family. It was only when the slavery of ancient times became the basis of production for the market that barbarous treatment of slaves became general.<sup>7</sup>

In the Middle Ages, the communal laws placed strict limits on the working time of the craftsmen. In such laws we find, as a rule, besides prohibition of night work, also the stoppage of work on numerous religious holidays (saints' days) and at certain periods of the year. On the basis of a study of the by-laws of the small town of Guines, in Artois, Georges Espinas has estimated the number of actual working days in the mediaeval year at 240.<sup>8</sup> In the Bavarian mines there were in the sixteenth century between 99 and 190 holidays every year.<sup>9</sup> Hue concludes that, taking into account the numerous holidays, the average working week in the mines of the fifteenth century was 36 hours.<sup>10</sup>

As soon, however, as capitalist enterprise appears, a constant striving to lengthen the working day is to be observed. From the fourteenth century onward laws were passed in Great Britain to forbid too short a working day. English writing of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is full of complaints regarding the "idleness" of the workers, who, "if they earn in four days enough to provide food for a whole week, do not go to work for the three following days." All the leading bourgeois thinkers take part in this campaign: the Dutchman Jan De Witt, Spinoza's friend; William Petty, the father of



English classical political economy; Colbert, who speaks of the "idle people", etc. Sombart fills seven pages with quotations like this from the period under consideration.<sup>11</sup>

When the capitalist mode of production crosses the oceans and penetrates fresh continents, it finds itself up against the same natural resistance by the workers to the lengthening of their working day. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the press of the virtuous Puritan colonists in North America resounded with complaints about the high cost of labour, "contrary to reason and equity". "Tis the poor that make the rich," artlessly declared the *New York Weekly Journal*. In 1769 the *Maryland Gazette* complained that "the wages they receive for the labour of one day will support them (the workers) in intemperance for three days."<sup>12</sup> "The denunciations of the 'luxury, pride and sloth' of the English wage-earners of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are, indeed, almost exactly identical with those directed against African natives today."<sup>13</sup>

Alfred Bonn  notes the amazement shown by Western observers when they beheld poor Arabs who prefer to earn £1 a year as shepherds rather than £6 a month as factory hands.<sup>14</sup> Audrey I. Richards reports the same repugnance among the Negroes of Rhodesia: "Men who worked an intermittent three or four hours a day in their tribal reserves are now asked to do a regular eight to ten hours under white supervision on the big plantations or in industrial concerns."<sup>15</sup>

It was sufficient, however, to take advantage of the enormous mass of labour-power uprooted and unemployed as a result of the social and economic upheavals of the period between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries to bring a pressure to bear on wages which brought them below subsistence level. In this way the bourgeoisie was able to advance from victory to victory in this "struggle against the idleness of the people".

From the eighteenth century onward we find that the normal working day in England is 13 or 14 hours.<sup>16</sup> In the English cotton mills the working week is between 75 and 80 hours in 1747; 72 hours in 1797; between 74 and 80 hours in 1804.<sup>17</sup> And since wages had fallen so low that every day without work was a day without food, Napoleon cuts a more generous figure than his minister Portalis when he rejects the latter's proposal to prohibit Sunday work: "Since the people eat every day they should be allowed [!] to work every day."<sup>18</sup>

### *The growth in the productivity and intensity of labour*

However, absolute surplus-value cannot be increased without limit. Its natural limit is, first of all, the physical capacity of the workers. Capital is interested in exploiting but not in destroying the labour-power which constitutes its constant source of potential surplus labour.

Beyond a definite physical limit, the worker's capacity to produce declines rapidly towards zero.

