THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY

BEING A TRANSLATION OF THE

MISÈRE
DE LA PHILOSOPHIE

(A REPLY TO "LA PHILOSOPHIE DE LA MISÈRE" OF
M. PROUDHON)

BY

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WITH A PREFACE BY

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CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................................................................ 5
Preface ......................................................................................................................... 9
Author's Preface ......................................................................................................... 29
Author's Introductory Note ......................................................................................... 31

CHAPTER I.—A Scientific Discovery.
  Section I.—Opposition of Utility Value to Exchange Value ........................................... 33
  " II.—Constituted or Synthetic Value ......................................................................... 46
  " III.—Application of the Law of the Proportion of Value—(a) Money ...................... 85
  " (b) Surplus Labor .................................................................................................. 97

CHAPTER II.—The Metaphysics of Political Economy.
  Section I.—The Method .......................................................................................... 112
  " II.—The Division of Labor and Machinery ............................................................... 138
  " III.—Competition and Monopoly ........................................................................... 158
  " IV.—Property and Rent ......................................................................................... 168
  " V.—Strikes and the Combination of Workmen ....................................................... 181

Appendix I.—Proudhon Judged by Marx .................................................................... 193
  " II.—John Gray and his Theory of Labor Notes ....................................................... 203
  " III.—Free Trade ...................................................................................................... 208
INTRODUCTION.

No apology, I imagine, is necessary for the appearance of this translation of Marx's "Misère de la Philosophie." On the contrary it is strange that it should not have been published in England before, and that the translation of his monumental work, the "Capital," tardy as that was, should have yet been made before that of a work which was originally published some twenty years before "Capital" first appeared.

It may be that the translators and editors of the latter work were of opinion that in view of the comprehensiveness of "Capital," a publication of an English edition of the "Misère de la Philosophie" would be a work of supererogation. Or it may be that they thought a book so distinctly French—as the "Capital" may be said to be distinctly English—and which was, further, exclusively a criticism of a work of Proudhon's little known in England—would have slight interest for English readers. On the other hand, the groundwork of the theories so fully elaborated in "Capital," apart from its exhaustive analysis of the capitalist system of production and distribution, will be found in "Misère." In addition, there are several subjects—notably that of rent—
INTRODUCTION

dealt with in this volume which are barely touched upon in the single book of "Capital" which has been translated into English.

Marx's criticism of Proudhon's theory that "the time which is necessary to create a commodity indicates exactly its degree of utility," so that "the things of which the production costs the least time are the things which are the most immediately useful," has been matched by H. M. Hyndman's crushing refutation of the theory of Final Utility. The subject of rent, too, has been fully dealt with by the latter in the same book, "The Economics of Socialism," published, as the author says, in the hope of furnishing "the rapidly-increasing number of students of sociology with a concise and readable statement of the main theories of the scientific school of political economy founded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels." Neither of these facts, however, necessarily detracts from the value of this older work of Marx's. On the question of rent, after reviewing the Ricardian theory and the many objections which present themselves to that theory, Hyndman says: "It seems, therefore, that a wider definition of the rent of land under capitalism is needed than that given by Ricardo, and the following is suggested:—Rent of land is that portion of the total net revenue which is paid to the landlord for the use of plots of land after the average profit on the capital embarked in developing such land has been deducted." On the question of confiscating rent he says it "would not affect the position of the working portion of the community unless the money so obtained were devoted to giving them more amusement, to providing them with better surroundings and the like. ... In fact, the attack upon competitive rents is merely a capitalist attack. That class sees a considerable income going off to a set of
people who take no part in the direct exploitation of labor; and its representatives are naturally anxious to stop this leakage, as they consider it, and to reduce their own taxation for public purposes by appropriating rent to the service of the State. That is all very well for them."

On this point Marx says: "We can understand such economists as Mill, Cherbuliez, Hilditch and others, demanding that rent should be handed over to the State to be used for the remission of taxation. That is only the frank expression of the hate which the industrial capitalist feels for the landed proprietor, who appears to him as a useless incumbrance, a superfluity in the otherwise harmonious whole of bourgeois production."

"Rent," says Marx, "results from the social relations in which exploitation is carried on. It cannot result from the nature, more or less fixed, more or less durable, of land. Rent proceeds from society and not from the soil."

The criticism of Proudhon's appreciation of gold and silver as the first manifestation of this theory of "constituted value" should be interesting reading to those admirers of the French Anarchist who yet profess their profound detestation of money and its function. So, too, should his declaration against strikes and combinations of workmen. In this we see once more how extremes meet. This declaration of Proudhon's would not be out of place in the organ of the Liberty and Property Defence League.

In this matter of trade union combination, Marx was scarcely accurate in his perception of its development. He clearly did not foresee that the great English trade unions would become fossilised, as it were; and that instead of being a revolutionary force they would become a reactionary mass, opposing the progress of the mere
proletarian outside their ranks, as they have done. With
the spread of Socialist ideas among them, however, their
exclusive character is being modified, and they may even
yet take that place in the revolutionary working-class
movement which Marx anticipated they would occupy.
Given this change of attitude, the development must
inevitably be along the lines he predicted. We are
seeing "in face of constantly united capital, the mainte-
nance of the association [becoming] more important
and necessary for them than the maintenance of wages,"
and, further, that the combinations of capital are forcing
the trade unions to that point where "association takes a
political character."

It is scarcely necessary to point out that in this work,
written in 1847, some words have a meaning quite other
than that which they bear to-day. Thus, for instance,
the words "Socialists" and "Socialism," where they
occur, refer to the utopians—who formulated theories of
a social system independent of the industrial evolution—
and to these theories themselves.

In most cases the numerous quotations have been
verified and reproduced in the original. In some in-
stances, however, they are summaries rather than quota-
tions, and appear as translated.

A translation in necessarily an imperfect presentation
of the thoughts, ideas, and conclusions of the author.
In this work I have endeavored to adhere as closely as
possible to the form and letter, as well as the spirit of
the original, and to this the indulgent reader is asked to
ascribe such faults of language as would otherwise merit
his censure.

H. QUELCH.
PREFACE.

The present work was written in the winter of 1846-7, at a time when Marx had just elucidated the principles of his new historical and economic theory.* The "Système des Contradictions Economique ou Philosophie de la Misère," of Proudhon, which had just appeared, gave him the opportunity of developing his principles in opposing them to the ideas of the man who from then was to take a preponderating place among the French Socialists of his epoch. From the moment when both of them at Paris had lengthily discussed economic questions together, often for whole nights at a stretch, their tendency had been to drift further and further apart: Proudhon's book showed that there was already

* "La Misère de la Philosophie," written in French, was published in 1847 in Paris, by A. Franck, 69, Rue Richelieu, and in Brussels by C. G. Vogler, 2, Petite Rue de la Madeline; it was translated into German by E. Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, and published in 1892 by the Social-Democratic Party, together with this preface by Engels.

Marx's own copy of the work, which, as well as his other books were given by his two daughters, Laura and Eleanor, to the German Social-Democratic Party, to form the basis of a library for the party, bears some corrections from the hand of the author. They have been reproduced in this edition.—Note by Editor.
an impassable gulf between them; to keep silence was no longer possible. Marx demonstrates in this reply the irreparable rupture which had taken place.

The summary of Marx's judgment of Proudhon is expressed in the article reproduced as an appendix to this work, which first appeared in the *Sozialdemokrat* of Berlin, Nos. 16, 17 and 18. It was the only article Marx ever wrote for that journal. The efforts of Herr von Schweitzer to drag the paper into governmental and feudal waters constrained us to publicly withdraw from it after a few weeks.

The present work has for Germany a special importance which Marx did not foresee. How could he have known that in attacking Proudhon he at the same time struck a blow at the idol of the *Strebars* (arrivistes) of to-day, Rodbertus, whose name even he did not know?

This is not the place to deal at length with the relations existing between Marx and Rodbertus; I may soon have the opportunity to do it. Suffice it here to say that when Rodbertus accuses Marx of having "pillaged" him, and of having in his "Capital" profited much by his work, "Zur Erkenntniss," &c., without making any acknowledgment, he allows himself to be guilty of a calumny which is only to be explained by the natural ill-humor of a misunderstood genius, and his remarkable ignorance of everything occurring outside of Prussia, and notably of Socialist and economic literature. These accusations never, any more than the work we have cited, came under the notice of Marx; of Rodbertus's work he knew nothing, except the three "Sozialen Briefe" ("Social Letters"), and even these certainly not before 1858 or 1859.

There is much more foundation for Rodbertus's claim to have in these letters discovered "the constituted value
of Proudhon" long before Proudhon. But he is wrong in flattering himself with the belief that he was the first to discover it. In any case, the present work criticises him with Proudhon, and this forces me to dilate somewhat upon his fundamental brochure, "Zur Erkenntniss unserer Staatswirthschaftlichen Zustände" [On the Explanation of our Economical Position], 1842, at least so far as this work of his, besides the communism of Weitling, which it also contains, however unconsciously anticipates Proudhon.

In so far as modern Socialism, of no matter what tendency otherwise it may be, proceeds from bourgeois political economy, it almost exclusively attaches itself to the theory of value of Ricardo. The two propositions which Ricardo in 1817 put at the head of his "Principles"; First, that the value of each commodity is only and solely determined by the quantity of labor exacted by its production; and, second, that the product of the totality of social labor is shared between the three classes of landlords (rent), capitalists (profit), and laborers (wages)—these two propositions had already in England afforded material for Socialist conclusions. They had been deduced with so much clearness and profundity that this literature, which has now almost disappeared and which Marx had in great part discovered, could not be surpassed until the appearance of "Capital." We shall return to this another time. When Rodbertus, in 1842, on his side drew certain Socialist conclusions from the principles above stated, that was then certainly an important step for a German to take, but it was only a discovery for Germany. Marx shows how little there is of novelty in a similar application of the theory of Ricardo by Proudhon, who suffered from an equal imagination.
“Whoever is, no matter how little, acquainted with the movement of political economy in England, cannot but know that nearly all the Socialists of that country have, at different times, proposed the equalitarian (that is to say, Socialist) application of the Ricardian theory.” We might cite to M. Proudhon the “Political Economy” of Hopkins, 1822; William Thompson, “An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth most conducive to Human Happiness,” 1827; T. R. Edmonds, “Practical Moral and Political Economy,” 1828, &c., &c., and we might add pages of “&c.” We will content ourselves with hearing an English Communist, Bray, in his remarkable work, “Labor’s Wrongs and Labor’s Remedy,” Leeds, 1839, and these quotations from Bray alone settle, for the most part, the claim to priority set up by Rodbertus.

At this time Marx had not entered the reading-room of the British Museum. Beyond the libraries, besides my books and my extracts, which he read during a journey of six weeks which we made together in England in the summer of 1845, he had perused only the books which one could procure at Manchester. The literature of which we have spoken was then not as inaccessible as it may be at the present time. If, in spite of that, it was unknown to Rodbertus, that is entirely due to the fact that he was an exclusive Prussian. He is the veritable founder of specifically Prussian Socialism, and he is at last recognized as such.

However, even in his beloved Prussia, Rodbertus could not remain in absolute ignorance of the work of others. In 1859 there appeared at Berlin the first book of the “Critique de l’Economie Politique,” by Marx. There we find, among the objections raised by the economists against Ricardo, as second objection, p. 40:
"If the value in exchange of a product is equal to the labor time which it contains, the value in exchange of a day of labor is equal to its product. Or, indeed, wages must be equal to the product of labor. But it is the contrary which is true." In a note: "This objection raised against Ricardo from the side of the economists, has been raised again later by the Socialists. The theoretical exactitude of the formula being admitted, the practice is accused of being in contradiction to the theory, and bourgeois society was invited to draw practically the conclusions implied by the theory. Some English Socialists have, at least in this sense, turned the formula of the exchange-value of Ricardo against political economy." We are referred in this note to the "Misère de la Philosophie" of Marx, which was then in all the libraries.

It was, then, sufficiently easy for Rodbertus to convince himself of the real novelty of his discoveries of 1842. Instead of that he has not ceased to proclaim them, and to believe them to be so incomparable that he has never once been able to suppose that Marx all alone could have drawn from Ricardo the same conclusions as Rodbertus himself had done. That was impossible. Marx had "pillaged" him—him to whom the same Marx had offered every facility for convincing himself that long before either of them these conclusions, at least in the gross form that they still possess with Rodbertus, had already been expressed in England.

The most simple Socialist application of the theory of Ricardo is that which we have given above. In many cases it has led to perceptions on the origin and the nature of surplus-value which have gone far beyond Ricardo. The same may be said with regard to Rodbertus. Not only does he in this order of ideas never
present anything which has not already been at least as well said before, but his expositions also possess all the defects of those of his predecessors. He accepts the economic categories of labor, capital, value, in the crude form in which they had been transmitted to him by the economists, under their assumed form, without seeking their content. He thus not only closes to himself all means of developing himself more completely—contrary to Marx who, for the first time, has made something of these propositions so often reproduced during the past sixty-four years—but he takes the road which leads straight to utopia, as we will show.

The above application of the theory of Ricardo, which shows to the workers that the totality of social production, which is their product, belongs to them because they are the only real producers, leads direct to Communism. But it is also, as Marx shows, false in form, economically speaking, because it is simply an application of morality to economy. According to the laws of bourgeois economy, the greater part of the product does not belong to the workers who have created it. If, then, we say, "That is unjust, it ought not to be"; that has nothing whatever to do with economy, we are only stating that this economic fact is in contradiction to our moral sentiment. That is why Marx has never based upon this his Communist conclusions, but rather upon the necessary overthrow, which is developing itself under our eyes every day, of the capitalist system of production. He contents himself with saying that surplus-value consists of unpaid labor; it is a fact, pure and simple. But that which may be false in form from the economic point of view may yet be exact from the point of view of universal history. If the moral sentiment of the mass regards an economic fact—as, formerly,
slavery and serfdom—as unjust, that proves that this fact itself is a survival; that other economic facts are established thanks to which the first has become insupportable, intolerable. Behind the formal economic inexactitude may, therefore, be hidden a very real economic content. It would, however, be out of place here to dwell at length on the importance and the history of surplus-value.

We can draw other conclusions from Ricardo's theory of value, and that has been done. The value of commodities is determined by the labor exacted by their production. But it is found that in this wicked world commodities are bought sometimes above, sometimes below, their value, and besides, there is the relation to the variations of competition. As the rate of profit has a tendency to maintain itself at the same level for all capitalists, the price of commodities tends also to sink to the value of labor, through the intermediary of supply and demand. But the rate of profit is calculated upon the total capital employed in an industrial enterprise; on the other hand, in two different branches of industry the annual production may incorporate equal masses of labor, that is to say, present equal values, while, if the wages are at an equal level in these two branches, the capital advanced can be, and often is, doubled or trebled in one or the other branch. Ricardo's law of value, as Ricardo himself has already discovered, is in contradiction to the law of the equality of the rate of profit. If the products of the two branches are sold at their value, the aggregates of profits cannot be equal; but if the rates of profit are equal, the products of the two branches are not sold at their value everywhere and always. We have then, here, a contradiction, an antagonism between two economic laws. The practical solu-
tion operates, according to Ricardo (chap. i., sections 4 and 5) regularly in favor of the rate of profit at the expense of the value.

But Ricardo's definition of value, in spite of its evil characteristics, has a phase which renders it dear to our good bourgeoisie. That is the side on which it appeals with irresistible force to their sense of justice. Justice and equality of rights, those are the twin pillars upon which the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would raise their social edifice above the ruins of injustice, of feudal inequalities and privileges. The determination of the value of commodities by labor and the free exchange which arises according to this measure of value between the possessors of equal rights, such are, as Marx has already shown, the real foundation upon which all the political, juridical and philosophical ideology of the modern bourgeoisie is erected. When one knows that labor is the measure of commodities, the good sentiments of the worthy bourgeoisie must feel deeply wounded by the wickedness of the world, which, indeed, nominally recognises this principle of justice, but which every moment without compunction actually appears to set it on one side. Above all, the "little man," whose honest labor—even when it is only that of his workmen or of his apprentices—loses every day more and more of its value through the competition of the great industry and of machinery; above all, the small producer must ardently desire a society in which the exchange of products according to their labor-value would be a complete and invariable reality. In other terms, he must ardently desire a society in which a single law of production of commodities reigns fully and exclusively, but in which the conditions which alone render this law effective, that is to say, the other laws of
the production of commodities, or better, of capitalist production, were entirely suppressed.

This utopia has struck its roots deep and wide in the thought of the modern middle class—real or ideal. This is demonstrated by the fact that already in 1831 it had been systematically developed by John Gray; that at this period it had been practically tried, theoretically expounded, in England, proclaimed as the most recent truth in 1842 by Rodbertus in Germany, in 1846 by Proudhon in France, and again published by Rodbertus as the solution of the social question, and, so to speak, his social testament in 1871; and in 1884 it receives the adhesion of the sequel evolved under the name of Rodbertus to exploit Prussian State Socialism.

The criticism of this utopia has been made so completely by Marx, as well against Proudhon as against Gray (Cf. appendix 2 of this work), that I need only devote myself here to some remarks on the special form that Rodbertus has adapted to formulate and express it.

As we have said: Rodbertus accepts the traditional economic concepts under the exact form in which they have been transmitted to him by the economists. He does not make the slightest attempt to verify them. Value is for him "the quantitative valuation of one thing relatively to others, this valuation being taken for measure." This none too rigorous definition gives us at the most an idea of what value appears almost to be, but does not say absolutely what it is. But as it is all that Rodbertus is able to tell us about value, it is comprehensible that he seeks for a measure of value outside of value. After having at random, and without method, twisted use-value and exchange-value about under a hundred aspects with that power of abstraction so infinitely admired by M. Adolphe Wagner, he arrives at
this result—that there is no real measure of value, and that it is necessary to be content with a supererogatory measure. Labor may be such measure, but only in the case of an exchange between products of equal quantities of labor; if the case is otherwise in other instances, it is not so unless one has taken means to assure it. Value and labor thus remain without the least real relation to each other, although all the first chapter has been devoted to an endeavor to explain to us how and why the cost of commodities is determined by labor and by nothing but labor.

Labor is yet again taken in the form in which one meets it with the economists. And not even that. Because although there may be something said as to the difference in intensity of labor, it is very generally represented as something which "costs," that is to say which is a measure of value, whether it be expended or not under the normal conditions of society. Whether the producers employ ten days in the manufacture of products which could be manufactured in one day, or if they, employ only one; whether they use the best or the worst implements; whether they apply their labor time to the manufacture of articles socially necessary or in the quantity socially required; whether they make articles for which there is no demand at all or articles for which there is more or less demand—of all that there is no question; labor is labor, the product of equal labor must be exchanged with the product of equal labor. Rodbertus, who in all other cases is always ready, whether it be relevant or not, to place himself at the national point of view and to consider the relations of isolated producers from the height of the observatory of general society, timidly avoids all that here. Simply because from the first line of his book he goes straight to the
utopia of the labor-note, and that all analysis of labor as the producer of value only strews his route with difficulties. His instinct was here considerably stronger than his power of abstraction—that cannot be discovered in Rodbertus, it may be said in passing, only by means of the most concrete poverty of ideas.

