

The Social Problem and Its Solution

By Jules Guesde

I—The Problem

The problem that Socialism sets itself to solve is to be found in a fact, of which it can be said as of the sun: he is blind who does not see it. It is the *divorce between the means of production and the producers*.

Neither are the mines in the hands of the workers underground who give them value at the daily peril of their lives; nor do the railroads belong to those who have been called the slaves of the iron-way; nor do the weavers who work the looms, the spinners who toil at the spinning machine, the smiths of the blast furnaces, etc, possess the smallest title to call their own that which they create and which occupies the greater and best portion of their lives—lives spent in barriers and useless sacrifice; and, the economic development of Society tends to generalise this state of things by destroying naturally and necessarily the small industries, founded on the ownership of the means of production by the producer.

Next to industry, properly so-called, we find commerce and agriculture, on the expropriation of the little tradesman and peasant proprietor, organised on a large scale and monopolised by the non-producers.

Labour is, on the one hand, more and more furnished by a class; Property or Capital, on the other, held and controlled by another class. Here you have workers without property—the proletariat. There you have property without work—or capital.

It is this separation between the two factors of production which produces all the evils, all the disorders which afflict not only wage-workers but Society as a whole.

The workers without property are excluded from their products, from the riches they create—which accumulate in the hands of the property holders, capitalists and large land-owners.

Labour, which is inseparable from the workman, is in effect nothing more than a commodity—like old bags, bicycles, bones or biscuits—submitted to the laws which rule the prices of commodities and drag it down through the ups and downs of supply and demand to the mere expenses of living and reproduction of the species—food and maintenance; and, these expenses tend constantly to further reduction, because, to derive an advantage from the markets, capitalists, whatever their personal sentiment—had they the heart of a Saint Vincent de Paul or a Louise Michel—are obliged to reduce to a minimum their net cost which includes all labour, material and mental.

There is then a universal and forced tendency to reduce to the lowest the workers' wages, and this law is sufficient to crush all the best intentions of employers, prisoners of the social order, by which, however, they benefit.

Another cause by virtue of which wages cannot rise—whatever may be the productivity of human labour—above the immediate wants of the working class is that the supply of labourers tends ever more and more to outrun the demand.

The increase of supply results from the forcing into the ranks of the proletariat of the expropriated small industries, little tradesmen, shopkeepers, all reduced, in their turn, to selling their power of doing work—their labour-power—in order to eat.

The decrease in the demand for labour results from the introduction of machinery and its extension. The non-human labour power (steam, electricity, etc) replaces and renders more and more useless human labour power. Here is what we call progress in the economic system: the never ceasing reduction of the sum of labour necessary to a given production.

The economists pretend, it is true, that this reduction in the field of human labour-power (the only means of existence of a class) is but temporary. Following a better market, the produce, more in demand, would bring in its train an increasing flow of production and a new demand for labour-power. But the economists might just as well say that the mechanical manufacture of coffins would multiply

the need for coffins. Is not the mechanical production of bottles and casks dependent on the production of wine, beer, etc., and is not the output of rails or boilers limited by the number of factories and the development of the means of communication? On the other hand, neither the agricultural machinery (steam ploughs, sowers, mowers, binders and thrashers) nor the cranes on the quays multiply the products; they simply displace manual labour. But even in the industries where the machine has resulted in an extraordinary increase of manufactured articles, the demand for labour has diminished. Example: The cotton industry in England, in which the productivity has increased 1231 per cent from 1819-22 to 1880-82, while for the same period the number of those employed fell from 1/37th of the population (445,000 out of a population of 16,500,000) to 1/50th (686,000 out of a population of 34,000,000). Another example: The boot and shoe trade of the United States carried from 70 million pairs in 1845 to 448 millions in 1875, while the workers employed have fallen from 1/414 (45,900 out of 19 millions population) to 1/1145th (48,000 out of 55 millions).

Under the system of non-possession of the working class of the instruments with which they work, all progress, no matter what its nature, is turned against them, making greater their misery, their slavery; accentuating the insecurity of their existence; in a word: making unavoidable their exploitation—their robbery.

