

The Modern State

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I. THE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLE OF MODERN SOCIETIES

What is important to us is to analyse the distinctive features of society and the modern State in order to determine where we are going, what is attained today, and what we hope to conquer in the future.

The current society is certainly not the outcome of any principle, logically developed to be applied to the thousand needs of [human] life. Like any living organism it represents, on the contrary, a very intricate outcome of thousands of struggles and thousands of compromises, of survivals of the past and of longings for a better future.

The theocratic spirit of high antiquity, slavery, imperialism, serfdom, the medieval commune, ancient prejudices, and the modern spirit — all these are found more or less represented, with all nuances, in all imaginable forms of mitigation [in modern societies]. Shadows of the past and outlines of the future; customs and conceptions dating from the Stone Age and tendencies towards a future which is scarcely emerging on the horizon — all these are found in continual struggle, in every individual, in every social stratum, in every generation, as in society as a whole.

However, if we consider the great struggles, the great popular revolutions which took place in Europe and America since the twelfth century, we see a principle emerging. All the uprisings were directed at the abolition of what had survived of ancient slavery in its mitigated form — serfdom. All had the aim of freeing either villagers or townspeople, or both, from the *obligatory labour* that was imposed upon them by law in favour of particular masters. To recognise the right of man to dispose of his own person and to work as he pleases and for as long as he pleases, without anyone having the right to *compel* him — in other words, *to liberate the person* of the peasant and the artisan, such was the objective of all the popular revolutions: the great uprisings of the communes in the twelfth century; the peasant wars in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Bohemia, Germany, and the Netherlands, the revolutions of 1381 and 1648 in England, and, finally the Great Revolution [of 1789–1793] in France.

It is true that this goal was only partially attained. As the individual freed himself and he conquered his personal liberty, new economic conditions were imposed upon him to paralyse his liberty, to forge new chains, to bring him back under the yoke by the threat of starvation. We have seen a recent example of this when the Russian serfs, liberated in 1861, were forced to buy back the land they had cultivated for centuries, which brought ruin and misery, so their enslavement was recreated. What was done in Russia today was also done, in one way or another, everywhere in Western Europe. Physical compulsion disappeared, new forms of constraint were established. Personal serfdom abolished, servitude reappeared in a new form — the economic form.

And yet, despite all that, the dominant principle of modern societies is that of individual freedom, proclaimed, at least in theory, for everyone. By law, work is no longer obligatory for

anyone. A caste of slaves, forced to toil for their masters, does not exist; and, at least in Europe, there are no more serfs obliged to give to their master three days' work a week in return for [the use of] a plot of land to which they remain bound all their life. Everyone is free to work if he wants, as long as he wants, and at what he wants.

That is — in theory, at least — the dominant principle of current society.

However, we know — and socialists of every shade [of opinion] never cease demonstrating it every day — to what extent this freedom is illusory. Millions and millions of men, women, and children are constantly forced by the threat of hunger to alienate their liberty, to give their labour to a master under the conditions that he wishes to impose upon them. And we know — and we try to clearly prove it to the masses — that, in the form of land-rent [*rente*], house-rent and interest generally paid to the capitalist,¹ the worker and the peasant continue to give, to several masters instead of one, the same three days a week; very often even more than the three days, just to obtain the right to cultivate the land or to even have a roof over their head [*de vivre sous un abri*].

We also know that if one day an economist took the trouble to practice [real] political economy and calculate all that the various masters (boss, landlord, middle-men, shareholders and so on, in addition to the State) levy directly or indirectly on the wages of the worker, we would be amazed at the meagre share left for him to pay all the other workers whose products he consumes: to pay the labour of the peasant who has grown the wheat he eats, the bricklayer who built the house he lives in, those who made his furniture, his clothes, and so on. We would be struck to see how little goes to all the workers who produce what this other worker consumes compared to the immense part which goes to the barons of modern feudalism.

However, this dispossession of the worker is no longer done by one master lawfully imposed on the person of each worker. There is for that an entire mechanism, extremely complicated — impersonal and irresponsible. As in past centuries, the worker gives a considerable part of his work to the privileged; but he no longer does it under the whip of a master. The compulsion is no longer a bodily constraint. He will be thrown onto the street, forced to live in a slum, to never have enough to eat, to see his children perish from starvation, to beg in his old age; but he will not be put on a bench in a police-station in order to be administered a beating for a badly sewn coat or a badly cultivated field, as was done during our lifetime in Eastern Europe and formerly practiced across Europe.

Under the present regime, often more ferocious and pitiless than the former, man retains, nevertheless, a feeling of personal liberty. We know that for the proletarian this feeling is almost an illusion. Yet we must recognise that all modern progress and all our hopes for the future are still based on this feeling of freedom, however limited it may be in reality.

The most destitute of tramps, in his moments of darkest misery, will not exchange his stone bed under the arch of a bridge for the bowl of soup which would be guaranteed to him every day along with the chain of the slave. Better yet. This feeling, this principle of individual liberty, is so dear to modern man that continually we see whole groups of workers accepting months of misery and marching against bayonets merely to maintain some acquired rights.

¹ The word *rente* (rent) in French includes all forms of property income as well as the economic rent associated with land use. Also, the version published in *Freedom* in 1914 added “profit” to this list of property-income exploited from the worker. (Editor)

Indeed, the most obstinate strikes and the most desperate popular revolts today stem from questions of liberty, of acquired rights, rather than from questions of wages.

The right and liberty of a man to work on what he wants and as much as he wants, thus remains *the principle* of modern societies. And the strongest accusation we raise against current society is to prove that this freedom, so dear to the workers, is continually rendered illusionary by the necessity of selling his [labour] forces to a capitalist; that the modern State is the most powerful weapon for maintaining the workers in this necessity by means of the privileges and monopolies which it continually bestows upon one class of citizens to the detriment of the worker. We begin to understand, in fact, that the principle on which all are agreed is continually evaded by a series of monopolies; that he who owns nothing becomes again the serf of those who do own, since he is forced to accept the terms of the master of the land or the factory in order to work; since he pays to the rich — to all the rich — an immense tribute, thanks to the monopolies established in their favour. These monopolies are attacked by the people, not [only] for the idleness they allow the privileged classes but above all for the domination which they assured them over the working class.

The great criticism that we direct at modern society is not that it has taken the wrong path by proclaiming that henceforth everyone will work as he wants and as long as he wants; but in having created conditions of ownership that *do not permit the worker to work as he wants and for as long as he wants*. We describe this society as cruel because, after having proclaimed the principle of individual liberty, it has placed the worker of the fields and industry in conditions which nullify this principle; because it reduces the worker to a state of disguised serfdom — to the state of a man which misery forces to toil to enrich the masters and to perpetuate his own condition of inferiority. He must forge his own chains.

Well, if that is true; if this principle, “You will work at what you want and as long as you want,” is really dear to modern man; if every form of obligatory and servile work repels him; if his individual liberty trumps all else — then the activity [*conduite*] of the revolutionary is indicated.

He will reject all forms of a disguised serfdom. He will work to ensure that this freedom is no longer just a word. He will seek to know what prevents the worker from really being the sole master of his [mental] abilities and his arms; and he will work to abolish these barriers — by force if necessary — while at the same time taking care not to introduce other barriers which, while perhaps procuring an increase in well-being, would once more cause man to lose his freedom.

Let us then analyse those obstacles which, in current society, reduce the freedom of the worker and enslave him.

II. SERFS OF THE STATE

Nobody can be forced by law to work for others. Such is, we say, the principle of modern societies, conquered by a series of revolutions. And those of us who have known serfdom in the first half of the last century [in Russia], or else have only seen its remnants (in England, for example they had been preserved until 1848 in the form of the forced labour of children who were removed by law from their impoverished parents, if they were in the Workhouse, and transported to the cotton factories in the North), those amongst us who have known the mark etched by these institutions upon the whole of society will understand with a single word the importance of the change produced by the definite abolition of legal servitude.

But if the legal obligation to work for others no longer exists between individuals, the State thus far has retained the right to impose obligatory work on its subjects. More than that. As the relations of master and serf disappeared from society, the State more and more extended its right to the forced labour of citizens; so much so that the powers of the modern State would make the jurists who tried to establish royal power in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries blush with envy.

Today, for example, the State imposes compulsory education on all citizens. An excellent thing in principle, so long as we consider it from the point of view of the right of the child to go to school even though their parents seek to keep them at home or send them to the factory or to an ignorant sister [from a convent]. But in reality — what has become of the information given today in primary schools? A whole body of doctrines is instilled, created to secure the rights of the State over the citizen; to justify the monopolies that the State bestows on whole groups of citizens; to proclaim sacrosanct the right of the rich to exploit the poor and [thus] become rich thanks to this poverty; to teach children that vengeance [*vindicté*], [when] carried out by society, is supreme justice and that conquerors were the greatest men of humanity.¹ Worse than that! State-controlled teaching — a worthy heir to instruction by the Jesuits — is the perfect means of killing any spirit of initiative and independence and to teach the child servility of thought and action.

And when the child has grown, the State will force him to do compulsory military service and it will command him, in addition, to do various [kinds of] labour for the municipality and the State in the case of an emergency. Finally, by means of taxes, it will oblige every citizen to perform a formidable amount of work for the State as well as for the protected of the State — while making him believe that it is he who voluntarily establishes it himself and who disposes, through his representatives, the sums of money which flow into the coffers of the State.

Once again a new principle has been proclaimed. Personal servitude no longer exists. There are no more serfs of the State as there were in past centuries even in France and England. A king can no longer order ten or twenty thousand of his subjects to come build fortresses for him

¹ See, for example, Kropotkin's pamphlet *L'Organisation de la Vindicté appelée Justice* (Paris: Au Bureau des "Temps Nouveaux," 1901), translated as *Organised Vengeance called 'Justice'* (London: Freedom Press, 1902). (Editor)

or build the gardens and palaces of Versailles in spite of the “prodigious morality amongst the workers, whose bodies are carried away every night in carts,” as Madame de Sévigné wrote.² The palaces of Windsor, Versailles and Peterhof are no longer built by means of *corvée* labour.³ It is by means of taxes, under the pretext of productive works and under the pretext of protecting the liberty of the citizens and increasing their wealth, that the State demands all these services from its subjects.

We are the first to applaud the abolition of the principle of serfdom and to indicate its importance for the general advancement of the ideas of liberation. To be [physically] brought from Nancy or Lyons to Versailles to build palaces for the amusement of the king’s favourites was far harder than paying so much in taxes — so many days of labour — even though these taxes would also be spent on unnecessary works or even on works harmful to the nation. We are grateful, and more than grateful, to the men of 1793 for having freed Europe from *corvée* labour.

But it is nevertheless true that in proportion as the liberation from personal servitude of man to man was achieved during the course of the nineteenth century, servitude towards the State was always growing. From decade to decade the work demanded by the State from each citizen grew in number, in variety, in quantity. Towards the end of the nineteenth century we even see the State regaining its right to *corvée* labour. It imposes, for example, on railway workers (a recent law in Italy) compulsory work in the event of a strike — *corvée* labour, because it is *corvée* labour — for the benefit of the big companies that own the railways. From the railway to the mine, and from the mine to the factory, there is but a step. And once the pretext of *public safety*, or even only of necessity or *public utility*, has been recognised — there is no longer any limit to the powers of the State.

If the miners or the railway employees have not yet been treated as guilty of high treason every time they went on strike⁴ and not hung high for that, it was only because the need has not yet been felt. It is more convenient to take advantage of some threatening gestures by a few strikers to shoot the crowd at point blank range and to send the ringleaders to hard labour. This is commonly done today, in a republic as in a monarchy.

Until now “voluntary servitude” has sufficed. But on the day when the need, or rather the fear of this need, was felt in Italy, Parliament did not hesitate for a moment to pass a law to this effect although the Italian railways still remain in the hands of private companies. For “oneself” — in the name of “public safety” — the State will certainly not hesitate to do, with even more severity, what it already once did for its favourite, the big companies. It did it well in Russia. In Spain, it went as far as torture to protect the monopolists. Indeed, since the terrible tortures practiced in Montjuich in 1896, torture has returned to Spain, [as] an institution for the benefit of the current protected of the State, wealthy financiers.⁵

² In a letter dated 12 October 1678: “The prodigious morality amongst the workers, whose bodies are carried away every night in carts, as if from a charity-hospital. One hides the grim convoys so as not to terrify the worksite” (*Lettres de Madame de Sévigné de sa famille et de ses amis*, Volume II [Lavigne/Chamerot: Paris 1836], 31). (Editor)

³ These are the main royal palaces and associated gardens of the royalty of England, France, and Russia, respectively. (Editor)

⁴ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds: “(in Russia it has already been done, in 1906, while a new law treats as felony all strikes in ‘establishments of public utility’).” (Editor)

⁵ A reference to the torturing of suspects following the wholesale arrest of hundreds of anarchists after a bomb was thrown into the procession on Corpus Christi Day in Barcelona in 1896, avoiding various members of the ruling class at the front but killing seven working class people and a soldier at its rear (so suggesting the act of an *agent*

In fact, we are heading so far down this path, driven by what those favoured by the government whispered to it, and the second half of the nineteenth century has gone so far towards centralisation, that, if we are not careful, we shall soon see the discontented, the strikers — no longer shot as fermenters of revolt and looting but guillotined and transported to the pestilent swamps of some colony for simply neglecting a *public service*.

They do it in the army — they will do it in the mines. The Conservatives are already loudly demanding it in England.

For we must not be mistaken. Two great movements, two great currents of ideas and action characterised the nineteenth century. On the one hand, we saw a sustained struggle against all the vestiges of the former servitude. Not only did the armies of the First Republic abolish serfdom as they marched victoriously through Europe; but when these armies were driven out of the lands they had liberated and serfdom was restored there, it could no longer maintain itself for long. The inspiration of the revolution of 1848 definitely carried with it Western Europe; It [serfdom] had to die even in Russia in 1861 and seventeen years later in the Balkan peninsula.

More than that. In every nation man worked to claim his rights to personal freedom. He emancipated himself from prejudices concerning royalty, the nobility, and the upper classes and by a thousand small acts of revolt performed in every corner of Europe he affirmed, by the very use he made of it, his right to be recognised as a free man.

Moreover, the whole intellectual movement of the century — poetry, fiction, drama, when they ceased being a mere amusement for the leisured class [*les oisifs*] — bore this character. Taking France, think of Victor Hugo, of Eugène Sue in his *Mystères du Peuple* [*Mysteries of the People*], of Alexandre Dumas — the father, of course — of George Sand, etc.; then of the great conspirators, Barbès and Blanqui, of historians like Sismondi and Augustin Thierry. And we see that they have all expressed in literature the movement which has taken place in every corner of France, in every family, in every conscious individual to free the individual from the habits and customs of an era of personal servitude. And what has been done in France has been done everywhere, more or less, always to free men, women and children from the customs and ideas which centuries of servitude had established.

But alongside this great liberating movement, another which unfortunately also had its origins in the Great [French] Revolution, was going on at the same time. This one had for its purpose to develop the omnipotence of the State in the name of that vague and ambiguous term, which opened the door to all ambitions and treachery — the *public good*.⁶

Coming from the time when the Church sought to conquer souls to lead them to salvation, bequeathed to our civilisation by the Roman Empire and Roman Law, this idea of the omnipotence of the State has silently made tremendous progress during the last half of the century that has just ended.

provocateur). Those arrested were subjected to terrible treatment in the prison of Montjuich, from which several died, while five anarchists were officially executed (eighteen were condemned to long imprisonment and acquitted prisoners were deported to a Spanish prison colony in the western Sahara). The actual bomb thrower was never found. Kropotkin dates this 1901 (when prisoners were released) and this has been corrected. (Editor)

⁶ Kropotkin clarifies his meaning in the 1914 *Freedom* version by immediately adding: “*organised, not by the nation itself in each town and village, but by its chosen so-called representatives.*” (Editor)

Just compare compulsory military service as it exists today with the forms it had taken in past centuries — and you will be terrified by the ground gained by this servitude towards the State under the pretext of equality.

Never did the serf of the Middle Ages let himself be deprived of his human rights to the same degree as modern man, who voluntarily abdicates them through a spirit of voluntary servitude. At the age of twenty — that is to say at the age which has the most thirst and need for freedom, of the “abuses” even of freedom — the young man lets himself be imprisoned for two or three years in a barracks [conscripted into the armed forces], where he ruins his physical, intellectual and moral health. Why?... To learn a trade which the Swiss learn in six weeks and the Boers learned, better than the European armies, by clearing the land and crossing their grasslands on horseback.

Not only does he risk his life but he goes further in his voluntary servitude than the serf. He lets his commanders control his love-life, he leaves the woman he loves, he makes a vow of celibacy and he glorifies obeying like an automaton his commanders of whom he can judge neither the knowledge, nor the military talent, nor even the integrity. What serf of the Middle Ages, apart from the stable boy who followed the armies with the baggage, ever agreed to march to war under the conditions imposed today upon the modern serf stupefied by the ideas of discipline? Worse! The serfs of the twentieth century undergo even the horrors, the abominations of the punishment battalion in Africa — the Biribi — without rebelling.

When at that time did the serf — peasant or artisan — renounce his right to oppose his secret leagues to those of his Lords and to defend by arms the right to join together? Was there an epoch in the Middle Ages so dark that the people of the cities renounced their right to judge the judges and to throw them into the water on the day when they did not approve of their judgments? And when then, even during the darkest periods of the old oppression, did we see the State having the real possibility of perverting all teaching, from primary education to the University, through its system of schools? Machiavelli had long dreamt of it, but his dream was not achieved until the nineteenth century!

We therefore have had an immense *progressive* movement working during the first half of the [last] century to completely liberate the individual and his thought; and an immense *regressive* movement which imposed itself on the former during the whole of the second half of the century to re-establish the servitude of old for the benefit of the State — and to increase it, to portray it as *voluntary*. It is the salient characteristic of the period.

But this only relates to direct servitude. As for indirect servitude, obtained by means of taxation and capitalist monopoly [and] less visible at first sight, it grows every day. It becomes so threatening that it is time to seriously study it.

III. TAXATION: A MEANS OF CREATING THE POWERS OF THE STATE

If the State, by military service, by the education which it directs in the interests of the rich classes, by the Church, and by its thousands of functionaries, already exercises a formidable power over its subjects – this power is further increased tenfold by means of taxation.

An innocuous instrument in its infancy, welcomed and called for by taxpayers themselves when it was introduced to replace *corvée* labour, taxation has today become, in addition to a very heavy burden, a formidable weapon, a power all the greater because it disguises itself under a thousand [different] aspects, capable of directing the whole economic and political life of societies in the interest of the rulers and the rich. For those who are in power now use it not only for carving out [high] salaries but above all to make and unmake fortunes, to accumulate immense wealth in the hands of a privileged few, to establish monopolies, to ruin the people and enslave them to the rich – and all this without the taxpayer even suspecting the power they have given to their rulers.

“What is more just, though, than taxation?” the defenders of the State will no doubt tell us. “Look,” they will say, “a bridge built by the inhabitants of a town. The river, swollen by the rains, will carry it away if it is not repaired at once. Is it not natural and right to call upon all the inhabitants of the town to repair this bridge? And as the great majority have their own work to do – is it not be reasonable to replace their personal labour, their inexperienced *corvée* labour, with a payment which will make it possible to call upon specialist workers and engineers?”

“Or else,” they say, “here. A ford that becomes impassable in certain seasons. Why should the inhabitants of the neighbouring towns not tax themselves to build a bridge? Why should they not pay [so much] per head instead of all coming with a spade in their hands to repair this embankment? To shore-up this route? Or again, why build a granary into which each inhabitant will have to pour so much wheat a year to avert food shortages instead of entrusting the State to take care of food in case of scarcity in return of a trivial tax?”

All this seems so natural, so just, so reasonable, that even the most stubborn would have nothing to say about it – even more so provided that a certain equality of conditions prevails in the town. And, providing multiple examples of this kind, the economists and the defenders of the State in general hasten to conclude that taxation is justifiable, desirable from every point of view and... “Long live taxation!”