The journey to utopia is quickly made. "The dispositions" which fix the exchange of commodities according to the value of labor as following an absolute law present no difficulty. All the other utopians of this tendency, from Gray to Proudhon, are at great pains to elaborate social measures. In order to realize this object they at least endeavor to resolve the economic question by economic means, due to the action of the owner of commodities who exchanges them. For Rodbertus it is much more simple. As a good Prussian he calls in the State. A decree of the public power establishes the reform.

Value is thus then happily "constituted," but not the priority of this constitution which is claimed by Rodbertus. On the contrary, Gray as well as Bray—among many others—have often expressed the same idea; they piously desire measures by which the products will exchange, in spite of all obstacles, always and only at their value in labor. After the State has thus constituted value—at least of a part of the products, as Rodbertus is modest—it issues its labor-notes; in effect, as advances to the industrial capitalists with which the workers are paid; the workers then buy the products with the labor-notes they have received and thus permit the return of the paper money to its original source. It is necessary to learn from Rodbertus himself how admirably that develops.

"For this second condition we must secure the dis-
position which exacts that the value attested should be really in circulation by giving only to him who actually delivers a product, a note on which should be marked exactly the quantity of labor necessary for the manufacture of the product. He who delivers a product of two days' labor would receive a note marked 'two days.' The second condition would be necessarily fulfilled by the strict observance of this regulation in the issue of the notes. According to our hypothesis, the true value of goods coincides with the quantity of labor expended in their manufacture, and this quantity of labor is measured by the division of time expressed. He who delivers a product to which two days' labor have been devoted, if he receives a certificate of two days' labor, has then secured that there should be assigned or certified to him neither more nor less value than he has in fact delivered—and further, as he only who has really put a product in circulation, alone secures such an attestation, it is equally certain that the value inscribed on the note is capable of paying society. Enlarge as much as we will the sphere of the division of labor, if the regulation is properly followed the sum of value disposable must be exactly equal to the sum of value certified, and, as the sum of value certified is exactly the sum assigned, this must necessarily coincide with the value disposable. All the exigencies are satisfied and the liquidation is perfect."

(Pages 166, 167.)

If Rodbertus has up to the present had the misfortune of arriving too late with his discoveries, this time, at least, he has obtained a kind of originality; none of his rivals had dared to give to the foolish utopia of the labor-note this form so naively infantile, I might even say so truly Pomeranian. Because that for each note an object of corresponding value is delivered, as no object
of value is delivered except against a corresponding note, necessarily the sum of notes is covered by the sum of the objects of value. The calculation is perfectly equal, it is exact to a second of labor time, and there is not a superior employee in the Office of the Public Debt who, however appalled by his own duties, could in this calculation make the slightest error. What more could be desired?

In modern capitalist society each industrial capitalist produces on his own account what he likes, how he likes, and as much as he likes. The quantity socially demanded is for him an unknown magnitude, and he does not know the quality of the objects demanded any more than their quantity. That which to-day cannot be supplied quickly enough may to-morrow be in excess of the demand. Ultimately demand is satisfied in some fashion, ill or well, and generally production is definitely regulated by the objects demanded. How is the reconciliation of this contradiction effected? By competition. And how does that arrive at this solution? Simply by depreciating below their labor value the commodities which are by reason of their quality or quantity useless or unnecessary, in the present state of the demand of society, and in making the producers feel, in this explicit fashion, that they have manufactured articles absolutely useless or unnecessary, or that they have manufactured a superfluity of otherwise useful articles. From that two things follow:

First, the continual deviation of the price of commodities in relation to the value of commodities is the necessary condition by which alone the value of commodities can exist. It is only by the fluctuations of competition, and following that, of the price of commodities, that the law of value realizes itself in the
production of commodities and that the determination of value by the labor time socially necessary becomes a reality. That the form of representation of value, price, has, in general, a quite other aspect than the value which it manifests, is a lot which it shares with the greater part of social relations. The king often bears but slight resemblance to the monarchy which he represents. In a society of producers of exchangeable commodities, to wish to determine value by labor time by interdicting competition from establishing this determination of value in the single form by which it can do this—in influencing its price, is to show, at least in this connection, the habitual utopian misunderstanding of economic laws.

In the second place competition, in realizing the law of value of the production of commodities in a society of producers for exchange, establishes by that means and by assured conditions the single order and the single organisation possible for social production. It is only by the depreciation or appreciation of the price of products that the isolated producers of commodities learn to their cost what kind of things society requires, and the quantity it requires of them. But it is precisely this single regulator which the utopianism shared by Rodbertus would suppress. And if we ask what guarantee we have that only the necessary quantity of each commodity would be produced, that we should not be wanting corn and meat while there was an abundance of beet sugar and we were inundated with a too plentiful supply of potato spirit, that we should not be lacking breeches to cover our nakedness while breeches buttons were multiplied by the million—Rodbertus triumphantly shows us his famous account, in which there is set forth an exact certificate for each superfluous pound of sugar, for each cask of spirit not purchased, for each useless
breeches button, an account which is "just," which "satisfies all the conditions and in which the liquidation is exact." And anyone who does not believe this has only to address himself to "M. X.," the superior employee of the Office of the Public Debt in Pomerania, who has revised the calculation and has found it just, and who may be regarded as never having been capable of a mistake in his accounts.

And now let us briefly notice the naïveté with which Rodbertus would suppress industrial and commercial crises by means of his utopia. When the production of commodities has reached the limits of the world market it is by a cataclysm of this market, by a commercial crisis, that equilibrium is established between the isolated producers, producing each according to his individual calculation, and the market for which they produce, and of the demand of which, both as to quantity and quality, they are ignorant. If competition is to be prevented from making known to the isolated producers the state of the market by the rise or fall of prices, they would be blinded indeed. To direct the production of commodities in such fashion that the producers could not know the state of the market for which they produce—it is to provide for crises in such a fashion as to raise the envy of Doctor Eisenbart for Rodbertus.

We can understand now why Rodbertus determined the value of commodities by labor, and further admitted different degrees of intensity of labor. If he had enquired why and how labor created value and, in consequence, determined and measured it, he would have arrived at socially necessary labor, necessary for the isolated product, as well in relation to other products of the same kind, as well as in relation to the total quantity socially required. He would have been met with the question:
How is the production of isolated producers accommodated to the total social demand? and all his utopia would have become impossible. This time, indeed, he has preferred to abstract, he has made an abstraction of the problem to be solved.

At last we come to the point where Rodbertus offers us something new: the point which distinguishes him from all his numerous comrades of the organisation of exchange by labor-notes. They all acclaim this method of exchange with the object of destroying the exploitation of wage-labor by capital. Each producer must obtain the total labor-value of his product. They are unanimous about this from Gray to Proudhon. Not at all, says Rodbertus, on the contrary. Wage-labor and its exploitation will still exist.

In the first place there is no social state possible in which the laborer could receive for his own consumption the total value of his product. The funds produced must support a number of functions economically unproductive but necessary; and they must consequently maintain the people concerned with these functions. That is true only as regards the present division of labor. In regard to a society where productive labor would be obligatory, a society which is certainly possible, the statement falls to the ground. There still remains the necessity for an accumulated social reserve fund, and then the laborers, that is to say all, would remain in possession and in enjoyment of the total product, but each isolated worker would not enjoy the integral product of his own labor. The support of functions, economically unproductive, by the product of labor has not been neglected by the other labor-note utopians. But they leave the workers to impose this obligation upon themselves, following in this respect the customary democratic method, while Rod-
bertus, whose whole theory of social reform in 1842 is fashioned according to the Prussian State pattern of that time, refers everything to the judgment of the bureaucracy, which authoritatively determines the share of the worker in the product of his own labor, and graciously abandons that part to him. Then rent and profit must also continue to exist. In fact, the landed proprietors and the industrial capitalists do fulfil certain functions, socially useful, or even necessary, although economically unproductive, and receive in exchange a kind of remuneration, rent and profit—which is a conception scarcely new, even in 1842. Truth to tell, they receive very much too much for the little that they do, and which they do sufficiently ill; but Robbertus has need of a privileged class, at least for 500 years to come, also the rate of surplus-value, to express myself correctly, that must also exist, but without being capable of being augmented. Robbertus accepts as the actual aggregate of surplus value, 200 per cent., that is to say, that for a daily labor of twelve hours the worker will not receive a certificate of twelve hours, but one of four hours only, and the value produced in the remaining eight hours must be shared between landlord and capitalist. The labor-notes of Robbertus lie then, absolutely, but it is necessary to be a Pomeranian feudal proprietor to imagine that there is a working class to whom it would be advantageous to work twelve hours to obtain a labor-note of four hours. If the juggleries of capitalist production were translated in this simple manner, in which it appears as a manifest theft, it would be rendered impossible. Each labor-note given to the worker would be a direct provocation to rebellion, and would fall within the scope of section 110 of the penal code of the German Empire. It is necessary never to have seen any
other proletariat than that of a Pomeranian feudal estate, a proletariat of day laborers, almost serfs, in fact, where the bâton and the whip reign supreme, and where all the pretty girls of the village belong to the harem of their gracious seigneur, to be able to offer such impertinences to the workers. But our conservatives are our greatest revolutionists.

But if the workers were sufficiently simple to allow themselves to be persuaded that having labored for twelve full hours, they have in reality only labored four hours, they would at least be recompensed by being guaranteed that their proportion of the product of their own labor would never fall below a third. That is, in reality, to play the air of the society of the future on a child’s trumpet. That is really not worth spending another word upon. Consequently all that Rodbertus offers that is new in his utopia of labor—notes is childish and far inferior to the labor of his numerous rivals, whether they have preceded or followed him.

For the epoch in which it appeared Rodbertus’s “Zur Erkenntniss, &c.” was certainly an important book. To pursue the theory of Ricardo in this direction was a promising beginning. If for him and for Germany alone it was a novelty, his work might in its completion have attained the same height as that of the best among his English predecessors. But it was only a commencement of which the theory could only achieve a real result by ulterior, fundamental, critical work. This development was arrested because from the outset the development of the theory of Ricardo was carried in the other direction, in the direction of utopia. From then it lost the essential of all criticism—Independence. Rodbertus worked then with a preconceived end; he became an economist with a settled tendency. Once seized by his
utopianism, he is precluded from all possibility of scientific progress. From 1842 until his death he turned in the same circle, reproduced the same ideas, already expressed or indicated in his preceding works, found himself misunderstood, found himself pillaged, when he had nothing of which to be robbed, and at last refused to accept the evidence that at bottom he had discovered nothing which had not already been established long before him.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that in this work the language is not identical with that of “Capital.” In this work Marx still speaks of labor as a commodity, and of its purchase and sale, instead of labor power.

As appendices we have added to this work: 1st, a passage from Marx’s work, “Critique de l’Economie Politique,” Berlin, 1859, with reference to the first labor-notes utopia of John Gray; and 2nd, the discourse of Marx on “Free Trade” delivered in French at Brussels in 1847, which belongs to the same period of the author’s development as the “Misère.”

FRIEDRICH ENGELS.

London, October 23, 1884.
M. Proudhon has the misfortune of being singularly misunderstood in Europe. In France he has the right to be a bad economist, because he passes for a good German philosopher. In Germany he has the right to be a bad philosopher, because he passes for one of the greatest of the French economists. We, as both German and economist at the same time, wish to protest against this double error.

The reader will understand that in this ungrateful task it has been often necessary for us to leave the criticism of M. Proudhon, in order to turn to that of German philosophy and to set forth from time to time some views on political economy.

KARL MARX.

Brussels, June 15, 1847.
The work of M. Proudhon is not simply a treatise on political economy, an ordinary book, it is a Bible: "Mysteries," "Secrets dragged from the bosom of God," "Revelations," nothing is wanting. But as, in our days, the prophets are discussed more conscientiously than the profane authors, the reader must resign himself to pass with us by the arid and gloomy erudition of "Genesis" in order to rise later with M. Proudhon into the ethereal and fruitful regions of supra-Socialism. (See Proudhon's "Philosophie de la Misère," Prologue, page III, line 20.)
CHAPTER I.

A SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY.

SECTION I.—OPPOSITION OF UTILITY-VALUE TO EXCHANGE-VALUE.

"The capacity possessed by all products, natural or industrial, to serve the subsistence of man is specially described as utility-value; the capacity they have of being given in exchange for each other as exchange-value.... How does utility-value become exchange-value?.... The generation of the idea of value (in exchange) has not been noted by the economists with sufficient care; it is important for us to halt here. Since among the objects of which I have need many are found in nature only in very small quantities, or, in some cases, not at all, I am forced to aid in the production of what I want; and, as I cannot turn my hand to so many things, I propose to other men, my collaborators in different functions, to cede to me a portion of their products in exchange for mine." (Proudhon, vol. I., chap. ii.)

M. Proudhon proposes to himself to, before all, explain to us the double nature of value, "the distinction in value,"...
the process which makes exchange-value of utility-value. It is important for us to halt with M. Proudhon at this act of transubstantiation. This is how this act is accomplished according to our author:

A large number of products are not found in nature, they are found at the end of industry. Suppose his needs exceed the spontaneous production of nature, man is forced to have recourse to industrial production. What is this production, in the supposition of M. Proudhon? What is its origin? A single man experiencing the want of a large number of things "cannot turn his hand to so many things." To have so many wants to satisfy supposes so many things to produce—there are no products without production—to have so many things to produce pre-supposes more than the hand of a single man already assisting in production. But from the moment that you suppose more than one hand assisting in production you have already supposed a whole system of production based on the sub-division of labor. Thus the need, such as M. Proudhon supposes it, itself pre-supposes the whole sub-division of labor. In supposing the sub-division of labor you have exchange, and consequently exchange-value. It would have been just as well to have supposed exchange-value in the first place.

But M. Proudhon prefers to make the circuit. Let us follow him in all his detours, to always return to the point of departure.

To leave the state of things in which each produces solitarily, and to arrive at exchange, "I address myself," says M. Proudhon, "to my collaborators in various functions." Then, it seems, I have some collaborators who all have various functions, without I and all the others, in order to arrive at such a state of things—always according to the supposition of M. Proudhon—
having abandoned the solitary and unsocial position of Robinson Crusoe. The collaborators, and the diverse functions, the division of labor and the exchange which it indicates are all existing already.

To summarise: I have wants based upon the division of labor and on the exchange of commodities. In supposing these wants M. Proudhon finds that he has supposed exchange, exchange-value, of which he precisely proposes to "note the generation with more care than the other economists."

M. Proudhon could just as well have inverted the order of things without by so doing inverting the justness of his conclusions. To explain exchange-value there must be exchange. To explain exchange there must be division of labor. To explain the division of labor there must be wants which necessitate the division of labor. To explain these wants it is necessary to "suppose" them, which is not to deny them, contrary to the first axiom of M. Proudhon's prologue: "To suppose God is to deny him." (Prologue, p. i).

How does M. Proudhon, for whom the division of labor is supposed known, take this to explain exchange-value, which for him is always the unknown?

"A man" sets out "to propose to other men, his collaborators in various functions," to establish exchange and to make a distinction between use-value and exchangeable value. In accepting this proposed distinction the collaborators have left to M. Proudhon no other "care" than to take account of the fact, to mark, to "note" in his treatise of political economy "the generation of the idea of value." But he owes it to us, always, to explain "the generation" of this proposition, to tell us, finally, how this single solitary man, this Robinson Crusoe, has had suddenly the idea of making
"to his collaborators" a proposition of this kind, and how his collaborators have been led to accept it without any protest whatever.

M. Proudhon does not enter into these genealogical details. He simply gives to the fact of exchange a kind of historical cachet in presenting it under the form of a motion, which a third party has made, tending to establish exchange.

That is a sample of "the historical and descriptive method" of M. Proudhon, who professes a superb disdain for the "historical and descriptive method" of Adam Smith and Ricardo.

Exchange has its own history. It has passed through different phases.

There was a time, as in the Middle Ages, when only the superfluity, the excess of production over consumption, was exchanged.

There was, again, a time when not only the superfluity but all the products, the whole of industrial existence, entered into commerce, in which the whole production depended entirely upon exchange. How are we to explain this second phase of exchange—saleable value at its second power?

M. Proudhon would be prepared with an answer: Admit that a man has "proposed to other men, his collaborators in various functions," to raise saleable value to its second power.

Lastly, there comes a time when all that men have regarded as inalienable become objects of exchange, of traffic, and can be disposed of. It is the time in which even the things which until then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, opinion, science, conscience, &c.—where all at last enter into commerce. It
is the period of general corruption; of universal venality, or, to speak in the terms of political economy, the time when everything moral or physical having become a saleable commodity, is conveyed to the market to be appraised at its proper value.

How can we explain this new and last phase of exchange—saleable value at its third power?

M. Proudhon would have an answer all ready: Put it that a person has "proposed to some other persons, his collaborators in various functions," to make of virtue, love, &c., a saleable value, to raise exchange-value to its third and last power. We thus see that the "historical and descriptive method" of M. Proudhon suffices for everything, it answers to everything, it explains everything. If it is above all a question of explaining historically "the generation of an economic idea," he supposes a man who proposes to other men, his collaborators in various functions, that they should accomplish this act of generation, and all is said.

Henceforth we accept the "generation" of exchange-value as an accomplished fact; it only remains now to explain the relation of exchange-value to utility-value. Listen to M. Proudhon.

"The economists have very well explained the double character of value; but what they have not set out with equal clearness is its contradictory nature; it is here that our criticism begins.... It is a small matter to have signalled in utility-value and exchange-value this astonishing contrast, in which the economists are accustomed to see nothing but the most simple matter: it is necessary to show that this pretended simplicity hides a profound mystery which it is our duty to penetrate.... In technical terms use-value and exchange-value are in inverse ratio the one to the other."
If we have grasped M. Proudhon's idea, here are the four points he proposes to establish:

1. Utility-value and exchange-value form an "astonishing contrast," they are in opposition to each other.

2. Utility-value and exchange-value are in inverse ratio the one to the other, in contradiction.

3. The economists have neither seen nor known, either the opposition or the contradiction.

4. The criticism of M. Proudhon begins at the end. We also, we will commence at the end, and in order to clear the economists from the accusations of M. Proudhon we will hear what two economists of some importance have to say.

Sismondi: "It is the opposition between value in use and exchangeable value to which commerce has reduced all things, &c." ("Études," vol. II., p. 162. Brussels edition.)

Lauderdale: "In general national wealth (utility-value) diminishes in proportion as individual fortunes increase by the augmentation of saleable value; and to the extent that these are reduced by the diminution of this value, the first generally increases." ("Enquiries into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth.")

Upon the opposition between use-value and exchange-value Sismondi has based his principal theory that the diminution of the revenue is in proportion to the increase of production.