I spoke just now of the machine. Can it be possible that it could not have released suffering humanity from over-toil, troubles; could not have given us liberty? On the contrary, it has aggravated man's hard labour by setting up in competition with him women, transformed into toilers, and children. From the very moment that it permitted the employment of feminine and infantile arms, it was necessary that the woman should enter the factory, leaving behind her health, her dignity; compromising even the very race itself, attacked by the foul virus of capitalism while yet a foetus in its mother's womb. The effect of this competition let loose between the different members of the worker's family has been still a further lowering of labour. Thus the legend of the well-being of the family enforced by more bread-winners does not hold good even before a Jules Simon. When the woman and the child were not industrialised, the wages of the husband had to suffice for the maintenance of all. To-day, for the same price which the single labour-power of the man was bought, the employer buys the threefold labour-power of the man, the woman, and the child.

The discovery of gas, this creation of human industry, of a midnight sun to prolong and complete that of day, has not been less fatal than the machine for the working-class. It has given place to night work; the slaughter-house of the night.

And the instruction that is being extended—and which we are the first to applaud as a new element for the destruction of existing Society—what consequences do you think it is going to introduce for the proletariat as long as this Society exists? In perfecting the human tool, which produces more and better, it will create new stoppages, longer slack seasons. One instructed workman will be sufficient where formerly two ignorant workmen were necessary—and occupied.

We hear “profit sharing” much spoken of as a remedy to heal all social sores, to reconcile labour and capital. If the cure were applicable, profit sharing would only remove the field of battle to a conflict over the profits to be shared. But without insisting on this point, in urging the worker to produce the most possible, it would only oblige him to do in two days the work of three, concluding consequently in the multiplication of the already too numerous days of no pay or stoppages. From the hell in which the dispossessed productive class struggles and writhes there is no redemption—“abandon all hope ye who enter here!”

The social consequences of the rupture, ever more complete, between labour and capital are no less terrible. First, we have the struggle of all against all.

It is the fashion amongst the adversaries of Socialism—through ignorance or enmity—to charge us with fomenting the class war. Just though we had invented it! We do nothing but state it and make it serve, which is better, to its own ends. We know that the first condition which imposes itself on a doctor who is called to combat a disease is to examine it in order to understand it. It is not by shutting our eyes to the war which divides and exhausts humanity that we shall arrive at the desired peace.

The war of every moment is threefold:

War between the proletariat and the capitalist for their respective shares in the produce; on one side, wages, on the other, profits; each side exerting itself to carry off a maximum. Man becomes a wolf for his fellow-man. It is a question of eating one's brother or being eaten by him.

War between workers and workers for the sharing of wages.

War between capitalists and capitalists for the sharing of profits.

On the other hand, all the marvels of human genius, all the conquests over nature, of which I have pointed out already the homicidal results to the working-class, do not strike less mortally at the other classes of Society. The colours of aniline, coal extracts, so extensively used in the dyeing industry, have ruined whole districts which lived on the cultivation of the madder root formerly employed in this industry before the discovery of chemical dyes. Tomorrow, as has been recently foreshadowed, means may be discovered for the direct manufacture by electricity of metal-castings, and then the blast-furnaces, their fires extinguished, will leave to the millionaire of yesterday nothing but eyes to weep. All discoveries are condemned to operate only through revolutions, leaving behind them victims by the million, at the top as well as at the bottom of the social ladder.

It is, according to the admirable expression found in the programme of the German Social-Democracy: *General insecurity becomes the normal condition of society.*

What shall we say, in conclusion, of the overproduction which goes on increasing and multiplying and which nothing can stop? When industry was yet confined to one or two countries, in order to reduce the frequency of these crises born of the ever growing division between the unbounded productivity of human labour and the limit put to the reward of the workers, outlets were furnished by exportation to those parts of Europe remaining agricultural (Italy, Germany, etc.). To-day, having become in their turn industrial, these same nations are confronted with over-production, and Africa and Asia are "opened up"—civilized—to supply markets for this too great store of commodities. Here you have an explanation also of the crimes of Colonial policy, Colonial wars, etc. which are the order of the day with Capitalist Governments. But after? They will only have stepped back in order to jump the better.