Well, all this reasoning is false. For if certain communal taxes really have their origin in *communal labour, done together* – taxation or rather the formidable and manifold taxes that we pay to the State have a very different origin – *conquest*.

It was on the conquered peoples that the monarchs of the East and later on the Emperors of Rome levied *corvée labour*. The Roman citizen was exempt; he dumped it on the peoples under

its domination. Until the Great [French] Revolution — partly to the present day — the supposed descendants of the conquering race (Roman, German, or Norman), that is to say the so-called “nobles,” were exempted from taxation. The peasant, the black bone conquered by the white bone, alone figured on the list of those subject to “*corvée* labour and taxation” [“*corvéables et taillables*”].¹ The lands of the nobles and the “ennobled” paid nothing [in France] until 1789. And up to the present day the stupendously rich English landowners pay next to nothing for their immense estates and keep them uncultivated until their value has increased tenfold.

Thus the taxes we are now paying to the State come from conquest, serfdom — never from freely agreed communal labour. Indeed, when the State overwhelmed the people with *corvée* labours in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was not a question of those works which the hamlets or villages undertook by the free consent of their inhabitants. Communal works continued to be carried out by the inhabitants of the communes. But alongside this work hundreds of thousands of peasants were brought under military escort from remote villages to build a national road or a fortress; to transport the provisions needed to supply an army; to follow, with their exhausted horses, the nobles setting off to the conquest of new castles. Others toiled in the mines and factories of the State; others again, under the whips of functionaries, obeyed the criminal whimsies of the masters, digging the ponds of the royal castles, or building palaces for kings, lords and their courtesans while the women and children of these *corvée* labourers fed upon the weeds of the uncultivated fields, begged on the roads, or, starving, fell under the bullets of soldiers when attempting to plunder the convoys of exported wheat.

Corvée labour, imposed first upon the conquered races (as the French, the English, the Germans now impose it upon the blacks of Africa) and later on upon all the peasants; such was the origin — the true origin — of the taxes which we today pay to the State. Will we be surprised then that it has retained to our days the stamp of its origin?

It was an immense relief for the countryside when, at the approach of the Great [French] Revolution, the *corvées* labour for the State were replaced by a kind of fee — taxation paid in money. When the Revolution, at last bringing a ray of light into the cottages, abolished part of the salt tax² and land tax³ which weighed directly on the poorest and when the idea of a more equitable (and also more beneficial to the State) tax began to appear, there was, we are told, a general contentment in the country. Especially amongst the peasants more or less enriched by trade and lending at interest.

¹ A reference to the pre-modern Kazakhstan (the Kazakh khanate) in which the Kazakh aristocracy (called the white bone — *ak suiuk*) traced their descent from Genghis Khan and had special rights and privileges. The general population of Kazakh was known as black bone (*kara suiuk*). (Editor)

² The *gabelle* was originally imposed in the fourteenth century and denoted any tax on the sale of agricultural and industrial commodities. In the fifteenth century the *gabelle* began to mean specifically the salt tax, that is, a tax on consumption of salt and the nobility, the clergy, and certain other privileged persons were exempt. It was one of the most hated and grossly unequal forms of indirect taxation and was forcefully expressed in the lists of grievances drawn up for the Estates-General of 1789 on the eve of the revolution. It was abolished in March 1790. (Editor)

³ The *tailles* was a direct land tax on the French peasantry and non-nobles, imposed on each household and based on how much land it held. Originally an “exceptional” tax (i.e., imposed and collected in times of need, as the king was expected to survive on the revenues of the “*domaine royal*,” or lands that belonged to him directly), it became permanent in 1439. The total amount of the *taille* was set by the French king from year to year, and this amount was then apportioned among the various provinces for collection. The clergy, nobles, officers of the crown, and magistrates were exempt from the tax. (Editor)

But until the present taxation has remained faithful to its original source. In the hands of the bourgeois which has seized power, it has never ceased to grow and never ceased being employed mainly for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. By means of taxation, the gang of rulers — the State, representing the quadruple alliance of the king, the Church, the judge, and the lord-soldier — has never ceased to extend its powers and to treat the people like a conquered race. And today, by means of this invaluable instrument which strikes without us directly feeling the blows, we have become almost as enslaved by the State as our fathers formally were by their landlords and masters.

How much work does each of us give to the State? No economist has ever sought to estimate the number of working days that the worker in the fields and factories gives each year to this Babylonian idol. We would search the textbooks of political economy in vain to find an approximate estimate of what the man who produces wealth gives of his labour to the State. A simple estimation based on the budget of the State, the nation, the provinces, and the municipalities (which also contribute to the expenditure of the State) would say nothing; because it would be necessary to estimate not what is in the coffers of the treasury but what the payment of each Franc paid to the Treasury represents of the real expenditures made by the taxpayer. All we can say is that the amount of work the producer gives each year to the State is immense. It must reach, and for certain categories [of worker] exceed, the three days of work a week that the serf once gave to his lord.

And note well that, whatever may be done to overhaul the basis of tax assessment, it is always the worker who bears the entire burden. Every centime paid to the Treasury is ultimately paid by the worker, the producer.

The State may well trim to a certain extent the revenue of the rich. But it is also necessary for the rich to have an income that this income is made, produced by someone — and that can only be done by he who produces something by his labour. The State demands from the rich its share of the spoils; but where do these spoils come from, which ultimately represents so much sold wheat, iron, porcelain or cloth — all the result of the labour of the producer? Apart from the wealth that comes from abroad and which represents the exploitation of other workers — the inhabitants of Russia, the East, Argentina, Africa — it is still the workers of the country itself who must give so many days of their labour to pay tax, as well as to enrich the rich.

If the tax levied by the State — compared to its immense expenditures — seems to be a little less heavy in England than in the other countries of Europe, it is for two reasons. One is that Parliament, half composed of landowners, favours them by allowing them to levy an immense tribute on the residents of the towns and countryside and pay only a small tax; and the other — the main one — is that of all the European countries England is the one which levies most upon the labour of the workers of other nations.⁴

⁴ The sums levied by the English on the capital they have lent to other nations are variously estimated. It is only known that more than two and a half billions (100 million pounds sterling) represents the English revenue on the sums they have lent only to various *States* and *railway* companies. If we add to this the interest levied each year on the sums which the English lent to foreign *cities*, then to the various maritime and other *shipping* companies (everywhere, but especially in America), *lighthouses*, *underwater cables*, *telegraphs*, *banks* in Asia, Africa, America and Australia (this revenue is immense) and, finally, what was placed in a thousand *industries* of all the countries of the world, the English statisticians reach the minimum figure of seven and a half billion francs a year. The net profit which England makes on all her experts (less than a billion and a half) is so small in comparison with the income obtained by cutting share coupons with a pair of scissors that we can say that the principal industry of England is the trading of capital. It has become what Holland was at the beginning of the seventeenth century — the principal

We are sometimes told that a progressive tax on income would, according to our rulers, strike the rich for the benefit of the poor. This was indeed the idea of the Great [French] Revolution, when it introduced this form of taxation. But today all that we obtain by slightly progressive taxation is to trim a little of the revenue of the rich; we take a little more than before from what he has taken away from the worker. But that is all. It is always the worker who pays, and who generally pays *more* than what the State takes from the rich.

Thus we were able to see for ourselves in Bromley how immediately after the tax on inhabited houses in our municipality was increased by around five francs per year on all worker housing – (a half-house, as they say in England) – the rent went up by the amount of 60 centimes per week, or about 30 francs a year. The owner of the building immediately dumped the increase on his tenants and he took advantage of the blow to augment his exploitation.

As for indirect taxes, we not only know that it is the objects consumed by everyone that are especially hit by taxation (the others yield little) but also that any increase of a few centimes on the tax upon beverages, or coffee, or wheat results in a much higher increase in the prices paid by the consumer.

It is evident, moreover, that only he who *produces, who creates wealth by his labour, can pay* taxes. The rest is only a division of the spoils taken away from he who produces – a division which for the worker always amounts to an increase in exploitation.

So we can say that, apart from the taxes levied upon the riches made abroad,⁵ the billions paid each year to the public Treasury – in France, for example – are levied almost entirely on the labour of the ten million workers possessed by France.

Here the worker pays as a consumer of drinks, sugar, matches, petrol; there, it is he who, when paying his rent, pays the Treasury the tax which the State has levied on the owner of the house. Here again, by buying his bread he pays the property taxes, the rent for the land, the rent and taxes of the bakery, the [costs of governmental] overseeing, the [expenditure of the] Ministry of Finance, and so on. There, finally, by buying a dress, she pays taxes on imported cotton, the monopoly created by protectionism. By buying his coal, when travelling by train, he pays the monopolies of the mines and of the railways, created by the State in favour of capitalists, the owners of the mines and the railway lines – in short, it is always he who pays all the aftereffects of the taxes that the State, the province, the municipality levy on the soil and its products, the raw material, the factory, the revenue of the employer, the privilege of education – everything, everything that the municipality, the province and the State see coming into their coffers.

How many days of labour a year do all these taxes represent? Is it not very probable that, having added them all together we would find that the modern worker toils more for the State than the serf formerly worked for his master?

But if it were only that!

But the reality is that taxation gives rulers the means of rendering exploitation even more intense, of holding the people in misery, to create legally, without speaking of theft or of [massive frauds like] the Panamas, fortunes which capital could never have accumulated alone.

moneylender of the world. France follows it closely; Belgium in proportion to its population. Indeed, according to the assessment of Alfred Neymarck, France holds 25 to 30 billion foreign securities, which would already give an annual income of one billion to a billion and a half only on the securities officially listed on the Paris Stock Exchange.

⁵ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds: “derived from the exploitation of foreign workers by means of interest on foreign loans.” (Editor)

IV. TAXATION: A MEANS OF ENRICHING THE WEALTHY

Taxation is so convenient! The naïve — the “dear citizens” of election times — have been brought up to see in taxation the means of accomplishing the great civilising works useful for the nation; and they accept all sorts of taxes so easily! But the rulers know perfectly well that taxation offers them the most convenient means of making great futures at the expense of the small; to impoverish the masses and enrich the few; to better deliver the peasant and the proletarian to the manufacturer and to the speculator; to encourage one industry at the expense of another, and all industries in general at the expense of agriculture, and especially the peasant or the whole nation.

If tomorrow they dared to vote in the Chamber 50,000,000 francs for the benefit of the landowners (as [Lord] Salisbury did in England in 1900 to reward his Conservative voters¹), all of France would cry out as one man; the Ministry would be immediately toppled [*par terre*]. Well, by means of taxation the same fifty millions from the pockets of the poor are placed in those of the rich without them noticing the filching. No one cries out — and the same end is attained marvellously. So much so that this function of taxation goes unnoticed by those who make the study of taxes their speciality.

It is so simple! It is enough, for example, to burden the peasant, his horse and his cart, or else his windows, with a few additional centimes [in taxes] to thereby ruin tens of thousands of farming households. Those who already hardly succeeded in making both ends meet, those who already the slightest shock could ruin and relegate to the ranks of the proletariat were crushed this time by the slight increase in taxation. They sell their plots and go to the cities, offering their arms to the owners of the factories. Others sell their horse and start working hard with the spade, hoping to recover. But a new increase in taxes, which is undoubtedly done in a few years, brings the final blow: they become proletarians in their turn.

This proletarianisation of the weak by the State, by the rulers, is done continuously, year after year, without making anyone cry out, except the ruined whose voice does not reach the general public. This has been seen on a grand scale during the last forty years in Russia, especially in central Russia, where the dream of the bigwig industrialists of creating a proletariat has been realised by means of taxation — whereas a law which would have sought to ruin a few millions of peasants by a single strike of the pen would have made everyone cry out, even in Russia under

¹ A reference to the 1896 Agricultural Relief Bill introduced under the Conservative Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, which halved the local tax burden of landowners. Ostensibly aiming to offset the effects of the depression in farming by reducing local taxation on the agrarian economy, it granted assistance directly to landowners, so failing the tenant farmers who were bearing the brunt of the decline in agricultural prices. It was denounced by opponents as a “dole” to the landlords. (Editor)

absolute government. Taxation has accomplished quietly what the legislator did not dare to do openly.

And the economists who bestow upon themselves the title “scientific” — to then speak to us about the “established” laws of economic development, of “capitalist fatalism,” and its “self-negation” when a simple study of taxation would alone explain a good half of what they attribute to the supposed inevitability of economic laws. It is that the ruin and expropriation of the peasant — such as was done in England during the seventeenth century and which Marx had described as “primitive capitalist accumulation” — continues to this day, year after year, by the means of this so convenient instrument — taxation.

Far from growing according to immanent laws of internal growth, the strength of capital would be badly paralysed in its expansion if it had not the State in its service which, on the one hand, creates new monopolies (mines, railways, water supply, telephones, measures against workers associations, action against strikers, privileged education, etc., etc.) and, on the other hand, builds fortunes and ruins the masses of workers by means of taxation.

If capitalism has helped to create the modern State, it is also — let us not forget — the modern State that creates and nourishes capitalism.

Adam Smith had already indicated, more than a century ago, this power of taxation;² but the study whose outlines he had indicated was not continued and today to show this power of taxation we must gather our examples from everywhere.

So let us take the taxation of land which is one of the most powerful weapons in the hands of the State. The eighth report of the State Bureau of Labor [of Illinois] offers a wealth of evidence to show how — even in a democratic State — the fortunes of millionaires were made simply by the way the State struck the land and building in Chicago.

This great city has grown by leaps and bounds, reaching 1.5 million inhabitants in fifty years. Well, by imposing taxes on built property while only imposing it slightly on undeveloped property, even in the most central streets of the city, the State created the fortunes of millionaires. Plots of land on such-and-such a great street worth fifty years ago six thousand francs for a tenth of a hectare have now reached the value of five million to six million francs.

It is obvious however that if the tax had been “metric,” that is to say so much by the square metre whether built-upon or undeveloped — well yes if the land had been municipalised, such fortunes would never have accumulated. The city would have benefited from the increase in its population, reducing accordingly the taxes on the houses inhabited by workers. Now, on the contrary, since it is the six- and ten-storey houses inhabited by the workers which bear the bulk of the taxes, it is the worker who is forced to work to enable the rich to become even richer; and, on the other hand, he is forced to live in unhealthy slums which, as is well known, arrest even the intellectual development of the class that inhabits these slums and delivers it all the better to the manufacturer. The *Eighth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of Illinois Taxation*, 1894, is full of striking information on this subject.

Or else let us take the English arsenal of Woolwich. Formerly, the land on which Woolwich grew up on was only a warren, inhabited only by rabbits. Since the State built its great arsenal

² Adam Smith discusses taxation in Volume II, Book V, Chapter II of *The Wealth of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976). (Editor)

there, where 20,000 men work in State factories manufacturing devices of destruction, Woolwich and its neighbouring communities have become a populous city.³

One day, in June 1899, a member of Parliament asked the government to increase the wages of the workers. “What is the point?” replied the economist-Minister Goschen, “It will all be absorbed by the landlords!... During the last ten years wages have risen by twenty percent; but in the meantime the rents of the workers rose by fifty per cent. The increase of wages (I quote verbally) had the effect of sending a larger sum into the pockets of the landlords” (millionaires already). The minister’s argument was evidently specious; but the fact that millionaires absorb most of the wage increases is worth addressing. It is perfectly true.

In addition, the inhabitants of Woolwich, like those of any other great city, are continually summoned to [pay] double and triple taxes to drain, channel [the sewer system], pave [the streets of] the city, which once polluted has now become healthy. And, thanks to the system of taxation on land and property in force, all this mass of money went to enrich the landlords by the same amount. “The landlord is everywhere in the habit of selling back to the citizens in detail what they have already paid for in common,” said, quite rightly, the journal of the Woolwich Co-operators, *Comradeship*.⁴

Or else, a steam ferry has to be taken to cross the Thames and to connect Woolwich with London. Initially, it was a monopoly which parliament created in favour of a capitalist, authorising him to establish a link by steam ferry. Then, after a while, as the monopolist charged too much for the crossing, the municipality bought-back from the monopolist the right to maintain this ferry. The whole cost to the taxpayers was 5.5 million francs in eight years. But then, a small plot of land near the ferry rose in value to seventy-five thousand francs, which is obviously pocketed by the landowner. And as this plot will continue to rise in value, here is a new monopoly established, a new capitalist added to the legions of others already created by the English State.⁵

But what! The workers in the Woolwich State factories eventually form a union and, through [their] struggles, they succeeded in securing their wages at a higher level than in other factories of the same kind. They also founded a [consumers’] co-operative and so cut their living expenses by

³ The 1914 version in *Freedom* immediately adds the following paragraph: “But who has profited chiefly by that growth? Owing to taxation as it exists in this country, it was the landlord! Not the workers who built the Arsenal and for years were putting its machinery into action — but the local landlords!” (Editor)

⁴ Frederick Verinder, “Taxation of Land Values,” Part II, *Comradeship* No. 11 (February 1900), 16. Kropotkin paraphrases this passage to clarify for his French readers: “These sell back in detail to the taxpayers the profits they have pocketed from the sanitary improvements, paid for by these same taxpayers.” The journal subsequently published a letter from Kropotkin (No 13, April 1900) entitled “Prince Kropotkin on Land Monopoly and Co-Operation” which covers many of the points he raises here. (Editor)

⁵ The 1914 *Freedom* version expands slightly: “Or, speaking still of Woolwich, one day a steam ferry was running across the Thames, in order to connect Woolwich with London. Of course, the Government, to begin with, made of the ferry a monopoly in favour of a railway company. Later on, as the company charged too much for the crossing, and the “dear citizen” grumbled, the municipality bought the ferry right back from the company, the whole costing the town about £220,000 in eight years. But then it appeared that a free ferry was a new handsome gift made to the landlords. The value of land in Woolwich went up by leaps. A tiny bit of land situated close by the ferry rose at once in value fully £3,000, which, of course, was a gift of the town to the owner of that piece of the land. And as the land in Woolwich will continue to rise in value (every war scare contributing to raise the value of land round the big Arsenal), we have here a new monopoly, and numbers of new capitalists added to the legions of others by the State, with the aid of the working people’s money.” It then adds this paragraph: “You see now for what the State exists, and why it is so dear to all those who are capitalists or expect to become either capitalists or members of the capitalist-making machinery.” (Editor)

a quarter — and “the best of the harvest” goes to the lords!⁶ When one of these gentlemen decides to sell a plot of his land, his agent announces to us in the local newspapers (this is verbatim): “The high wages paid by the Arsenal to workers, thanks to their unions, as well as the existence in Woolwich of a prosperous co-operative [society] render this land eminently suitable for building of worker’s dwellings.” Which means: “You can pay dearly for this plot, gentlemen builders of workers’ houses. You will easily recoup on the rents.” And they pay, they buy to build, to be repaid later on by the worker.⁷

But that is not all. A few enthusiasts, with untold sorrows and immense work, succeeded in founding in this same Woolwich a sort of co-operative city of working class maisonettes. The land was bought by a co-operative; it was drained, [the sewers] channelled, and the streets built in co-operation; then the plots were sold to workers who, always thanks to the co-operative, could build their maisonettes cheaply.⁸ The founders [of the scheme] congratulated themselves on its success and enquired about the terms under which they could buy a hectare of land to enlarge their co-operative city. They had paid the rate of 37,500 francs per hectare (£500 per acre) for theirs; now they are asked for 75,000 francs for the next hectare... Why? “But, gentlemen, your city is going so well that it has doubled the value of this land.”

Absolutely! Since the State has constituted and maintains the monopoly of land in favour of Mr. So-and-So, they have [simply] toiled to enrich this gentleman and to render the extension of their worker city impossible.

“Long live the State.”

“Work for us, poor creature who thinks you can improve your lot by co-operatives without daring to touch at the same time, property, taxation, and the State!”⁹

But, without going to Chicago or Woolwich, do we not see in every great city how the State, merely by imposing a heavier tax on the six-storey house inhabited by workers than upon the private mansion of the rich, establishes a formidable privilege in favour of the latter? It allows him to pocket the increase in value given to his property by the growth and beautification of the city — especially by the house with six floors where the misery which beautifies the city for a beggar’s wage throngs.