Furthermore, the organisation of workers' resistance by the trade unions brought about from the middle of the nineteenth century the first regulation of the working day in the direction of laying down a maximum length. The legal limit of the working day was fixed first at 12, then at 10, and in the twentieth century at 8 hours, so as to give in some countries a 40-hour week: not without howls about economic ruin from the bourgeoisie at each reduction.\*

Capital now falls back more and more upon a second way of increasing surplus-value. Instead of lengthening the working day, it tries to cut down the labour-time necessary to produce the equivalent of the worker's wages. Let us assume that with a working day of 10 hours, 4 hours are needed to create the amount of necessary value represented by the worker's wages. If this necessary labour can be cut from 4 to 2 hours, then surplus labour is increased from 6 to 8 hours, and exactly the same result is achieved as if the working day had been lengthened from 10 to 12 hours. This is what is called *increasing relative surplus value*.

The increase of relative surplus-value results essentially from growth in the productivity of labour thanks to the employment of new machinery, more rational methods of work, a more advanced division of labour, a better way of organising labour, etc.† Industrial capitalism has transformed economic life more than all the earlier modes of production put together. The fall in prices of articles of current consumption is clearly expressed in these figures:

|                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| In 1779 a certain quantity of No. 40 cotton thread cost 16s. |
| In 1784 it cost only 10s. 11d.                               |
| In 1799 it cost only 7s. 6d.                                 |
| In 1812 it cost only 2s. 6d.                                 |
| In 1830 it cost only 1s. 2-5d. <sup>19</sup>                 |

No less eloquent is the following table, which relates to a slightly later period in the United States, where the triumphs of machine production occurred somewhat later than in Great Britain.

\* These howls are to be compared to the well-known exclamation by the economist Senior: "Abolishing the last hour of work means abolishing profit."

† Surplus value is the difference between what is produced by labour-power and the cost of upkeep of this same labour-power. By gathering the workers together in factories and by introducing among them a more and more far-reaching division and co-operation of labour, capital increased their productivity (their production) even without changing the instruments of labour, and took the increased product for itself.

*Free labour and alienated labour*

The producer in a primitive society does not usually separate his productive activity, "labour", from his other human activities. Thus, this high degree of integration of his whole life is more an expression of the poverty of society and the extreme narrowness of his needs than a conscious effort towards the all-round development of all human potentialities. The tyranny to which he is subjected is that of the forces of nature. It implies a poor knowledge of the natural setting, a degrading subjection to magic, a primitive development of thought. But the effect of this degradation is greatly mitigated by the high level of social solidarity and co-operation. The integration of the individual with society is achieved in a comparatively harmonious way. When the natural setting is not too hostile, labour is combined with pleasure of body and mind. It satisfies needs both physical and social, aesthetic and moral.\*

As the productive forces increase, mankind frees itself more and more completely from the tyranny of the forces of nature. It gets to know its natural setting and learns to change this in accordance with its own ends. It subjects these forces to which formerly it was itself doomed to be more or less passively subject. So begins the triumphal march of science and scientific techniques, which will make man the master of nature and the universe.

But mankind pays a heavy price for this emancipating progress. The transition from a society of absolute poverty to a society of relative scarcity is at the same time transition from a society harmoniously united to a society divided into classes. With the appearance of individual leisure for a minority of society there also appears the alienated time, the time devoted to slave labour, the unpaid labour provided for others by the majority of society. As man frees himself from the tyranny of natural forces he falls more and more under the tyranny of blind social forces, the tyranny of other men (slavery, serfdom) or the tyranny of his own products (petty commodity production and capitalist production).

The alienated nature of slave labour does not need to be explained. The slave and the serf are no longer masters of their lives and of the bulk of their time. Not only the free development of their personality but any development at all is closed to them by their social condition. But labour in capitalist society is also alienated labour, it too implies human alienation to an extreme degree.

