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SOCIALISTS AND ANARCHISTS IN THE MAIN, remarked Bertrand Russell, "are products of industrial life, and few among them have any practical knowledge on the subject of food production. But Kropotkin is an exception. His two books *The Conquest of Bread* and *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, are very full of detailed information, and, even making great allowances for an optimistic bias, I do not think it can be denied that they demonstrate possibilities in which few of us would otherwise have believed." This of course was Kropotkin's intention. He found that his conclusions about industry and agriculture were so much at variance with those of contemporary economic thinking, that a painstaking compilation of all the facts supporting them, presented in a nonsectarian way to the reading public in general, was the best way open to him to influence opinion on these subjects. *Fields, Factories and Workshops* was first published in 1898 and was reprinted several times in cheap editions in the next decade, appearing again in a revised and enlarged edition just before the first world war, and was last reprinted in England in

1919. The reviewer of *The Times* dealing with the first edition, remarked that the author "has the genuine scientific temper, and nobody can say that he does not extend his observations widely enough, for he seems to have been everywhere and to have read everything," and certainly the statistical material that the book contains is most comprehensive, though now completely out of date. But the ideas which emerge have been seen to have a striking contemporary relevance by every new generation of Kropotkin's readers. Thus when Herbert Read compiled his volume of selections from Peter Kropotkin's books in 1942, he found that "its deductions and proposals remain as valid as on the day when they were written" and when Paul Goodman wrote in 1948 on the fiftieth anniversary of its first publication he remarked that "The ways that Kropotkin suggested, how men can at once begin to live better, are still the ways; the evils he attacked are mostly still the evils; the popular misconceptions of the relations of machinery and social planning. Recently studying the modern facts and the modern authors, I wrote a little book (*Communitas*) on a related subject; there is not one important proposition in my book that is not in *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, often in the same words."

Kropotkin's first two chapters are on "The Decentralisation of Industries," and in them he discusses the trend which he was able to discern, even in the days when Britain was still "the workshop of the world," for industrial activity to spread into areas and countries which were formerly merely consumers of the products from the traditional industrial areas. "The monopoly of the first comers on the industrial field has ceased to exist. And it will exist no more, whatever may be the spasmodic efforts made to return to a state of things already belonging in the domain of history." Progress, he remarks, "must be looked for in another direction. It is in producing for home use. The customers for the Lancashire cottons and the Sheffield cutlery, the Lyons silks and the Hungarian

flour-mills, are not in India, nor in Africa. The true consumers of the produce of our factories must be our own populations. And they can be that, once we organise our economical life so that they might issue from their present destitution." For he emphasises the paradox that while the owners of an industry are seeking markets farther and farther afield, the actual producers are often lacking the very products they are employed to make. Anticipating that in the future each region will become its own producer and its own consumer of manufactured goods, he notes that this implies at the same time that it will be its own producer of agricultural products. And for this reason he devotes his next three chapters to the possibilities of agriculture.

"The character of the new conditions are plain," he says, "and their consequences are easy to understand. As the manufacturing nations of West Europe are meeting with steadily growing difficulties in selling their manufactured goods abroad and getting food in exchange, they will be compelled to grow their food at home; they will be bound to rely on home customers for their manufactures, and on home producers for their food. And the sooner they do so the better."

"Two great objections stand, however, in the way against the general acceptance of such conclusions. We have been taught, both by economists and politicians that the territories of the West European States are so overcrowded with inhabitants that they cannot grow all the food and raw produce which are necessary for the maintenance of their steadily increasing populations. Therefore the necessity of exporting manufactured goods and of importing food. And we are told moreover, that even if it were possible to grow in Western Europe all the food necessary for its inhabitants, there would be no advantage in doing so as long as the same food can be got cheaper from abroad. Such are the present teachings and the ideas which are current in society at large." He sets out to prove that these ideas are erroneous. Studying British

agriculture he shows that in the period after 1870 agriculture did not in fact "change its direction" but simply went down in all directions. The agricultural depression which began in the "seventies" and "eighties" of the nineteenth century had, he declares, "causes much more deeply seated that the fall in the prices of wheat in consequence of American competition." He seeks to show, from the experience of developments in, for instance, France, Belgium and Denmark, that intensive cultivation using all the mechanical and scientific ingenuity that can be mustered, will produce staple foods as well as luxury ones at costs which make local food production economical.