Or else, we are surprised that the cities grow so rapidly to the detriment of the countryside. And we do not want to see that the entire financial policy of the nineteenth century was to burden the farmer — the real producer, since he managed to obtain three, four and ten times more produce from the soil than before — to the benefit of the cities, that is to say the bankers, the lawyers, the merchants, and all the pack of sensualists [*jouisseurs*] and rulers.

And do not tell us that the creation of monopolies in favour of the rich is not the essence of the modern State and the sympathies which it finds amongst the rich and educated who have passed through the schools of the State. Here is an excellent recent example of the use of taxes in Africa.

⁶ The 1914 *Freedom* version has: “But lo! thanks to our laws, they who profit most from both the Union and the Co-operative are again — the landlords?” (Editor)

⁷ The 1914 *Freedom* version has: In other words, this means: “You can pay, gentlemen builders, a high price for this land. It is most suitable for workers’ houses. With the higher wages obtained by the workers, and their economies, you will be able to get higher rents.” And the “gentleman builder” pays the landlord a higher price — and extorts higher rents from the worker. Don’t you admire that mechanism? If not — never talk of Aesthetics!” (Editor)

⁸ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds: “True, the scheme was not exactly what they intended it to be at the outset: their Communist tendencies were lost amidst mercantile considerations.” (Editor)

⁹ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds this paragraph: “Keep them up — and remain their slave!” (Editor)

We know that the principal objective of the war of England against the Boers was to abolish the Boer law which prevented blacks being forced to work in the gold mines. The English companies founded for the exploitation of these mines did not make the profits they had been expected to. Well, here is what Earl Grey said to parliament: “They must dismiss from their minds the idea of developing their mines with white labour. Means had to be sought to induce the natives to seek, spontaneously, employment at the mines... an incentive to labour must be provided by imposition of a hut-tax of at least £1, in conformity to the practice of Basutoland; and also by the establishment of a small labour-tax, which these able-bodied natives should be required to pay who are unable to show a certificate for four months’ work.” (Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, p. 234).¹⁰

So here is serfdom which they did not dare to introduce openly but which was introduced by *taxation*. Assume every miserable hut struck with 25 francs [that is, £1] of tax and serfdom is made. And Rudd, the agent of Rhodes, dots the i’s [and crosses the t’s] by writing: “If under the cry of civilisation we in Egypt lately mowed down 10,000 or 20,000 Dervishes with Maxims, surely it cannot be considered a hardship to compel the natives in South Africa *to give three months in the year to do a little honest work.*” Always two or three days a week! There is no escape. As for paying for the “honest work,” Rudd bluntly stated: 60 to 70 francs per month is “morbid sentimentality.” Quarter that would be amply sufficient (*Ibid.*, p. 235).¹¹ That way, the black will not enrich themselves and will remain a serf. They must take from him, by tax, what he earns as wages; he must be prevented from giving himself rest.

And indeed, since the English have become the masters of the Transvaal and of the “blacks,” the extraction of gold rose from 313 million francs to 875 million [per annum]. Nearly 200,000 “blacks” are now forced to toil in the mines to enrich the companies that were the primary causes of the war.¹²

But what the English did in Africa to reduce blacks to poverty and to impose forced labour on them, the State did for three centuries in Europe in relation to the peasants; and it does it again to impose the same forced labour onto the workers of the towns.

And academics speak to us about the “immutable laws” of Political Economy!

Remaining still in the domain of recent history, we might tell of another blow made by means of taxation. We could entitle it: “How the British Government took 4.6 million francs from the Nation to give them to the Big Tea Merchants — a Farce in one Act.” On Saturday, 3 March 1900, it was learned in London that the government was going to increase by two pence (twenty centimes) per pound (per 450 grams) the customs duty on tea. Immediately, on Saturday and Monday, twenty-two million pounds of tea which were in customs in London awaiting payment of the tax were taken out by the merchants by paying the *previous* duty; and, Tuesday, the price of tea in all the shops in London was raised by two pence [per pound]. If we count only the twenty-two million pounds removed on Saturday and Monday, this would already make a *net* profit of 44 million pennies, or 4,583,000 francs taken from the pockets of the taxpayers and given to the tea merchants. But the same manoeuvre was carried out in all the other customs, in

¹⁰ J. A. Hobson, *The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Effects* (London: James Hisbet & Co., 1900). Kropotkin’s paraphrased translation has been replaced with the original quote. (Editor)

¹¹ Kropotkin’s emphasis and, again, the original text of the book has been reproduced. (Editor)

¹² This footnote was added to the 1914 *Freedom* version: “These lines were written two years ago; the figures have increased since. As to how the imported Hindus, and the British workers too, are treated — we saw it lately. Slavery breeds slavery.” (Editor)

Liverpool, in Scotland, etc. without counting the tea which had been taken out of the customs before notification of the tax increase. It will no doubt be about ten million *given* by the State to these gentlemen.

The same goes for tobacco, beer, spirits, wine — and here are the wealthy enriched by about 25 million [francs] taken from the poor. And, “Long live Taxation! Long live the State!”

And you, children of the poor, thus learn in the primary school (the children of the rich learn something else at university), learn that taxation has been created to relieve the poor dear peasants from *corvée* labours, replacing them with a small annual payment to the coffers of the State. And tell your mother, bent under the weight of years of work and domestic toil [*d'économie domestique*] that they teach you there a great and beautiful science — Political Economy...

Take, indeed, education. We have come a long way since the time when the community itself found a house for the school as well as the teacher and where the wise man, the physician, the philosopher, surrounded himself with voluntary pupils to transmit to them the secrets of his science or his philosophy. Today, we have so-called free education provided at our expense by the State; we have secondary schools, universities, academies, subsidised scientific societies, scientific mission — what have you.

Since the State asks no better than to always extend the sphere of its power and that the citizens demand nothing better than to be exempted from thinking about matters of general interest — to “emancipate” themselves from their fellow citizens by abandoning common matters to a third party — everything works out perfectly. “Education,” says the State, “delighted, ladies and gentlemen, to give it to your children! To lighten your cares, we will even *forbid* you from meddling with education. We will write all the programmes — and no criticism, please! First, we will stupefy your children by the study of dead languages and the virtues of Roman Law. That will make them pliable and submissive. Then, to deprive them of any inclination to revolt, we shall teach them the virtues of the State and of governments as well as contempt for the governed. We will make them believe that they, having learned Latin, become the salt of the earth, the leaven of progress, that without them humanity would perish. This will flatter you; as for them, they will swallow it up marvellously and become as vain as hell. That is what we need. We will teach them that the misery of the masses is a “law of nature” and they will be delighted to learn it and to repeat it. However, changing the teaching according to the varying tastes of the times, we will tell them that sometimes this is the will of God, sometimes that it is an “iron law” which causes the worker to be impoverished as soon as he begins to enrich himself, since he has forgotten in his well-being to have children.¹³ All education will have the purpose of making your children believe that there is no salvation outside the providential State! And you will applaud, will you not?”

“Then, after having made the people pay for the cost of all education — primary, secondary, university and academic — we will arrange ourselves in such a way as to keep the best portions

¹³ A reference to Thomas Malthus and his “law of population” and the related “iron law of wages.” Malthus blamed the poverty of his time on the tendency of population (that is to say, numbers of working class people) to exceed food supplies rather than an unjust economic system as the radicals he attacked (like William Godwin) were arguing. His assertions were well received — for obvious reasons — by the ruling class of his and subsequent times while radicals and socialists viewed them as apologetics. Proudhon wrote against Malthus on many occasions, most famously in his article “The Malthusians” (included in *Property is Theft!*) as did Kropotkin (see, for example *Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles* (London: Freedom Press, 1891) and *Fields, Factories and Workshops; or, Industry combined with agriculture and brain work with manual work* (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1912). (Editor)

of the budgetary pie for the sons of the bourgeois.¹⁴ And this great fellow, the people, boasting of their universities and their scholars, will not even perceive how we will construct government as a monopoly for those who can afford the luxury of colleges and universities for their children. If we told them point blank: You will be governed, judged, accused and defended, educated and stupefied by the rich, in the interest of the rich — they would without doubt revolt. It is obvious! But with taxation and a few nice, very “liberal” laws stating to the people, for example, that they must have undergone twenty examinations to be admitted to the high office of judge or minister — the fellow will find that very good!”

And this is how, one thing leading to another, the government of the people by the landlords and the wealthy bourgeois, against which the people once revolted when they saw it face-on, is reconstituted in another form under the disguise of taxation with the consent and almost the applause of the people!

We need not talk about taxation for the military because everyone should already know what to expect on that. When, then, was the permanent army not the means of keeping the people in bondage? And when did a regular army succeed in conquering a country if it met a people in arms?¹⁵

But take any tax — direct or indirect: on land, on income, or on consumption, for contracting debts of the State or under the pretext of paying them (because they never are); take the tax for war or public education, analyse it, see to what it ultimately leads you, and you will be struck by the immense force, by the omnipotence which we have given to our rulers.

Taxation is the most convenient form for the rich to keep the people in misery. It is also the means for ruining entire groups of farmers and industrial workers as they manage through an incredible series of efforts to increase ever-so-slightly their well-being. It is at the same time the most convenient instrument for making government the eternal monopoly of the rich. Finally, it allows, under different pretexts, the forging of the weapons which will one day be used to crush the people if they revolt.

An octopus with a thousand heads and a thousand suckers, like the sea monsters of the old tales, it makes it possible to envelop all society and to channel all individual efforts so as to make them result in the enrichment and governmental monopoly of the privileged classes.

And so long as the State, armed with taxation, continues to exist, the liberation of the proletariat cannot be accomplished in any way, neither by the path of reforms nor even by revolution. For if the revolution does not crush this octopus, if it does not destroy its head and cut off its arms and suckers, it will be strangled by the beast. The revolution itself will be placed at the service of monopoly, as was the [French] revolution of 1793.

¹⁴ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds: “And the workmen will not even notice that: they will have learned that they are ‘the Unfit.’” (Editor)

¹⁵ The 1914 *Freedom* version has a different paragraph: “We need not talk about the taxation for military purposes. By this time every one ought to understand what armies and navies are kept for. Evidently not for the defence of the country, but for the conquest of new markets and new territory, to exploit them in the interest of the few.” (Editor)

V. MONOPOLIES

Let us continue to examine how the modern State, that which established itself in Europe after the sixteenth century and later in the young republics of the two Americas, works to enslave the individual. After having accepted the personal emancipation of a few strata of society that had broken the yoke of serfdom in the free cities, it applied itself, as we have seen, to maintaining serfdom for the peasants as long as possible, and to re-establish economic servitude for all under a new form, bringing its subjects under the yoke of its functionaries and a whole new class of privileged bureaucrats, the Church, the landlords, merchants, and capitalists. And we have just seen how the State wielded taxation for this purpose.

We are now going to take a look at another weapon which the State knew so well how to use – the creation of privileges and monopolies to the benefit of some of its subjects to the detriment of others. Here we see the State in its true function, fulfilling its true mission. It applied itself to this from its beginnings: it is even this which enabled it to form and group under its protection the lord, the soldier, the priest and the judge. The sovereign was recognised at this price. To this mission it remains faithful to this day; and if it failed, if it ceased to be a mutual insurance [company] between the privileged, that would be the death of the institution – of the historical growth which has taken a form determined by this end and which we call State.

It is striking, indeed, to note to what extent the creation of monopolies for the benefit of those who already possessed these [privileges] from birth or else those with theocratic or military power was the very essence of the [social] organisation that started to develop in Europe in the sixteenth century, replacing that of the free cities of the Middle Ages.

We can take any nation: France, England, the German, Italian or Slavic States – everywhere we find in the emerging State the same character. This is why we need only look at the development of monopolies in a single nation – England, for example, where this development has been studied best – to understand and grasp this essential role of the State in all modern nations.¹ None offers the least exception.

It is very clear, indeed, how the establishment of the emerging State in England since the end of the sixteenth century and the establishment of monopolies in favour of the privileged went hand in hand.²

Even before the reign of Elizabeth, when the English State was still in its infancy, the Tudor kings always created monopolies for their favourites. Under Elizabeth, when maritime commerce

¹ We have for England the work of Professor Hermann Levy, *Monopole, Kartelle und Trusts*, published in 1909, and translated into English as *Monopoly and Competition* (London, 1911). It has this advantage that the author does not even deal with the role of the State: it is the economic causes of monopolies that concerns him. Therefore there is no bias against the State.

² See G. Unwin's *Industrial Organisation [in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries]* (Oxford, 1904), H. Price's *English Patents of Monopolies* (Boston, 1906), W. Cunningham's *The Growth of English Industry [and Commerce in Modern Times: The Mercantile System (1882)]*, and especially the works of Hermann Levy and Macrosty.

began to develop and a whole series of new industries were introduced in England, this tendency became even more marked. Each new industry was erected as a monopoly, either in favour of foreigners who paid the Queen or in favour of Courtiers whom they made a point of rewarding.³

The exploitation of the alum deposits in Yorkshire, salt, tin mines, the coal mines around Newcastle, the glass industry, the improved manufacture of soap, pins, and so on — all these were set up as monopolies which prevented the development of industries and tended to kill the small industrialists. For example, to protect the Courtiers to whom the soap monopoly had been granted, they went so far as to forbid individuals from making soap for their laundry at home.

Under James I⁴ the creation of “concessions” and of patents continued to increase until 1624 when finally, at the approach of the Revolution, a law was passed against monopolies. But this law was a two-faced law: it condemned the monopolies and at the same time not only retained those that existed but authorised new and very important ones. Besides, it was violated as soon as it was passed. They benefited from one of its paragraphs which assisted the old corporations of the towns in establishing monopolies in a certain town initially and later to extend them to entire regions. From 1630 to 1650, the government also took advantage of “patents” to establish new monopolies.⁵

It took the Revolution of 1688 to put an end to this orgy of monopolies.⁶ And it was not until 1689, when a new Parliament (which represented an alliance between the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy against royal absolutism and the *camarilla*⁷) began to function, that measures were taken against the creation of new monopolies by the royalty. The economic historians even say that for nearly a century after 1689 the English parliament was watchful [*jaloux*] of not allowing the creation of industrial monopolies that would have favoured certain manufacturers over others.

It must indeed be recognised that the Revolution and the coming to power of the bourgeoisie had this consequence and that in this way great industries, such as cotton, wool, iron, coal, etc., could develop without being hindered by monopolists. They could even develop into *national* industries, in which a mass of small entrepreneurs could take part. This enabled thousands of

³ The 1914 *Freedom* version immediately adds: “for their services (against the nation).” (Editor)

⁴ The French edition has “James II” but this must be a typographical error as shown by the 1914 *Freedom* version having James I. (Editor)

⁵ The term patent originates from the Latin *patere* (“to lay open”) but, in this context, it is a shortened version of the term *letters patent*. This was a royal decree granting exclusive rights to a person or corporation. By the sixteenth century, the English Crown would habitually abuse the granting of letters patent for monopolies. After public outcry, King James I of England (James VI of Scotland) was forced to revoke all existing monopolies and declare that they were only to be used for “projects of new invention.” This was incorporated into the Statute of Monopolies (1624) in which Parliament restricted the Crown’s power so that the King could only issue letters patent to the inventors or introducers of original inventions for a fixed number of years. The Statute became the foundation for later developments in patent law in England and elsewhere. (Editor)

⁶ A reference to the so-called “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 in which a few English parliamentarians appealed to the Dutch William III, Prince of Orange, to invade the United Kingdom to replace the Catholic King James II (James VII of Scotland) who was asserting his divine right to rule. William and his wife Anne (daughter of James) became joint monarchs but subject to Parliament (albeit one elected by only the wealthiest). This ended absolute monarchy in the United Kingdom and its replacement by a constitutional one. Compared to the civil wars of two decades previously, the invasion was relatively bloodless — at least in England. In the 1914 *Freedom* version Kropotkin dates the revolution as being from 1648 to 1688. (Editor)

⁷ A *camarilla* is a group of courtiers or favourites who surround a monarch and influence from behind the scenes. The term derives from the Spanish word *camarilla* meaning “little chamber” or private cabinet of the king and was first used to describe the circle of cronies around King Ferdinand VII who reigned Spain from 1814 to 1833. (Editor)

workers in the small workshops to contribute the thousand improvements without which these industries could never have advanced.

But meanwhile the statist bureaucracy was forming and strengthening. Governmental centralisation which is the essence of every State made its way — and soon the creation of new monopolies in new spheres recommenced, this time on a far larger scale than in the times of the Tudors. Then, the art [of monopolising] was in its infancy. Now, the State was mature.

If Parliament was prevented to a certain extent by the representatives of the local bourgeoisie from interfering in England even in emerging industries and from favouring some at the expense of others, it carried its monopolist activity to the colonies. Here it acted on a grand scale. The [East] India Company,⁸ the Hudson Bay Company in Canada⁹ became fantastically wealthy kingdoms, given to groups of private individuals. Later on, concessions of territories in America, of gold-fields in Australia, privileges for navigation, and the seizure of new branches of business, became in the hands of the State the means of granting to its favourites [*protégés*] fabulous incomes. Colossal fortunes were amassed in this way.

True to its double composition, of bourgeois in the House of Commons and of landed aristocracy in the House of Lords, the English Parliament¹⁰ first applied itself throughout the eighteenth century to proletarianising the peasants and delivering the cultivators of the soil, bound feet and hands, to the landowners. By means of acts of “demarcation” (*Enclosure Acts*), by which Parliament declared the communal lands the private property of the lord, as soon as the lord had surrounded them with any fence,¹¹ nearly 3,000,000 hectares of communal land passed from the hands of the communes to those of the lords between 1709 and 1869.¹² Overall, the result of monopolist legislation by the English Parliament is that a *third* of all the cultivatable land of England now belongs to 523 families.

Demarcation [of boundaries] was an act of open robbery but in the eighteenth century the State, which had been renovated by the Revolution [of 1688], already felt strong enough to defy

⁸ The East India Company was an English joint-stock company formed to pursue trade with the East Indies but ended up trading mainly with the Indian subcontinent and China. The company eventually accounted for half of the world's trade, particularly in basic commodities. It received a Royal Charter from Queen Elizabeth I in 1600 and wealthy merchants and aristocrats owned its shares. It eventually came to rule large areas of India with its own private armies, exercising military power and assuming administrative functions. Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the British Crown assumed direct control of India in the form of the new British Raj. (Editor)

⁹ The Hudson's Bay Company was incorporated by English royal charter in 1670 controlled the fur trade throughout much of the English controlled North America for several centuries and it functioned as the de facto government in parts of North America. In the late nineteenth century, with its signing of the Deed of Surrender, its vast territory became the largest portion of the newly formed Dominion of Canada, in which the company was the largest private landowner. (Editor)

¹⁰ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds: “the British Parliament had other ways to exploit the nation than to favour a few factory-owners at the expense of the others. It had all the rural population to re-enslave. So it did it.” (Editor)

¹¹ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds: “Parliament robbed the peasants [...] Historically, he [the lord] had not the slightest shadow of right to these lands: they belonged to the village community. All that he might have claimed was the right of pasture on an equal footing with all the commoners, whenever that right was granted him by the community. He was the magistrate of the locality and the head of the militias but not the owner of the land. And yet Parliament, by an act of sheer robbery, gave him the communal land.” (Editor)

¹² On the evils caused by demarcation, excellent information can be found, with supporting maps, in a recent work on this subject by Dr. Gilbert Slater, *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields* (London, 1907). On the agrarian question in general and the plunder of the nation by legislators, see the work of Alfred Russel Wallace, the follower of Darwin, *Land Nationalisation; its Necessity and its Aims* [1906].

discontent and possibly the insurrections of the peasants. Had it not for that the support of the bourgeoisie?

For if Parliament thus endowed the lords with estates, it also favoured the bourgeois industrialists. By driving the peasants out of the villages into the towns, it gave the industrialists the “hands” of hungry peasants. In addition, by virtue of Parliament’s interpretation of the Poor Law, the agents of the cotton manufacturers roamed the workhouses, that is to say the prisons in which proletarians without work were confined with their families; and from these prisons they carried away carts full of children who, under the name of *workhouse apprentices*, had to work fourteen or sixteen hours a day in the cotton factories. Many a town in Lancashire has a population which bears to this day the stamp of its origin [in this practice]. The impoverished blood of these hungry children, brought from the *workhouses* of the South, and made to work [in the factories] under the whip of the foremen to enrich the bourgeois of the midlands, often from the age of seven, is still seen in the stunted and anaemic population of these small towns [of Lancashire and Yorkshire]. This lasted until the nineteenth century.