Lauderdale has based his system on the theory of the inverse ratio of the two kinds of value, and his doctrine was so popular at the time of Ricardo that the latter could speak of it as of a thing generally known:

"It is through confounding the ideas of value and wealth, or riches, that it has been asserted that by diminishing the quantity of commodities, that is to say,
of the necessaries, conveniences and enjoyments of human life, riches may be increased.” (Ricardo, “Principles of Political Economy.”)

We have just seen that the economists before M. Proudhon have “signalised” the profound mystery of opposition and contradiction. Let us now see how in his turn M. Proudhon explains this mystery after the economists.

The exchange-value of a product falls in proportion as the supply increases; in other terms, the greater the abundance of a product relatively to the demand, the lower its exchange-value or its price falls. And vice versa, the smaller the supply relatively to the demand, the higher the exchange-value or the price of the product rises; in other terms, the greater the scarcity of the products offered relatively to the demand, the dearer they are. The exchange-value of a product depends upon its abundance or its scarcity, but always in relation to the demand. Suppose a most rare product, one unique of its kind, if you will: this unique product would be more than abundant if it were not wanted at all. On the other hand, suppose a product multiplied by millions, it will be always scarce so long as it does not meet the demand; that is to say, if it is in too great demand.

These are mere truisms, but it is necessary to reproduce them here in order to make M. Proudhon’s mysteries clearly understood.

“Therefore in following the principle to its ultimate consequences we come to this conclusion, the most logical in the world, that the things which are most necessary as articles of use, and whose quantity is infinite can be had for nothing, and those of which the utility is nil and which are extremely scarce will have an inestimable price. To increase the difficulty, actual
practice does not admit these extremes; on the one side, no human product ever attains the infinite in magnitude; on the other the most scarce things have need of some degree of utility in order to be possessed of any value. Use-value and exchange-value are thus fatally chained to each other, although by their nature they continually tend to exclude each other.” (Vol. I., p. 39.)

What is it which adds to the difficulty of M. Proudhon? It is simply that he has forgotten the demand, and that a thing can only be scarce or abundant according as it is in demand. Demand once set aside he assimilates exchange-value to scarcity and use-value to abundance. Practically in saying that the things “of which the utility is nil, and which are extremely scarce, will have an inestimable price,” he simply says that exchange-value is nothing but scarcity. “Extreme scarcity and utility nil,” is pure scarcity. “Inestimable price” is the maximum of exchange-value, it is pure exchange-value. He puts these two terms in equation. Then, exchange-value and scarcity are equivalent terms. In arriving at these pretended “extreme consequences,” M. Proudhon finds in effect that he has pushed to extremes, not the things, but the terms which express them, and in that he demonstrates his rhetoric rather than his logic. He finds once more his first hypotheses in all their nakedness when he believes that he has discovered new consequences. Thanks to the same process he succeeds in identifying use-value with pure abundance.

After having put in equation exchange-value and scarcity, utility-value and abundance, M. Proudhon is astonished not to find utility-value in scarcity and exchange-value, nor exchange-value in abundance and utility-value; and in seeing that actual practice does not admit of these extremes he can do no other than believe
in the mystery. There is for him inestimable price, because there are no buyers, and he will never find them while he continues to exclude demand.

From another side, the abundance of M. Proudhon seems to be something spontaneous. He all at once forgets that there are people who produce, and that it is to their interest never to lose sight of the demand. If not, how can M. Proudhon have been able to say that the things which are very useful must be very cheap, or even cost nothing? He ought to have concluded, on the contrary, that it is necessary to restrict abundance, the production of very useful things, if one wished to raise their price, their value in exchange.

The old vine growers of France, in asking for a law prohibiting the planting of fresh vines; the Dutch, in burning the spices of Asia, in uprooting the clove-trees in the Malays, wished simply to reduce abundance in order to raise the exchange-value. So the society of the Middle Ages, in limiting by law the number of associates whom a single master could employ, and in limiting the number of instruments he could use, acted on the same principle. (See Anderson, "History of Commerce."

After having represented abundance as use-value and scarcity as exchange-value—nothing more easy than to demonstrate that abundance and scarcity are in inverse ratio—M. Proudhon identifies use-value with supply and exchange-value with demand. To make the antithesis still more clear, he substitutes other terms by putting value of choice instead of exchange-value. Here then the struggle has changed its ground and we have on one side utility (use-value, supply), on the other choice (exchange-value, demand.)

These two powers opposed the one to the other, who will reconcile them? What can be done to bring them
into accord? Is it possible for us only to establish between them a point of comparison?

"Certainly," cries M. Proudhon, "there is one, it is choice! The price which will result from this struggle between supply and demand, between utility and choice, will not be the expression of eternal justice."

M. Proudhon proceeds to develop this antithesis:

"In my character of free purchaser, I am the judge of what I want, judge of the convenience of the article, judge of the price I am willing to put upon it. On the other hand, in your quality of free producer, you are master of the means of production, and in consequence you have the power to reduce your cost of production." (Vol. I., p. 42.)

And as demand, or exchange-value, is identical with opinion, M. Proudhon is led to say:

"It is proved that it is the free will of man which gives rise to the opposition between use-value and exchange-value. How can we solve this opposition whilst maintaining free will? And how can we sacrifice this, without at least sacrificing man?" (Vol. I., p. 51.)

Thus then there is no result possible. There is a struggle between two incommensurable powers, so to speak, between utility and choice, between the free purchaser and the free producer.

Let us examine these things a little more closely.

Supply does not represent utility exclusively; demand does not represent choice exclusively. He who demands, does he not also offer a product of some kind, or the representative sign of all products, money; and in supplying this does he not, according to M. Proudhon, represent utility, or use-value?

On the other hand, he who offers, does he not also demand a product of some kind, or the representative
sign of all products? And does he not thus become the representative of choice, of the value of choice, or exchange-value?

A demand is at the same time an offer, an offer is at the same time a demand. Thus the antithesis of M. Proudhon in simply identifying supply and demand, the one to utility, the other to choice, rests merely on a futile abstraction.

What M. Proudhon calls value of utility other economists, with as much reason, call value of choice. We will only cite Storch. ("Cours d'Économie Politique," Paris, 1823, pp. 88 and 99.)

According to him, those things are called wants, of which we feel the want; those things are called values to which we attribute value. Most things only have value because they satisfy wants engendered by choice. Opinion as to our wants may change, then the utility of things, which expresses only the relation of those things to our wants, may change also. Natural wants themselves change continually. What variety there is, for instance, in the objects which serve as the staple food among different peoples!

The struggle is not really between utility and choice; it is between the saleable value demanded by him who wishes to sell, and the saleable value offered by him who makes the demand, who wishes to buy. The exchangeable value of the product is each time the result of these contradictory appreciations.

In a final analysis, supply and demand bring together production and consumption, but production and consumption based upon individual exchanges. The product offered is not utility in itself. It is the consumer who verifies its utility. And even when its quality of utility is recognised, it is not exclusively utility. In the
course of production it has been exchanged against all the expenses of production, such as raw material, workpeople’s wages, &c., all things which are saleable values. Thus the product represents, in the eyes of the producer, a sum of saleable values. What he offers is not merely an object of utility, but, above all, a saleable value.

As to demand, it can only be effective on condition that it has at its disposal some means of exchange. These means themselves are products, saleable values.

In supply and demand then, we find, on one side a product which has cost some saleable values, and the desire to sell; on the other, some means which have cost some saleable values and the desire to purchase.

M. Proudhon opposes the free purchaser to the free producer. He has given to the one and to the other some purely metaphysical qualities. This it is which makes him say: “It is proved that it is the free will of man which gives rise to the opposition between use-value and exchange-value.”

The producer, from the moment that he has produced in a society based on the division of labor and the exchange of commodities—and that is the hypothesis of M. Proudhon—is forced to sell. M. Proudhon makes the producer master of the means of production; but he will agree with us that it is not upon his free will that his means of production depend. Further, these means of production consist largely of products which come to him from without, and in modern production he is not even free to produce whatever quantity he likes. The actual degree of development of productive forces obliges him to produce on such and such a scale.

The consumer is not more free than the producer. His choice depends upon his means and his wants. The one and the other are determined by his social position,
which itself depends upon the entire social organisation. Thus the worker who buys potatoes, and the kept woman who buys lace, follow the one and the other their respective choice. But the diversity of their choice is explained by the difference in the positions which they occupy in the world, a difference which is the product of the social organisation.

Is the entire range of wants based upon choice or upon the whole organisation of production? In most cases wants spring directly from production or from a state of things based upon production. The commerce of the world almost entirely turns upon wants arising not from individual consumption but from production. Thus, to take another example, does not the need for notaries presuppose a given civil right, which is only an expression of a certain development of property; that is to say, production?

For M. Proudhon it is not sufficient to have eliminated from the relation of supply and demand the elements of which we have just spoken. He pushes abstraction to the farthest limits, in confounding all producers in a single producer, all consumers in a single consumer, and in establishing the struggle between these two chimerical personages. But in the real world matters go otherwise. The competition between those who offer, and the competition between those who demand, forms a necessary element of the struggle between buyers and sellers, from which saleable value arises.

After having eliminated the cost of production and competition, M. Proudhon can at his ease reduce to absurdity the formula of supply and demand.

"Supply and demand," he says, "are nothing but two ceremonial forms serving to set before each other use-value and exchange-value, and to effect their reconcilia-
tion. They are the two electric poles which, when put into relation with each other, produce the phenomenon of affinity called exchange." (Vol. I., pp. 49 and 50.)

This amounts to as much as saying that exchange is only a "ceremonial form" to bring face to face the consumer and the object of consumption. As well say that all economic relations are "ceremonial forms" serving as intermediaries to immediate consumption. Supply and demand are relations of a given production, neither more nor less than are individual exchanges.

Of what, after all, then, does M. Proudhon's dialectic consist? In substituting for use-value and exchange-value, for supply and demand, some abstract and contradictory notions, such as scarcity and abundance, utility and choice, a producer and a consumer, both of them chevaliers of free will.

And to what, as the result of all this, does he come?

To arrange the means of introducing later one of the elements which he had excluded, the cost of production, as the synthesis between use-value and exchange-value. It is thus that in his eyes the cost of production constitutes synthetic value, or constituted value.

SECTION II.—CONSTITUTED OR SYNTHETIC VALUE.

"Value (saleable) is the corner-stone of the economic edifice." "Constituted" value is the corner-stone of the system of economic contradictions.

What then, is this "constituted value" which constitutes all M. Proudhon's discovery in political economy?

Utility being admitted, labor is the source of value. The measure of labor is time. The relative value of products is determined by the labor time it is necessary
to employ in order to produce them. Price is the monetary expression of the relative value of a product. Finally the *constituted* value of a product is simply the value which is constituted by the labor time embodied in it.

Just as Adam Smith discovered the *division of labor*, in the same way M. Proudhon claims to have discovered "constituted value." This is not precisely "something unheard of," but then it must also be admitted that there is nothing unheard of in any discovery in economic science. M. Proudhon, who feels all the importance of his discovery, nevertheless seeks to attenuate its merit, "in order to reassure the reader with regard to his pretensions to originality and to conciliate those whose timidity rends them but little favorable to new ideas." But, while admitting that each of his predecessors has done something for the appreciation of value, he is compelled to loudly proclaim that it is to him that the greater part, the lion's share, belongs.

"The synthetical idea of value was vaguely perceived by Adam Smith.... But this idea of value was entirely intuitive with Adam Smith; nevertheless, society does not change its habits on the faith of intuitions, it decides only on the authority of facts. It is necessary that the contradiction should be expressed in a clearer and more sensible manner. J. B. Say was its principal exponent."

There is the whole history of the discovery of synthetical value—to Adam Smith vague intuition, to J. B. Say contradiction, to M. Proudhon the constituent and "constituted" truth. And let there be no mistake; all the other economists, from Say to Proudhon, have done nothing but wander in the beaten path of contradiction.

"It is incredible that so many men of sense should for forty years have struggled against such a simple idea."
But no, the comparison of values is effected without there being any point of comparison between them and without unity of measure:—that is what the economists of the nineteenth century, rather than embrace the revolutionary theory of equality, have resolved to maintain towards and against all. *What will posterity say about it?"* (Vol. I., p. 68.)

Posterity, so brusquely apostrophised, will commence by being puzzled about this chronology. It must necessarily ask: But were not Ricardo and his school economists of the nineteenth century? The system of Ricardo, which set forth the principle "that the relative value of commodities depends exclusively on the quantity of labor required for their production," appeared in 1817. Ricardo is the chief of a whole school which reigned in England since the Restoration. The Ricardian theory sums up, rigorously, pitilessly, all the doctrine of the English middle class, itself the type of the modern bourgeoisie.

"What will posterity say about it?" It will not say that M. Proudhon did not know Ricardo, because he speaks of him, deals with his theory at considerable length, returns to it constantly, and ends by saying that it is rubbish. If ever posterity concerns itself with the subject, it will say, perhaps, that M. Proudhon, fearing to shock the anglophobia of his readers, has preferred to make himself the editor responsible for the ideas of Ricardo. However that may be, it will find it very curious that M. Proudhon gave as a "revolutionary theory of the future" that which Ricardo had scientifically explained as the theory of existing society, of bourgeois society, and that he thus took for the solution of the contradiction between utility and exchange-value what Ricardo and his school had, a long time before him, pre-
A SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

presented as the scientific formula of a single side of that contradiction of *exchange-value*. But let us put posterity altogether on one side and confront M. Proudhon with his predecessor Ricardo. Here are some passages from that author which sum up his theory of value.

"It is not utility which is the measure of *exchange-value* although that quality is absolutely necessary." (Vol. I., p. 3, "Principles of Political Economy.")

"Things, once they are recognised as useful in themselves, draw their exchange-value from two sources: from their scarcity and from the quantity of labor necessary to acquire them. There are some things the value of which depends only on their scarcity. No amount of labor being capable of increasing their quantity, their value cannot fall through their too great abundance. Such are rare statues, pictures, &c. This value depends solely on the faculties, the tastes and the caprice of those desirous of possessing such objects." (Vol. I., pp. 4 and 5.) "These, however, form but a very small part of the commodities which are constantly exchanged. The greater number of desirable objects being the fruit of industry, they can be multiplied, not only in one country, but in many, to an extent to which it is almost impossible to fix any limits, every time that one is willing to employ the industry necessary to create them." (Vol. I., p. 5.) "When, then, we speak of commodities, of their exchange-value, and of the principles which regulate their relative price, we have in view only those commodities the quantity of which can be increased by the industry of man, the production of which is encouraged by competition, and is not prevented by any obstacle." (Vol. I., p. 5)

Ricardo quotes Adam Smith, who, according to him, "has defined with great precision the primitive source
of all exchange-value" (Vol. I., ch. 5 of Smith), and he adds: "That such must in reality be the basis of exchange-value of all things (namely, labor time) except those which the industry of man cannot multiply at will, is a doctrinal point of the highest importance in political economy; for there is no source from which have flowed so many errors, and out of which have sprung so many diverse opinions in this science as from the vague and indefinite sense attached to the word value." (Vol. I., p. 8.)

"If it is the quantity of labor embodied in an article which regulates its exchange-value, it follows that every increase in the quantity of labor must necessarily increase the value of the object upon which it has been employed, in the same way every reduction in the amount of labor must bring about a reduction in price." (Vol. I., p. 9.)

Ricardo afterwards reproaches Smith:

(1) "With having given to value a measure other than labor, sometimes the value of wheat, sometimes the quantity of labor which an article would purchase, &c." (Vol. I., pp. 9 and 10.)

(2) "With having admitted the principle without reserve, and to have, nevertheless, restricted its application to the rude and primitive state of society which preceded the accumulation of capital and the ownership of land." (Vol. I., p. 21.)

Ricardo devotes himself to demonstrating that the ownership of land, that is to say rent, cannot change the relative value of commodities, and that the accumulation of capital exercises only a passing and oscillating influence on the relative values determined by the comparative quantity of labor employed in their production. In support of this proposition he formulates his famous
theory of rent, decomposes capital and comes, in the final analysis, to find that there is nothing but accumulated labor. He afterwards develops a whole theory of wages and profit, and demonstrates that wages and profit rise and fall in inverse ratio the one to the other, without influencing the relative value of the product. He does not ignore the influence which the accumulation of capitals and the difference in their nature (fixed capital and circulating capital), as well as the rate of wages, may exercise on the proportional value of the products. There are, indeed, the principal problems which occupy Ricardo.

"Every economy of labor," says he, "never fails to reduce the relative value of a commodity, whether this economy be effected in the labor necessary to the manufacture of the article itself or in the labor necessary to the formation of the capital employed in that manufacture." (Vol. I., p. 48.) "In consequence, while a day's labor continues to give to one the same quantity of fish and to the other the same of game, the natural rate of the respective prices of exchange will remain the same, whatever may, otherwise, be the variation in wages and in profit, and in spite of all the effects of the accumulation of capital." (Vol. I., p. 32.) "We have regarded labor as the foundation of the value of things, and the quantity of labor necessary to their production as the law which determines the respective quantities of commodities which must be given in exchange for others; but we have not pretended to deny that there may be in the current prices of commodities some accidental and passing deviation from this primitive and natural price." (Vol. I., p. 105). "It is the cost of production which regulates, in the last analysis, the price of things
and not, as has often been advanced, the proportion between supply and demand."

Lord Lauderdale had developed the variations of exchange-value according to the law of supply and demand, or of scarcity and abundance relatively to demand. According to him the value of a thing would increase when its quantity diminished or demand increased; it would diminish in proportion to the increase of its quantity or to the reduction of demand. Thus the value of anything might change by the operation of eight different causes, namely, four causes appertaining to the thing itself, and four causes appertaining to money or any other commodity which served as measure of its value. Here is Ricardo's refutation:

"The products of which an individual or a company has the monopoly vary in value according to the law which Lord Lauderdale has postulated: they fall in proportion as they are supplied in greater quantity, and they rise with the desire of purchasers to acquire them; their price has no necessary relation to their natural value. But as to the things which are subject to competition between the sellers, and of which the quantity can be increased within reasonable limits, their price depends definitely not upon the state of demand and of supply, but upon the actual cost of production." (Vol. II., p. 159.)

We will leave the reader to compare the precise, clear, and simple language of Ricardo with the rhetorical efforts made by M. Proudhon in order to arrive at the determination of relative value by labor time.