Thus more and more has Capitalist Society proved its horrible failure to produce anything from a superabundance of riches; of means of consumption and happiness, but misery, suffering, ruin and death!

II—Solution

The solution of the social problem is to be found in the problem itself, such as I have just given in a short exposition. The greatest socio-economic evil of today consists in the ever more complete divorce of the two factors in production, labour and property or capital, and consequently the remedy can be found only in their unification.

Under what form ought this unification to be effected?

It cannot be carried out by making the individual worker proprietor of his tool since this would exclude production on a large scale, and the system of labour having become collective consequent upon the introduction of steam and electricity, there can be but collective ownership to go hand in hand with collective labour.

Outside a Count de Mun, hypnotised by the arts and crafts of the middle ages and counting on a miracle for their re-establishment, there are only the anarchists, dreaming of natural rights and an ideal State of nature, who would retrogressively push their Utopia to such an extent as to establish a system of sharing out, of dismemberment and individualisation of modern machinery:

The engine to the driver,
And the dome to the builder,
as they sing in what is for them their "Marseillaise".

The only possible form, I repeat, is that which is imposed by the modern conditions of production and exchange, not even communal or guild, but social. The mines whose dark caverns are hollowed out

beneath the crust of many counties, the railways that stretch their iron tentacles over entire continents, commercial establishments like the Louvre and Bon Marché disposing of the lives of thousands of workers, do not, not one of them, lend themselves to communalisation, no more than the other machinery of production, distribution, or transport. Consequent upon the transmission of force by means of electricity, the waterfalls to-day and the tides tomorrow can be converted into motive powers. With this fact in mind, how is it possible to consider seriously, for one moment, the notion of the monopolisation—I had nearly said confiscation—of these natural powers, now become the condition of all industry, by some localities to the detriment of others?

The guild form is likewise brought into collision with other impossibilities of a similar nature. In fact, both forms, by the competition which would be kept up between the various productive groups, here guild, there communal, would bring in their train the same murderous anarchy as exists to-day under capitalist society.

It is only collectively that the workers, comprising the entire nation, can and ought to possess the means of wealth (mines, railways, canals, factories, etc.) socially operated. Capitalist evolution itself supplies the necessary elements, material and intellectual, of this *appropriation* and of this *production by and for society* now become a vast co-operative commonwealth.

Material elements: The concentration of capital that is effected every day in the spheres of industry, commerce and agriculture—the great manufactories just as the no less great commerce and agriculture of to-day being impelled to swallow up the middle capitalists in the same way as the smaller ones have been already swallowed. From 1870 to 1880, when in the United States the number of spindles increased from 7,131,818 to 10,678,526 and the number of spinners from 157,310 to 227,156 with an increased value of from 562,825,164 francs to 831,127,472 francs, the cotton manufactories fell from 959 to 751. It is the function of finance, by continually absorbing the surplus incomes, to hurry on this accumulation under the pretext of democratising capital.

Intellectual elements: The concentration of all physical and mental activities in the non-possessing class or proletariat from the fireman and greaser of the wheels to the scientist such as Claude Bernard, including chemists, engineers, managers, etc. The organisation of labour: the entire army of labour, officers and men, comprising all outside the capitalist class, is already encamped in complete order on the patrimony of mankind which alone is to be exploited—in the technical sense of the word—and it is now only a question of the complete restitution to society by the very same process which has served for its dispossession, namely: by *expropriation*.

It is well to understand that we Socialists have by no means invented the classes and their destructive class-war than we have invented the process of expropriation, which is the law of all human progress.

It was by the expropriation of the artisan from his tools at first, from this technical skill after, then from his domestic hearth, despoiled of wife and child, that private or capitalist property was established, to say nothing about the expropriation of the product of his toil which is accomplished daily by the operation of the law of wages. The expropriators will themselves in their turn be expropriated—it is as Gambetta would say, “immanent justice”—and they will all the more easily be expropriated under the company and share-holding system of to-day, they having become so completely estranged from all direct interference in production that their total severance might take place tomorrow without a perceptible check to industry.