This alienation appears primarily as a radical separation between labour and all non-"economic" human activities. The overwhelming majority of the citizens of a capitalist society work not because they like their trade, because they fulfil themselves in their work, because

\* See, for example, the description of the *dôkumô*, communal labour in Dahomey.<sup>80</sup>

they regard it as a necessary and adequate condition for the development of their physical, intellectual and moral capacities. They work, on the contrary, *from necessity, in order to satisfy their human needs other than labour*. At the beginning of the capitalist system—as still today in a large part of the "third world"—these needs were reduced, moreover, to the almost animal level of subsistence and physical reproduction. As these needs grow bigger and as the duration of working time grows less, the contrast between "time lost" and "time regained" becomes all the more striking and acute.

Alienation is then expressed in the worker's total loss of control over his conditions of labour, over his instruments of labour, over the product of his labour. This loss of control becomes more marked precisely in proportion as the increase of relative surplus-value replaces the increase of absolute surplus-value, as the working day is shortened, but at the cost of a more and more inhuman intensification and mechanisation of this labour.

Shift work, which deprives the workers of the normal rhythm of the succession of day and night, the conveyor belt and semi-automation, the break-up of old skills, the generalisation of detail-work, are so many stages in this process of alienation. At the end of this process the worker is nothing but an insignificant link in two monstrous mechanisms, the machine in the literal sense, i.e. the instruments of labour that crush him,\* and the social machine which crushes him no less with its orders, its hierarchy, its commands, its fines and its organised insecurity. With the crushing of the individual is associated the boredom caused by his mechanised work, a boredom which ends by sapping the vitality of the worker at the bench, and to which the office-workers too will be subject in proportion as office work becomes mechanised as well.†

Alienation is, finally, expressed by the all-round commercialisation and atomisation of capitalist society. Everything is bought and sold. The struggle of all against all implies the negation of the most fundamental and most characteristic of human motives: the protection of the weak, of the old and of children; group solidarity; the desire for co-operation and mutual help; love of one's neighbour. All the qualities, aspirations, potentialities of humanity are no longer realisable

\* In both the literal (enormous increase in accidents at work) and the metaphorical sense of the word.

† "A hard-working semi-skilled operative learns, after twenty-five years on the job, that the 17-year-old kid next to him, who just quit high school to go to work, is making, within a few pennies, the same hourly wage as he is. And the repetitious arm movement he makes hour after hour is excruciatingly boring. His father, he recalls, was poor, but a craftsman who was proud of the barrels he made. Here the machine has all the brains, all the reasons for pride. Perhaps the rules also forbid him to talk to workers nearby, or to get a drink of water except at the break period."<sup>80</sup>

except by way of acquiring things or services on the market; an acquisition process which capitalism commercialises more and more, thereby levelling and mechanising it. Thus, the shortening of working time is accompanied much less by a growth in humanised and humanising individual leisure than by leisure which is increasingly commercialised and dehumanised.

Recently some Protestant clergymen in West Germany, following the example of the Catholic worker-priests, worked for several months in large factories. On the basis of this experience they have sketched in striking fashion the alienated nature of labour under capitalism:

"The attitude (of the workers) towards labour is usually negative, except for some craftsmen, for whom the skill they have acquired and the experience they are constantly obtaining still play a certain part. As for the rest, they regard work in the factory as a *necessary evil*. His job is the worker's 'enemy', to which he *has to submit* every day for a long stretch, with all that that implies: machines that he must serve; the hierarchy of the enterprise, from the foreman to the management, to which he has been *handed over*, without any possibility of discussion (joint management, i.e. the works council, plays practically no part in our enterprises); but also his fellow-workers, in so far as they themselves are only integral parts of that world which one joins *reluctantly* at the beginning of one's stint and which one leaves *as though escaping* at the end of it..."

"*The time spent in the factory is regarded as a waste of one's life.*"

"... The mode and form of labour (whether exhausting physical work or merely the watching of mechanical processes) is not so important as its social status, which is likewise expressed, in the workplaces we have come to know, by the *placing of the worker under authority*, as the mere object of decisions taken concerning him..."