Ricardo shows us the real movement of bourgeois production which constitutes value. M. Proudhon, making abstraction of this movement, "struggles" to invent new processes in order to regulate the world
according to a professedly new formula which is only the theoretical expression of the real existing movement so well expounded by Ricardo. Ricardo takes for his point of departure existing society to demonstrate to us how it constitutes value. M. Proudhon takes for his point of departure constituted value, in order to constitute a new social world by means of this value. For him, M. Proudhon, constituted value must make a circuit and become the constituent for a world already fully constituted according to this mode of valuation. The determination of value by labor time is for Ricardo the law of exchange-value; for M. Proudhon it is the synthesis of use-value and exchange-value. The theory of value of Ricardo is the scientific interpretation of actual economic life; the theory of value of M. Proudhon is the utopian interpretation of the theory of Ricardo. Ricardo proves the truth of his formula by drawing his conclusions from all the economic relations and in explaining by this means all the phenomena, even those which at first sight appear to contradict it, such as rent, the accumulation of capitals, and the connection between wages and profits; that is precisely what makes of his theory a scientific system. M. Proudhon, who has rediscovered this formula of Ricardo's by means of entirely arbitrary hypotheses, is compelled afterwards to seek for isolated economic facts which he tortures and falsifies, in order to make them serve as examples, applications already existing, of the beginnings of the realisation of his regenerating idea. (See our Section 3, "Application of Constituted Value.")

Let us now pass on to the conclusions which M. Proudhon draws from value constituted (by labor time).

— A given quantity of labor equals the product created by the same quantity of labor.
Every day's labor is worth another day's labor; that is to say, in equal quantity the labor of one is worth the labor of another: there is no qualitative difference. Given an equal quantity of labor, the product of one will exchange for the product of another. All men are wage-workers, and equal wages pay for an equal time of labor. Perfect equality presides over the exchange.

Are these conclusions the natural, rigorous consequences of value "constituted," or determined, by labor-time?

If the relative value of a commodity is determined by the quantity of labor required to produce it, it naturally follows that the relative value of labor, or wages, must be equally determined by the quantity of labor which is necessary to produce the wages. The wage, that is to say the relative value, or price, of labor, is then determined by the labor-time which is necessary to produce all that is required for the subsistence of the worker. "Reduce the cost of manufacturing hats and eventually their price will fall to their new natural price, although the demand may be doubled, trebled, or quadrupled. Reduce the cost of subsistence of men by reducing the natural price of the necessary food and clothing and you will see wages eventually fall, although the demand for hands may have considerably increased." (Ricardo, vol. II., p. 253.)

Certainly the language of Ricardo is most cynical. To put in the same category the cost of manufacturing hats and the cost of subsistence of man, is to transform man into a hat. The cynicism is in the things themselves, and not in the words which express these things. Some French writers, such as MM. Droz, Blanqui, Rossi and others, give themselves the innocent satisfaction of proving their superiority to the English economists by
A SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

seeking to observe the etiquette of "humanitarian" language; if they reproach Ricardo and his school with their cynical language, it is because they are annoyed at seeing economic conditions exposed in all their crudity, at seeing the mysteries of the bourgeoisie betrayed.

Let us sum up: Labor being itself a commodity, measures itself as such by the labor-time necessary to produce this labor-commodity. And what is necessary to produce the labor-commodity? Exactly that amount of labor time which is necessary to produce the objects indispensable to the constant subsistence of labor; that is to say, to enable the workers to live and to propagate his race. The natural price of labor is nothing but the minimum wage. If the current price of wages rises above the natural price it is precisely because the law of value, postulated in principle by M. Proudhon, finds itself counterbalanced by the consequences of the variations in the relation between supply and demand. But the minimum wage is, nevertheless, the centre towards which the current price of wages constantly gravitates.

Thus relative value, measured by labor-time, is fatally the formula of the modern slavery of the worker, instead of being, as M. Proudhon would have it, the "revolutionary theory" of the emancipation of the proletariat.

Let us now see in how many cases the application of labor time as the measure of value is incompatible with the existing antagonism of classes and the unequal distribution of the product between the immediate worker and the possessor of accumulated labor.

Let us suppose a certain product: for instance, linen. This product, as such, embodies a definite quantity of labor. This quantity of labor will be the same no
matter what may be the reciprocal positions of those whose labor has combined to create this product.

Let us take another product (cloth) which has exacted the same quantity of labor as the linen.

If there is an exchange of these products there is an exchange of equal quantities of labor. In exchanging these equal quantities of labor, we do not change the reciprocal position of the producers any more than we change something in the situation of the workers and manufacturers among them. To say that this exchange of products measured by time has, for its consequence, the equal remuneration of all the producers, is to suppose that equality of participation has existed anterior to the exchange. When the exchange of the cloth for the linen has been accomplished, the producers of the cloth will share in the linen in precisely the same proportions as they before shared in the cloth.

The illusion of M. Proudhon proceeds from his taking as a necessary consequence what at the most can be nothing but a gratuitous assumption.

Let us go further.

Does labor time, as the measure of value, suppose at least that the days are equivalent, and that the day of one is worth the day of another? No.

Assuming, for a moment, that the day of a jeweler is worth three days of a weaver, all changes in the value of jewels relatively to the value of woven stuffs must always, apart from the passing effects of the oscillation of supply and demand, have for cause a reduction or an increase on one side or the other of the time employed in production. Let three days of labor of different workers be in the proportion of 1, 2, 3, and all change in the relative value of their products will be a change in this proportion of 1, 2, 3. Thus
value may be measured by labor time in spite of the inequality of value of different days of labor; but, to apply a similar measure it is necessary for us to have a comparative scale of the different days of labor; it is competition which establishes this scale.

Is your hour of labor equal to mine? That is a question debated and settled by competition.

Competition, according to an American economist, determines how many days of simple labor are contained in a day of complex labor. Does not this reduction of days of complex labor to days of simple labor suppose that simple labor is itself taken as the measure of value? The single quantity of labor serving as the measure of value supposes in its turn that simple labor has become the pivot of industry. It supposes that labors are equalised by the subordination of man to the machine, or by the extreme division of labor; that men are effaced before labor; that the balance of the pendulum has become the exact measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Then it is not necessary to say that the hour of one man is worth the hour of another man, but rather that a man of one hour is worth another man of an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is no more than the carcase of time. There is no more question of quality. Quantity alone decides everything, hour for hour, day for day: but this equalisation of labor is not the work of M. Proudhon’s “eternal justice”; it is solely the accomplishment of modern industry.

In the automatic workshop the labor of one worker is scarcely distinguished in anything from the labor of another worker: the workers cannot distinguish between themselves except by the quantity of time they work. Nevertheless, this quantitative difference becomes, at a
certain point of view, qualitative, inasmuch as the time given to work depends, in part, on purely material causes, such as physical constitution, age, and sex; in part on purely negative moral qualities, such as patience, impassability, assiduity. Lastly, if there is a difference of quality in the labor of the workers it is at most a degree of the last quality, which is far from being a distinctive speciality. Such is, in the final analysis, the state of things in modern industry. It is on this already realised equality of automatic labor that M. Proudhon bases his plane of "equalisation" which he proposes to realise universally in "the time to come."

All the "equalitarian" consequences which M. Proudhon draws from the doctrine of Ricardo rest upon a fundamental error. That is, that he confounds the value of commodities measured by the quantity of labor embodied in them with the value of commodities measured by "the value of labor." If these two methods of measuring the value of commodities were confounded in one, we might say indifferently, the relative value of any commodity is measured by the quantity of value embodied in it; or, it is measured by the quantity of labor which it is able to purchase; or, again, it is measured by the quantity of labor which will purchase it. It is necessary, indeed, that it should be thus. The value of labor could no more serve as a measure of value than the value of any other commodity. Some examples will serve to more fully explain the above point.

If a quarter of wheat cost two days' labor instead of one, it would have double its primitive value; but it would not put in motion a double quantity of labor, because it would contain no more nutritive matter than before. Thus the value of the wheat, measured by the quantity of labor employed to produce it, would have
doubled; but measured either by the quantity of labor that it could buy, or by the quantity of labor by which it could be bought, it would be far from having doubled. On the other hand, if the same labor produced double the amount of clothing as before, the relative value would fall to one half; but nevertheless this double quantity of clothing will not thereby be reduced to command only half the quantity of labor, nor could the same quantity of labor command double the quantity of clothing, as the half of the clothing would continue to render to the workers the same service as before.

Thus, to determine the relative value of commodities by the value of labor is contrary to economic facts. It is to move in a vicious circle, to determine relative value by a relative value which, in its turn, needs to be determined.

It is beyond doubt that M. Proudhon confounds the two measures, the measure by the labor-time necessary to the production of a commodity, and the measure by the value of the labor. "The labor of every man," says he, "will purchase the labor which it embodies." Thus, according to him, a certain quantity of labor embodied in a product equals in value the remuneration of the worker, that is to say, the value of labor. It is, once more, the same reason which leads him to confound the cost of production with wages.

"What are wages? They are the price of the amount of wheat, &c., .... the integral price of all things." Let us go further still: "Wages are the proportionality of the elements which compose wealth!" What are wages? They are the value of labor.

Adam Smith takes as measures of value, sometimes the labor time necessary to the production of a commodity, sometimes the value of labor. Ricardo exposed
this error by showing clearly the disparity between these two methods of measuring. M. Proudhon enhances the error of Adam Smith by identifying the two things which the latter had only placed in juxtaposition.

It is in order to find the just proportion in which the workers should share in the products, or in other terms, to determine the relative value of labor, that M. Proudhon seeks for a measure of the relative value of commodities. To determine the measure of the relative value of commodities he can think of nothing better than of giving as the equivalent of a certain quantity of labor the sum of the products that it has created, which amounts to supposing that the whole of society consists solely of direct workers receiving for wages their own produce. In the second place, he sets forth as a fact the equality of the days of different workers. To sum up, he seeks the measure of the relative value of commodities in order to discover the equal remuneration of the workers, and he assumes, as an already established fact, equality of wages in order to discover the relative value of commodities. What admirable dialectic!

"Say and the economists who have followed him have observed that labor being itself subject to valuation, a commodity like any other, in fact, to take it for a principle and the efficient cause of value would be to move in a vicious circle. These economists, if they will permit me to say so, have shown by that a prodigious inattention. Labor is called value, not as being a commodity itself, but in view of the values supposed to be potentially embodied in it. The value of labor is a figurative expression, an anticipation of the cause and the effect. It is a fiction of the same kind as the productivity of capital. Labor produces, capital denotes value.... Labor, like liberty, is a vague and indefinite
thing by nature, but it becomes qualitatively defined by its object; that is to say, it becomes a reality by its product.

"But what need to insist? When the economist (read M. Proudhon) changes the name of things, _vera rerum vocabula_, he implicitly avows his impotence and puts himself out of court." (Proudhon I., 188.)

We have seen that M. Proudhon makes of the value of labor "the efficient cause" of the value of products to the extent that for him _wages_, the official name of the "value of labor," form the integral price of everything. That is why the objection of Say troubles him. In labor commodity, which is a frightful reality, he sees nothing but a grammatical ellipsis. The whole of existing society, then, based upon labor commodity, is henceforth based upon a poetic licence, on a figurative expression.

Does society desire to "eliminate all the inconveniences" which trouble it, it has only to eliminate all the ill-sounding terms. Let it change the language, and for that it has only to address itself to the Academy and ask it for a new edition of its dictionary. After all that we have seen, it is easy to understand why M. Proudhon, in a work on political economy, has had to enter into long dissertations on etymology and other parts of grammar. Thus, he has still to gravely discuss _servus a servare_. These philological dissertations have a profound meaning, an esoteric meaning; they form an essential part of the argument of M. Proudhon.

Labor, labor force, inasmuch as it is bought and sold, is a commodity the same as any other commodity, and has consequently an exchange-value. But the value of labor, or labor, as a commodity, does not produce, any more than the value of wheat, or wheat, as a commodity, serves for nourishment.
Labor "is worth" more or less, according as alimentary commodities are more or less dear, according as the supply and demand of "hands" exists in such or such a degree, &c., &c.

Labor is not a "vague thing": it is always definitely determined labor, never labor in general, which is bought and sold. It is not only the labor which is qualitatively defined by the object, but it is also the object which is determined by the specific quality of the labor.

Labor, in so far as it is bought and sold, is itself a commodity. Why is it purchased? "In view of the values supposed to be potentially embodied in it." But if we say that a certain thing is a commodity there is no question of the object for which we buy it, it is simply for the service we intend to derive from it; the application which we shall make of it. It is a commodity as object of traffic. All the reasonings of M. Proudhon confine themselves to this: We do not purchase labor as an object of immediate consumption. No, we buy it as an instrument of production, as we would buy a machine. Merely as a commodity labor is worth nothing and produces nothing. M. Proudhon might just as well have said that there are no commodities in existence at all, seeing that every commodity is only acquired for some use and never merely as a commodity.

In measuring the value of commodities by labor M. Proudhon vaguely perceives the impossibility of expressing labor by this same measure, in so far as it has a value, labor commodity. He has a misgiving that it is to make of the minimum wage the natural and normal price of direct labor, that it is to accept the existing state of society. So, to escape from this fatal consequence he performs a volte-face and pretends that labor is not a commodity, that it could not have a value. He forgets
that he has himself taken labor value for a measure. He forgets that his whole system rests on the labor commodity, on labor which is trafficked, bought and sold, exchanged for products, &c.; on the labor, in fine, which is an immediate source of revenue for the worker. He forgets all.

In order to save his system he consents to sacrifice its basis.

Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas!

We now arrive at a new definition of "constituted value."

"Value is the relation of the proportion of the products which compose wealth."

First of all let us remark that the simple expression "relative or exchangeable value" implies the idea of some sort of relation, in which the products exchange reciprocally. By giving to this relation the name of "relation of proportion" we change nothing of the relative value, except the expression. Neither the depreciation nor the enhancement of the value of a product destroys the quality which it possesses of finding itself in a "relation of proportion" of some kind with the other products which form wealth.

Why, then, this new term, which conveys no new idea?

The "relation of proportion" makes one think of many other economic relations, such as the proportion of production, the just proportion between supply and demand, &c.; and M. Proudhon has thought of all that in formulating this didactic paraphrase of saleable values.

In the first place, the relative value of products being determined by the comparative quantity of labor employed in the production of each of them, the relation
of the proportion, applied to this special use, signifies the respective quota of products which can be manufactured in a given time, and which, consequently, would be given in exchange.

Let us see what advantage M. Proudhon draws from this relation of proportion. Everybody knows that when supply and demand are equal the relative value of any product whatever is exactly determined by the quantity of labor embodied in it—that is to say, that this relative value expresses the relation of the proportion precisely in the sense in which we have just given it. M. Proudhon reverses the order of things. Begin, says he, by measuring the relative value of a product by the quantity of labor embodied in it, and then supply and demand will infallibly equalise themselves. Production will correspond with consumption; the product will be always exchangeable. Its current price will express precisely its exact value. Instead of saying, with everybody else, that when the weather is fine one sees many people out walking, M. Proudhon makes his people walk out in order to ensure fine weather.

What M. Proudhon gives as the consequence of saleable value determined à priori by labor time could only be justified by a law formulated in almost these terms:

Products will henceforth be exchanged in exact ratio to the labor time they have cost. Whatever may be the proportion between supply and demand, the exchange of commodities will be always as if they had been produced proportionately to the demand.

Let M. Proudhon take it on himself to formulate and to make such a law, and we will pass the proofs to him. If he intends on the contrary to justify his theory, not as legislator, but as economist, he will have to prove that the time which is necessary to create a commodity in-
A SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

dicates exactly its degree of utility, and marks its relation of proportion to the demand and, by consequence, to the total mass of wealth. In this case, if a product is sold at a price equal to its cost of production, supply and demand always equalise themselves; since the cost of production is deemed to express the true relation of supply and demand.

Practically M. Proudhon sets himself to prove that the labor-time necessary to create a product marks its exact proportion to existing wants, in such sort that the things of which the production costs the least time are those things which are the most immediately useful, and so on, gradually. The production of an article of luxury in itself proves, according to this doctrine, that society has sufficient leisure to permit it to satisfy a desire for luxury.

The very proof of his thesis M. Proudhon finds in the observation that the things the most useful cost the least time to produce, that society commences always by the most simple industries, and that it successively "attacks the production of objects which cost more labor time, and which correspond to wants of a higher order."

M. Proudhon borrows from M. Dunoyer the example of extractive industry—gathering wild fruit, pasturage, the chase, fishing, &c.—which represents the most simple form of industry, the least costly, and by which man commenced "the first day of his second creation." The first day of his first creation is enshrined in Genesis, which shows us God as the first industrial of the world.

Things go quite otherwise than as M. Proudhon thinks. From the very moment in which civilisation begins production commences to be based on the antagonism of
orders, of States, of classes, and finally on the antagonism between accumulated labor and present labor. No antagonism, no progress. That is the law which civilisation has followed down to our day. Up to the present the productive forces have been developed thanks to this régime of the antagonism of classes. To say now that, because all the wants of all the workers were satisfied, men could give themselves up to the creation of products of a superior order, more complicated industries, would be to make abstraction of the antagonism of classes, and to overthrow the whole development of history. It is as if one should say that because, under the Roman emperors, murenas were nourished in artificial fish-ponds, there was food in abundance for all the population of Rome. But, on the contrary, the Roman people wanted the necessary means to buy bread while the Roman aristocrats had no lack of slaves with which to feed their fishes.

The price of food has almost continually risen, while the price of manufactured articles and luxuries has almost continually fallen. Take the agricultural industry itself: the most indispensable objects, such as wheat, meat, &c., increase in price while cotton, sugar, coffee, &c., fall continually in a surprising fashion. Even among food-stuffs, properly so-called, luxuries, such as artichokes, asparagus, &c., are relatively cheaper to-day than the objects of prime necessity. In our epoch the superfluity is more easily produced than the necessaries of life. Finally, at different historical epochs, the reciprocal relations of price are not only different but opposed. All through the Middle Ages agricultural products were relatively cheaper than manufactured products: in modern times the relations are reversed.
Has the utility of agricultural products therefore diminished since the Middle Ages?

The use of products is determined by the social conditions in which the consumers are placed, and these conditions themselves rest on the antagonism of classes.

Cotton, potatoes and spirits are the objects of commonest use. Potatoes have engendered scrofula; cotton has largely driven linen and wool out of the market, although wool and linen are in many cases of much greater utility, if only from considerations of hygiene; spirits, again, have largely replaced beer and wine, although spirits, used as food, are generally recognised to be poison. For a whole century Governments vainly struggled against European opinion; economics prevailed, they dictated orders to consumption.

Why, then, are cotton, potatoes and spirits the pivots of bourgeois society? Because the least amount of labor is necessary for their production, and they are in consequence at the lowest price. Why does the minimum of price decide the maximum of consumption? Can it by any chance be because of the absolute utility of these objects, of their intrinsic utility, of their utility in so far as they correspond in the most useful manner to the needs of the worker, as man, and not of the man as worker? No, it is because, in a society based upon poverty, the poorest products have the fatal prerogative of serving the use of the greatest number.

To say now that, because the least costly things are most generally used therefore they must be of the greatest utility, is to say that the extensive use of spirits because of their low cost of production is the most conclusive proof of their utility; it is to tell the proletariat that the potato is the most salutary meat; it is to accept the existing state of things; it is, in fine, to make, with M.
Proudhon, the apology for a society without comprehending it.