Finally, Parliament always crushed by its legislation the national industries in the colonies to aid infant industries [in mainland Britain]. Thus the textile industry of India, which had attained such a high degree of artistic perfection, was killed. They delivered this rich market to English rubbish. The weaving of cloth in Ireland was killed in the same way in favour of the cotton-works of Manchester.

We thus see that the bourgeois Parliament, anxious to enrich its customers by the development of large national industries, during the eighteenth century opposed that individual industrialists or distinct branches of English industry should be favoured at the expense of the others — it made up for this by the proletarianisation of the great mass of the agricultural population and the colonies which it delivered to most ignoble exploitation by powerful monopolists. At the same time, if it could, it maintained and favoured in England even the mining monopolies established in the preceding century, such as that of the Newcastle mine-owners which lasted until 1844 or else that of the copper mines which lasted until 1820.¹³

¹³ The 1914 Freedom version adds the following paragraph: “And in the meantime new branches of monopolies, far more profitable than the old ones, began to be created by the same legislators.” (Editor)

VI. MONOPOLIES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

As of the first half of the nineteenth century new monopolies began to emerge under the protection of the Law before which the old ones were merely children's toys.

Initially, the attentions of business tycoons were on the railways and the main lines of ocean navigation subsidised by the State. Colossal fortunes were made in a few decades in England and in France with the help of "concessions" received by individuals and companies for the construction of railway lines, generally with the guarantee a certain [minimum] revenue.

To this were added the great metallurgical and mining companies for supplying the railways with rails, iron or steel bridges, rolling stock, and fuel — all realising fabulous profits and immense speculations on the acquired lands. Big companies for the construction of iron ships, and especially for production of iron, steel, copper for war material as well as for this same material — warships, cannons, guns, swords, etc.; the large canal enterprises (Suez, Panama, etc.) and finally what was called "the development" of countries backward in industry followed closely. Millionaires were thus created by steam, by half-starved workers, who were pitilessly shot or transported to forced labour as soon as they made the slightest attempt at revolt.

The construction of a vast network of railways in Russia (begun in the [eighteen-]sixties), in the peninsulas of Europe, in the United States, in Mexico, in the republics of South America — all these were sources of unheard-of riches, accumulated by a real robbery under the protection of the State. What misery it once was, when a feudal baron plundered some merchant caravan passing near his castle! Here, they were hundreds of millions of human flocks being fleeced by business tycoons with the open connivance of States, of governments — autocratic, parliamentary or republican.

But that is not all.¹ Soon they were joined by the construction of ships for the merchant navy subsidised by the various States, subsidised shipping lines, submarine cables, and [transcontinental] telegraphs; the boring of isthmus and tunnels, the beautification of cities inaugurated under Napoleon III, and finally — dominating all this like the Eiffel Tower dominates the neighbouring houses [in Paris]—the borrowing of the States and the subsidised banks! All these dances of the billions became material for "concessions." Finance, commerce, war, armaments, education — all were used to create monopolies, to manufacture billionaires.²

And let no one try to excuse these monopolies and concessions by saying that in this way they succeeded, nevertheless, in carrying out a mass of useful initiatives. Because for every million

¹ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds: "New sources of enrichment, for the privileged ones were soon discovered." (Editor)

² The 1914 *Freedom* version has a different paragraph here: "All these new perfected instruments of robbery were now brought into the monopolies market and sold by the minions of the State. Hordes of millionaires and multi-millionaires were created." (Editor)

of capital usefully employed in these enterprises the founders of these Companies added three, four, five, sometimes ten millions to the burden of public debt. We need only recall Panama, where millions were devoured to “float” the Companies and only a tenth of the money paid by the shareholders went to the real work of piercing the isthmus. But what was done in Panama was done with all companies, without exception, in America, in the Republic of the United States, as in the European monarchies. “Nearly all our railroad companies and other incorporations are loaded down in this way,” said Henry George in *Progress and Poverty*. “When one dollar’s worth of capital has been really used, certificates for two, three, four, five, or even ten have been issued, and upon this fictitious amount interest or dividends are paid.”³

And if it were only that!⁴ When these great companies are formed, their power over human agglomerations is such that it can only be compared to that of the brigands who once held the roads and levied a tribute upon every traveller whether he was on foot or the head of a merchant caravan.⁵ And for every millionaire who emerges with the aid of the State there are millions that pour down in the ministries.

The pillage of national wealth which has been done and is still being done with the consent and with aid of the State — especially where there are still natural resources to grab — is simply sickening. We must look at, for example, the great Trans-Canadian [railway] to get an idea of this pillage authorised by the State. All the best land on the shores of the Great Lakes in North America or in the big cities along rivers belongs to the company [the Canadian Pacific Railway] that received the privilege of building this line. A strip of land seven and a half kilometres wide on each side along its entire length was given [by the Canadian Federal Parliament] to the capitalists who undertook to build the Trans-Canadian;⁶ and when this, advancing towards the west, crossed unproductive plateaus, the equivalent of this strip of land was allocated a bit everywhere, where there were fertile lands which would soon reach a high value. Where the State still distributed land to new settlers free of charge, the land was allocated to the Trans-Canadian was divided into lots of one square mile, placed like the black squares on a chessboard in the midst of the lands which the State gave to the settlers. With the result that today, the

³ Kropotkin’s emphasis; Henry George, *Poverty and Progress* (William Reeves: London, 1884), 145. Kropotkin’s translation has been replaced with the original text. (Editor)

⁴ The 1914 *Freedom* version has the following slightly different paragraph: “The worse is, that once these big companies had been formed, their power over human agglomerations became such that it could only be compared with the power exercised in the medieval age by feudal barons, who levied a tribute upon everyone who passed on the high road in the vicinity of their castles. And while millionaires were thus created by the State, millions and millions flowed into the pockets of the functionaries in the Ministries.” (Editor)

⁵ Henry George, in *Protection and Free Trade*, gave the following example of an iron mine in the State of Michigan. The owners had bought it by paying for the land 15 fr. per hectare. They assigned the right to extract the ore to a certain Colby for the payment of 2 fr. per tonne of ore mined. Colby assigned this right to Morse and Co. for 2 francs 62 c. per tonne, which Morse sold to Sellwood for 4 fr. 37 [c.] per tonne. Sellwood did not extract it himself but had it done by an entrepreneur that he paid 0 fr 62 ½ c. per tonne and for which extraction by the tonne was all-inclusive (wages, machinery, supervision administration, 0 fr 50 c.); which gave a net profit of 0 fr. 12 ½ c. As it was possible to extract 1,200 tonnes a day, this gave a net revenue: 150 fr per day to the entrepreneur who had the extraction done; 450 fr. for Sellwood; 8,400 fr. for Morse and Co.; 750 [fr.] for Colby and 2,400 fr. for the owners; or a net income of 12,150 fr. per day in addition to the cost of labour and the profits realised by the work entrepreneur. It was the price of the monopoly, guaranteed by the State — the surcharge paid by the consumer for leaving to the State the right to establish monopolies. This example is a small picture of what has been done on a large scale in all concessions: for railways, canals, ships, rolling stock, armaments, etc.

⁶ The 1914 *Freedom* version adds: “in addition to all the profits they would draw from the railway.” (Editor)

squares belonging to the State and given to the emigrants being all inhabited, the land given to the capitalists of the Trans-Canadian is worth hundreds of millions of dollars. And as to the capital that the Company was supposed to have spent to build the line, it represents according to all three or four times the sum that was actually spent.

It is absolutely the same wherever we look, so much so it becomes difficult to name a single big fortune due solely to industry, without the aid of any monopoly of governmental origin. In the United States, as Henry George had already noted, it is absolutely impossible.

Thus the immense fortune of the Rothschilds owes its origin entirely to the loans made by the founder banker of the family to kings, to fight either other kings or their own subjects.

The no less colossal fortune of the Dukes of Westminster is entirely due to the fact that their ancestors obtained from the whims [*bon plaisir*] of kings the lands upon which a great part of London is now built; and this fortune is maintained solely because the English Parliament, contrary to all justice, does not want to raise the question of the blatant appropriation of the land of the English nation by the lords.

As for the fortunes of the big American billionaires — the Astors, the Vanderbilts, the Rockefellers, [the Carnegies⁷], the trusts of oil, steel, railways, and even matches, etc. — all have their origin in monopolies created by the State.

In a word, if someone one day made a list of the riches that were seized by the financiers and business tycoons with the aid of privileges and monopolies established by States; if someone succeeded in evaluating the riches that were thus withdrawn from the public wealth by all governments — parliamentarian, monarchist and republican — to give them to individuals in exchange for more or less disguised bribes — the workers would be amazed, outraged. These are incredible figures, hardly conceivable for those who live on their meagre wages.

Alongside these figures — a product of pillage — those spoken to us by the anointed treatises of political economy are trifles, crumbs. When the economists want us to believe that at the origin of Capital the poor would find behind the hoarded money the privations of the bosses from the profits of their industrial establishments, either these gentlemen are ignorant or else they knowing say what is not true.⁸ The rapine, the appropriation, the plunder of national wealth with the aid of the State by “interesting” the powerful — this is the real source of the immense fortunes accumulated each year by the lords and the bourgeois.

Perhaps it will be said: “But you are talking of the monopolisation of the riches in virgin countries, newly conquered by the industrial civilisation of the nineteenth century.” And it will be added: “This is not the case for the older countries, so to speak, in their political life, such as England or France.”

Well, it is absolutely the same in the countries most advanced in their political life. The rulers of these States continually find new opportunities to deprive the citizens for the benefit of their favourites [*protégés*]. Was “Panama,” which served to enrich so many business tycoons, not purely French? Was it not an application of the *Enrich yourselves!* attributed to Guizot; and

⁷ Added in the 1914 *Freedom* version. (Editor)

⁸ The 1914 *Freedom* version states: By the side of these colossal legal robberies, the fortunes that are ascribed by the economists to the moral virtues of the capitalists are a mere trifle. When the economists tell us that at the origin of Capital the worker would find the pence and shillings carefully put aside, at the cost of hard privation, by the masters of the factories — these economists are either ignoramuses who repeat parrot-like the fables they were taught at the University, or they consciously tell what they themselves know to be lies. (Editor)

alongside Panama, which ended in a scandal, have there not been hundreds of others which flourish to this day? We have only to think of Morocco, the Tripoli adventure, that of the Yalou in Korea, the plunder of Persia, etc.⁹ These acts of high fraud are still occurring every day and they will only end after the social revolution.

Capital and State are two parallel growths which would be impossible the one without the other and which, for this reason, must always be combated together — both at once. The State would never have been able to form and acquire the power which it possesses today — not even that which it possessed in the Rome of the emperors, in the Egypt of the Pharaohs, in Assyria, etc. — if it had not favoured, as it did, the growth of landed and industrial capital and the exploitation first of the tribes of pastoral people, then peasant farmers and later still workers of industry. It was by protecting with its whip and its sword those to whom it gave the possibility of monopolising the soil and of getting hold of (first by pillage, and later by the forced labour of the conquered) some tools either for the cultivation of the soil or for obtaining industrial products; it was by forcing those who possessed nothing to work for those who owned (land, iron, slaves) that little by little was formed this formidable organisation that is called State. And if capitalism would never have reached its present form without the watchful, thoughtful and continuous aid of the State, the State in its turn would never have reached this formidable strength, this power of absorption, the possibility of holding in its hands the whole life of every citizen it has today, if it had not consciously worked with patience and method to constitute Capital. Without the help of Capital, royal power would never even have managed to free itself from the Church and without the help of the capitalist it would never have been able to lay hands on the whole existence of modern man, from his first days at school to his grave.

That is why, when it is said that Capitalism dates from the fifteenth or sixteenth century, this statement can be considered as having some utility — as long as it serves to *affirm the parallelism* of the development of the State and Capital. But the fact is that exploitation of the capitalist already existed where there were the first seeds of individual ownership of the soil, where the [exclusive] right of such-and-such individuals to graze livestock on such-and-such land, and later the possibility of cultivating such-and-such land by forced or hired labour had been established. At this very moment, we can see Capital already achieving its pernicious work amongst the Mongol pastoral peoples (the Mongols, the Buryats) who are just emerging from the tribal phase. It is sufficient, indeed, for commerce to leave the tribal phase (during which nothing could be sold by a member of the tribe to another member), it is enough that trade becomes *individual*, so that capitalism already appears. And as soon as the State (coming from outside or developed within such-and-such a tribe) puts its hands on the tribe by taxation and its functionaries, as it does with the Mongolian tribes, the proletariat and capitalism are already born, and they necessarily begin their evolution. It is precisely to deliver the Kabyles, the Moroccans, the Arabs of Tripolitania, the Egyptian fellahs,¹⁰ the Persians, etc. into the grip of the capitalists imported from Europe and to the indigenous exploiters that the European States are making their conquests in Africa and Asia. And in these countries, recently conquered, we can see on the spot how the State and

⁹ References to various imperialist acts: the annexation of the Touat-Gourara-Tidikelt regions in Morocco by France in 1901; the annexation of Tripoli in Libya by Italy in 1911; the annexation of Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910) by Japan; the division of Persia (modern-day Iran) between Britain and Russia (1907). (Editor)

¹⁰ A fellah is a farmer or agricultural labourer in the Middle East and North Africa (the word derives from the Arabic word for “ploughman” or “tiller”). The 1914 *Freedom* version adds “the Hottentots, the Somalis” to the list of tribal peoples being colonised by Western Imperial Powers. (Editor)

Capital are intimately linked, how one produces the other, how they mutually determine their parallel evolution.

VII. MONOPOLIES IN CONSTITUTIONAL ENGLAND – IN GERMANY – KINGS OF THE ERA

The economists who have recently studied the development of monopolies in various States made this remark that in England – not only in the eighteenth century, as we have just seen, but also in the nineteenth century – the creation of monopolies in *national industries* and also of these combinations between bosses to raise the prices of their products that we call *cartels* or *trusts* has not reached the extent it has recently taken in Germany.

However, this fact is explained not by the virtues of the political organisation of the English State – which is just as monopolist as the others – but, as these same economists point out, by the island location of England which allows the cheap import of goods (even bulky goods with low prices) and the free trade that results from it.

Furthermore, having conquered colonies as rich as India and having colonised (always thanks to its maritime location) territories like North America and Australia, the English State found such numerous and such immense opportunities in these countries to create monopolies of a colossal stature that it directed its principal activity there.

Without these two reasons, it would be the same in England as elsewhere.

In fact, Adam Smith had already pointed out that three bosses never meet without conspiring amongst themselves against their workers – and, obviously, also against consumers.¹ The ten-

¹ Given how often Adam Smith's name is used to bolster the position of those with economic power, it is useful to quote *The Wealth of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976): "The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little as possible. The former are disposed to combine in order to raise, the latter in order to lower the wages of labour [...] The masters, being fewer in number, can combine much more easily; and the law, besides, authorises, or at least does not prohibit their combinations, while it prohibits those of the workmen. [...] We rarely hear, it has been said, of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines, upon this account that masters rarely combine, is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and every where in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise the wages of labour above their actual rate [...] We seldom, indeed, hear of this combination, because it is the usual, and one may say, the natural state of things." (Volume I, 74–75) "People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices." (Volume I, 144) "Merchants and master manufacturers are [...] the two classes of people who commonly employ the largest capitals [...] The interest of the dealers, however, in any particular branch of trade or manufactures, is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public. To widen the market and to narrow the competition, is always the interest of the dealers. To widen the market may frequently be agreeable enough to the interest of the public; but to narrow the competition must always be against it, and can serve only to enable the dealers, by raising their profits above what they naturally would be, to levy, for their own benefit, an absurd tax upon the rest of their fellow-citizens. The proposal of any new law or regulation of commerce which comes from this order [...] comes from an order of men whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it." (Volume I, 278) These, and others like them, are the passages Kropotkin had in mind. (Editor)

dency to form combinations of bosses — *cartels* and *trusts* — has always existed and we find in Macrosty's book a number of facts that show how the bosses conspired against consumers.²

The English parliament, like all other governments, favoured these bosses' conspiracies; the law only struck agreements between workers, which it punished as conspiracies against the security of the State.

But there was, besides this, the free trade which was introduced in the forties [of the nineteenth century] and the low prices of imports by sea which quite often thwarted the conspiracies of the bosses. Being the first to create big industry at home which little feared foreign competition and demanded the free import of raw materials; having given at the same time two-thirds of its land to a handful of lords who drove the peasants off their estates; and thus forced to live on imported wheat, barley, oats and meat, England was *forced* to maintain free trade.³

But free trade also allowed the import of manufactured goods. And then — it has been ably recounted by Hermann Levy — each time a combination between bosses was formed to increase prices, either of sewing thread, or cement, or glassware, we imported these goods from abroad. Inferior for the most part in quality, they nevertheless competed when the inferior quality was not considered important. In this way the plans of the bosses who had devised a *cartel* or a kind of *trust* were frustrated. But — what struggles to maintain free trade which was by no means to the taste of the great landowning lords and their farmers.

However, starting around the years 1886–1895 the creation of large cartels or trusts of bosses monopolising certain industries began to occur in England as elsewhere. And the cause — we learn today — is that bosses' syndicates began to be organised *internationally* so as to include entrepreneurs of the same industries in the protectionist countries as well as those in England.⁴ In this way, the privilege established in Germany or in Russia in favour of German or Russian manufacturers spreads to the countries of free trade. The effect of these international syndicates is being felt everywhere. They contribute to a high degree to price increases. They raise not only — it must be noted — the prices of these specific goods targeted by the syndicate but *those of all goods*.

Need we add that these syndicates or *trusts* enjoy under a thousand relationships (banks, etc.) the high protection of the States whereas workers international unions are outlawed by these same governments. Thus the French government banned the International and the Belgian and German governments immediately deport the agitator from England encouraging the organisation of an international workers trade union. But we have never seen an agent of the *trusts* expelled from anywhere.⁵

² Presumably a reference to Henry Macrosty's book *The Trust Movement in British Industry: A Study of Business Organisation* (London: Longman, Green & Co.: 1907). (Editor)

³ We even import food for the little livestock we raise in England: oil-cakes, hay, various meal; and as for meat, English peasants only started eating beef and mutton when we started, in the sixties, to import meat from America, and later from Australia and New Zealand. Until then, meat was an unattainable luxury for the peasants.

⁴ These syndicates, which include in addition to English manufacturers, the main manufacturers of sewing thread, glass, cement, etc. in the protectionist nations prevent foreign competition from lowering prices in England. Previously, German or Russian manufacturers of these same products, after having sold a certain quantity of them at home at a high price (thanks to the customs tariff), could send a part to England once the main English manufacturers of these products had come to an agreement amongst themselves and had formed a syndicate to raise prices. Today, entering into an *international bosses syndicate*, the big German and Russian manufacturers commit not to do that.

⁵ Concerning this modern growth of international cartels, let me summarise what Mr. André Morizet has related in the *Guerre Sociale* [Social War] of 6 February 1912 on the international agreement that exists for the supply of

To return to the English parliament, it has never failed in the mission of all governments of ancient and modern States: that of promoting the exploitation of the poor by the rich. In the nineteenth century, as before, it never failed to create monopolies as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Thus Professor Levy, who wants to show how England is superior to Germany in this respect, nevertheless is forced to recognise that the English parliament did not fail to take advantage of any lack of opportunities for foreign import in order to foster monopolies.

Thus the monopoly of Newcastle coal merchants on the London market was assisted by the law until 1830 and the cartel of these merchants was broken only in 1844 during the strong Chartist agitation of the time. As recently as 1870–1880 these coalitions of shipping companies, the *Shipping rings* which we have heard so much about, were formed — fostered, it goes without saying, by the State.

But if there was only that! All that could be monopolised was monopolised by the English parliament.