"The worker is undoubtedly, in spite of the trade unions and the works councils, the weakest feature of our economic system: business fluctuations, temporary stoppages and crises find in him their first victim, threatening his job, whereas they can be absorbed without great human damage by the other factors in the production process. *The feeling of insecurity of livelihood and of total dependence on an arbitrary process of evolution of our entrepreneurial economy is nowhere so high as in this social stratum...* Without any doubt the urgently desirable change in the social consciousness of the workers is conceivable only in conjunction with a real change in their social situation."<sup>71</sup> \* [Emphasis ours.]

### *The class struggle*

Never since the division of society into classes has existed have men

\* See the analyses, similar in all respects, of the position of the workers in France, in A. Andrieux and J. Lignon: *L'Ouvrier d'aujourd'hui*.

resigned themselves to the reign of social injustice under the pretext that this could be regarded as an inevitable stage in social progress. The producers have never accepted as normal or natural that the surplus product of their labour should be seized by the possessing classes, who thus obtain a monopoly of leisure and culture. Always and unceasingly they have revolted against this order of things. And unceasingly the most generous spirits among the possessing classes have themselves felt compelled to condemn social inequality and join the struggle of the exploited against exploitation. The history of mankind is nothing but a long succession of class struggles.

The dawn of class society was marked by slave revolts. Only the revolt led by Spartacus and the slave revolts in Sicily under Verres are widely known. About the same time, however, there was the revolt of 40,000 slaves working in the mines of Spain, the revolt of the slaves of Macedonia and Delos, and, a half-century later, the great revolt of the miners of Laurium, in Greece.<sup>72</sup> From the third century A.D. a vast uprising of slaves and impoverished peasants spread over the whole western part of the Roman Empire (the movement of the Bagaudae) and North Africa (the Donatist movement). The importance of the part played by these revolts in the collapse of the Roman Empire has usually been underestimated.<sup>73</sup> The spirit that animated them was clearly grasped by the Arab chronicler Abu Zakaria, who wrote as follows about the Donatists:

"They hate the masters and the rich, and when they meet a master riding in his chariot and surrounded by his slaves, they make him get down, put the slaves in the chariot, and oblige the master to run on foot. They boast that they have come to re-establish equality on earth, and they summon the slaves to liberty."<sup>74</sup>

The invasions of the Visigoths in the Byzantine Empire were likewise accompanied by slave revolts, notably those of the miners in Thrace.<sup>75</sup> Later (820-823) a new and terrible revolt broke out in the Byzantine Empire, helped by the poor, which the Emperor Michael II could only crush after three years of fighting.

In the same period, an army of black slaves used by the Arabs to drain the Shatt-el-Arab rose in revolt (868) and held out for fifteen years against the imperial armies. Again, when commercial and manufacturing capital revived slavery overseas in its most abject forms, there were many insurrections, such as that led by Soerapati, in Java (1690-1710), those of the Indians in Bolivia (1686, 1695, 1704, 1742, and 1767) and that of the Black Jacobins of Haiti.<sup>76</sup>

The peasants, crushed by labour-services or land-rent, themselves endeavoured many times to shake off the yoke of exploitation. The entire history of Antiquity—of Egypt, Judaea, Athens and Rome—is filled with peasant revolts against usury, indebtedness and the concentration of property. In the Persian Empire of the Sassanids the fifth

and sixth centuries A.D. show the movement of the Mazdakites, who demanded community of goods, abolition of all privileges and prohibition of the killing of any living thing. This is no doubt why historians in the service of the possessing classes call them "barbarians" and "degenerates".