In a future society, where the antagonism of classes will have ceased, where there will no longer be classes, use will no longer be determined by the *minimum* time of production; but the time of social production which will be devoted to the various objects will be determined by their degree of social utility.

To return to the thesis of M. Proudhon: From the moment that the labor time necessary to the production of an object is not the expression of its degree of utility, the exchange-value of this object, determined beforehand by the labor time embodied in it, can never regulate the just relation of supply and demand, that is to say, the relation of the proportion in the sense which M. Proudhon for the moment attaches to it.

It is not the sale of any product whatever at the price of its cost of production which constitutes "the relation of proportion" of supply and demand, or the proportional quota of this product relatively to the whole of production; it is the variations of demand and of supply which fix for the producer the quantity in which it is necessary to produce a given product in order to get in exchange at least the cost of production. And as these variations are continued, there is also a continual movement of withdrawal and of application of capitals with regard to the different branches of industry.

"It is only by reason of similar variations that capitals are devoted precisely in the required proportion, and not beyond, to the production of the different commodities for which there is a demand. By the rise or fall of prices profits rise above or fall below their mean level, and by that capital is attracted to or repelled from the
particular employment which experiences the one or the other of these variations."

"If we cast our eyes over the markets of large towns we shall see with what regularity they are provided with all kinds of commodities, native and foreign, in the required quantity; and whatever difference there may be in demand as the effect of caprice, of taste, or by the variation of population; without there often being a glut by too abundant a supply, or excessive dearness through the poorness of supply compared to demand; we must admit that the principle which distributes capital in each branch of industry in the exact proportions required, is more powerful than is generally supposed." (Ricardo, vol: I., pp. 105 and 108.)

If M. Proudhon accepts the value of products as determined by labor time, he must equally accept the oscillatory movement which alone makes labor time the measure of value. There is no "relation of proportion" completely constituted, there is only a constituting movement.

We have seen in what sense it is correct to speak of the "proportion" as of a consequence of value determined by labor time. We will see now how this measure by time, called by M. Proudhon "law of proportion," transforms itself into a law of disproportion.

Every new invention which permits of the production in one hour of that which hitherto took two hours to produce depreciates all the homogeneous products already on the market. Competition compels the producer to sell the product of two hours as cheaply as the product of one hour. Competition realises the law according to which the relative value of a product is determined by the labor time necessary to produce it. Labor time,
serving as measure of saleable value, thus becomes the law of a continual depreciation of labor. We will say more. There will be depreciation, not only of the commodities put on the market, but also the instruments of production and of the whole manufacture. This fact Ricardo has already noted in saying: "In constantly increasing the facility of production we constantly reduce the value of the things previously produced."

Sismondi goes further. He sees in this "value constituted" by labor time the source of all the contradictions of modern commerce and industry. "Mercantile value," he says, "is always fixed, in the last analysis, by the quantity of labor necessary to procure the thing valued: it is not what it has actually cost, but what it will cost henceforth with perhaps perfect means; and this quantity, however difficult it may be to appreciate, is always established with fidelity by competition.... It is on this basis that is calculated the demand of the seller and the offer of the purchaser. The first will perhaps affirm that the thing has cost him ten days' labor; but if the other recognises that he may henceforth accomplish it with eight days' labor, if competition carries the demonstration to the two contracting parties, it will be to eight days only that the value will be reduced, and that the market price will be established. The two contracting parties have indeed, it is true, the notion that the thing is useful, that it is desired, that without desire there would be no sale; but the fixation of price has no connection with utility." ("Études," &c., Vol. II., p. 267, Brussels edition.)

It is important to insist upon this point, that what determines value is not the time in which a thing has been produced, but the minimum time in which it is susceptible
of being produced, and this minimum is demonstrated by competition. Suppose for a moment that there is no longer any competition, and therefore, no means of demonstrating the minimum of labor necessary for the production of a commodity, what would be the result? It would suffice to put six hours' labor into the production of a commodity in order to have the right, according to M. Proudhon, to exact in exchange six times as much as he who has devoted only one hour to the production of the same article.

In place of a "relation of proportion" we have a relation of disproportion, if we are at all times willing to remain in these relations, good or evil.

The continual depreciation of labor is only a single side, only a single consequence of the valuation of commodities by labor time. The inflation of prices, over-production, and many other of the phenomena of industrial anarchy find their interpretation in this mode of valuation.

But labor time serving as means of value, does it at least give rise to the proportional variety in commodities which so charms M. Proudhon?

On the contrary, monopoly in all its dreary monotony, follows in its train and invades the world of commodities, as, in the sight and to the knowledge of everybody, monopoly invades the world of the instruments of production. It appertains only to certain branches of industry to make very rapid progress, as, for instance, the cotton industry. The natural consequence of this progress is that the products manufactured from cotton fall rapidly in price; but in proportion as the prices of cotton falls the price of linen must rise in comparison. What is the result? Linen is replaced by cotton. It is in this way that linen has been nearly driven out of the
whole of North America. And we have obtained instead of the proportional variety of product, the reign of cotton.

What now remains of this "relation of proportion." Nothing but the vow of an honest man, who would that the commodities should be produced in such proportions that they can be sold at an honest price. In all times the good bourgeois and the philanthropist economists have been pleased to make this innocent vow.

Let us hear old Bois-Guilebert: "The price of commodities," says he, "must always be proportioned, there being only this intelligence which can make them live together to constantly give and receive reciprocally (see the continual exchangeability of M. Proudhon) birth to one another...... As wealth, then, is only this constant intercourse between man and man, between metier and metier, it is a fearful blindness to seek for the cause of poverty elsewhere than in the cessation of such commerce brought about by the derangement in the proportion of prices." ("Dissertations sur la Nature des Richesses.")

Listen also to a modern economist.

"A great law which must be applied to production, is the law of proportion, which can alone preserve the continuity of value...... The equivalent must be guaranteed.... All the nations have essayed at different epochs, by means of numerous commercial regulations and restrictions, to realise up to a certain point this law of proportion; but egoism, inherent in the nature of man, has forced him to overthrow all this regulation régime. A proportional production is the realisation of the entire truth of the science of social economy." (W. Atkinson, "Principles of Political Economy," London, 1840, pp. 170-195.)

*Fuit Troja.* This true proportion between supply and demand which again begins to become the object of so
many vows, has long ceased to exist. It has died of old age. It was only possible in the epoch in which the means of production were limited, and in which exchange only took place within very narrow limits. With the birth of the great industry this just proportion disappeared, and production was fatally constrained to pass in a perpetual succession, through the vicissitudes of prosperity, depression, crisis, stagnation, new prosperity, and so on in succession.

Those who, like Sismondi, would return to the just proportion of production, while conserving the existing bases of society, are reactionary, since, to be consistent, they must also desire to re-establish all the other conditions of past times.

What was it which maintained production in just proportion, or nearly so? It was the demand which governed the supply which preceded it. Production followed consumption step by step. The great industry, forced by the very instruments of which it disposed to produce on an ever-increasing scale, could not wait for the demand. Production preceded consumption, the supply forced the demand.

In existing society, in the industry based on individual exchanges, the anarchy of production, which is the source of so much misery, is at the same time the source of all progress.

Thus of two things, one:

Either you would have the just proportions of past centuries, with the means of production of our epoch, in which case you are at once a reactionary and a utopian;

Or, you would have progress without anarchy: In which case, in order to conserve productive forces, you must abandon individual exchanges.

Individual exchanges accord only with the small
industry of past centuries and its corollary of "just proportion," or with the great industry and all its train of misery and anarchy.

After all, the determination of value by labor time, that is to say the formula which M. Proudhon has given us as the regenerating formula of the future, is then only the scientific expression of the economic relations of existing society, as Ricardo has clearly and definitely demonstrated it long before M. Proudhon.

But at least the "equalitarian" application of this formula belongs to M. Proudhon. Is it he who has first thought of reforming society by transforming all men into immediate workers, exchanging quantities of equal labor? Is it indeed for him to make to the Communists—these people innocent of all knowledge of political economy, these "obstinately stupid men," these "paradiical dreamers"—the reproach of not having found before him, this "solution of the problem of the proletariat"?

Whoever is, no matter how little, acquainted with the movement of political economy in England, knows that nearly all the Socialists of that country have, at different times, proposed the equalitarian application of the Ricardian theory. We may cite to M. Proudhon the "Political Economy" of Hopkins; William Thompson: "An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth most Conducive to Human Happiness," 1827; T. R. Edmonds: "Practical, Moral, and Political Economy," 1828, &c., &c., and we might add pages of &c. We will content ourselves with quoting an English Communist. We will reproduce the decisive passage of his remarkable work, "Labor's Wrongs and Labor's Remedy," Leeds, 1839, and we will dwell upon it at sufficient length; in the first place, because J. F. Bray is yet but
little known in France; and, further, because we believe we have there found the key of the past, present and future works of M. Proudhon.

"The only way to arrive at truth is to go at once to first principles.... Let us go at once to the source from whence governments themselves have arisen.... By thus going to the origin of the thing we shall find that every form of government, and every social and governmental wrong, owes its rise to the existing social system—to the institution of property as it at present exists—and that, therefore, if we would end our wrongs and our miseries at once and for ever, the present arrangements of society must be totally subverted, and supplanted by those more in accordance with the principles of justice and the rationality of man.

"By thus fighting them upon their own ground, and with their own weapons, we shall avoid that senseless clatter respecting 'visionaries' and 'theorists' with which they are so ready to assail all who dare move one step from that beaten track which 'by authority' has been pronounced to be the only right one. Before the conclusions arrived at by such a course of proceeding can be overthrown the economists must unsay or disprove those established truths and principles on which their own arguments are founded." (J. F. Bray, pp. 17 and 41.)

"It is labor alone which bestows value.... Every man has an undoubted right to all that his honest labor can procure him. When he thus appropriates the fruits of his labor he commits no injustice upon any other human being, for he interferes with no other man's right of doing the same with the produce of his labor.... All these ideas of superior and inferior—of master and man—may be traced to the neglect of first principles, and to the consequent rise of inequality of possessions;
and such ideas will never be eradicated, nor the institutions founded upon them be subverted, so long as this inequality is maintained. Men have hitherto blindly hoped to remedy the present unnatural state of things, and to institute equality of rights and laws by removing one rich tyrant and setting up another—by destroying existing inequality and leaving untouched the cause of the inequality; but it will shortly be seen that it is not in the nature of any mere governmental change to afford permanent relief—that misgovernment is not a cause but a consequence—that it is not the creator, but the created—that it is the offspring of inequality of possessions; and that inequality of possessions is inseparably connected with our present social system.” (J. F. Bray, pp. 33, 36 and 37.)

"Not only are the greatest advantages, but strict justice also, on the side of a system of equality..... Every man is a link, and an indispensable link, in the chain of effects—the beginning of which is but an idea, and the end, perhaps, the production of a piece of cloth. Thus, although we may entertain different feelings towards the several parties, it does not follow that one should be better paid for his labor than another. The inventor will ever receive, in addition to his just pecuniary reward, that which genius only can obtain from us—the tribute of our admiration.”

"From the very nature of labor and exchange, strict justice not only requires that all exchangers should be mutually, but that they should likewise be equally benefited. Men have only two things which they can exchange with each other, namely, labor, and the produce of labor; therefore, let them exchange as they will, they merely give, as it were, labor for labor. If a just system of exchanges were acted upon, the value
of all articles would be determined by the *entire cost of production, and equal values should always exchange for equal values*. If, for instance, it takes a hatter one day to make a hat, and a shoemaker the same time to make a pair of shoes—supposing the material used by each to be of the same value—and they exchange these articles with each other, they are not only mutually but equally benefited: the advantage derived by either party cannot be a disadvantage to the other, as each has given the same amount of labor, and the materials made use of by each were of equal value. But if the hatter should obtain two pair of shoes for one hat—time and value of material being as before—the exchange would clearly be an unjust one. The hatter would defraud the shoemaker of one day's labor; and were the former to act thus in all his exchanges he would receive for the labor of half a year, the product of some other person's whole year; therefore the gain of the first would necessarily be a loss to the last. We have heretofore acted upon no other than this most unjust system of exchanges—the workmen have given the capitalist the labor of a whole year in exchange for the value of only half a year—and from this, and not from the assumed inequality of bodily and mental powers, in individuals, has arisen the inequality of wealth and power which at present exists around us. It is an inevitable condition of inequality of exchanges—of buying at one price and selling at another—that capitalists shall continue to be capitalists and working men be working men, the one a class of tyrants and the other a class of slaves...... The whole transaction, therefore, plainly shows that the capitalists and proprietors do no more than give the working man, for his labor of one week, a part of the wealth which they obtained from him the week before!—which just amounts
to giving him *nothing for something*. The whole transaction, therefore, between the producer and the capitalist is a palpable deception, a mere farce; it is, in fact, in thousands of instances, no more than a barefaced though a legalised robbery.” (J. F. Bray, pp. 45, 48, 49 and 50.)

"The gain of the employer will never cease to be the loss of the employed, until the exchanges between the parties are equal; and exchanges never can be equal while society is divided into capitalists and producers—the last living upon their labor, and the first bloating upon the profit of that labor."

"It is plain," continues Bray, "that you may establish whatever form of government you will ... that you may talk of morality and brotherly love ... no such reciprocity can exist where there are unequal exchanges, and inequality of rewards for equal services.... Inequality of exchanges, as being the cause of inequality of possessions, is the secret enemy that devours us."

"It has been deduced, also, from a consideration of the intention and end of society, not only that all men should labor, and thereby become exchangers, but that equal values should always exchange for equal values—and that as the gain of one man ought never to be the loss of another, value should ever be determined by cost of production. But we have seen that, under the present arrangements of society, all men do not labor.... that the gain of the capitalist and the rich man is always the loss of the workman—that this result will invariably take place, and the poor man be left entirely at the mercy of the rich man, so long as there is inequality of exchanges—and that equality of exchanges can be insured only under social arrangements in which labor is universal.... If exchanges were equal, the wealth of
the present capitalists would gradually go from them to the working classes." (Bray, pp. 51, 52, 53 and 55.)

"So long as the system of unequal exchanges is tolerated, the producers will be almost as poor and as ignorant and as hardworked as they are at present, even if every Governmental burden be swept away and all taxes be abolished.... Nothing but a total change of system—an equalising of labor and exchanges—can alter this state of things for the better, and ensure men a true equality of rights.... The producers have but to make an effort—and by them must every effort for their own redemption be made—and their chains will be snapped asunder for ever.... As an end political equality is a failure. As a means, also, it is a failure.... Where things are of equal value, and they are exchanged unequally, the gain of one exchanger must ever be the loss of another.... for every exchange is then simply a transfer, and not a sacrifice of labor and wealth. Thus, although under a social system based on equal exchanges, a parsimonious man may become rich, his wealth will be no more than the accumulated produce of his own labor. He may exchange his wealth or he may give it to others who will exchange it for an equal value of the wealth of other persons; but a rich man cannot continue wealthy for any length of time after he has ceased to labor. Under equality of exchanges, wealth cannot have, as it has now, a procreative and apparently self-generating power, such as replenishes all waste from consumption; for, unless it be renewed by labor, wealth, when once consumed, is given up for ever. That which is now called profit and interest cannot exist, as such, in connection with equality of exchanges, for producer and distributor would be alike remunerated, and the sum total of their labor would determine the value of the article created and brought to
the hands of the consumer. The principle of equal exchanges, therefore, must, from its very nature, *ensur... universal labor.*” (Bray, pp. 67, 88, 89, 94, 109 and 110.) After having rebutted the objections of the economists to communism, Bray continues thus: “If a changed character be essential to the success of the social system of community in its most perfect form—and if, likewise, the present system affords no circumstances and no facilities for effecting the requisite change of character and preparing man for the higher and better state desired, it is evident that things must remain as they are... unless some preparatory steps be discovered and made use of—some movement partaking partly of the present and partly of the desired system, some intermediate resting-place, to which society may go with all its faults and all its follies, and from which it may move forward, imbued with those qualities and attributes without which the system of community and equality cannot as such have existence.” (Bray, p. 134.)

“The whole movement would require only co-operation in its simplest form..... Cost of production would in every instance determine value; and equal values would always exchange for equal values. If one person worked a whole week, and another worked only half a week, the first would receive double the remuneration of the last; but this extra pay of the one would not be at the expense of the other, nor would the loss incurred by the last man fall in any way upon the first. Each person would exchange the wages he individually received for commodities of the same value as his respective wages; and in no case could the gain of one man or one trade be a loss to another man or another trade. The labor of every individual would *alone determine* his gain and his losses.”
"By means of general and local boards of trade, and the directors attached to each individual company, the quantities of the various commodities required for consumption (the relative value of each in regard to each other), the number of hands required in various trades and descriptions of labor, and all other matters connected with production and distribution, could in a short time be as easily determined for a nation as for an individual company under the present arrangements....

As individuals compose families, and families towns, under the existing system, so likewise would they after the joint-stock change had been effected. The present distribution of people in towns and villages, bad as it is, would not be directly interfered with.... Under this joint-stock system.... every individual would be at liberty to accumulate as much as he pleased, and to enjoy such accumulations when and where he might think proper.... Society would be, as it were, one great joint-stock company, composed of an indefinite number of smaller companies, all laboring, producing and exchanging with each other on terms of the most perfect equality...."

"Our new system of society by shares, which is only a concession made to existing society, in order to arrive at communism, established in such a way as to admit of individual property in productions in connection with a common property in production powers—making every individual dependent on his own exertions, and at the same time allowing him an equal participation in every advantage afforded by nature and art—is fitted to take society as it is, and to prepare the way for other and better changes." (Bray, pp. 158, 160, 162, 163, 168, 170 and 194.)

We have only a few words to say in reply to Mr.
Bray, who, quite in spite of ourselves, we find to have supplanted M. Proudhon, inasmuch as Mr. Bray, far from wishing to have the last word of humanity, only proposes such measures as he believes good for a period of transition between existing society and a system of communism.

An hour of the labor of Peter is exchanged for an hour of the labor of Paul. That is the fundamental axiom of Mr. Bray. Suppose Peter has performed twelve hours' work and Paul has only done six; then Peter will only be able to make with Paul an exchange of six against six. Peter will consequently have six hours' labor remaining. What will he do with these six hours of labor?

Either he will do nothing with them, that is to say he will have worked six hours for nothing; or maybe he will idle six hours in order to equalise matters; or, again, and this is his last resource, he will give to Paul these six hours, with which he can do nothing else, into the bargain.

Thus at the end of the account, what has Peter gained on Paul? Some hours of labor? No. He will have gained only some hours of leisure; he will be compelled to be an idler for six hours. And for this new right of idleness to be not only accepted but appreciated in the new society it is necessary that the latter should find its highest felicity in laziness and that labor should weigh upon it like a chain from which it must free itself at any cost. Yet still, if these hours of leisure which Peter has gained over Paul were only a real gain! But no. Paul, in beginning by working only six hours, arrives by steady and regular labor at the same result as Peter only obtains by commencing with an excess of labor. Each would desire to be Paul, there would be competition
to obtain the position of Paul, a competition in idleness.