In refuting the usual Malthusian conclusions on the relation of population to food supply, he shows that "It is precisely in the most densely populated parts of the world that agriculture has lately made such strides … A dense population, a high development of industry, and a high development of agriculture and horticulture, go hand in hand; they are inseparable."

He turns in subsequent chapters to industry in order to refute the notion that industrial development necessarily implies concentration into larger and larger factories, and he shows how every large industrial concentration brings in its train a vast number of small specialised workshops. Profits, he notes, are centralised, not production.

The moral and physical advantages which man would derive from dividing his work between the field and the workshop are self-evident. But the difficulty is, we are told, in the necessary centralisation of the modern industries. In industry, as well as in politics, centralisation has so many admirers! But in both spheres the ideal of the centralisers badly needs revision. In fact, if we analyse the modern industries, we soon discover that for some of them the co-operation of hundreds, or even thousands, of workers gathered at the same spot is really necessary. The great iron works and mining enterprises decidedly belong to that category: ocean steamers cannot be built in village factories. But very many of our big factories are nothing

tres of population and built in relatively small centres of population" so that "rural factories, clean, small concentrated units will be dotted about the countryside," and they also remind us that automation will make the production line worker obsolete. "Large numbers of people will need to change their jobs" the Economist told us last month. What to? To a combination of industrial and agricultural production, would be Kropotkin's answer. And would this answer be foolish or wise?

Isn't it likelier in fact, that Britain will find herself in direct competition for the products of the primary exporters, with their own populations—as is the case at the moment over Argentine beef, and with those countries whose population is half-starved but who have not the earning capacity to pay for imports?

There is obviously no point in making a fetish of self-sufficiency. The poor countries have to be self-sufficient apart from what they can get in grants, loans and charity because they have nothing to sell that the rich countries care to buy. There is no point in this country becoming *self-sufficient for its own sake*, since obviously some crops are produced with less expenditure of energy in other climates. As it is a sudden increase in home production of sugar beet would ruin the economies of several Caribbean countries. But there is some point, as Kropotkin would put it, in evolving an economic system which, unlike all previous economic systems, does not depend on the exploitation of others.

A footnote in Self and Storing's *The State and the Farmer* remarks that "As a spare-time activity, it should be repeated, the importance of small-scale farming, in conjunction with employment in decentralised industries, may well grow." But is this all that Kropotkin's vision of industry combined with agriculture has shrunk to? It immediately leads us to the question of what is spare time, and to wonder whether the real relevance of his ideas might not be in the future. Kropotkin was criticised for his optimistic opinion that "provided that the production of food-stuffs should not be the work of the isolated individual, but the planned-out and combined action of human groups" a few hours work a day would feed a family. In the era of automation this does not seem so absurd. Writers on automation (for instance Langdon Goodman in his Penguin Man and Automation frequently pictures the situation where "Automation being a large employer of plant and a relatively small employer of labour, allows plants to be taken away from the large cen-

else but agglomerations under a common management, of several distinct industries: while others are mere agglomerations of hundreds of copies of the very same machine; such are most of our gigantic spinning and weaving establishments.

His chapter on brain work combined with manual work discusses the defects of the educational ideas current in his day, and from the examples he had observed in various parts of the world, he recommends an education which combines manual and intellectual training. He shows how many of the key inventions of modern industry and countless improvements and adaptations of them have been made by practical handworkers rather than by academic scientists. He wants an integral education, just as he wants an integral economy, and some of his most interesting pages develop these ideas.