This economic expropriation—which would allow to the expropriated full participation in the benefits accruing from social appropriation—must be preceded by a political expropriation, the establishment of the Socialist Republic being only realisable by a proletariat master of the State and acting in conformity with the law, since it itself will be and make the law.

It now only remains for me to point out the principal consequences which will result from this transformation of capitalist property into social property.

(1) There will be an end to all class distinction and consequently an end to the class-war. The workers are for the future their own capitalists, or to put it better, all the members of society are at once and with equal title co-proprietors and co-producers. The State, in the oppressive sense of the word, will cease to exist, it being nothing more than a means of maintaining artificially, by force, order that a

system of society, founded on the antagonism of interests would naturally give birth to. The government of men gives place to the administration of things. It is the reign of social peace, daughter of universal harmony.

(2) Commercial production of exchange-values with an end to realising profit will disappear, and be replaced by the co-operative production of use-values for consumption with a view to satisfying social wants. In place of robbing and exploiting one another, we will all help one another. *Homo homini Deus*, "Man is a god to man".

(3) Liberty, which until now has been but a word for the great majority of mankind, is henceforth a great and living reality, this liberty of which Socialism, according to our enemies, was to have been the tomb, will, on the contrary, blossom forth into the fullest perfection when reared in the uncontaminated atmosphere of the Socialist State. Liberty provides the means of accomplishing our will and therefore of satisfying our wants. These means will from now forward exist for all, multiplied by social labour, which, in point of productivity, stands in the same relation to modern capitalist industry as this does to small primitive industry. At the same time the effort to be made by each member will be reduced to a minimum.

The socially necessary labour-time to be furnished by each capable member of the Socialist State will likewise be reduced:

(a) By the suppression of slack seasons, which are the rule to-day in some many trades during periods from three to six months per year, as well as stoppages which doom to enforced idleness hundreds of thousands of workers, men and women, giving them over to the bitter pangs of starvation. These slack seasons and stoppages are the result, as Prof. Durkheim of Bordeaux very well puts it, of "this too great diffusion of the economic functions which under Socialism will be transferred to the organised community".

(b) By the disappearance of the parasitical class, and not only of that alone but also of the sub-parasites who live on this class. In France there are more than two million persons of both sexes employed in domestic pursuits, without counting the numbers of prostitutes and parsons, police, magistrates, and soldiers;

(c) By the employment in work of a socially necessary character of all the human and technical forces now used in works of a destructive nature (cannon, guns, torpedoes, etc.) or socially useless (in superfluous display, or even of simple journeying of capital from the pocket of Peter into that of Paul);

(d) By the utilisation of all the energy at present wasted, lost, or reduced to nothing in the midst of unbridled competition;

(e) By perfecting "automatising", the machine which each one will be interested in developing as far as he can, since it will be so much the more leisure or well-being realised both for himself and the community in general.

Even to-day when no one of these conditions is either fulfilled or capable of being so, an English statistician, quoted by Domela Nieuwenhuis in his pamphlet on the First of May, has calculated that with the machine at its actual stage of development and taking into consideration the point we have reached in technical skill, one hour and twenty minutes of daily labour would suffice to provide for the material wants of all.

One more fruit of Socialist society and I have done: that is the end of religious or supernatural idea current amongst men. The religious idea, far from vanishing before the forward development of modern science, has taken a new flight. Thus it is that in the age which has seen the prolific genius of Lavoisier, Laplace, Darwin, and Edison, we have witnessed the birth of new religions. Why? Because other and still more complex phenomena have arisen in the place of natural phenomena already explained and controlled once and for all by man. The phenomena of which I speak belong to the economic order which in the individualist atmosphere of to-day escape from man's control and dominate him. God, chased out by one door, the door of nature, has re-entered by another, the social door. Therefore, as long as the productive forces which crush us individually will not have been

mastered in the only way that they can be: by bringing them within the administration of society, man, a prey to misery, the plaything of chance, will bow low before the “unknown”—and will deify it.

It is only when the economic elements have been tamed as have been the natural elements, when society has become a providence for each one of its members, then and then alone will men cease to search for a providence beyond the skies, because then—contrary to the christian legend of God becoming man—man will have become God.

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