Ah well! What has the exchange of equal quantities of labor given us? Overproduction, depreciation, overwork followed by enforced idleness; in fine, the economic relations such as we see them in existing society, less the competition of labor.

But no, we deceive ourselves. There would be still an expedient by which the new society, the society of Peters and Pauls, could be saved. Peter might eat all alone the product of the six hours of labor which remained to him. But from the moment in which there is no more exchanging in order to have a product, there is no longer production in order to exchange, and all the supposition of a society founded on exchange and the division of labor falls to the ground. We should have saved the equality of exchanges, only through the cessation of exchange: Paul and Peter would have arrived at the condition of Robinson Crusoe.

Then if we imagine all the members of society to be workers, the exchange of equal quantities of hours of labor is only possible on condition that we understand beforehand the number of hours necessary to employ in material production. But such an understanding denies individual exchange.

We shall still arrive at the same result if we take for a starting point, not the distribution of the products created, but the act of production. In the great industry Peter is not free to fix for himself the time of his labor, because the labor of Peter is nothing without the co-operation of all the Peters and all the Pauls in the establishment. It is this which clearly explains the obstinate resistance of the English manufacturer to the Ten Hours Bill. They knew very well that a reduction of two hours' labor given to the women and children
would be sure to result in a reduction of the hours of labor of adult men. It is in the nature of the great industry that the hours of labor should be equal for all. That which is to-day the result of capital and the competition of the workers among themselves, will be to-morrow, if you cut off the relation between labor and capital, the effect of an understanding based on the relation of the sum of the productive forces to the sum of existing wants.

But such an understanding is the condemnation of individual exchange, and so we arrive once more at our first result.

In principle there is no exchange of products, but exchange of the labors which co-operate in production. The mode of exchange of the products depends upon the mode of production of the productive forces. Generally the form of the exchange of products corresponds to the form of production. Change the latter and the former finds itself changed as a consequence. We may also see in the history of society the mode of exchanging products regulated by the method of producing them. Individual exchange also corresponds to a determined method of production, which itself corresponds to the antagonism of classes. Thus there is no individual exchange without the antagonism of classes.

But the honest consciences refuse to accept this evidence. So long as one is bourgeois one cannot do other than see in this relation of antagonism a relation of harmony and eternal justice, which permits no one to get value at the expense of another. For the bourgeois individual exchange can exist without the antagonism of classes; for him these are two entirely incompatible things. Individual exchange, as it presents itself to the
bourgeois, is far from resembling individual exchange as it is in actual practice.

Mr. Bray makes of the illusion of the honest bourgeois the ideal which he desires to realise. In purifying individual exchange, in freeing it from all the antagonistic elements he finds in it, he believes he has found an "equalitarian" relation which he desires to see adopted by society.

Mr. Bray does not see that this equalitarian relation, this corrective ideal, which he wishes to apply to the world is itself nothing but the reflection of the existing world, and that it is in consequence quite impossible to reconstitute society on a basis which is only an embellished shadow. In proportion as this shadow becomes substance, it is seen that this substance, far from being the dreamed-of transfiguration, is nothing but the body of existing society.*

Section III.—Application of the Law of the Proportion of Value.

(A)—Money.

"Gold and silver are the first commodities the value of which has arrived at its constitution."

Gold and silver then are the first applications of the "constituted value" of M. Proudhon. And as M. Proudhon constitutes the values of products in deter-

* Like all other theories, this of Mr. Bray has had its partisans who have been deceived by appearances. In London, Sheffield, Leeds, and many other towns in England, have been founded some "equitable-labor-exchange-bazaars." These bazaars, after having absorbed considerable capital, have all failed miserably. People have lost the taste for them for ever. Let M. Proudhon take note!
mining them by the comparative quantity of labor they embody, all that he had to do was to prove that variations which have taken place in the value of gold and silver were always to be explained by the variations in the time of labor necessary to produce them. M. Proudhon does not dream of that. He does not speak of gold and silver as commodities, he speaks of them as money.

All his logic, if logic there be, consists in juggling with the quality which gold and silver possess, of serving as money, for the benefit of all the commodities which have the quality of being valued by labor time. Decidedly there is more of simplicity than malice in this shuffling.

A useful product, being valued by the labor time necessary to produce it, is always acceptable in exchange. Witness, cries M. Proudhon, gold and silver which find themselves in my desired conditions of “exchangeability.” Then gold and silver are value arrived at the state of constitution—they are the incorporation of the idea of M. Proudhon. He is most happy in his choice of an example. Gold and silver, in addition to the quality which they possess of being commodities, valued like all other commodities by labor time, have further that of being the universal agent of exchange, of being money. In taking now gold and silver as an application of “value constituted” by labor time, nothing is more easy than to prove that every commodity the value of which may be constituted by labor time will be always exchangeable, will be money.

A very simple question presents itself to the mind of M. Proudhon. Why have gold and silver the privilege of being the type of “constituted value”?

“The particular function which usage has devolved upon the precious metals of serving as the agent of com-
merce is purely conventional, and every other commodity could, less conveniently perhaps, but in a sufficiently satisfactory manner, fill this rôle; the economists recognise and cite more than one example of this. What, then, is the reason for this preference generally accorded to the precious metals, of serving as money, and how is this speciality of functions of money, without analogy in political economy, to be explained .... Is it possible to re-establish the series from which money seems to have been detached, and thereby to bring it back to its true principle?"

Already, in putting the question in these terms, M. Proudhon has supposed the existence of money. The first question he should have put is, why, in the exchanges as they are actually constituted, exchange-value should have had to be individualised, so to speak, by the creation of a special agent of exchange. Money is not a thing, it is a social relation. Why is the relation of money a relation of production, like every other economic relation, such as the division of labor, &c.? If M. Proudhon had clearly ascertained this relation he would not have seen in money an exception, a member detached from a series, unknown or to be discovered.

He would, on the contrary, have recognised that this relation is a link of, and as such, intimately attached to, the whole chain of the other economic relations, and that this relation corresponds to a determined mode of production, neither more nor less than individual exchange. What does he do? He begins by detaching money from the whole of the existing mode of production, in order later to make it the first member of an imaginary series, a series to be discovered.

Once the necessity for a special agent of exchange, that is to say the necessity for money, is recognised, it is
only necessary to explain why this particular function has devolved upon gold and silver rather than upon any other commodity. That is a secondary question which is not explained by the chain of the relations of production, but by the specific qualities inherent in gold and silver as material. If, after all, the economists on this occasion have “gone outside their own science and have made this a physical, a mechanical, and historical question, &c.,” as M. Proudhon has reproached them with having done, they have only done what they ought. The question is no longer within the domain of political economy.

“What none of the economists,” says M. Proudhon, “has either seen or comprehended, is the economic reason which has determined, in favor of the precious metals, the privilege which they enjoy.”

The economic reason which no one, and with good cause, has either seen or comprehended, M. Proudhon has seen, comprehended, and bequeathed to posterity.

“But what no one has remarked is that, of all commodities, gold and silver are the first the value of which has been constituted. In the patriarchal period, gold and silver were bought and sold and exchanged in ingots, but even then with an obvious tendency to domination, and with a marked preference. Little by little monarchs took possession of them and set their seal upon them; and from this sovereign consecration sprang money, that is to say the commodity par excellence, which in spite of all the shocks of commerce, maintains a fixed proportioned value and makes itself accepted in payment everywhere..... The distinctive feature of gold and silver, I repeat, arise from this that, thanks to their metallic properties, to the difficulties attending their production, and, above all, to the intervention of the public
authority, they have at an early stage, conquered, as commodities, fixity and authenticity."

To say that, of all commodities, gold and silver are the first the value of which has been constituted, is to say, after all which has preceded it, that gold and silver are the first commodities which have become money. That is the great revelation of M. Proudhon, that is the truth which no one had discovered before him!

If by these words M. Proudhon has wished to say that gold and silver are commodities the time necessary to the production of which has been sooner known than in the case of any others, that would still be one of the suppositions with which he is so ready to gratify his readers. If we wished to hold to this patriarchal erudition, we should say to M. Proudhon that the time necessary for the production of the objects of prime necessity, such as iron, &c., was known in the first place. We would make him a present of the classic arch of Adam Smith.

But, after all, how can M. Proudhon speak of the constitution of a value, since one value is never constituted alone? It is constituted not by the time which is necessary for its production alone, but relatively to the quota of all other products which can be created in the same time. Thus the constitution of the value of gold and silver presupposes the constitution to be already established of a mass of other products.

It is then, not the commodity which has arrived, in gold and silver, at the state of "constituted value," it is the "constituted value" of M. Proudhon which has arrived, in gold and silver, at the state of money.

Let us now examine more closely these economic reasons, which, according to M. Proudhon, have afforded gold and silver the advantage of being erected into money
sooner than all other products, of passing to the constitutive state of value.

These economic reasons are: the "marked preference," already in "the patriarchal period," and other circumlocutions of the same fact, which augment the difficulty, since they multiply the fact in multiplying the incidents which M. Proudhon brings forward to explain the fact. M. Proudhon has not yet exhausted all the pretended economic reasons. Here is one of supreme force, irresistible:

"It is from the sovereign consecration that money springs; the monarchs seize gold and silver and place their seal upon them."

Thus the good pleasure of monarchs is, for M. Proudhon, the supreme reason, in political economy!

Truly it is necessary to be entirely innocent of all historical knowledge not to know that in all times sovereigns have had to submit to the economic conditions and have never made laws for these. Legislation, political as well as civil, could do no more than give expression to the will of the economic conditions.

Has the monarch seized gold and silver to make them the universal agents of exchange by impressing his seal upon them, or have these universal agents of exchange not rather taken possession of the monarch by forcing him to impress his seal upon them and thus give them a political consecration?

The imprint which has been, and is, given to money is not that of its value, it is that of its weight. The fixity and authenticity of which M. Proudhon speaks applies only to the standard of the money, and this standard indicates how much of material metal there is in a coined piece of gold or silver. "The sole intrinsic value of a silver mark," said Voltaire, with his usual
good sense, "is that of a mark of silver—a half pound of the weight of eight ounces. The weight and the standard alone make this intrinsic value." (Voltaire, "Système de Law.") But the question: What is the value of an ounce of gold or of silver? still remains. If a cashmere from the establishment of the great Colbert bore the trade mark of the manufactory, pure wool, this mark would still not tell us the value of the cashmere. The question of how much the wool was worth would still remain. "Philippe I., King of France," says M. Proudhon, "mixed with the pound (sterling) of Charlemagne a third of alloy, imagining that as he alone had the monopoly of the manufacture of money he could do what any trader having a monopoly can do. What was the effect of this alteration of the coinage with which Philippe and his successors have been so strongly reproached? A very sound reasoning, from the commercial point of view, but very unsound in economic science, is to suppose that, as supply and demand regulate value, it is possible, either by producing an artificial scarcity or by monopolising the manufacture, to increase the estimation and consequently the value of things, and that this is true of gold and silver as well as of corn, wine, oil or tobacco. However, the fraud of Philippe was no sooner suspected than his money was reduced to its proper value, and he at once lost all that he imagined he had gained out of his subjects. The same thing would happen as the result of any similar attempts."

To begin with, it has been demonstrated over and over again that if the monarch debases the coinage it is he who suffers the loss. What he has gained once by the first issue he loses as many times as the falsified money returns to him in the form of duties, taxes, &c. But Philippe and his successors knew how to more or
less protect themselves from this loss, as, once the debased money was put in circulation, they had nothing to do but to order a general reminting of money at the old standard.

And, besides, if Philippe I. had really reasoned like M. Proudhon, Philippe would not have reasoned well "from the commercial point of view." Neither Philippe I. nor M. Proudhon show any evidence of mercantile genius when they imagine that it is possible to alter the value of gold as well as that of every other commodity, simply because that value is determined by the relation of supply and demand.

If King Philippe had ordered that a quarter of wheat should be henceforth called two quarters he would have been a swindler. He would have deceived all the fundholders, all the people who had to receive a hundred quarters of wheat; he would have been the cause of all these people receiving, instead of a hundred quarters, only fifty. Suppose the king to owe a hundred quarters of wheat, he would have only really had to pay fifty. But in commerce a hundred such quarters would never be worth more than fifty. In changing the name we do not change the thing. The quantity of wheat, either in supply or demand, would not be diminished or increased by this simple change of name. Thus, the relation of supply to demand being precisely the same in spite of this change of name, the price of the wheat would undergo no real alteration. In speaking of the supply and demand of things we do not speak of the supply and demand of the name of things. Philippe I. was not the maker of gold or silver, as Proudhon says; he was the maker of the name of moneys. Make your French cashmeres pass for Asiatic cashmeres, and it is possible that you may deceive a buyer or two; but once the
fraud becomes known, and your pretended Asiatic cash-meres will fall to the price of the French article. In giving a false standard to gold and silver, King Philippe could only make dupes so long as the fraud was not known. Like any other shopkeeper, he deceived his customers by a false description of the commodity, but that could not last long. Sooner or later he must suffer the rigor of the laws of commerce. Is it that which M. Proudhon wishes to prove? No. According to him it is from the monarch, and not from commerce, that money receives its value. And what is it that he has effectively proved? That commerce is more sovereign than the monarch. Let the monarch order that a mark shall be henceforth two marks,—commerce will always tell you that these two marks are only worth one mark as before.

But for all that, the question of the determination of value by the quantity of labor has not been taken a step further. It still remains to be decided if the value of these two marks—again become the original mark—is determined by the cost of production or by supply and demand.

M. Proudhon continues: "It may be equally assumed that if, instead of altering the money it had been in the power of the King to double its quantity, the exchange-value of gold and silver would have immediately fallen to half, always in consequence of this proportion and equilibrium."

If this opinion, which M. Proudhon shares with the economists, is correct, it is a proof in support of their theory of supply and demand, and not in support of the "proportion" of M. Proudhon. Because, whatever may have been the quantity of labor embodied in the double quantity of gold and silver its value would have fallen by
half, the demand remaining the same and the supply having doubled. Or is it indeed, by chance, that "the law of proportion" confounds itself this time with the so-despised law of supply and demand? This just proportion of M. Proudhon is in effect so elastic, it lends itself to so many variations, combinations and permutations, that it may possibly for once coincide with the relation of supply and demand.

To "make every commodity acceptable in exchange, if not in fact at least by right," in basing it on the function performed by gold and silver, is then to misunderstand this function. Gold and silver are only acceptable in exchange by right, because they are so in fact, and they are so in fact because the existing organisation of production has need of a universal agent of exchange. The right is only the official recognition of the fact.

We have seen this, that the example of money as an application of value passed to the state of constitution has been chosen by M. Proudhon only that he might smuggle in the whole of his theory of exchangeability; that is to say, in order to demonstrate that every commodity valued by its cost of production must arrive at the state of money. All that would be beautiful and good but for the difficulty that precisely gold and silver—as money—are of all commodities the only ones which are not determined by their cost of production; and that is so far true that in circulation they may be replaced by paper. Inasmuch as there will be a certain proportion observed between the needs of circulation and the quantity of money issued, whether the money be in paper, in gold, in platinum, or in copper, there can be no question of any proportion to the observed between the intrinsic value (the cost of production) and the nominal value of
money. Undoubtedly, in international commerce the value of money, as that of every other commodity, is determined by labor time. But that is simply because gold and silver in international commerce are means of exchange as products and not as money; that is to say, that in this connection gold and silver lose that very character of "fixity and authenticity," of "sovereign consecration," which is for M. Proudhon their specific characteristic. Ricardo has so well understood this truth that after having based his whole system on value determined by labor time and after having said, "Gold and silver, as well as all other commodities, have value only in proportion to the quantity of labor necessary to produce them and put them on the market," he added, nevertheless, that the value of money is not determined by the labor time embodied in its substance, but only by the law of supply and demand. "Although paper money has no intrinsic value, nevertheless if its quantity be limited its exchangeable value may equal the value of metallic money of the same denomination, or of bullion estimated as specie. It is by the same principle, that is to say by the limitation of the quantity of money, that coins of a low standard are able to circulate at the same value as they would have had if their weight and their value were those fixed by law, and not at the intrinsic value of the pure metal which they contain. That is why in the history of English money we find that our currency has never been depreciated in the same proportion as it has been changed. The reason is that it has never been multiplied in proportion to its depreciation" (Ricardo.)

J. B. Say, on the subject of this passage of Ricardo, observes:

"This example should suffice, it seems to me, to con-
vince the author that the basis of all value is not the quantity of labor necessary to produce a commodity, but the need which exists for that commodity, balanced by its scarcity."

Thus money, which is for Ricardo no longer a value determined by labor time and which J. B. Say takes for that reason as an example to convince Ricardo that other values cannot be any more than money, determined by labor time, this money, I say, which is taken by J. B. Say as the example of value determined exclusively by supply and demand, becomes for M. Proudhon the example, par excellence, of the application of value constituted.... by labor time.

To conclude, if money is not a "value constituted" by labor time, still less can it have anything in common with the "just proportion" of M. Proudhon. Gold and silver are always exchangeable, because they have the particular function of serving as the universal agent of exchange, and not at all because they exist in a proportionate quantity to the mass of wealth; or, to speak more correctly, they are always in proportion because, alone of all commodities, they serve as money, as the universal agent of exchange, whatever may be their quantity relatively to the whole mass of wealth. "The money in circulation can never be sufficient to cause a glut; because if you reduce its value you augment its quantity in the same proportion, and in increasing its value you diminish the quantity." (Ricardo.)

"What an imbroglio is political economy!" cries M. Proudhon.

"Accursed gold!" ironically exclaims a Communist (by the mouth of M. Proudhon). It would be as reasonable to say: Accursed wheat, accursed vines, accursed sheep! seeing that "in the same way as gold and silver,
all commercial value must arrive at its exact and rigorous determination."

The idea of sheep and vines being brought to the state of money is not new. In France that idea belongs to the period of Louis XIV. At that epoch, money having begun to establish its omnipotence, there was great complaint of the depreciation of all other commodities, and the people prayed most ardently for the moment in which "every commercial value" would arrive at its exact and rigorous determination, at the state of money.

Here is what we find in Bois-Guillebert, one of the oldest economists of France: "Money then, by this growth of innumerable competitors, which will be the commodities themselves established in their exact values, will be restricted to its natural limits." ("Economistes Financiers du Dixhuitième Siècle," p. 422.)

We see that the first illusions of the bourgeoisie are also their last.

(B.)—Surplus Labor.

"We read in some works on political economy this absurd hypothesis: If the price of all things were doubled.... As if the price of all things was not the proportion of things, and as if one could double a proportion, a relation, a law!" (Proudhon, vol. I., page 81.)

The economists have fallen into this error through not having known how to apply the "law of proportion" and of "constituted value"!