> Political economy has hitherto insisted chiefly upon division. We proclaim integration, and we maintain that the ideal of society—that is, the state towards which society is already marching—is a society of combined, integrated labour. A society where each individual is a producer of manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works both in the field and in the industrial workshop: where each aggregation of individuals, large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources—it may be a nation, or rather a region—produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce…
>
> A reorganised society will have to abandon the fallacy of nations specialised for the production of either agricultural or manufactured produce. It will have to rely on itself for the production of food and many, if not most, of the raw materials; it must find the best means of combining agriculture with

> manufacture—the work in the field with the decentralised industry; and it will have to provide for "integrated education," which education alone, by teaching both science and handicraft from earliest childhood, can give to society the men and women it really needs.
>
> The scattering of industries over the country—so as to bring the factory amidst the fields, to make agriculture derive all those profits which it always finds in being combined with industry and to provide a combination of industrial with agricultural work—is surely the next step to be taken, so soon as a reorganisation of present conditions is possible. This step is imposed by the very necessity of producing for the producers themselves; it is imposed by the necessity for each healthy man and woman to spend a part of their lives in manual work in the free air; and it will be rendered the more necessary when the great social movements, which have now become unavoidable, come to disturb the present international trade, and compel each nation to revert to her own resources for her own maintenance.

To what extent has subsequent history shown Kropotkin's views to be correct, and in what way can they be considered a pointer to the future?

The first thing we realise when re-reading his thoughts on education is how little progress we have made. He was writing, certainly, at a time when very large numbers of children left school at twelve or thirteen after being exposed to a basic instruction in the three Rs and little else. He envisaged an education for all boys and girls up to the age of eighteen or twenty, but today we are still far from the implementation of the intention of the 1944 Act to raise the minimum leaving age to

> finds that the productivity of her labour is much higher in industry … So long as Japan has to supply most of her own food, she will find that at the conditions of price and exchange which make her agriculture competitive, her industry will be able to undercut the prices of other nations. Conversely, if the prices of her industrial products were to rise to the levels which would be comparable to other countries, her agriculture could not exist without heavy support.
>
> Because the cost in terms of real resources used is so high in Japanese agriculture, it would obviously be worth while to expand the industrial sector and to import a larger part of the food supply. This argument applies to Japan with even more force than it ever did to the United Kingdom. Most probably she will gradually try to do this. but she is limited by the willingness of other countries to buy her goods…

He doesn't in fact believe that the consequent growth of Japan (or of the next countries to reach Japan's level of industrial development, as a food importer), will cause greater competition for the exports of the primary producing countries, because "if present trends continue, Europe may be importing less and Australia, New Zealand and the Argentine may have been joined as major primary exporters by other South American countries and by parts of Africa."

But he has stated with great clarity the standard economist's argument against the views of Kropotkin. He doesn't mention that it was precisely this need to find markets which Britain solved by imperialist adventures and economic imperialism in the nineteenth century, just as Japan did in the first half of the twentieth.

but its output per acre is among the lowest. Self and Storing explain that "The high output per man is largely the result of substituting machinery for the labour which left the industry in the years of depression and the low output per acre is an inheritance from the time when conditions were not favourable for intensive production."

A country which illustrates some of Kropotkin's contentions very well is Japan, the most densely populated country in the Far East, and the most densely populated in the world in terms of the ratio of population to agricultural land. Her agricultural area is only about a third of that of the United Kingdom and her population (90 million) is about 80 per cent higher. Gavin McCrone, after enumerating the difficulties of a country in Japan's situation observes that "it will be clear that even in Japan, where conditions might be imagined to be as difficult as anywhere, it has been possible to increase the output of food considerably faster than population. There is every reason to suppose that the methods employed by the Japanese to obtain this increase would be applicable in other countries. Increased agricultural output can be obtained either from improvements in yields or by reclaiming more land; but with their very limited area the Japanese concentrated on the former." He shows how Japanese yields per acre are at least double those for almost all the other Far Eastern countries, even though they are still low compared with those of several countries in Europe.

Mr. McCrone notes that "if it is assumed that the Far East, though obliged to rely mainly on its own food supplies at present, will ultimately become industrialised, a situation might develop which could be of much more consequence to the food supplies of the rest of the world." Japan, he says, has more or less reached this stage now:

> Although she is able to provide most of her own food from her limited agricultural resources, she

16. Our whole system in this country is geared producing an academically specialised elite, leaving a vast underprivileged and barely literate stratum at the bottom. The Crowther and Newsom reports indicate how far we have to go before we get anywhere near Kropotkin's ideal of an integral education.