As soon as we started to light the towns with gas, to bring pure water from afar, to channel the sewers, to build tramways, and finally, just recently, to install telephones, the English parliament never failed to set up these public

services as monopolies in favour of privileged companies. So that today, for example, people living in the towns of Kent and several other counties have to pay preposterous prices for water and it is impossible for them to bring and distribute the needed household water by themselves: parliament granted this privilege to companies. Elsewhere it is the gas, elsewhere the trams, and everywhere, until 1 January 1912, it was the monopoly on telephones.

The first telephones were introduced in England by several private companies. And the State, parliament, obviously hastened to grant them the monopoly to install telephones in such-and-such towns, such-and-such regions, for thirty-one years. Soon most of these companies were amalgamated into a single powerful national company and then it was a scandalous monopoly. With its master-lines and its “concessions,” the National Telephone Company charged English people five to ten times more for the telephone service than was paid elsewhere in Europe. And as the Company, armed with its monopoly, was making a *net profit of twenty-seven million* per year (official figures) on an annual expenditure of seventy-five million, it certainly did not press itself to increase the number of its stations, preferring to pay large dividends to its shareholders and to increase its reserve fund (having already reached more than one hundred million in fifteen years). This increased the “value” of this company and, consequently, the amount that the State would have to pay it to repurchase its privilege if it were forced to do so before the thirty-one years had passed. This situation had as a result that the private telephone, which had become so common on the continent, was in England only for the merchants and the rich. It was only

armour-plating. It originally contained ten participants, including Krupp, Schneider, Maxim, Carnegie, etc., divided into four groups: English, German, French and American. These ten participants made arrangements amongst themselves to distribute government orders without competing. The participant to which the order was entrusted tendered a certain agreed price and the other members of the cartel bid slightly higher prices. Furthermore there was a *pool* — a fund consisting of payments of so much percent on each order which was used to equalise the profits of the various orders. Since 1899, three more large companies were admitted to this cartel in order to avoid competition. We can understand the immense strength this syndicate has. Not only does it offer the means to plunder the coffers of the State and to realise immense profits but it has every interest in urging all States, large and small, to build battleships. That is why we see, at this moment, a real fever to build *Dreadnoughts* and *Super-Dreadnoughts*. Bankers, interested in this syndicate, ask no better than to lend the necessary money to States, whatever their public debts already are—“Long live the State!”

on 1 January 1912 that the telephone system of the monopolist Company was repurchased by the post and telegraph administration after having enriched the monopolists by several hundred millions.⁶

This is how we create an increasingly large and phenomenally wealthy bourgeoisie in a nation where half of the adult men wage-earners, more than four million men, earn *less* than thirty-four francs per week and more than three million — less than twenty-five francs. Now, thirty-four francs per week in England with the current prices of foodstuffs is hardly the *bare minimum* for a family of two adults and two children to live and pay [the rent on] their dwelling at the rate of five francs per week. The scrupulous studies of Professor Bowley and of [Benjamin] Rowntree in York, complemented by those of Chiozza Money, have fully established it.

If such was the creation of monopolies in a country of free trade, what to say about the protectionist countries where not only the competition of foreign products is rendered impossible but where the great iron industries, railway manufacturing, sugar, etc., always hard-pressed to find money, are continually subsidised by the State? Germany, France, Russia, the United States are the true breeding-grounds of monopolies and syndicates of bosses protected by the State. These organisations, very numerous and sometimes very powerful, have the potential to raise the prices of their products in appalling proportion.

Ores — almost all ores — metals, raw sugar and sugar refineries, ethanol for industry and a number of specialised industries (nails, pottery, etc.), tobacco, oil refining and so on — all this is formed into monopolies, cartels, or trusts — always thanks to the intervention of the State, and very often under its protection.

One of the best examples of this last kind is offered by the German sugar syndicates. The production of sugar being an industry subject to supervision by the State and to some extent in its management, 450 sugar refineries met under the patronage of the State to exploit the public. This exploitation lasted until the Brussels conference which limited a little the interested protection of the German and Russian governments in the sugar industry — to protect the English refiners.⁷

The same thing happens in Germany in several other industries, such as the brandy syndicate, the Westphalian coal syndicate, the protected syndicate of Steingut Fabriker pottery, the Union of manufacturers of nails made with German wire, etc., etc., without speaking of the shipping lines, the railways, the industries for war material and so on, nor of the monopolistic syndicates for the extraction of ores in Brazil, and so many others.

You can go to America — we find the same thing there. Not only in the times of colonisation and at the beginnings of modern industry but today still, every day, in every American town scan-

⁶ The National Telephone Company (NTC) was a British telephone company from 1881 until 1911 that brought together smaller local companies in the early years of the telephone. As it had become a monopoly, it was nationalised by the coalition Liberal and Labour government under the Telephone Transfer Act 1911 and taken over by the General Post Office (GPO) in 1912. It remained nationalised until it was re-privatised in 1984 (then called British Telecommunications). Perhaps needless to say, shares were priced lower than the market rate (by the end of the day it was floated on the stock-market, shares had risen by a third) meaning that the government had sold off public assets too cheaply and so giving investors millions in profits. (Editor)

⁷ A reference to the 1902 Brussels Sugar Convention. in which Britain and nine other nations attempted to stabilise world sugar prices by setting up a commission to investigate export bounties and decide on penalties. It created intergovernmental regulation of the sugar trade in the name of eliminating anti-competitive practices. Member States agreed to liberalise trade by levying countervailing duties against the state-subsidised beet sugar that has been responsible for a spiral of over-production. It is seen as one of the influences in modern multilateral trade agreements and institutions. (Editor)

alous monopolies are formed. Everywhere it is the same tendency to favour and to strengthen, under the protection of the State, the exploitation of the poor by the propertied and the crafty. Each new advance of civilisation brings new monopolies, new methods of exploitation fostered by the State in America as in the old States of Europe.

Aristocracy and democracy, placed within the framework of the State, act the same. Both, having come to power, are equally enemies of the simplest justice towards the producer of all wealth — the worker.⁸

And if it were only the vile exploitation to which entire populations are delivered by States to enrich a certain number of industrialists, companies or bankers! If it were only that! But the evil is infinitely deeper. It is that the big railway, steel, coal, oil, copper, etc. companies, the big banking companies and the big financiers become a formidable *political* power in all modern States. We only have to think of the way in which bankers and large financiers dominate governments in matters of war. Thus, we know that the personal sympathies for Germany, not only of Alexander II but also of Queen Victoria, influenced Russian politics and English politics in 1870 and contributed to the crushing of France. We then saw how much the personal sympathies of King Edward VII mattered in the Franco-English agreement.⁹ But there would be no exaggeration to say that predilections of the Rothschild family, the interests of the high bank in Paris and the Catholic bank of Rome are much more powerful than the predilections and interests of queens and kings. We know, for example, that the attitude of the United States towards Cuba and Spain depended much more on the monopolist senators in the sugar industry than on the sympathies of the American statesmen towards the Cuban insurgents.¹⁰

⁸ Delaisi gave an excellent example of a syndicate — that of Saint-Aubin — born under Louis XV which has always managed to prosper by seeking its shareholders in the high spheres of the rulers. Picking its shareholders and protectors firstly in the Court of the King, then in the imperial nobility of Napoleon I, then in the high aristocracy of the Restoration and finally in the republican bourgeoisie and changing its sphere of exploitation according to the times, this syndicate prospers still under the protection of the Legitimists, Bonapartists and Republicans associated for exploitation. The form of the State changes; but since its substance is the same the monopoly and the trust remain always there and the exploitation of the poor for the profit of the rich continues.

⁹ A reference to the *Entente Cordiale*, a series of agreements signed on 8 April 1904 between the United Kingdom and the French Third Republic. Beyond the immediate concerns of colonial expansion addressed by the agreement (such as granting freedom of action to the UK in Egypt and to France in Morocco), the agreement marked the end of almost a thousand years of intermittent conflict between the two States and their predecessors. It also strengthened both powers against various rivals (most obviously, Germany) and was invoked when war finally broke out in 1914. (Editor)

¹⁰ A reference to the Spanish–American War of 1898 when an internal explosion of the *USS Maine* in Havana harbor in Cuba led the United States to intervene in the Cuban War of Independence (1895–1898). After a short war, Spain was defeated and lost its empire. The U.S. annexed the former Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam, while in Cuba American forces did not allow armed rebels to enter the capital city of Santiago and left the old Spanish civil authorities in charge of the municipal offices. U.S. military occupation of Cuba lasted until 1902, while its new constitution saw the U.S. retain the right to intervene in Cuban affairs and to supervise its finances and foreign relations. During the occupation, Americans began taking over railroad, mine, sugar properties (for example, United Fruit moving into the Cuban sugar industry, buying 1,900,000 acres of land for about twenty cents an acre) and the American Tobacco Company arrived. By 1901, an estimated 80 percent (at least) of the export of Cuba's minerals were in American hands, mostly Bethlehem Steel (see chapter 12 of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* [Essex: Longman, 1996] for more details). (Editor)

VIII. WAR

Industrial Rivalries

As long ago as 1882, when England, Germany, Austria, and Romania, taking advantage of the isolation of France, leagued themselves against Russia and a terrible European war was about to break out, we showed in *Le Révolté* what were the real motives for rivalry between States and the wars that would result.¹

The cause of modern wars is always competition for markets and the right to exploit nations backward in industry. In Europe we no longer fight for the honour of kings. Armies are pitted against each other so that the revenues of Your Most Powerful Rothschild or Schneider, the Most Worshipful Company of Anzin or the most Holy Catholic Bank of Rome may remain unimpaired. Kings no longer count.

In fact, all wars waged in Europe during the last hundred and fifty years were wars for commercial interests, rights of exploitation.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century great industry and world commerce, supported by a navy and colonies in America (Canada) and Asia (in India), began to develop in France. Thereupon England, which had already crushed its competitors in Spain and Holland, anxious to keep for itself alone the monopoly of maritime commerce, of sea-power, and of a colonial empire, took advantage of the revolution in France to begin a whole series of wars against it. Since then it understood what [riches] the monopolised outlet for her growing industry would bring it.

Finding itself rich enough to pay for the armies of Prussia, Austria, and Russia, it waged during a quarter of a century a succession of terrible and disastrous wars against France. France had to bleed itself dry to sustain these wars; and only at this price was it able to uphold its right to remain a "great power." That is to say, it retained its right not to submit to all the conditions that the English monopolists wished to impose upon it to the advantage of their commerce. It retained its right to have a navy and military ports. Frustrated in its plans for expansion in North America (it had lost Canada) and in India (it had to abandon its colonies), it obtained in return permission to create a colonial empire in Africa — on condition that it did not touch Egypt — and to enrich its monopolists by pillaging the Arabs in Algeria.

Later on, in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was the turn of Germany. When serfdom was abolished as a consequence of the uprisings in 1848, and the abolition of communal

¹ The book references 1883 but the original article has 1882 ("La Guerre," *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 March 1912). In 1882 Kropotkin wrote the pamphlet *La Guerre* (Geneva: *Le Révolté*, 1882) which was later included in *Words of a Rebel* (1885). Moreover, in 1883 he was a prisoner in France and so did not contribute to the anarchist press until he was freed in 1886. So while he may be referring to an article published in *Le Révolté* written by another anarchist, it seems far more likely that this is a typographical error by the printer. As such, the date has been changed to 1882. (Editor)

property forced young peasants in mass to leave the country for the town, where they offered their “idle hands” at starvation wages to the entrepreneurs of industry — great industry began to flourish in various German States. German industrialists soon realised that if the people were given a good practical education they would quickly catch up with great industrial countries like France and England — on condition, needless to say, of procuring for Germany advantageous outlets beyond its frontiers. They knew what Proudhon had so well demonstrated:² that the industrialist can only succeed in substantially enriching himself if a large portion of his products is exported to countries where it can be sold at prices they could never obtain in the country of origin.

So in all the social strata of Germany, that of the exploited as well as of the exploiters, there was a passionate desire to unify Germany at any price: to build a powerful empire capable of supporting an immense army, a strong navy, and capable of conquering ports in the North Sea, in the Adriatic, and — one day — in Africa and the East — an empire which could dictate economic law in Europe.

For this [to succeed], it was evidently necessary to break the strength of France, which would have opposed it and which then had, or seemed to have, the power to prevent it.

Hence — the terrible war of 1870, with all its sad consequences for universal progress which we suffer from even today.

By this war and this victory over France, a German Empire, that dream of radicals, socialists and, in part, German conservatives since 1848, was at last constituted and soon made itself felt and its political power and its right to dictate the law in Europe recognised.

Germany, on entering a striking period of youthful activity, indeed quickly succeeded in increasing its industrial productivity by double, treble, tenfold and at this moment the German bourgeoisie covets new sources of enrichment throughout the plains of Poland, the steppes of Hungary, the plateaus of Africa, and especially around the railway line to Bagdad — in the rich valleys of Asia Minor which can provide German capitalists with a hardworking population to exploit under one of the most beautiful skies in the world; perhaps, one day, also Egypt.

Therefore, it is ports for export and especially military ports in the Mediterranean Adriatic and in the Adriatic of the Indian Ocean — the Persian Gulf — as well as on the African coast in Beira, and later in the Pacific Ocean, that these German colonial tycoons wish to conquer. Their faithful servant, the German Empire with its armies and battleships, is at their service.

But everywhere these new conquerors encountered a formidable rival, the English who bar their way.

Jealous of keeping its supremacy on the seas, jealous above all of holding its colonies for exploitation by its [own] monopolists; frightened by the success of German Empire’s colonial policy and the rapid development of its navy, England redoubled its efforts to have a fleet capable of definitely crushing the German fleet. It also looks everywhere for allies to weaken the military power of Germany on land. And when the English press sows alarm and terror by pretending to fear a German invasion, it knows very well that danger does not lie there. What it needs is the power to launch the regular army to where Germany, in accord with Turkey, might attack some colony of the British Empire (Egypt, for instance). And for that it must be able to retain at home a strong “territorial” army that can drown in blood, if necessary, any workers’ revolt. It

² Kropotkin is undoubtedly referring to Proudhon’s chapter on “Free Trade” in his 1846 work *System of Economic Contradictions*. Sadly, as with most of its second volume, this discussion has not been translated into English. (Editor)

is for this reason, predominantly, that military science is taught to young bourgeois, grouped in squads of “scouts.”³

The English bourgeoisie of today wants to act towards Germany as it twice acted towards Russia in order to halt, for fifty years or more, the development of that country’s sea-power: once in 1855, with the help of Turkey, France, and Piedmont; and again in 1904 by hurling Japan against the Russian fleet and against its military port in the Pacific.⁴

That is why for the past two years we have been living on the alert, expecting a colossal European war to break out at any time.

Besides, we must not forget that the industrial wave, in rolling from West to East, has also invaded Italy, Austria and Russia. And these States are in their turn asserting their “right” — the right of their monopolists to the feeding frenzy in Africa and Asia.

Russian brigandage in Persia, Italian brigandage against the desert Arabs around Tripoli, and French brigandage in Morocco are the consequences.

The *consortium* of brigands, at the service of the monopolists who govern Europe, has “allowed” France to seize Morocco, as it “allowed” England to seize Egypt. It has “allowed” Italy to seize a part of the Ottoman Empire to prevent it being seized by Germany, and it has allowed Russia to take Northern Persia so that England might seize a substantial strip of land on the shores of the Persian Gulf before the German railway reached it!

And for this the Italians disgracefully massacre harmless Arabs, the French massacre Moors, and the hired assassins of the Tsar hang Persian patriots who endeavour to regenerate their country by a little political liberty.

Zola was right to say: “What scoundrels respectable people are!”⁵

High Finance

All States, we said, as soon as great industry develops itself in the nation, are made to seek war. They are driven by their industrialists, and even by workers, to conquer new markets — new sources of easy riches.

But there is more. In every State there exists today a class — a clique, rather — infinitely more powerful even than entrepreneurs of industry and which, too, pushes for war. It is high finance, the big bankers, who intervene in international relations and who foment wars.

This is done today in a very simple manner.

³ The British Boy Scouts organised strike-breaking during the 1926 General Strike, for example. For further discussion of its imperialist and militarist origins, see Brain Morris, “The Truth about Baden-Powell and the Boy Scouts,” *Ecology and Anarchism: Essays and Reviews on Contemporary Thought* (Malvern Wells: Images Publishing Ltd, 1996). For its founder’s praise for fascism, see Christopher Hitchens, “Young Men in Shorts,” *The Atlantic Magazine*, June 2004. (Editor)

⁴ A reference to the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905), respectively. During the latter conflict, Kropotkin refused to take sides. See “La Guerre Russo-Japonaise,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 5th March 1904. (Editor)

⁵ The final words of Zola’s 1873 novel *Le Ventre de Paris*. This work has been translated at least three times under different titles: *Fat and Thin* (188), *Savage Paris* (1955) and *The Belly of Paris* (2007). (Editor)

Towards the end of the Middle Ages most of the major city-republics of Italy had ended up by getting into debt. When their period of decay had begun, owing to their wish to conquer rich markets in the East and the conquest of such markets bringing endless wars between the city-republics, these cities began to incur immense debts to their own guilds of big merchants.

The same phenomenon occurs today for States, with bankers' syndicates very willing to lend against a mortgage on their future income.

Naturally, it is mainly on the small States that this is practised. Bankers lend them money at seven, eight, ten percent, knowing that they can "realise" the loan only at seventy or eighty percent. So that, after deducting the "commissions" to banks and middlemen — which amount to ten to twenty and sometimes up to thirty percent — the State does not even receive three-quarters of the amount inscribed in its ledger.

On these amounts, swollen in this way, the indebted State must now pay both interest and depreciation. And when it does not do so at the appointed time, the bankers ask for nothing better than to add the arrears of interest and depreciation to the principal of the loan. The worse the finances of the debtor State grow, the more reckless the expenditure of its leaders — and the more willingly are new loans offered to it. Whereupon the bankers, setting themselves up as a "consortium" one day, lay hands on certain taxes, certain duties, certain railway lines.

This was how the big financiers ruined and later annexed Egypt by England. The more foolish the expenditure of the Khedive, the more they encouraged him. It was annexation by small doses.⁶

It is the same way that they ruined Turkey to take its provinces little by little. It was also the same thing, we are told, for Greece, that a group of financiers pushed for war against Turkey to seize part of defeated Greece's revenues.

And that is how Japan was exploited by high finance in England and the United States before and during its wars against China and Russia. As for China, for several years it has been partitioned by a syndicate representing the great banks of England, France, Germany and the United States. And since the Revolution in China,⁷ Russia and Japan demand to be allowed to join this syndicate. They want to profit by it to extend not only their spheres of exploitation but also their territories. The partitioning of China, prepared by bankers, is thus the order of the day.

In short, there is in the lending States a complete organisation in which rulers, bankers, promoters of companies,⁸ tycoons and all the shady gentlemen Zola has so well described in *L'Argent* lend a hand to exploit whole States.⁹

⁶ The term Khedive is a title equivalent to viceroy. It was first used by Muhammad Ali Pasha (1769–1849), vassal of the Ottoman Empire and governor of Egypt and Sudan. In 1882, a rebellion saw Egypt in the hands of nationalists opposed to European domination of the country, leading to a British naval bombardment of Alexandria and then to the landing of a British expeditionary force. British troops defeated the Egyptian Army, restoring the government of the Khedive and international controls which had been in place to streamline Egyptian financing. The first period of British rule (1882–1914) is often called the "veiled protectorate."

⁷ The Xinhai Revolution, also known as the Revolution of 1911, overthrew China's last imperial dynasty (the Qing dynasty) and established the Republic of China. It consisted of many revolts and uprisings and its success in 1912 marked the end of two thousand years of imperial rule. (Editor)

⁸ That is, someone who solicits people to invest money in a company or corporation (usually when it is being formed). (Editor)

⁹ Zola's *L'Argent* (*Money*) was published as a novel in 1891 and focuses on the financial world of the Second French Empire as embodied in the *Paris Bourse* (Stock Exchange). He aimed to show the terrible effects of speculation and fraud in company promotion on society as well as the impotency of contemporary regulation and laws. (Editor)

Where the naive believe they have discovered deep political reasons, or national hatreds, there are only plots hatched by the buccaneers of finance. They exploit everything: political and economic rivalries, national enmities, diplomatic traditions and religious conflicts.