Unfortunately we find in the work of M. Proudhon (Vol. I., p. 110) this absurd hypothesis, that "if wages were raised generally, the price of everything would rise." Furthermore, if the phrase in question is found in a work of political economy, there is also the
explanation. "If we say that the prices of all commodities rise or fall, we always exclude one commodity or another, the commodity excluded being generally either money or labor." ("Encyclopædia Metropolitaine, or Universal Dictionary of Knowledge," vol. IV., the article on Political Economy by Senior, London, 1836.) See also, on this expression, John Stuart Mill, "Essays on some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy," London, 1844, and Tooke, "A History of Prices, &c.," London, 1838.

Let us now pass to the second application of "constituted value," and other proportionalities, whose single failing is that they are so little proportioned, and see if M. Proudhon is more happy in that than in the monetisation of sheep.

"An axiom generally admitted by the economists is that all labor must leave a surplus. This proposition is for me a universal and absolute truth: it is the corollary of the law of proportion, which may be regarded as the summary of the whole science of economy. But, I must crave the pardon of the economists, the principle that all labor must leave a surplus has, in their theory, no meaning, and is not susceptible of demonstration." (Proudhon.)

In order to prove that all labor must leave a surplus, M. Proudhon personifies society; he makes a personal society, a society which is not, so much as it is necessary, the society of persons, since it has its laws apart, having nothing in common with the people composing society, and its "own intelligence," which is not the common intelligence of men but an intelligence which has no common sense. M. Proudhon reproaches the economists with not having understood the personality of this collective being. We are pleased to oppose to him the
following passage from an American economist who reproaches the other economists with quite the opposite fault. “The moral entity in the grammatical being called society has been clothed with attributes which have no existence except in the imagination of those who make a thing with a word....that it is which has led to so many difficulties and to such deplorable mistakes in political economy.” (Th. Cooper, “Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy,” Columbia, 1826.)

“This principle of the surplus of labor,” continues M. Proudhon, “is true of individuals only because it emanates from society, which thus confers upon them the benefit of its own laws.”

Does M. Proudhon wish by that to say simply that the production of the social individual exceeds that of the isolated individual? Is it of this surplus of the production of associated individuals over that of non-associated individuals that M. Proudhon is to be understood to speak? If that is so we can cite a hundred economists who have expressed this simple truth without all the mysticism with which M. Proudhon surrounds it. Here is what Sadler, for instance, says on the subject:

“Combined labor gives results which individual labor could never produce. In proportion, then, as people increase in number, the products of their united industry will greatly exceed the sum of a simple addition calculated on this increase.... In mechanical arts, as in the labors of science, a man can actually do more in a day than an isolated individual could do in the whole of his life. The axiom of the mathematician, that the whole is equal to the parts, is not true, as applied to this subject. As to labor, the great pillar of human existence, it may be said that the product of accumulated efforts greatly exceeds all that individual and separate efforts could

To return to M. Proudhon. The surplus of labor, he says, explains itself by society personified. The life of this personal society follows laws opposed to the laws by which man acts as an individual, as he will prove by “facts.”

“The discovery of an economic process can never be worth to the inventor the profit which it yields to society.... It has been remarked that railway undertakings have been much less a source of riches to the owners than to the State.... The average price for the transport of commodities by road is eighteen centimes per ton per kilometre, goods called for and delivered. It has been calculated that at this rate, an ordinary railway undertaking would not clear ten per cent. net profit, a return nearly equal to that of road cartage. But, admitting that the speed of railway transport is to road transport as four to one, as in society time is money, the railway would show an advantage over the road of four hundred per cent. This enormous advantage, however, very real for society, is far from being realised in the same proportion by the railway proprietor, who, while he enables society to enjoy an additional value of four hundred per cent., does not draw, himself, even ten per cent. Let us suppose, to make the matter clearer, that the railway increases its tariff to twenty-five centimes, that of road transport remaining at eighteen, it would immediately lose all its consignments. Traders and their consignees, everybody, in fact, would return to the old road waggons. The locomotive would be deserted. A social advantage of four hundred per cent. would be sacrificed to a loss of thirty-five per cent. The reason is easy to comprehend: the advantage arising from
the speed of the railway is entirely social, and each individual participates in it only in a minimum proportion (remember we are dealing here only with the transport of merchandise), while the loss falls directly upon the consumer personally. A social benefit of four hundred represents for the individual, if the society only number a million men, four ten-thousandths; while a loss of thirty-three per cent. for the consumer would suppose a social deficit of thirty-three millions.” (Proudhon.)

M. Proudhon not only expresses a quadrupled speed by four hundred per cent. of the primitive celerity, but he sets up a relation between the percentage of speed and the percentage of profit, and establishes a proportion between two conditions which, although they may be separately estimated at so much per cent., are nevertheless incommensurable with each other: This is to establish a proportion between the percentages and to leave out the denominations. Percentages are always percentages. Ten per cent. and four hundred per cent. are commensurable, they are to each other as ten is to four hundred. Then, concludes M. Proudhon, a profit of ten per cent. is worth forty times less than a quadrupled speed. In order to save appearances he says that, for society, time is money. This error arises from the fact that he confusedly recollects that there is a relation between value and labor time, and he has nothing to do but assimilate labor time with the time of transport; that is to say, he identifies the drivers, guards and firemen, whose labor time is nothing but the time of transport, with the whole of society. For this master stroke, behold speed become capital, and in such case he is quite right to say: “A benefit of four hundred per cent. would be sacrificed to a loss of thirty-five per cent.”
After having set up this strange proposition as a mathematician, he gives us the explanation as an economist.

“A social benefit equal to four hundred represents for the individual, if the society is only one of a million of men, four ten-thousandths.” Certainly; but it is not a question of four hundred, it is a question of four hundred per cent., and a benefit of four hundred per cent. represents neither more nor less than four hundred per cent. for the individual. Whatever may be the capital, the dividends will be always in the proportion of four hundred per cent. What does M. Proudhon do? He takes the percentage for the capital, and, as though he feared that his confusion was not sufficiently manifest, sufficiently “clear,” he continues:—

“A loss of thirty-three per cent. for the consumer would suppose a social deficit of thirty-three millins.” Thirty-three per cent. of loss for the consumer would remain a loss of thirty-three per cent. for a million consumers. How can M. Proudhon say afterwards, definitely, that the social deficit, in the case of a loss of thirty-three per cent., would amount to thirty-three millions when he does not know either the social capital or even that of a single one of those interested? Thus, it is not sufficient for M. Proudhon to have confounded the capital and the percentage, but he must go further still, and identify the capital put into an undertaking with the number of those concerned. “Let us suppose, to make the matter still clearer,” a determined capital. A social profit of four hundred per cent. shared among a million participants, supposing each to be interested to the extent of a franc, would mean four francs profit per head, and not 0.0004, as M. Proudhon pretends. In the same way a loss of thirty-three per cent. for each of the participants would represent a social deficit of 330,000
francs, and not thirty-three millions (100 : 33 = 1,000,000 : 330,000).

M. Proudhon, preoccupied with his theory of personified society, forgets to make the division by 100. He thus obtains 330,000 francs loss; but four francs per head profit make for the society a profit of four million francs. There remains for society a net profit of 3,670,000 francs. This account exactly demonstrates the opposite to that which M. Proudhon wished to demonstrate, that is, that the profits and losses of society are not in inverse ratio to the profits and losses of the individual.

After having rectified these simple errors of calculation, let us glance for a moment at the consequences to which we should arrive if we were to admit for railways this relation of speed to capital such as M. Proudhon gives it, less the errors of calculation. Suppose a transport four times as rapid cost four times as much, this transport would not give less profit than the road transport which is four times as slow and costs only a quarter as much. Then if the latter charges eighteen centimes the railway could charge seventy-two centimes. This would be, according to "mathematical rigor," the consequence of the supposition of M. Proudhon, always excepting his errors of calculation. But then he suddenly tells us that if, instead of seventy-two centimes the railway charged twenty-five it would at once lose all its consignments. Decidedly it would be necessary to return to the old road waggons. Only if we have any advice to offer M. Proudhon it is not to forget in his "Programme of the Progressive Association" to make the division by 100. But, alas! it is scarcely to be hoped that our advice will be listened to, for M. Proudhon is so enamored of his "progressive" calculation, corresponding to the "progressive occasion" that he cries with
much emphasis: "I have already shown in Chapter II., by the solution of the contradiction of value, that the advantage of every useful discovery is incomparably less for the inventor, whoever he may be, than for society. I have carried out the demonstration of this point with mathematical rigor!"

Let us return to the fiction of society personified, a fiction which has no other object than to prove the following simple truth: A new invention causing a larger quantity of commodities to be produced with the same amount of labor, results in a fall in the saleable value of the product. Society makes a profit then, not in obtaining more exchangeable values, but in obtaining more commodities for the same value. As to the inventor, competition causes his profit to fall successively to the general level of profits. Has M. Proudhon proved this proposition as well as he wished to do? No. That does not prevent him from reproaching the economists with having failed to make this demonstration. To prove to him the contrary we will only cite Ricardo and Lauderdale; Ricardo, the chief of the school which determines value by labor time, Lauderdale one of the most vigorous defenders of the determination of value by supply and demand. Both have developed the same thesis.

"In constantly augmenting the facility of production, we constantly diminish the value of some of the things already produced, although by the same means we not only add to the national wealth, but we increase the facility of producing for the future.... As soon as, by means of machines, or by our knowledge of physics, we force natural agents to do the work which has previously been done by man, the value of this work falls in consequence. If it takes ten men to turn a corn-mill, and it is discovered that by means of wind or water the
labor of these ten men can be saved, the flour which will be the product of the action of the mill will, from that moment, fall in value, in proportion to the amount of labor saved; and society will find itself enriched by all the value of the things which the labor of these ten men can produce, the funds destined to the support of the workers not having by that suffered the least diminution.” (Ricardo.)

Lauderdale, in his turn, says:—

“There is no part of the capital of a country that more obviously derives its profits from supplanting a portion of labor that would otherwise be performed by man, or from performing a portion which is beyond the reach of his personal exertion, than that which is vested in machinery.... The small profit which the proprietors of machinery generally acquire, when compared with the wages of labor which the machine supplants, may perhaps create a suspicion of the rectitude of this opinion. Some fire-engines, for instance, draw more water from a coalpit in one day than could be conveyed on the shoulders of three hundred men, even assisted by the machinery of buckets; and a fire-engine undoubtedly performs its labor at a much smaller expense than the amount of the wages of those whose labor it thus supplants. This is, in truth, the case with all machinery. All machines must execute the labor that was antecedently performed, at a cheaper rate than it could be done by the hand of man.... If such a privilege is given for the invention of a machine, which performs, by the labor of one man a quantity of work that used to take the labor of four; as the possession of the exclusive privilege prevents any competition in doing the work, but what proceeds from the labor of the four workmen, their wages, as long as the patent continues, must obviously
form the measure of the patentee’s charge; that is, to secure employment, he has only to charge a little less than the wages of the labor which the machine supplants. But when the patent expires, other machines of the same nature are brought into competition; and then his charge must be regulated on the same principle as every other, according to the abundance of machines.... The profit of capital employed in foreign trade, though it arises from supplanting labor, comes to be regulated, not by the value of the labor it supplants, but, as in all other cases, by the competition among the proprietors of capital, and it will be great or small in proportion to the quantity of capital that presents itself for performing the duty, and the demand for it.” (“An Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth.”)

Finally, then, in proportion as the profit may be greater than in other industries, fresh capital will be thrown into the new industry until the average profits in it have fallen to the common level.

We have just seen that the illustration of the railway was scarcely appropriate for throwing any light on the fiction of personified society. Nevertheless, M. Proudhon hardly continues his discourse: “These points cleared, nothing is more easy than to explain how labor must leave to each producer a surplus.”

This which now follows belongs to classic antiquity. It is a poetic romance told in order to relieve the reader from the fatigue he has suffered from the rigor of the mathematical demonstrations which have preceded it. M. Proudhon gives to his personified society the name of Prometheus, whose noble traits he glorifies in these terms:

“At first, Prometheus, springing from the bosom of nature, awakes to life in an inertia full of charms, &c.,
&c. Prometheus sets to work, and from his first day, the first day of the second creation, the product of Prometheus, that is to say his wealth, his well-being, is equal to ten. The second day Prometheus divides his labor, and his product becomes equal to a hundred. The third day and every following day, Prometheus invents machines, discovers new utilities in his body, new forces in nature. . . . At each step that his industry takes the amount of his production increases, and denotes to him an increase of felicity. And finally, since, for him, to consume is to produce, it is clear that each day's consumption, absorbing only the product of yesterday, leaves a surplus product for the day after."

This Prometheus of M. Proudhon is a droll sort of fellow, as feeble in logic as in political economy. In so far as Prometheus only informs us of the division of labor, the application of machinery, the exploitation of natural forces and scientific power, multiplying the productive forces of men and giving a surplus as compared with the product of isolated labor, this new Prometheus has only the misfortune of coming too late. But when Prometheus begins to speak of production and consumption he becomes really grotesque. To consume is, for him, to produce; he consumes next day that which he produced the day before—thus he has always a day in hand; this day in hand is his "surplus of labor." But in consuming the next day that which he produced the day before, it is necessary that on the first day, which had no yesterday, he should have worked two days, in order to afterwards have a day in hand. How did Prometheus gain this surplus on the first day, when there was neither division of labor, nor machinery, nor even any knowledge of physical forces except fire? Thus the question, in order to have been deferred to
"the first day of the second creation," has not advanced a step. This manner of explaining things derived at the same time from the Greek and the Hebrew, which is at once mystic and allegorical, gives to M. Proudhon the perfect right to say, "I have demonstrated by theory and by facts the principle that all labor must leave a surplus."

The facts, they are the famous progressive calculation; the theory, it is the myth of Prometheus.

"But," continues M. Proudhon, "this principle, accurate as an arithmetical proposition, is yet far from being realised for everybody. While by the progress of collective industry, each day of individual labor creates a larger and still larger product, and by a necessary consequence, while the worker, with the same wages, must become richer every day, there exist in society some classes which thrive and others which perish."

In 1770 the population of the United Kingdom of Great Britain was fifteen millions and the productive population three millions. The scientific power of production would about equal a population of twelve more millions; thus making a total of fifteen millions of productive forces. Thus the productive power was to the population as 1 is to 1, and the scientific power was to manual power as 4 is to 1.

In 1840 the population did not exceed thirty millions: the productive population was six millions, while the scientific power amounted to 650 millions, that is to say that is was to the whole population as 21 to 1, and to manual power as 108 to 1.

In English society, the day of labor had thus acquired in seventy years a surplus of 2,700 per cent. of productivity, that is to say that in 1840 it produced twenty-seven times as much as in 1770. According to M. Proudhon it is necessary to put the following question:
Why is the English workmen of 1840 not twenty-seven times richer than the workman of 1770? In putting such a question one would naturally suppose that the English had been able to produce these riches without the historical conditions in which they were produced—such as: the private accumulation of capital; the modern division of labor; the automatic workshop; anarchic competition; the wage-system, and, in fine, all that which is based upon the antagonism of classes—having to exist. But these were precisely the necessary conditions for the development of the productive forces and of the surplus of labor. Thus, it was necessary, in order to obtain this development of the productive forces, and this surplus of labor, that there should be some classes which thrive and others which perish.

What then, in the last place, is this Prometheus resuscitated by M. Proudhon? It is society, it is the social relations based on the antagonism of classes. These relations are, not the relations of individual to individual, but of workman to capitalist, of farmer to landlord, &c. Efface these relations and you have extinguished the whole of society, and your Prometheus is nothing more than a phantom without arms or legs, that is to say without the automatic workshop, without the division of labor, wanting, in fine, all that you have originally endowed him with in order to enable him to obtain this surplus of labor.

If then, in theory, it suffices to interpret, as M. Proudhon does, the formula of the surplus of labor in the sense of equality without taking account of the actual conditions of production, it must suffice, in practice, to make among the workers an equal distribution of wealth without changing anything in the actual conditions of
production. This distribution would not assure a great
degree of comfort to each of the participants.

But M. Proudhon is not so pessimistic as one might
believe him to be. As proportion is everything for him,
it is indeed necessary that he should see in his fully
endowed Prometheus, that is to say in actual society, a
commencement of the realisation of his favorite idea.

"But everywhere also the progress of riches, that is to
say the proportion of values, is the dominant law; and
when the economists oppose to the complaints of the
social party the progressive growth of the public wealth
and the amelioration effected in the condition of even
the most unfortunate classes, they proclaim, without
suspecting it, a truth which is the condemnation of
their theories."

What, in effect, are collective riches, public wealth?
They are the wealth of the bourgeoisie, and not that of
each individual bourgeois. Well! the economist have
simply demonstrated how, in the relations of production
as they exist, the wealth of the bourgeoisie has developed
and must still grow. As to the working classes, it is still
a much debated question whether their condition has
been ameliorated at all as a result of the growth of the
so-called public wealth. If the economists cite to us, in
support of their optimism, the example of the workers
engaged in the English cotton industry, they only notice
their position in the rare moments of commercial pros-
perity. These moments of prosperity are to the epochs
of crisis and stagnation in the "exact proportion" of
three to ten. But perhaps also, in speaking of ameliora-
tion, the economists may have wished to refer to the
millions of workers condemned to perish, in the East
Indies, in order to procure for the million and a half of
workpeople employed in England in the same industry, three years of prosperity out of ten.

As to the temporary participation in the growth of public wealth, that is different. The fact of the temporary participation is explained by the theory of the economists. It is the confirmation of that theory and not the "condemnation," as M. Proudhon says. If there was anything to condemn it would certainly be the system of M. Proudhon, which, as we have demonstrated, would reduce the worker to the minimum wage, in spite of the growth of riches. It is only by reducing the worker to the minimum wage that he could make an application of the "exact proportion" of values, of "value constituted"—by labor time. It is because wages, in consequence of competition, oscillate above and below the price of the necessaries of life essential to the sustentation of the worker that he can not only participate, to however small a degree, in the development of the collective wealth, but also that he can perish of want. There is the whole theory of the economists, which sets up no illusions.

After his long divagations on the subject of railways, of Prometheus and of the new society to be reconstituted on "constituted value," M. Proudhon reflects; emotion overcomes him, and in a paternal tone he cries:

"I adjure the economists to question themselves a moment, in the silence of their hearts, far from the prejudices which disturb them and without regard to the employments which occupy, or which await them, to the interests which they serve so ill, to the approbation to which they aspire, or to the distinctions which their vanity craves; that they should say if to this day the principle that all labor must leave a surplus has been apparent to them with this chain of preliminaries and of consequences that we have raised."
CHAPTER II.
THE METAPHYSICS OF POLITICAL ECONOMY.

SECTION I.—THE METHOD.

Now we are quite in Germany! We have now to talk metaphysics while speaking of political economy. And, in this again, we only follow the "contradictions" of M. Proudhon. Just now he compelled us to speak English, to become even passably English ourselves. Now the scene changes. M. Proudhon transports us to our dear native land and compels us in spite of ourselves to once more assume our quality of German.