Throughout Chinese history the reigning dynasties were overthrown by revolts of the oppressed peasants. The dynasties of Han and Ming were themselves dynasties established by peasant leaders, who at first strove to combat not only landed property but even usurers's and merchant capital as well.<sup>97</sup> The fourteenth century in Western Europe was marked by "jacqueries" in nearly every country: France, Britain, Flanders, Bohemia, Spain, etc. The sixteenth century saw the development of the great German peasants' war, with comparable social tendencies in the towns, where the boldest revolutionary ideas appeared with Thomas Münzer and the Anabaptists. The history of Japan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was punctuated by a long series of peasant risings against the increased exploitation to which the peasants were subjected as a result of the generalisation of money economy. No less than 1,100 insurrections occurred between 1603 and 1853.<sup>98</sup>

Finally, the small craftsmen, their journeymen and their hirelings, the ancestors of the modern proletariat, rose up against both the lack of political rights in the great towns and their exploitation by merchant capital.\* It was not only the craftsmen of the Flemish and Italian cities of the Middle Ages who waged such struggles, but also the craftsmen of the cities of the Islamic Empire, among whom the powerful international movement of the Carmathians had in the ninth century A.D. welded together all the progressive ideas of the age, and which was continued in insurrections by town guilds in Anatolia and Istanbul right down to the seventeenth century.<sup>100</sup> This movement even succeeded in establishing a communist state in Bahrein and the Yemen which survived for over a hundred years (from the eleventh to the twelfth century).

Why did all these movements fail in their attempt to abolish social inequality; either being defeated or else, if victorious, themselves reproducing social conditions similar to those against which they revolted?† Because material conditions were not yet ripe for abolishing social exploitation and inequality.

\* The first workers' strike recorded by history was that of Egyptian workers who were working, about 1165 B.C., under Ramesses III, at Deir-el-Medina, on the west bank of the Nile, near Thebes.<sup>100</sup>

† One may quote in this connection the evolution of the Catholic monasteries in which community of goods was at first established, and that of the Czech city of Tabor. When this city was first set up, people had to give up all their possessions, depositing them in "public graves"; but petty commodity production reappeared a few years later.<sup>101</sup>

The absence of classes in man's pre-history is explained by the fact that the social product was there broadly equivalent to the necessary product. The division of society into classes corresponds to a development of the productive forces which already allows of the constitution of a certain surplus, but not yet enough to ensure for the whole of society the leisure needed to exercise functions of social accumulation. On the basis of this inadequate development of the productive forces, the reappearance of social inequality, of the division of society into classes, even where this division had been for a moment abolished, could not in the long run be avoided.

It is the capitalist mode of production that, by the extraordinary advance of the productive forces which it makes possible, creates for the first time in history the economic conditions needed for the abolition of class society altogether. The social surplus product would suffice to reduce extensively the working time of all men, which would ensure an advance of culture that would enable functions of accumulation (and of management) to be exercised by the whole of society. The conscious organisation of labour, already objectively socialised by capitalism, becomes an indispensable condition for a new all-round development of the productive forces.

The development of the capitalist mode of production does not create only the *economic* conditions for the abolition of class society. It likewise creates the *social* conditions. It produces a class which acquires a major interest in abolishing every form of private ownership of the means of production because it possesses none. This class at the same time gathers in its hands all the productive functions of modern society. Through its concentration in big factories it acquires by instinct and experience the conviction that it can defend its lot only by assembling its forces, by exercising its great qualities of *organisation*, *co-operation* and *solidarity*. To begin with, it uses these qualities to take from the employers a larger share of the new value it creates. It fights for a shorter working day and for higher wages. But soon it learns that this struggle can prove effective in the long run only on condition that the entire domination of Capital and its State is challenged.\*

\* In *The Town Labourer*, J. L. and B. Hammond describe graphically how in the nineteenth century the State was wholly at the service of Capital. In the areas of Caerphilly and Merthyr Tydfil the only magistrates were two iron-masters who had continually to sit in judgment [!] on their own workers. These same magistrates were responsible for applying the laws which forbade [!] them to employ the truck system. The same writers describe the movements of troops in industrial areas which "came to resemble a country under military occupation . . . ; soldiers were moved about in accordance with fluctuations in wages or employment."<sup>102</sup>