Nowadays we recognise that industry may be dispersed in the way he envisaged, through the coming of new and decentralised sources of motive power and the wider distribution of industrial skills. We recognise too that in fact small factories and workshops provide the greater part of the total industrial output, and that even giant industries like the motor industry depend on thousands of outside subcontractors. But have we put this knowledge, which was not apparent to the economists of Kropotkin's day, to creative us? The drift of the industrial population from the geographically static and declining basic industries to the new light and secondary industries of the West Midlands and the South-East, is in its way a dramatic confirmation of his views, though it is very far from what he would regard as a healthy regional dispersal of industry. In a way, too, Kropotkin's opinions were at the beginning of that stream of thought which through Ebenezer Howard's "garden city" idea reached its final apotheosis in the New Town policy pursued by the British government after the war. Howard's views however have been watered down to the reality of universal suburbia, which is very far from Kropotkin's concept. Another stream can be seen in the regionalism of Kropotkin's friend Patrick Geddes, which through persuasive advocates like Lewis Mumford has had a wide influence but all too little practical effect.

The decline in the importance of the basic exporting industries is, of course, a confirmation of the views expressed in Krotpotkin's earlier chapters. Countries which used to be markets for these exports are now producing, and sometimes exporting for themselves. India, to take one example, which was in Kropotkin's day an exporter of raw cotton, is now an importer,

and an exporter of finished cotton products. She is also an importer and no longer an exporter of food.

In the sphere of food production—at the heart of Kropotkin's book, how have his ideas fared? The kind of agricultural development which he envisaged has happened to a greater extent in the Western European countries from which he drew his data on intensive development than in Britain, whose deficiencies he discussed. The countries which now form the Common Market are together virtually self-supporting in foodstuffs. Denmark is a net exporter by 79 per cent, and Holland with the greatest population density in Europe manages to produce in value about 25 per cent above her own food requirements. Gavin McCrone in his book *The Economics of Subsidising Agriculture* (1962) remarking on the importance of spending liberally on research and new equipment declares that

> There seems little doubt that it is this sort of approach which has enabled countries such as Denmark and Holland, with their limited area and intensive methods, to compete with the extensive producers of Australia and the New World, and yet to be able to attain a high standard of living. Had Denmark been part of Great Britain, and had she been subject to British policy, it is most doubtful if her costs of production would be as low as they are.

In Britain however, the decline which Kropotkin observed, continued with scarcely a break right up to 1939. Since the war production has been kept at a higher level as a matter of government policy, by means of subsidies. We still produce a lower proportion of our own food than any country in Europe. The effects of the prolonged and severe depression of British agriculture are still being felt. McCrone remarks that it was frequently the more enterprising farmers who left the industry:

> Many of the less efficient ones found that rather than leave their farms, they could supplement an inadequate living by running down their capital equipment. Buildings and fences were not repaired, gates remained broken, drains became blocked and fields became overgrown with rushes and bracken. The idea of forcing the inefficient producers out of production sounds plausible in theory; but in agriculture they often stay until they have ruined the other factors of production and until the job of repair and reclamation is too expensive to be worth undertaking. A look at the state of some farm buildings and fields in Britain today, even after the war and post-war boom, makes it seem likely that such a process has taken place in this country: and, if this is so, it is much less surprising that British agriculture remains unable to compete …This is not to say that all Britain's farms are backward and inefficient; that is very far from being the case. But it seems to be true that there are a large number of farms which have been starved of important capital investment for many years and others which are producing below their optimum output.

In Britain there are 13,000 holdings with more than 300 acres, 64,000 with 100 to 300 acres, and over 200,000 with 5 to 100 acres "The small farms cover under a third of the agricultural area, but they account for a considerably higher proportion of total output. Shortage of space compels the small farmer to work his limited area more intensively to earn a livelihood. Larger farms tend to become progressively more extensive, as interest shifts from output per acre to output per worker." (Self and Storing.) The paradox in this country is that the industry has a higher output per worker than most European countries,