In all the wars of the last quarter of a century we find the hand of high finance. The conquest of Egypt and the Transvaal, the annexation of Tripoli, the occupation of Morocco, the partition of Persia, the massacres in Manchuria, the massacres and international looting in China during the Boxer riots, the wars of Japan — everywhere we find great banks. Everywhere high finance has had a decisive voice. And if up till now a great European war has not yet broken out, it is because high finance hesitates. It does not quite know which way the scales will fall for the millions that will be brought into play: it does not know on which horse to put their millions.

As for the hundreds of thousands of human lives that war would cost — what has finance to do with them? The mind of the financier reasons with columns of figures which balance each other. The rest is not his domain: he does not even possess the imagination to bring human lives into his calculations.

What a despicable world would be unveiled if only somebody took the trouble to study high finance behind the scenes! We can guess it sufficiently, if only from the small corner of the veil lifted by “Lysis” in his articles in *La Revue* (published in 1908 in a volume entitled *Contre l’Oligarchie Financière en France* [*Against the Financial Oligarchy in France* (Paris: Bureaux de “La Revue,” 1908)]).

From this work we can, in fact, see how four or five big banks — Crédit Lyonnais, Société Générale, Comptoir National d’Escompte, and Crédit Industriel et Commercial — have a monopoly of large financial operations in France.

The bulk — nearly eight-tenths — of French savings, amounting every year to about two thousand million [of francs], is poured into these great banks; and when foreign States, great and small, railway companies, towns, industrial companies from the five parts of the globe present themselves in Paris to secure a loan, they address themselves to these four or five great banking companies. These banks have a monopoly on foreign loans and have at their disposal the necessary machinery to boost them.

It is evident that it was not the skill of the directors of these banks that created their lucrative position. It was *the State*, the French Government in the first place, that protected and favoured these banks and created for them a privileged position, which soon became a monopoly. And then the other States, the borrowing States, strengthened this monopoly. Thus Crédit Lyonnais, which monopolises Russian loans, owes this privileged position to the financial agents of the Russian government and to the Tsar’s finance ministers.

The business transacted by these four or five companies amounts to thousands of millions. Thus, in two years, 1906 and 1907, they distributed in various loans seven and a half thousand million — 7,500 million, including 5,500 million in foreign loans (“Lysis,” p. 101). And when we learn that the “commission” of these companies for organising a foreign loan is five per cent for the “syndicate of middle-men [*apporteurs*]” (those who “arrange” new loans), five per cent. for the underwriting syndicate, and from seven to ten per cent for the syndicate, or rather trust, of the four or five banks we have just named, we see what immense sums go to these monopolists.

Thus, a single middle-man who “arranged” the loan of 1,250 million contracted by the Russian government in 1906 to crush the revolution thereby received — “Lysis” tells us — a commission of twelve million!

We can therefore understand the secret influence on international politics exercised by the big directors of these financial companies, with their mysterious accounts and with the plenary powers that certain directors exact and obtain from their shareholders — because they must be discreet when paying twelve million to Monsieur So-and-So, 250,000 francs to a certain minister, and so many millions, as well as awards, to the press! There is not, says “Lysis,” a single major newspaper in France that is not paid by the banks. This is understandable. We can easily guess how much money it was necessary to distribute to the press when a series of Russian loans (State, railway, land bank loans) were being prepared during the years 1906 and 1907. How many pen-pushers [*plumitifs*] waxed fat on the loans can be seen from the book by “Lysis.” What a windfall, in fact! The government of a great State beleaguered! A revolution to crush! This does not happen every day!

Well, everybody is more or less aware of that. There is not a single politician who does not know the ins-and-outs of all this jiggery-pokery, and who does not hear mentioned the names of the women and men who “received” large sums after each loan, great or small, Russian or Brazilian.

And everyone, if he has only the slightest knowledge of business, also knows very well how all this organisation of high finance is a product of the State — *an essential attribute of the State*.

And it would be this State — the State which is so careful not to diminish its powers or reduce its functions — which in the mind of statist reformers should become the instrument for the emancipation of the masses?! What nonsense!

Whether it is stupidity, ignorance, or deceit which makes them assert this, it is equally unpardonable in people who believe themselves called to direct the fate of nations.

IX. WAR AND INDUSTRY

Let us now go a little deeper and see how the State has created a whole class of men in modern industry directly interested in turning nations into military camps, ready to hurl themselves at one another.

There are now, indeed, immense industries that employ millions of men and which exist for the sole purpose of producing war material: which makes the owners of these factories and their financial backers have every interest to prepare for war and to fan the fear that wars are always ready to break out.

It is not a matter of the small fry — the manufacturers of low-quality firearms, shoddy swords, and revolvers that always misfire, as we have in Birmingham, Liège, etc. These barely matter, although the trade in these weapons, carried on by exporters who speculate in “colonial” wars, has already attained some importance. So we know that English merchants supplied weapons to the Matabele when they were preparing to rise against the English, who were imposing serfdom upon them.¹ Later on, French manufacturers, and even well-known English manufacturers, made fortunes by sending firearms, cannons, and ammunition to the Boers. And even now they talk of quantities of weapons imported by English merchants into Arabia — which will cause tribal uprisings, the plunder of a few merchants and English intervention, to “restore order” and make some new “annexation.”

Besides, these little facts no longer count. It is well known what bourgeois “patriotism” is worth and far more serious events have been witnessed recently. Thus, during the last war between Russia and Japan, English gold was supplied to the Japanese so that they might destroy Russia’s emerging sea-power in the Pacific Ocean, which England had taken umbrage to. But at the same time the English coal companies sold 300,000 tons of coal at a very high price to Russia to enable it to send Rojdestvinsky’s fleet to the East. Two birds were killed with one stone: the coal companies in Wales made a great deal of money and the financiers of Lombard Street (the centre of financial operations in London) placed their money at nine or ten percent in the Japanese loan, and mortgaged a substantial part of the income of their “dear allies”!

These are but only a few facts amongst thousands of others of the same kind. We would learn fine things about all this world of our rulers if the bourgeoisie did not know how to keep their secrets! So let us move on to another category of facts.

¹ In 1891 the British government granted a royal charter to the British South Africa Company (BSAC) over Matabeleland and Mashonaland (in modern Zimbabwe), so becoming British protectorates and ruled by the company. This led to mass colonisation with the British controlling labour as well as mineral resources. The First Matabele War (1893–1894) pitted the BSAC against the Ndebele Kingdom. While the Ndebele did have riflemen alongside spearmen, they were no match for the company’s Maxim machine guns which, according to one eyewitness, “mow[ed] them down literally like grass.” Defeat led to increased colonisation with the company officially naming the land Rhodesia — after its founder and head, Cecil Rhodes — in 1895. The Second Matabele War or Matabeleland Rebellion (1896–1897) saw the Ndebele unsuccessfully revolt against the authority of the BSAC. The company ruled until the 1920s. (Editor)

We know that all the great States have favoured, alongside their [own] arsenals, the creation of huge private factories that manufacture cannons, battleships, warships of smaller size, shells, gunpowder, cartridges, etc. Immense amounts are spent by all States to obtain these auxiliary factories, where the most skilled workers and engineers are concentrated.

Now, it is obvious that it is in the direct interest of the capitalists who have invested their capital in these enterprises to constantly maintain rumours of war, to incessantly press [the need] for armaments, to sow panic if need be. Indeed, that is what they do.

And if the chances of a European war sometimes grow less, if the gentlemen of the government — though themselves interested as shareholders in the great factories of this kind (Anzin, Krupp, Armstrong, etc.) as well as the great railway companies, coal mines, etc. — if the rulers sometimes require coaxing in order to make them sound the war-trumpet, they are compelled to do so by chauvinistic opinion fabricated by newspapers, or even by fermenting insurrections [to justify invention and annexation].

Indeed, is there not that prostitute — the big press — to prepare minds for new wars, to hasten those that are likely [to break out] or, at least, force governments to double, to treble their armaments? Thus, did we not see in England, during the ten years preceding the Boer War, the big press, and especially its assistants in the illustrated press, skilfully prepare minds for the necessity of a war “to arouse patriotism”? To this end no stone was left unturned. With much bluster they published novels about the next war in which we were told how the English, beaten at first, made a supreme effort and ended by destroying the German fleet and establishing themselves in Rotterdam. A lord spent a great deal of money to stage a patriotic play across England. It was too stupid to break even but it was necessary for those gentlemen who intrigued with Rhodes in Africa in order to seize the Transvaal gold fields and force the blacks to work in them.

Forgetting everything, they even went so far as to revive the cult — yes, *cult* — of England’s sworn enemy, Napoleon I. And since then work in this direction has never ceased. In 1905 they almost succeeded in driving France, governed at that time by Clemenceau and Delcassé, into a war against Germany — the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Conservative Government, Lord Lansdowne, having promised to support the French armies by sending an English army corps to the continent! Delcassé, attaching undue importance to this ridiculous proposal, very nearly launched France into a disastrous war.

In general, the more we advance with our statist bourgeois civilisation, the more the press, ceasing to be the expression of what is called public opinion, applies itself to manufacturing that opinion by the most infamous means. The press, in all great States, is already [just] two or three syndicates of financial tycoons; which manufacture the opinion needed in the interests of their businesses. The big newspapers belong to them and the rest are of no account.

But this is not all: the gangrene goes even deeper.

Modern wars are no longer just the massacre of hundreds of thousands of men in every battle — a massacre which those who have not followed the details of the great battles during the war in Manchuria and the horrific details of the siege and defence of Port Arthur have absolutely no idea. And yet the three great historical battles — Gravelotte, Potomac, Borodino (Moscow) —

which lasted three days each and in which ninety to hundred and ten thousand men were killed and wounded on both sides, these were child's play in comparison to modern warfare!²

Great battles are now fought on a front of fifty, sixty kilometres; they last not three days, but seven days (Liaoyang), ten days (Mukden);³ and the losses are one hundred, one hundred and fifty thousand men on each side.

The devastation caused by shells fired with precision from a distance of five, six, seven kilometres by batteries placed in a position which cannot be discovered [by the enemy] as they use smokeless powder is unimaginable. It is no longer chance. The key positions occupied by the enemy are divided on a map into squares and the fire from all the batteries is concentrated on each square successively in order to destroy everything that is there.

When the fire from several hundred cannons is concentrated on a square kilometre, as is done today, there is no area of ten square metres that has not been struck by a shell, not a bush that has not been cut down by the howling monsters sent from nobody knows where. Seven or eight days of this terrible fire drives the soldiers to madness; and when the attacking columns — after having been repelled eight to ten times, but gaining a few more metres every time — finally reach the enemy's trenches, a hand-to-hand struggle begins. After throwing hand-grenades and pieces of pyroxyline at each other (two pieces of pyroxyline tied together with a string were used by the Japanese as a sling⁴), Russian and Japanese soldiers rolled in the trenches of Port Arthur like wild beasts, striking each other with their rifle-butts, knives, tearing each other's flesh with their teeth...

The western workers still have no idea about this terrible return to the most dreadful savagery that is modern warfare, and the bourgeois who do know are careful not to tell them.

But modern wars are not just the slaughter, the madness of massacre, the return to savagery. They are also the destruction of human labour on a colossal scale; and we continually feel the effect of this destruction *in time of peace* by an increase in the misery amongst the poor, parallel to the enrichment of the wealthy.

Every war is the destruction of a formidable [amount of] material, which includes not only the war material itself but also things most necessary for everyday life, to society as a whole: bread, meat, vegetables, foodstuffs of all kind, draught animals, leather, coal, metal, clothing. All this represents the useful work of millions of men over decades; and all this will be wasted, burnt or scrapped in a few months. But that is already wasted even now, in anticipation of war.

And as this war material, these metals, these provisions must be prepared beforehand, the mere possibility of a new war in the near future brings about in all our industries shocks and crises that affect us all. You, me, we all feel the effects in every detail of our life. The bread we eat, the coal we burn, the railway ticket we buy, the price of everything depends on the rumours spread by speculators, on the likelihood of war [breaking out] in the near future.

² The Battle of Gravelotte on 18 August 1870 was the largest battle during the Franco-Prussian War; there were numerous battles during the American Civil War (1861–1865) in and around the Potomac River and its tributaries; The Battle of Borodino (near Moscow) was fought on 7 September 1812 during the French invasion of Russia. (Editor)

³ Two major land battles of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905. (Editor)

⁴ A highly flammable nitrocellulose (a pulpy or cotton-like polymer derived from cellulose treated with nitric and sulphuric acids) used in making plastics, lacquers and explosives. (Editor)

Industrial crises due to expectations of war

The necessity for preparing in advance a formidable [amount of] war material and a mass of provisions of every kind, necessarily produces in all industries shocks and crises from which everyone, and especially workers, suffers to a terrible extent. Indeed, this was seen quite recently in the United States.

Everyone, no doubt, remembers the terrible industrial crisis that ravaged the United States during the past three or four years. In part, it is still continuing. Well, the origin of this crisis — whatever may have been said by “learned” economists who know the writings of their predecessors but ignore real life — the true origin of this crisis lay in the excessive production of the main industries which was carried on for several years in anticipation of a great war in Europe and also war between the United States and Japan. Those who pushed [the idea of] these wars knew very well the effect these predictions would have on American industries. For two or three years, indeed, there was a feverish activity in metal production, coal mining and the manufacturing of railway equipment, material for clothing, preserved foodstuffs.

The extraction of iron ore and manufacture of steel in the United States reached quite unexpected proportions during those years. It is above all steel that is consumed during modern wars and the United States produced it in fantastic amounts, as well as metals, such as nickel and manganese, required to manufacture the kinds of steel needed for war materials. It was in the supplies of iron, copper, lead and nickel that there was most speculation.

It was the same with supplies of wheat, preserved meat, fish and vegetables. Cottons, cloth and leather followed closely. And since every great industry gives rise to a number of smaller ones around it, the fever for production far in excess of the demand spread more and more. The lenders of money (or rather credit) who fuelled this production, profited by this fever — this goes without saying — even more than the chiefs of industry.

And then, at a stroke, production suddenly stopped without anyone being able to appeal to a single one of the causes which preceding crises had been attributed to. The truth is that from the day when European high finance was sure that Japan, ruined by the war in Manchuria, would not dare to attack the United States and that none of the European nations felt sufficiently sure of victory to unsheathe the sword, European capitalists refused [to provide] new credit to the American money-lenders who fuelled over-production as well as to the Japanese “nationalists.”

“No more war in the short term!” — and steel mills, copper mines, blast furnaces, shipyards, tanneries, speculators on commodities, all suddenly reduced their operations, their orders, their purchases.

It was then worse than a crisis: it was a disaster! Millions of working men and women were thrown onto the street in the most abject misery. Great and small factories closed, the contagion spread like an epidemic, sowing terror all around.

No one can describe the sufferings of millions (men, women and children), the broken lives, during this crisis while immense fortunes were being made in anticipation of the mangled flesh and piles of human corpses about to be heaped up in the great battles!

That is war; that is how the State enriches the wealthy, keeps the poor in misery and year by year makes them more enslaved to the rich.

Now a crisis similar to that in the United States will in all likelihood occur in Europe, and especially in England, as a result of the same causes.

Everybody was astonished around the middle of 1911 by the sudden and completely unexpected increase in English exports. Nothing in the economic world predicted it. No explanation has been given for it — precisely because the only possible explanation is that immense orders came from the continent in anticipation of a war between England and Germany. As we know, this war failed to break out in July 1911 but if it had started, France and Russia, Austria and Italy would have been forced to take part.

It is evident that the great financiers, who fuelled by their credit the speculators in metals, foodstuffs, cloth, leather, etc., had been warned of the threatening turn in the relations between the two maritime rivals. They knew how both governments were accelerating their military preparations and they hastened to make orders which increased English exports in 1911 beyond measure.⁵

But it is also to the same cause that we owe this recent extraordinary rise in prices of all foodstuffs without exception, although neither the yield of last year's harvest nor the quantities of all kinds of goods accumulation in warehouses justified this increase. The fact is, moreover, that the rise in prices affected *all* goods not just provisions and demand continued to grow whilst nothing explained this exaggerated demand apart from the expectations of war.

And now it will suffice for the great colonial speculators of England and Germany to come to an arrangement concerning their share in the partition of East Africa and that they agree on "the spheres of influence" in Asia and in Africa — that is to say, on the next conquests — for the same sudden stoppage of industries that the United States suffered to occur in Europe.

In fact, this stoppage was already starting to be felt at the beginning of 1912. That is why in England the coal companies and "the Cotton Lords" proved so intransigent towards their workers and drove them to strike. They expected a reduction of orders, they already had too many goods in [their] inventories, too much coal piled up around their mines.

When we closely analyse these facts of the activity of modern States, we understand the extent to which the whole life of our civilised societies depends — not on the facts of economic development in nations but on *the way in which various circles of privileged people, more or less favoured by the State, react to these facts.*

Thus it is evident that the entry into the economic arena of such a powerful producer as modern Germany, with its schools, its technical education widely spread amongst its people, its youthful spirit, and the organisational capacities of its people, changed relations between nations. A new adjustment of forces had to happen. But, given the specific organisation of modern States, the adjustment of *economic* forces is hindered by another factor of *political* origin: the privileges, the monopolies formed and maintained by the State.

⁵ Some figures will better indicate these shocks. Between 1900 and 1904 English exports were normal. For products of English origin, they stood at between seven and seven-and-a-half thousand million francs. In 1904 they began to talk of a great war; the United States pushed its production, and English exports rose in four years from 7,525 to 10,650 million. This lasted two years. But the much-desired war did not come and there was a sudden halt: the crisis of which we have spoken broke out in the United States, and exports of English produce fell to 9,495 million. However, 1910 arrived and the predictions of a great European war were set to come true. And in 1911 English exports rose to an absolutely unexpected height which they had never even remotely approached before and which nobody could explain. They were 11,350 million! Coal, steel, good fast ships, battleships, cartridges, cloth, linen, footwear — everything was in demanded, exported in bulk. Fortunes were visibly amassed. We are going to slaughter each other — what a godsend!

Fundamentally, in modern States — specifically formed to establish privileges in favour of the rich at the expense of the poor — it is always high finance which lays down the law in all political considerations. “What will Baron Rothschild say?” or else “What will the syndicate of great bankers in Paris, in Vienna, in London say?” has become the dominant element in political issues and relations between nations. It is the approval or disapproval of finance that makes and breaks ministries across Europe (in England there is also the approval of the official Church and of the brewers to consider; but the Church and the brewers are always in agreement with high finance, which is careful not to touch their income). And — as a Minister is after all a man who values his office, its power, and the opportunities of enrichment they offer him — it follows that questions of international relations are today reduced in the final analysis to knowing whether the favoured monopolists of a particular State will take this or that attitude towards the favourites of the same calibre in another State.

Thus, the state of [*economic*] forces involved is given by the technical development of the various nations at a certain point in history. But the use which will be made of these forces depends entirely on the level of subservience to their government and the statist form of organisation to which people have let themselves be reduced to. The forces which could have provided harmony, well-being, and a new flowering of a libertarian civilisation if they had free play in society — *when implemented within the framework of the State*, that is to say, an organisation specifically developed to enrich the wealthy and to absorb all advances for the benefit of the privileged classes — these same forces become an instrument of oppression, privilege and endless wars. They accelerate the enrichment of the privileged, they increase the misery and subjugation of the poor.

This is why economists who continue to consider economic forces alone, without analysing the statist framework within which they operate today, without taking into account statist ideology, nor the forces that each State necessarily places at the service of the wealthy in order to enrich them at the expense of the poor — this is why these economists remain completely outside the realities of the economic and social world.

X. THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STATE

We have briefly reviewed some of the essential functions of the State, its legislation on property, taxes, the formation of monopolies and finally defence — in other words, the right of war.

And we noticed this fact, significant to the highest degree, that in each of these functions the State always pursued, and still pursues, the same goal: to deliver the mass of the population it controls to groups of exploiters, to ensure to them the right of exploitation, to extend it. It is with this aim that the State was formed — it is what makes up its essential mission to the present.

The legislation of States on the right of ownership has never had, anywhere, the aim to ensure to each the fruits of his labour as academic science on Law proclaims. On the contrary, the State law has always aimed, it still does, to *dispossess* the great mass of the nation of a large part of the fruits of its labour, to the advantage of a privileged few. To keep the masses in a state close to poverty and to deliver them: in antiquity — to the lord and the priesthood, during the Middle Ages — to the lord, the priest and the merchant, and today — to the industrial and financial entrepreneur in addition to the previous three: such was the essential function of all States, theocratic, oligarchic or democratic.

Tax, as we have seen, is an instrument of a formidable power that the State wields to this end. This instrument allows the rulers to continue the expropriation of the poor in favour of the rich — the perfected expropriation which, without it being any less efficient, is not obvious. It allows them to artificially maintain poverty despite the immense growth in the productivity of human labour—without resorting for that [task] to the brutal forms of direct appropriation which were used in the past. What the feudal lord did, when he was extorting his serfs under the protection of the State, the State does now under an “acceptable” form by means of tax — but always in favour of some rich person, and by also sharing a part of the loot between the rich and its numerous functionaries.

We then saw how the State wields and still wields industrial, commercial and financial monopoly; and how it allows groups of entrepreneurs and business tycoons to quickly accumulate immense fortunes, by appropriating the product of the labour of the subjects of the State. And we showed how it is that all the new sources of enrichment offered to civilised nations, either as a consequence of technical and scientific progress or by the conquest of industrially backward countries, find themselves monopolised by a small minority of privileged people. This allows the State to enrich its coffers and to always extend its remits and power.

Finally, we saw what a terrible weapon to perpetuate social inequalities, monopolies and privileges of all sorts represents this other remit of the State: the maintaining of armies and the right of war. Under cover of patriotism, defence of the homeland, the State uses the army and wars for the same goal. Throughout history, since antiquity to the present day, conquests were always conducted to deliver new populations to be exploited by classes favoured by the State. It is the

same today: every war is waged to profit bankers, speculators, and the privileged. And in peacetime, the fabulous sums allocated to armaments, as well as loans by States, allow the rulers to create immense fortunes and new exploiters, chosen [from] amongst their favourites.

In this deep-rooted tendency to enrich some groups of citizens at the expense of the labour and sacrifices of the entire nation resides the very essence of this form of centralised political organisation which is called State and which only developed in Europe, amongst the peoples which had demolished the Roman Empire, after the period of the free cities — that is to say, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Note well that this is not in any way about what is called “abuse of power,” such as the atrocities continuously committed by all governments towards their subjects or conquered nations, as soon as it is a question of protecting people of the privileged class. We are not talking for the moment of the banditry of functionaries, the illegal extortions carried out by all rulers, the insults and suffering they lavish on the governed, nor the national hatred that they spread and uphold. In this respect, it suffices to note that “power” and “abuse of power” necessarily go hand in hand, and that functionaries have inevitably established a solidarity [amongst themselves] which allows them to forget what they like to call “the sad necessities of the exercise of power.”

Therefore we do not stop at these “sad necessities.” We restrict ourselves to considering the very essence of the organisation which was formed on several occasions in human societies and which, each time that it was reborn, always carried the same characteristic of mutual insurance between the church, the soldier and the lord, to live at the expense of the labour of the masses. Modern times only offer this difference: the wealthy commercial bourgeois, industrialists and moneylenders, and a horde of functionaries came to join the preceding trinity.

It is in the interest of the privileged — not of the nation — that the State took the land away from the peasants to give to groups of monopolisers, and that it drove a good part of the farmers away from the villages. And, that once masses of out of work proletarians started to accumulate in the cities, State legislation delivered these hungry proletarians to the favourites of royalty, to the industrial bourgeois, and later to moneylenders, to business tycoons, to big finance. All this teeming mass was put at the service of the government’s minions.

Later, when the privileged classes, who had developed with great skill and wisdom this political form — the State — began to notice that the exploited masses were trying to throw off the yoke, they knew how to find a new way to broaden the basis of their exploitation. Conquest had been, since the beginning of time, a means of enrichment not for the conquering nations (to those was given “the glory”), but for the ruling classes of these *nations* — just think about the riches delivered by Napoleon I to his generals and to his “military nobility!” Also, when technical discoveries and advances in navigation allowed States to maintain big standing armies and a powerful navy—the ruling classes knew how to use this navy and these armies to conquer “colonies.” It is in this way that Dutch, English, French, Belgian, German and even Russian bourgeoisies applied themselves in turn to the conquest of industrially backward nations — which now leads to the partition of Africa and Asia between them.

These States, that is to say, these bourgeoisies — because the workers gain nothing, except a few crumbs fallen from the table of the rich — these bourgeoisies thus end up becoming simultaneously masters and exploiters of vast populations, in addition to their “dear” fellow countrymen. As for the workers, they are won over in turn by promises of easy prey made by their masters. In the meantime they ask for customs “protection” against foreign competition and, duly prepared

by a criminal press in the pay of capitalists, they are ready to pounce on their neighbours to fight over the pickings, instead of rebelling against their compatriot exploiters and their all powerful weapon, the State.

XI. CAN THE STATE BE USED FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF THE WORKERS?

That is what ancient and modern history shows us. And yet, following an error of judgment which truly becomes tragic, while the State that provides the most terrible weapons to impoverish the peasant and the worker and to enrich by their labour the lord, the priest, the bourgeois, the financier and all the privileged gangsters of the rulers — it is to this same State, to the bourgeois State, to the exploiter State and guardian of the exploiters — that radical democrats and socialists ask to protect them against the monopolist exploiters! And when we say that it is the abolition of the State that we have to aim for, we are told: “Let us first abolish classes, and when this has been done, then we can place the State into a museum of antiquities, together with the stone axe and the spindle!”¹

By this quip they evaded, in the fifties of the last century, the discussion that Proudhon called for on the necessity of abolishing the State institution and the means of achieving this. And it is still being repeated today. “Let us seize power in the State” — the current bourgeois State, of course — “and then we will make the social revolution” — such is the slogan today.²

Proudhon’s idea had been to invite the workers to pose this question: “How could society organise itself without resorting to the State institution, developed during the darkest times of humanity to keep the masses in economic and intellectual poverty and to exploit their labour?” And he was answered with a paradox, a sophism.

Indeed, how can we talk about abolishing classes without touching the institution which was the instrument for establishing them and which remains the instrument which perpetuates them?

¹ A reference to the famous 1884 work by Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, which argues: “The state, then, has not existed from eternity. There have been societies that managed without it, that had no idea of the state and state authority. At a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily bound up with the split of society into classes, the state became a necessity owing to this split. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes not only will have ceased to be a necessity, but will become a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage. Along with them the state will inevitably fall. Society, which will reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole machinery of state where it will then belong: into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 26 [London: Lawrence & Wishat, 1990], 272). (Editor)

² A reference to, for example, Engels’s arguments from 1883 that while he and Marx saw the State’s “gradual dissolution and ultimate disappearance,” the proletariat “will first have to possess itself of the organised political force of the State and with its aid stamp out the resistance of the Capitalist class and re-organise society.” The anarchists “reverse the matter” by advocating revolution “has to begin by abolishing the political organisation of the State.” For Marxists “the only organisation the victorious working class finds ready-made for use, is that of the State. It may require adaptation to the new functions. But to destroy that at such a moment, would be to destroy the only organism by means of which the working class can exert its newly conquered power” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 47 [London: Lawrence & Wishat, 1993], 10). (Editor)

But instead of going deeper into this question — *the* question placed before us by all modern evolution — what do we do?

Is not the first question that the social reformer should ask himself this one: “The State, which was developed in the history of civilisations to give a legal character to the exploitation of the masses by the privileged classes, *can* it be the instrument of their liberation?” Furthermore, are not other groupings than the State already emerging in the evolution of modern societies — groups which can bring to society co-ordination, harmony of individual efforts and become the instrument of the liberation of the masses, without resorting to the submission of all to the pyramidal hierarchy of the State? The commune, for example, groupings by trades and by professions in addition to groupings by neighbourhoods and sections, which preceded the State in the free cities [of the Middle Ages]; the thousand societies that spring up today for the satisfaction of a thousand social needs: the federative principle that we see applied in modern groupings — do not these forms of organisation of society offer a field of activity which promises much more for our goals of emancipation than the efforts expended to make the State and its centralisation even more powerful than they already are?

Is this not the essential question that the social reformer should ask before choosing his course of action?

Well, instead of going deeper into this question, the democrats, radicals, as well as socialists, only know, only want one thing, the State! Not the future State, “the people’s State” of their dreams of yesteryear, but well and truly the current bourgeois State, the State nothing more and nothing less. This must seize, they say, all the life of society: economic, educational, intellectual activities and organising: industry, exchange, instruction, jurisdiction, administration — *everything* that fills our social life!

To workers who want their emancipation, they say: “Just let us worm ourselves into the powers of the current political form, developed by the nobles, the bourgeois, the capitalists to exploit you!” They say that, while we know very well by all the teachings of history that a new economic form of society has never been able to develop without a new political form being developed at the same time, developed by those who were seeking their emancipation.

Serfdom — and absolute royalty; corporative organisation — and the free cities, the republics of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries; merchant domination — and these same republics under the *podestas* and the *condottieri*;³ imperialism — and the military States of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the reign of the bourgeoisie — and representative government, are not all these forms going hand in hand striking evidence [of this]?

In order to develop itself as it has developed today and to maintain its power, despite all the progress of science and the democratic spirit, the bourgeoisie developed with much shrewdness representative government during the course of the nineteenth century.

And the spokespersons of the modern proletariat are so timid that they do not even dare to tackle the problem raised by the 1848 revolution— the problem of knowing what new political form the modern proletariat must and can develop to achieve its emancipation? How will it seek to organise the two essential functions of any society: the social production of everything necessary to live and the social consumption of these products? How will it guarantee to everyone,

³ *Podesta* were high officials (usually chief magistrate of a city state) in many Italian cities beginning in the later Middle Ages; *Condottieri* were the leaders of the professional military free companies (or mercenaries) contracted by the Italian city-states and the Papacy from the late Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance. (Editor)

not in words but in reality, the entire product of his labour by guaranteeing him *well-being* in exchange for his work? What form will “the organisation of labour” take as it cannot be accomplished by the State and must be the work of the workers themselves?

That is what the French proletariat, educated in the past by 1793 and 1848, asked their intellectual leaders.

But did they [their leaders] know how to answer them? They only knew how to keep on repeating this old formula, which said nothing, which evaded the answer: “Seize power in the bourgeois State, use this power to widen the functions of the modern State — and the problem of your emancipation will be solved!”

Once again the proletariat received lead instead of bread! This time from those to whom it had given its trust — and its blood!

To ask an institution which represents a historical growth that it serves to destroy the privileges that it strove to develop is to acknowledge you are incapable of understanding what a historical growth is in the life of societies. It is to ignore this general rule of all organic nature, that new functions require new organs, and that they need to develop them themselves. It is to acknowledge that you are too lazy and too timid in spirit to think in a new direction, imposed by a new evolution.

The whole of history is there to prove this truth, that each time that new social strata started to demonstrate an activity and an intelligence which met their own needs, each time that they attempted to display a creative force in the domain of an economic production which furthered their interests and those of society in general — *they knew how to find new forms of political organisation*; and these new political forms allowed the new strata to imprint their individuality on the era they were inaugurating. Can a *social* revolution be an exception to the rule? Can it do without this creative activity?

Thus the revolt of the communes in the twelfth century (in the eleventh century in Italy) and the abolition of serfdom in these communes which freed themselves from the bishop, the feudal baron, and the king mark the advent in history of a new class. And this class — as we saw in our previous study — while working towards its emancipation, soon created a whole new civilisation at the same time as the institutions which allowed it to develop.

The artisan takes the place of the villein.⁴ He becomes a free man and, under the protection of the walls of his commune, he gives an invigorating impetus to the technical “arts” and science which soon, with Galileo, opens a new era for the emancipated human spirit. Helped by thinkers and artists who were only too pleased to display their intellectuality in the new paths of intellectual freedom, man rediscovers the exact sciences and the philosophy of Ancient Greece, forgotten in the darkness of the Roman Empire and of the barbarian era which finished the work of breaking up this Empire. It creates the magnificent architecture that we do not know how to equal; it discovers the means and acquires the necessary audacity to develop distant navigation. It opens the Renaissance era, with its humanist programme.

Well, could our ancestors ever have accomplished all these wonders if they had timidly clung to the institutions that existed in Europe from the fifth to the twelfth century? Remnants of Caesarist forms from the Roman Empire, mixed with theocratic forms imported from the East, these

⁴ A villein in the feudal era denoted a peasant (tenant farmer) who was legally tied to a lord of the manor. A villein could not leave the land without the landowner’s consent. In the medieval social hierarchy, villeins were below a free peasant (or “freeman”) and above a slave. The majority of medieval European peasants were villeins. (Editor)

dying institutions from a slave past choked the invigorating federative and respectful of individuality spirit that the so-called Scandinavian, Gaul, Saxon and Slavic “barbarians” had brought with them. Was it to this rottenness that the man who was trying to emancipate himself had to cling to, like the spokespersons of the working masses do today?⁵

Obviously not! — Likewise the citizens of the liberated cities immediately tried, from the first day, to create by their “conspiracies,” that is to say by their mutual oaths, new institutions within their fortified cities. It is to the parish, recognised as an independent unit, *sovereign*; to the street and to the “neighbourhood,” or to the “section” (federations of streets), and on the other hand to the guild, just as independent; and finally to the organised and *sovereign* “arts” (each consequently having its “justice,” its banner and its militia) and finally to the *forum*, to the popular assembly representing the federation of parishes and guilds, that they looked to for the organisation of the various elements of the city. A series of institutions, absolutely contrary to the spirit of the Roman State and to the theocratic State of the East, were thus developed during the course of the three or four centuries that followed.

Who then — unless he prefers to ignore the life of the free Communes of this era, as do our statist (worthy pupils of the mind-numbing schools of the State) — who could therefore doubt for a moment that it was *these new institutions*, derived from the federative principle and respectful of individuality, which allowed the Communes of the Middle ages to develop, in the midst of the darkness of that era, the rich civilisation, the arts and science that we find in the fifteenth century?

⁵ Asked about Marx’s comments in *The Civil War in France* on the need of smashing the state-machine, Engels explained: “It is simply a question of showing that the victorious proletariat must first reshape the old, bureaucratic, administratively centralised state machine before they can use it for their own purposes; whereas, since 1848, *all* bourgeois republicans, so long as they were in opposition, have heaped abuse on that machine but, no sooner in office, have taken it over intact and made use of it, partly against reaction but to an even greater extent against the proletariat” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 47, 74). Later he reiterated this position: “A republic, in relation to the proletariat, differs from a monarchy only in that it is the *ready-made* political form for the future rule of the proletariat. You [in France] have the advantage of us in that it is already in being” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 50, 276). (Editor)

XII. THE MODERN CONSTITUTIONAL STATE

It was the same for the industrial and merchant bourgeoisie. In accordance with the causes that we indicated in the study on the historical role of the State (Moorish, Turkish and Mongol invasions, and causes of the internal decadence in the Communes), the royal military State had managed to develop in Europe in the course of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the ruins of the free Communes. But after over two centuries of this regime, the industrial and intellectual bourgeoisie, in England first at the onset of 1648 and one hundred and forty years later in France, made a new step forward. It understood that it would be absolutely impossible to achieve intellectual, commercial, industrial development — its overall [*mondial*] development that it already foresaw — if the human herds remained under the rule of a bureaucracy grown up around the palace where a Louis XIV could say “The State, it is me!” Since Montesquieu, the thinkers of the bourgeoisie — and there were some distinguished ones — understood that industry, commerce, education, science, technology, arts, social morality never could achieve the development they were capable of, and that the masses would never get out of the dreadful poverty in which they had been left engulfed, as long as the fate of the people remained in the hands of a clique and of the clergy: as long as the State — master of past and future privileges — remained in the hands of the Church and of the Court, with its favourites and its preferences.

Also, as soon as their forces allowed it, what did the English and French bourgeoisies do? Did they limit themselves to a simple change of dynasty, of rulers? Were they content to replace the king in a State of royal creation? Obviously not!

Their men of action preferred to lead the masses into profound economic revolutions than to stay forever in the stagnant swamp of an absolute royalty. And the political institutions which had developed under the royal absolutism were changed from top to bottom by these revolutions.

They believed at first that it would suffice to reduce royalty and its entourage to zero and to transfer power from the hands of individuals from the royal palace and the Church into those of the representatives of what they called the Third Estate.¹ But they soon realised that this would not be enough to completely demolish the old regime: to change the structure of society from top to bottom [was needed]. And when they saw the huge forces of the royalty stand before them, which did not by any means acknowledge itself deposed, they did not hesitate to unleash the passion, the fury of the destitute against the nobles and priests, and to take their properties, the main source of their power.

¹ A reference to the estates of the realm which existed in pre-revolutionary France and other Christian European nations from the medieval period to early modern Europe. The social hierarchy under the *Ancien Régime* was based on a three-estate system under the monarchy: clergy (the First Estate), nobles (the Second Estate), and everyone else (the Third Estate). It is estimated that ninety-eight per cent of the population made up this last category and it included bourgeoisie, wage-workers, and peasants. (Editor)

“And yet,” we will doubtless be told, “they did not seek to demolish the State. They opposed this with all their vigour when they realised that the people wanted to go further and destroy the State, to put in its place federated Communes and Sections and a whole new economic organisation!”

That is true. But the English bourgeoisie and the French bourgeoisie were in no way seeking to destroy institutions that would allow them to create privileges in *their* favour. They only wanted to substitute themselves for the nobility and the clergy and enjoy the privileges. Consequently the bourgeois certainly could not aim at the destruction of the State. The institution which had served to enrich the Church and nobility had to remain. It now had to allow the bourgeoisie to enrich themselves in turn – by opening, it is true, new channels of enrichment by the development of industries and sciences, by spreading knowledge, by introducing free labour² – but still using the nation’s labour [*la travail national*] to enrich, above all, themselves as the noblemen and the Church had enriched themselves until then.

Becoming heir to the established privileges, the bourgeoisie obviously did not seek to demolish the State. On the contrary, they worked to increase its power, to augment its functions, knowing that it could be they and their children who would above all furnish the functionaries and henceforth benefit from the privileges.

It was only the people, or rather a part of the popular masses – those that Desmoulines called “the beyond Marat” – who wanted emancipation without trying to subject any strata of society to its exploitation or its rule. These started in fact to lay the foundations of a new political organisation, which had to substitute itself to that of the State. It was the *Commune*. And as this decentralisation was still not sufficient, even in the big towns, it was pushed further, to the *Section*.

We see, in fact, a striking phenomenon taking place during the revolution, from 1789. Since the National Assembly was inevitably composed of representatives of the past, opposed to the Revolution becoming deeper and, above all, that the popular masses could really gain their freedom – it was the Communes which pushed forward. A municipal revolution, as Michelet and Aulard pointed out so well, was achieved from 1789. And since a revolution is not made by decrees, since it is on the ground that the balance of power in society must be overturned, it was the thousands of urban and village “municipalities” which undertook to carry out in the localities the abolition of feudal rights. Before the Assembly decided to proclaim it *in principle* on 4 August 1789 and well before proclaiming it *de facto* four years later, after having expelled the Girondins, the municipalities in some parts of France were already acting in this manner.

But the municipalities, and especially the advanced sections of large towns, did not limit themselves to this. When the National Assembly decided to proclaim the confiscation of the property of the clergy and the sale of these assets, the

State had no mechanism to carry this decision out. Well, it was the Communes, and in the large towns – the Sections, which volunteered to carry out the immense revolutionary transfer of fortunes. They alone were capable of doing it, *and they accomplished it de facto*.

But where we can see even better the constructive spirit of the people, *outside the State*, is when the war started in 1792. When the armed struggle became a matter of life or death for the Revolution, when France was invaded by foreigners invited by royalty and it had to *do the*

² The term free labour [*le travail affranchi*] refers to the abolition of the unfree labour associated with serfdom such as the certain number of days *corvée* labour provided to landlords or the monarchical State by their subjects. (Editor)

impossible: with neither army nor republican officers, it had to drive these foreigners from the land — it was the sections and the Communes which undertook to accomplish this huge task for which the State did not even have the necessary mechanism: to enlist volunteers, that is to say, *to choose men*, to decide who amongst those who presented themselves to give shoes, bread, rifle, lead and powder — because at the moment of reckoning the republican *was lacking everything*: bread as much as lead, musket as much as shoes and clothes.

In fact, who will know how to sort the men who volunteer? Who will ensure that the volunteer, after having received “sword, lead, bread,” will not throw away the rifle at the first opportunity or will not join the royalist packs? Who will find leathers and cloth? Sow clothes, scrape caves to get saltpetre?³ Who, finally, will tell the volunteer, when he is at the border, the truth about the progress of the Revolution in his native town and about the intrigues of the counter-revolutionaries? Who will inspire in him the burning zeal without which the impossible cannot be done, nor victories won? It was the sections and the communes who accomplished all this immense work. The statist historians could ignore it but the French people preserved the memory of it: it is they who taught it to us!

Would the Bastille and the Tuileries have ever been taken without this effort of the people — the unknowns?⁴ Would the republicans have driven out the enemy and abolished royalty and feudalism if they had not understood — without perhaps expressing it in these words that come from our pen — that *for a new phase of social life we need an organisation which will help make it blossom*? And if they had not found this organisation in the Commune, in their devotion, in the activity of their revolutionary Sections, almost independent of the Commune and linked to each other by temporary Committees, created whenever events indicated the need for it?

³ Saltpetre is a chemical compound (potassium nitrate) and one of the major components of gunpowder. A major natural source of it is deposits crystallising on cave walls. (Editor)

⁴ Kropotkin is referring to two popular insurrections in Paris during the French Revolution. The storming of the Bastille (a medieval fortress and prison) on 14 July 1789 began the French Revolution with the destruction of a symbol of the power and abuses of the monarchy by the mass action of the people. The storming of the Tuileries Palace on the 10 August 1792 resulted in the fall of the French monarchy six weeks later and the increase of *sans-culotte* influence in Paris. See chapters XII and XXXIII of Kropotkin’s *The Great French Revolution*. (Editor)

XIII. IS IT SENSIBLE TO STRENGTHEN THE CURRENT STATE?

It is therefore essential that to free themselves the masses who produce everything without being allowed to control the consumption of what they produce, find the means which enable them to display their creative forces and to develop themselves new, egalitarian, forms of consumption and of production.

The State and national representation cannot find these forms. It is the very *life* of the consumer and of the producer, his intellect, his organising spirit which must find them and improve them by applying them to the daily needs of life.

It is the same for forms of political organisation. In order to free themselves from the exploitation they are subjected to under the supervision of the State, the masses cannot remain under the domination of the forms which prevent the blossoming of popular initiative. These were developed by governments to perpetuate the servitude of the people, to *prevent it from letting its creative force blossom* and to develop institutions of egalitarian mutual aid. New forms must be found to serve the opposite goal.

But if we recognise that in order to be able to reshape the forms of consumption and production the class of producers will have to reshape the political forms of the organisation of society, we see at once how wrong it is to arm the *current bourgeois State* with the immense force which the management of economic monopolies — industrial and commercial exchange — gives it in addition to the political monopolies it already possesses.

Let us not talk about an imaginary State in which a government, composed of angels descended from the heavens for the needs of the discussion, would be the enemy of the powers we would have armed it with. To entertain such utopias is to lead the revolution to rocks where it will inevitably flounder. We must take the *current bourgeois State as it is* — and wonder if it is sensible to arm *this institution* with a more and more formidable power?

Is it sensible to give the institution which currently exists to hold the worker in servitude — because who would doubt that such is today the main function of the State? — is it sensible to strengthen it by giving it the ownership of a vast railway network? To give it the monopoly of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, sugar, etc., as well as that of credit and banking — in addition to that of justice, public education, territorial defence, and colonial banditry?

To hope that the oppressive mechanism, thus reinforced, becomes an instrument of revolution, is that not to ignore what history teaches us about what a creature of habit [*l'esprit routinier*] all bureaucracy is and about the strength of resistance of institutions? Is it not to make precisely the mistake we reproach [other] revolutionaries for — that of imagining that it is enough to expel a king to have a republic or name a socialist dictator to have collectivism?

Besides, did we not notice very recently — in 1905 and 1906 in Russia — the danger of arming a reactionary State with the power that railways and all sorts of monopolies gives it?

Whereas the government of Louis XVI, seeing itself facing bankruptcy, had to capitulate before the bourgeoisie who wanted the constitution; whereas the Manchu dynasty was forced to abdicate,¹ unable to borrow millions to fight republicans — the Romanov dynasty, beleaguered by the revolution which had triumphed in 1905, found it easy to borrow 1,200 million from France in 1906. And when members of the Russian Duma issued a manifesto to tell foreign financiers “Do not lend anything, the Russian State is going bankrupt!” — these financiers, better informed, replied: “But since you handed over 60,000 kilometres of railway tracks, bought-out the companies that built them, since you gave it the huge monopoly on drinks, we do not fear bankruptcy. It is not a Louis XVI monarchy which owned nothing!”

And they lent the twelve hundred million.

Well, it is to increase the capital owned by the modern bourgeois States that the radicals and socialists are working today. They did not even bother to discuss — like English co-operators asked me one day — if there were no way to hand over the railways *directly* to the railway-workers’ trade-unions, to free the enterprise from the yoke of the capitalist, instead of creating a new capitalist, even more dangerous than the bourgeois companies, the State.²

But no! The so-called statist intellectuals learned nothing in school other than faith in a saviour State, the omnipotent State; and they never even wanted to listen to those who were shouting at them “reckless-people” as they marched onwards, hypnotised by the State-capitalist and Vidal’s statist-collectivism, that they had resurrected under the name of “scientific socialism”!

The result we can see, not only in moments of crisis as in Russia, but in Europe every day. There, where railways are a public service of the State, all the government has to do if it feels threatened by a strike is to issue a two-line decree to “mobilise” all the railway workers.³ As a result striking becomes an act of rebellion. To shoot the striking railway workers is no longer an act of deference towards the plutocracy; it becomes an act of devotion to the motherland.⁴

It is the same thing for coalmines, large munitions factories, steel refineries, and even for food. And in this way a whole new mentality is in the process of being formed in society — not only amongst the bourgeois, but also amongst the workers. The exploitation of labour, far from being restricted, is placed under the permanent protection of the law. It becomes an institution, just like the State itself. It becomes a part of the *Constitution*, just like serfdom was in France until the Great Revolution or the division into classes of peasants, artisans, merchants with their

¹ The Manchu, or Qing, was the last imperial dynasty of China and ruled from 1644 until overthrown in 1912 by the Chinese revolution that started in 1911. (Editor)

² Kropotkin mentioned this letter in his article “Syndicalisme et parlementarisme” [“Trade Unionism and Parliamentarism”], *Les Temps Nouveaux* (13 October 1906), which argued “all the workers, engineers, stokers, etc., *managing that industry themselves* [...] *This is the future*. For it is not going to be the ministers but rather the workers themselves who will see to the honest management of industry.” The task was “to build up a force capable of imposing better working conditions on the bosses, but also — indeed primarily — to create among the working classes the union structures that might some day replace the bosses and take into their own hands the production and management of every industry.” This article is included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*. (Editor)

³ Kropotkin discusses this with regards to Holland in “Le Grève Générale en Hollande” [“The General Strike in Holland”], *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 11 April 1903. (Editor)

⁴ Kropotkin is referring to, amongst other events, the 1910 French railway strike. This started on 10 October 1910 on the Paris-Nord system. The following day, the strike committee called for a general railway strike and on the 12th, the Western division came out. The Prime Minister, Aristide Briand (a former socialist and advocate of the general strike), arrested the strike committee and conscripted the railway workers into the army. Martial law was thereby established for any striker who refused to work would be immediately court-martialled like any soldier who refused to follow orders (an act which could result in being shot). The strike ended on 18 October. (Editor)

established duties towards the two classes—that of the nobles and of clergy—that we still see in Russia.

“*The duty to be exploited!*”—That is where we are heading with this State-capitalist idea.

XIV. CONCLUSIONS

We clearly see, from the above, how wrong it is to see in the State [only] a hierarchical organisation of functionaries, elected or appointed to administer the various branches of social life and harmonise their action, and think it will be enough to change their personnel to make the machine go in any direction.

If the historical function — social and political — of the State had been limited to that, it would not have destroyed, as it did, every freedom of local institutions; it would not have centralised everything, justice, education, religions, arts, sciences, army, etc., in its ministries; it would not have wielded tax, as it has done, in the interest of the rich and to always hold the poor below “the poverty line,” as the young English economists say; it would not have wielded, as it has done, monopoly, to allow the rich to absorb the entire increase of wealth due to the progress of technology and science.

It is because the State is much more than the organisation of an administration with a view to establishing “harmony” in society, as they say in the universities. It is an organisation, developed and slowly perfected over the course of three centuries, to uphold the rights acquired by certain classes to benefit from the labour of the working masses; to expand these rights and create new ones, which lead to new subjugations [*inféodations*] of the citizens, impoverished by legislation, towards groups of individuals showered with favours from the governmental hierarchy. Such is the true essence of the State. All the rest are only words that the State itself taught to the people and which is repeated by apathy without closer analysis of them: words just as deceitful as those taught by the Church to cover its thirst for power, enrichment and more power!

It is high time, however, to submit these words to a serious criticism and to wonder where the infatuation of the radicals of the nineteenth century and their socialist continuators for an omnipotent State came from? We would then see that it above all came from the misconception that is usually made about the Jacobins of the Great [French] Revolution — of the legend that is created, or rather was created, around the Jacobin club. Because it is to this Club and its branches in the provinces that bourgeois historians of the Revolution (except Michelet) attributed all the glory of the great principles expressed by the Revolution and the terrible struggles that it had to sustain against royalty and royalists.

It is time to classify this legend in its true place, amongst the other legends of the Church and the State. We are already gradually beginning to know the truth about the Revolution and we start to notice that the Jacobin club was the club — not of the people but of the bourgeoisie which had come into power and wealth; not of the Revolution, but of those who knew how to take advantage of it. At none of the great moments of upheaval was it at the forefront of the Revolution: it always limited itself to channelling the threatening upsurges, to make them return to the frameworks of the State and — to smother them by killing the bold elements which were going beyond the views of the bourgeoisie that it represented.

Nursery for functionaries, which it provided in [large] numbers after each new step forward made by the Revolution (10 August, 31 May),¹ the Jacobin club was *the bulwark of the bourgeoisie coming to power against the egalitarian tendencies of the people*. It is precisely for that — for having known how to prevent the people from taking the communist and egalitarian path — it is so glorified by most historians.

It must be said that this Club had a well-defined ideal: it was the omnipotent State, which did not tolerate within itself any local power, such as a sovereign Commune, any professional power, such as trade unions, no will except that of the Jacobins of the Convention — which necessarily, inevitably, led to the dictatorship of the police of the Committee of General Security, and necessarily again to the consular dictatorship, [then] to the Empire.² That is why the Jacobins broke the strength of the Communes and especially the Paris Commune and its sections (after having transformed them into simple policing bodies [*bureaux de police*], placed under the orders of the Committee of Security). That is why they waged war on the Church — while seeking to maintain a clergy and a religion; that is why they did not accept the slightest provincial independence, nor the slightest functional independence in the organisation of the crafts, in education, in scientific researches, in Art.

“The State, it is I!” of Louis XIV was only a child’s toy in relation to the “State, it is us” of the Jacobins. It was the absorption of the whole national life, concentrated into a pyramid of functionaries. And this whole was to be used to enrich a certain class of citizens and at the same time maintain all the rest — that is to say, the whole nation except the privileged — in poverty. A poverty that would not be absolute destitution, begging, as it was the case under the old regime — starving beggars are not the workers needed by the bourgeois — but a poverty that forces man to sell his working strength to whoever wants to exploit it, and sell it at a price that only allows man *by exception* to get out of this state of wage-earning proletarian.

There is the ideal of the Jacobin State. Read all the literature of the time — except the writings of those called the Enraged, the Anarchists, and who were guillotined or otherwise eliminated for that reason — and you will see that this is precisely the Jacobin ideal.³

But then, we are led to wonder, how it is possible that the socialists of the second half of the nineteenth century adopted the ideal of the *Jacobin State* when this ideal had been designed from the viewpoint of the bourgeois, in direct opposition to the egalitarian and communist tendencies

¹ Kropotkin is referring to two popular insurrections in Paris which are defining events in the history of the French Revolution. The storming of the Tuileries Palace and the Insurrection of 31 May to 2 June 1793 resulted in the fall of the Girondinists in the National Convention under pressure of the Parisian *sans-culottes*. Both mass uprisings pushed the revolution in a more radical direction. See chapters XXXIII and XLVI of Kropotkin’s *The Great French Revolution* for details. (Editor)

² The Committee of General Security was a French parliamentary committee that acted as police agency during the French Revolution. Along with the Committee of Public Safety, it oversaw the Reign of Terror as well as supervising the local police committees in charge of investigating reports of treason and had the authority to refer suspects to the Revolutionary Tribunal and so execution by guillotine. By 1794 the Committee became part of the opposition to Robespierre and was involved in the Thermidor coup which saw a five-member committee called the Directory become the government of France. This, in turn, was overthrown by Napoleon Bonaparte in the Coup of 18 Brumaire (8–9 November 1799) and was replaced by the Consulate headed by Napoleon as First Consul. Napoleon did not declare himself head of state until May 1804 when the Senate passed a bill introducing the French Empire, with Napoleon as Emperor. The coronation ceremony took place on 2 December 1804, when Napoleon crowned himself as Emperor of the French, establishing the Empire. (Editor)

³ Kropotkin discusses both “les Enragés” and “les Anarchistes” of this time (and their fate) in his *Great French Revolution* — see, for example, chapters LX and CLI. (Editor)

of the people which had arisen during the Revolution?⁴ Here is the explanation to which my studies of this subject led me and that I believe to be true.

The link between the Jacobin Club of 1793 and the statist socialist militants — Louis Blanc, Vidal, Lassalle, the Marxists — is, in my opinion, the conspiracy of Babeuf. It is not in vain that it is, so to speak, canonised by the State socialists.

Now Babeuf — direct and pure descendant of the Jacobin Club of 1793 — had conceived this idea that a revolutionary surprise attack, prepared by a conspiracy, could create a *communist dictatorship* in France. But once — true Jacobin — he had conceived the communist revolution as something which could be done by decrees, he came to two other conclusions: *democracy first* would prepare communism; and then a single individual, a dictator, *provided that he had the strength of will to save the world*, will introduce communism!⁵

In this conception, passed on like a tradition by secret societies during the entire nineteenth century, lies the key to the riddle which allows to this day socialists to work towards creating an omnipotent State. The belief — because it is, after all, only an article of messianic faith — that one day a man will appear who will have “the strength of will to save the world” by communism and who, attaining “the dictatorship of the proletariat,” will achieve communism by his decrees, silently persisted during the entire nineteenth century. Indeed, we can see, twenty-five years apart, the faith in the “caesarism” of Napoleon III in France, and the leader of the German revolutionary socialists, Lassalle, after his conversations with Bismarck on a unified Germany writing that socialism will be introduced in Germany by a royal dynasty, but probably not by that of the Hohenzollern.

Faith in the Messiah, always! The faith which made Louis Napoleon popular after the massacres of June 1848⁶ — that same faith in the omnipotence of a dictatorship, *combined with the fear of great popular uprisings*⁷ — here, is the explanation of this tragic contradiction that the modern developments of statist-socialism offer us. If the representatives of this doctrine ask, on one hand, emancipation of the worker from bourgeois exploitation, and if, on the other hand, they work to strength the State that represents the true creator and defender of the bourgeoisie — it is obviously that they still have faith in finding their Napoleon, their Bismarck, their Lord Beaconsfield who one day will use the unified strength of the State to work against its mission, against its entire machinery and all its traditions.

* * *

⁴ Compare with Lenin: “A Jacobin who wholly identifies himself with the *organisation* of the proletariat — a proletariat conscious of its class interests — is a *revolutionary* Social Democrat.” (*Collected Works* [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1961]7: 383) (Editor)

⁵ Cf. my work, *The Great French Revolution*, ch. LVIII.

⁶ The June Days uprising (*les journées de juin*) occurred between 23–26 June 1848 in response to plans to close the National Workshops, created by the Second Republic in order to provide work for the unemployed. The National Guard, led by General Louis Eugène Cavaignac, quelled the protests with over 10,000 people killed or injured and 4,000 later deported to Algeria. It marked the end of the hopes of a “Democratic and Social Republic” (*République démocratique et sociale*) and the victory of the liberals over the Radical Republicans and Socialists. (Editor)

⁷ The need for popular uprisings was the major theme of Kropotkin’s article “Insurrections et revolution” [“Insurrections and Revolution”], *Les Temps Nouveaux* (6 August 1910). “If the Revolution is ever to be feasible,” Kropotkin argued, “local insurrections are called for. Indeed, huge numbers of them. [...] The whole of history is there for proof. And if the careerist leaders of the proletarian movement today — be they intellectuals or workers — preach the opposite, it is because they want no truck with revolution at all. *They fear it.*” This article is included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*. (Editor)

Those who want to meditate on the ideas outlined in these two studies on the historic State and the modern State will understand one of the essential elements of Anarchy. He will understand why anarchists refuse to support the State in any way and [refuse to] become part of the machinery of State. He will see why, taking advantage of the marked tendency of the time to establish thousands of groups which seek to substitute themselves for the State in all the functions that the State had monopolised — anarchists work so that the masses of the workers of the soil and of factory endeavour *to form organisations full of vitality in this direction*, rather than applying their strengths and intelligence to strengthen the bourgeois State.

He will also understand why and how anarchists aim at the destruction of the State by undermining wherever they can the idea of territorial centralisation and centralisation of functions, by opposing to it the independence of each locality and of each grouping formed for a social function; and why they seek union in action: not in pyramidal hierarchy, not in the orders of the central Committee of a secret organisation, but in the free group, federative, from the simple to the complex.

And he will understand that the seeds of the new life will be found in these free groups, respectful of human individuality, when the spirit of voluntary servitude and messianic faith will have given way to the spirit of independence, voluntary solidarity and the analysis of historical and social facts, finally freed from authoritarian and semi-religious prejudices that school and bourgeois statist literature instil in us.

He will also see, in the mists of a not very far future, what man will be able to reach one day when weary of his servitude he will seek his liberation in the free action of free men who act in solidarity for a common aim: to mutually guarantee by their collective labour a certain minimum of well-being in order to allow the individual to work on the complete development of his faculties, his individuality, and thereby achieve his *individuation*, of which we have heard so much about recently.

And he will finally understand, that individuation, that is to say, the fullest possible development of individuality, does not consist — as taught by the bourgeois and their mediocrities — in removing from the creative activity of man his social tendencies and his instincts of solidarity, to keep only the narrow and absurd individualism of the bourgeoisie which recommends that society be forgotten and the worship of the individual isolated from society. He will understand, on the contrary, that it is precisely *social inclinations* and *collective creation*, when they are given their free rein, which allow the individual to reach his full development and to soar to [great] heights, where, so far, only the great geniuses knew how to rise in a few beautiful creations of Art.

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Pëtr Kropotkin
The Modern State
1913

Peter Kropotkin, "Modern Science and Anarchy", ed. Iain McKay (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2018)
This essay first appeared in 1913 as part of the augmented French edition of *Modern Science and Anarchy* [as "*La Science Moderne et l'Anarchie*"]. Some chapters were taken from earlier articles in *Les Temps Nouveaux*, while others seem to have been written specifically to be included here.

In 1914, *The Modern State* began to be translated into English and serialized in the London's *Freedom*, but that was interrupted in the middle due to the outbreak of World War I and the incompatibilities between *Freedom* and Kropotkin in regard. It was also published as a specific book/brochure, at least in Amsterdam, with a foreword by Domela Nieuwenhuis (see here: archive.org).

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