If the Englishman transforms men into hats, the German transforms hats into ideas. The Englishman is Ricardo, a rich banker and distinguished economist; the German is Hegel, a simple professor of philosophy at the Berlin University.

Louis XV., the last absolute monarch and who represented the decadence of French royalty, had attached to his person a physician who was, himself, the first economist of France. This physician, this economist, represented the imminent and certain triumph of the French bourgeoisie. Doctor Quesnay has made of political economy a science; he has summarised it in his famous "Tableau Economique." Besides the thousand and one commentaries which have appeared on this
tableau, we possess one by the doctor himself. It is, "The Analysis of the Economic Tableau," followed by "Seven Important Observations."

M. Proudhon is another Doctor Quesnay. The Quesnay of the metaphysics of political economy. But metaphysics—the whole of philosophy, in fact—is summed up, according to Hegel, in the method. It will be necessary, then, for us to endeavor to elucidate the method of M. Proudhon, which is at least as obscure as the "Tableau Economique." For that purpose we will give seven observations more or less important. If Doctor Proudhon is not content with our observations, well, then, he must play Abbé Baudeau, and give "the explanation of the economico-metaphysical method" himself.

First Observation.

"We will not make a history according to the order of time, but according to the succession of ideas. The economic phases or categories are in their manifestation sometimes contemporaneous, sometimes in inverse order . . . . Economic theories have also their logical succession and their series in the comprehension. It is this order which we flatter ourselves with having discovered." (Proudhon vol. I., p. 146.)

Decidedly M. Proudhon has wished to frighten the French by throwing in their faces some quasi-Hegelian phrases. We are then concerned with two men, at first with M. Proudhon and then with Hegel. How does M. Proudhon distinguish himself from other economists? And Hegel, what rôle does he play in the political economy of M. Proudhon?

The economists express the relation of borgeois
production, the division of labor, credit, money, &c., as categories fixed, immutable, eternal. M. Proudhon, who has before him these already formed categories, would explain to us the act of formation, the generation of these categories, principles, laws, ideas, thoughts.

The economists explain to us how production is carried on in the relation given, but what they do not explain is how these relations are produced, that is to say the historical movement which has created them. M. Proudhon, having taken these relations as abstract principles, categories, and thoughts, has only to put order into these thoughts, which may be found ranged alphabetically at the end of any treatise on political economy. The material of the economists is the active and busy life of men; the materials of M. Proudhon are the dogmas of the economists. But from the moment that we cease to follow the historical movement of the relations of production, of which the categories are nothing but the theoretical expression, from the moment that we see in these categories only spontaneous thoughts and ideas, independent of the real relations, we are forced to assign the movement of pure reason as the origin of these thoughts and ideas. *How does pure reason, eternal, impersonal, give birth to these thoughts? How does it proceed in order to produce them?

If we had the intrepidity of M. Proudhon in this Hegelianism we should say: Reason is distinguished in itself from itself. What does this expression mean? Impersonal reason having outside of itself neither ground upon which to stand, nor object to which it can be opposed, nor subject with which it can be composed, finds itself forced to make a somersault in posing, opposing and composing itself—position, opposition, composition. To speak Greek, we have the thesis, the antithesis
and the synthesis. As to those who are not acquainted with Hegelian language, we would say to them in the sacramental formula, affirmation, negation, and negation of the negation. That is what it means to speak in this way. It is certainly not Hebrew, so as not to displease M. Proudhon; but it is the language of this reason so pure, separated from the individual. Instead of the ordinary individual, with his ordinary manner of speaking and thinking, we have nothing but this ordinary manner pure and simple, minus the individual.

Is there occasion to be surprised that everything, in the final abstraction, because it is abstraction and not analysis, presents itself in the state of logical category? Is there need to be astonished that in casting down little by little all which constitutes the individuality of a house, that in making abstraction of the materials of which it is composed, of the form which distinguishes it, you would come to have nothing but a body—that in making abstraction of the limits of this body you would very soon have nothing but an empty space—that, finally, in making abstraction of the dimensions of this space you would finish by having nothing more than quantity pure and simple, the logical category? In consequence of thus abstracting all the so-called accidents, animate or inanimate, men or things, we are right in saying that in the final abstraction we have as substance the logical categories. Thus the metaphysicians who imagine that in making these abstractions they make an analysis, and who in proportion as they detach more and more from certain objects imagine that they approach the point of penetrating them, these metaphysicians have in their turn the right to say that the things of this earth are embroideries of which the logical categories form the canvas. That is what distinguishes the philosopher from
the Christian. The Christian has but one incarnation of the Logos, in spite of logic; the philosopher has never finished with incarnations. That all which exists, that all which lives on land and in water, may, by force of abstraction, be reduced to a logical category; that in this fashion the whole of the real world may be drowned in the world of abstractions, in the world of logical categories, who can wonder?

All that exists, all that lives on land and in water, exists, lives, only by some movement. Thus the movement of history produces the social relations, the industrial movement gives us the products of industry, &c.

As by the force of abstraction we have transformed everything into a logical category, so we have only to make abstraction of all distinctive character of the different movements in order to arrive at movement in the abstract, movement purely formal, at the purely logical formula of movement. If in the logical categories is found the substance of all things, it might be supposed that in the logical formula of movement would be found the absolute method which not only explains everything, but which further implies the movement of things.

It is of this absolute method that Hegel speaks in these terms: "Method is absolute force, unique, supreme, infinite, which no object can resist; it is the tendency of reason to find itself, to recognise itself, in everything." ("Logic," vol. III.) Everything being reduced to a logical category, and every movement, every act of production, to method, it naturally follows that all masses of products and of production, of objects and of movement, are reduced to an applied metaphysic. What Hegel has done for religion, right, &c., M. Proudhon seeks to do for political economy.
What, then, is this absolute method? The abstraction of movement. What is the abstraction of movement? Movement in the abstract. What is movement in the abstract? The purely logical formula of movement or the movement of pure reason. In what does the movement of pure reason consist? To pose, oppose and compose itself, to be formulated as thesis, antithesis and synthesis, or, better still, to affirm itself, to deny itself and to deny its negation.

How does reason act, in order to affirm itself, to place itself in a given category? That is the affair of reason itself and of its apologists.

But once it has placed itself in thesis, this thesis, this thought, opposed to itself, doubles itself into two contradictory thoughts, the positive and the negative, the yes and no. The struggle of these two antagonistic elements, comprised in the antithesis, constitutes the dialectic movement. The yes becoming no, the no becoming yes, the yes becoming at once yes and no, the no becoming at once no and yes, the contraries balance themselves, neutralise themselves, paralyse themselves. The fusion of these two contradictory thoughts constitutes a new thought which is the synthesis of the two. This new thought unfolds itself again in two contradictory thoughts which are confounded in their turn in a new synthesis. From this travail is born a group of thoughts. This group of thoughts follows the same dialectic movement as a simple category, and has for antithesis a contradictory group. From these two groups is born a new group of thoughts which is the synthesis of them.

As from the dialectic movement of simple categories is born the group, so from the dialectic movement of the
groups is born the series, and from the dialectic movement of the series is born the whole system.

Apply this method to the categories of political economy, and you will have the logic and the metaphysics of political economy, or, in other words, you will have the economic categories, known to all the world, translated into an almost unknown language, which will give them the appearance of having been freshly hatched in a head of pure reason, so much do these categories seem to engender the one the other, to enchain and entangle the one in the other by the sole labor of the dialectic movement. Let not the reader be alarmed by these metaphysics with all their scaffolding of categories, of groups, of series and of systems. M. Proudhon, in spite of the great trouble he has taken to scale the height of the system of contradictions, has never been able to raise himself above the two first steps of simple thesis and antithesis, and yet he has bestridden them twice only, and out of the twice he has once tumbled backwards.

Up to the present we have only explained the dialectic of Hegel. We will see later how M. Proudhon has succeeded in reducing it to the most paltry proportions. Thus for Hegel, all which has passed and which still passes is exactly that which passes in his own reasoning. Thus the philosophy of history is only the history of philosophy, of his own philosophy. There is no longer "history according to the order of time"; there is only "the succession of ideas in the understanding." He thinks to construct the world by the movement of thought, while all that he does is to reconstruct systematically, and range under the absolute method, the thoughts which are in the heads of everybody.
Second Observation.

The economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions, of the social relations of production. M. Proudhon, as a true philosopher, taking the things inside out, sees in the real relations only the incarnations of these principles, of these categories, which sleep—M. Proudhon the philosopher tells us again—in the bosom of “the impersonal reason of humanity.” M. Proudhon the economist has clearly understood that men make cloth, linen, silk-stuffs, in certain determined relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these determined social relations are as much produced by men as are the cloth, the linen, &c. The social relations are intimately attached to the productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production, and in changing their mode of production, their manner of gaining a living, they change all their social relations. The windmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.

The same men who establish social relations conformably with their material productivity, produce also the principles, the ideas, the categories, conformably with their social relations.

Thus these ideas, these categories, are not more eternal than the relations which they express. They are historical and transitory products.

There is a continual movement of growth in the productive forces, of destruction in the social relations, of formation in ideas; there is nothing immutable but the abstraction of the movement—mors immortalis.
Third Observation.

The relations of production of every society form a whole. M. Proudhon regards the economic relations as so many phases, engendering the one the other, resulting the one from the other, as the antithesis from the thesis, and realising in their logical succession the impersonal reason of humanity.

The sole inconvenience of this method is that in approaching the examination of a single one of these phases M. Proudhon cannot explain it without having recourse to all the other relations of society, relations, however, which he has not yet caused to be engendered by his dialectic movement. When afterwards, by means of pure reason, M. Proudhon passes to the birth of the other phases, he acts as if these were new-born infants, he forgets that they are the same age as the first.

Thus, in order to arrive at the constitution of value, which is for him the basis of all the economic evolutions, he cannot get away from the division of labor, competition, &c. Nevertheless, in the series, in the understanding of M. Proudhon, in the logical succession, these relations do not yet exist.

In constructing with the categories of political economy the edifice of an ideological system, the members of the social system are dislocated. The different members of society are changed as belonging to separate societies which arrive one after the other. How, indeed, can the single logical formula of movement, of succession, of time, explain the composition of society, in which all the relations co-exist simultaneously and support each other?
Fourth Observation.

Let us see now the modifications to which M. Proudhon subjects the dialectic of Hegel in applying it to political economy.

For him, M. Proudhon, every economic category has two sides, the one good, the other bad. He regards the categories as the lower middle-class regard the great men of history: Napoleon was a great man; he did very much good, he also did much evil.

The good side and the bad side, the advantage and the inconvenience, taken together, form for M. Proudhon the contradiction in each economic category.

The problem to solve: To conserve the good side while eliminating the bad.

Slavery is an economic category as well as any other. That then has, that also, its two sides. Let us leave the bad side and speak of the beautiful side of slavery; being understood that it is only a question of direct slavery, of the slavery of the blacks in the East, in Brazil, in the Southern States of North America.

Direct slavery is the pivot of bourgeois industry as well as machinery, credit, &c. Without slavery you have no cotton, without cotton you cannot have modern industry. It is slavery which has given their value to the colonies, it is the colonies which have created the commerce of the world, it is the commerce of the world which is the essential condition of the great industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the highest importance.

Without slavery, North America, the most progressive country, would have been transformed into a patriarchal country. Efface North America from the map of the world and you would have the anarchy, the complete
decadence, of modern commerce and civilisation. Cause slavery to disappear, and you will have effaced America from the map of nations.

Thus slavery, because it is an economic category, has always existed in the institutions of the nations. Modern nations have known how to disguise slavery in their own lands alone, they have imposed it without disguise on the New World.

What will M. Proudhon do to save slavery? He puts the problem: Conserve the good side of this economic category, eliminate the bad.

Hegel has no problems to put. He has only dialectic. M. Proudhon has of the dialectic of Hegel nothing but the language. His dialectic movement for him is the dogmatic distinction of good and evil.

Let us for an instant take M. Proudhon himself as a category. Let us examine his good and his bad side, his advantages and his inconveniences.

If he has the advantage over Hegel of putting problems which he reserves it to himself to solve for the greater good of humanity, he has the inconvenience of being stricken with sterility when it is a question of engendering by dialectical travail a new category. In order merely to put the problem of eliminating the evil side, one cuts short the dialectic movement. It is not the category which poses and opposes itself by its contradictory nature, it is M. Proudhon who disturbs himself, argues with himself, strives and struggles between the two sides of the category.

Taken thus in a impasse, from which it is difficult to escape by legitimate means, M. Proudhon performs a veritable somersault which carries him at a single bound into a new category. It is then that the series in the understanding unveils itself to his astonished eyes.
He takes the first category to hand and arbitrarily attributes to it the quality of becoming a remedy to the inconveniences of the category which he wishes to purify. Thus imposts, if we are to believe M. Proudhon, remedy the inconveniences of monopoly; the balance of commerce, the inconveniences of imposts; landlordism, the inconveniences of credit.

In thus taking successively the economic categories one by one and making one the antidote of the other, M. Proudhon makes of this mixture of contradictions and of antidotes to the contradictions, two volumes of contradictions which he calls by their proper title: "The System of Economic Contradictions."

_Fifth Observation._

"In absolute reason all these ideas.... are equally simple and general.... In fact, we attain to the science only by a kind of scaffolding of our ideas. But truth in itself is independent of its dialectical figures, and free from the combinations of our mind." (Proudhon, vol. II., p. 97.)

There at a blow, by a kind of quick change of which we now know the secret, the metaphysic of political economy becomes an illusion! Never has M. Proudhon spoken more truly. Certainly from the moment that the development of the dialectical movement is reduced to the simple process of opposing the good to the bad, of posing problems tending to eliminate the bad, and of giving one category as antidote to the other, the categories have no more spontaneity; the idea "functions no more," it has no longer any life in it. It no longer poses or decomposes itself in categories. The succession of categories has become a kind of scaffolding. The dia-
lectic is no longer the movement of absolute reason. There is no longer any dialectic; at the most there is only pure ethics.

When M. Proudhon spoke of the series in the understanding, of the logical succession of categories, he declared positively that he would not give history according to the order of time, that is to say, according to M. Proudhon, the historical succession in which the categories are manifested. All therefore passed for him in the pure ether of reason. All must be caused to flow from this ether by means of dialectic. Now that it is a question of putting this dialectic in practice, reason makes default. The dialectic of M. Proudhon makes a false leap to the dialectic of Hegel, and here is M. Proudhon compelled to say that the order in which he gives the economic categories is no longer the order in which they engender each other. The economic evolutions are no longer the evolutions of reason itself.

What then is it that M. Proudhon gives us? Real history, that is to say, according to the understanding of M. Proudhon, the succession in which the categories are manifested in the order of time? No. History as it passes in the idea itself? Still less that. Thus neither the profane history of categories nor their sacred history. What history does he give us, in fine? The history of his own contradictions. We will see how they march and how they draw M. Proudhon after them. Before approaching this examination, which gives place to the sixth important observation, we have still an important observation to make.

We will admit with M. Proudhon that real history, history according to the order of time, is the historical succession in which the ideas, the categories, the principles are manifested.
Each principle has had its century in which to manifest itself: The principle of authority, for instance, had the eleventh century, as the principle of individualism had the eighteenth century. From consequence to consequence it was the century which appertained to the principle and not the principle to the century. In other words, it was the principle which made history, it was not history which made the principle. When, further, in order to save the principles as well as history, we enquire why such a principle has been manifested in the eleventh or in the eighteenth century rather than in another, we are necessarily compelled to minutely examine into what were the men of the eleventh century, what were those of the eighteenth, what were their respective wants, their productive forces, their mode of production, the raw material of their production, in fine, what were the relations between man and man resulting from all these conditions of existence. To thoroughly examine all these questions, is it not to make real profane history of the men in each century, to represent these men at the same time as the authors and the actors of their own drama? But from the moment that you represent men as the actors and the authors of their own history you have, by a detour, arrived at the actual point of departure since you have abandoned the eternal principles from which you at first set out.

M. Proudhon has not even advanced sufficiently on the cross-road which the ideologist takes in order to gain the highway of history.

**Sixth Observation.**

Let us take with M. Proudhon this cross-road.

Let us grant that the economic relations, regarded as **immutable laws, eternal principles, ideal categories, were**
antior to active living men; that, further, these laws, these principles, these categories, had, from the beginning of time, slept "in the impersonal reason of humanity." We have already seen that with these immutable and immovable eternities, there is no history; at the most it is only history in the idea, that is to say history which is reflected in the dialectical movement of pure reason. M. Proudhon, in saying that in the dialectical movement the ideas are no longer "differentiated," has annulled both the shadow of movement and the movement of the shadows, by means of which we might at most have still created a simulacrum of history. In the place of that he imputes to history his own impotence, he takes from it all, even to the French language. "It is then not correct to say," says M. Proudhon the philosopher, "that something happens, something is produced: in civilisation as in the universe everything exists, everything acts from eternity. It is thus with all social economy." (Vol. II., p. 102.)

Such is the productive force of the contradictions which function and which make M. Proudhon function, that in wishing to explain history he is forced to deny it, that in wishing to explain the successive development of social relations he denies that anything can happen, and in wishing to explain production in all its phases, he denies that anything can be produced.

Thus for M. Proudhon, no more history, no more succession of ideas, and nevertheless his book still exists; and this book is precisely, according to his own expression, "history according to the succession of ideas." How can we find a formula, as M. Proudhon is the man of formulas, by the aid of which we can leap at a single bound beyond all his contradictions?

For that he has invented a new kind of reason which
is neither absolute reason, pure and virginal, nor the
common reason of men living and active in the different
centuries, but a reason quite apart, the reason of society
personified, of the subject *humanity*, which, under the
pen of M. Proudhon, appears sometimes also as "social
genius," "general reason," and in the last place as
"human reason." This reason dressed up under so many
names, is, however, every instant recognised as the in-
dividual reason of M. Proudhon, with his good and bad
side, his antidotes and his problems.

"Human reason does not create the truth," hidden in
the profundity of absolute, eternal reason. It can only
unveil it. But the truths which it has unveiled up to the
present are incomplete, insufficient and therefore con-
tradictory. Then, the economic categories, being them-
selves discovered truths, revealed by human reason, by
social genius, are equally incomplete and enclose the
germ of contradiction. Before M. Proudhon social genius
has seen only the *antagonistic elements* and not the
*synthetic formula*, both simultaneously hidden in *ab-
solute reason*. Economic relations causing to be realised
on earth only these insufficient truths, these incomplete
categories, these contradictory notions, are then con-
tradictory in themselves and present the two sides, of
which one is good, the other evil.

To find the complete truth, the notion in all its pleni-
tude, the synthetic formula, which will annihilate the
contradiction—that is the problem of social genius. That
is why still, in the illusion of M. Proudhon, the same
social genius has been driven from one category to the
other without having yet come, with all the battery of
its categories, to drag from God, from absolute reason,
a synthetic formula.
"At first society (social genius) presents a first fact, emits a hypothesis....a true contradiction, of which the antagonistic results unfold themselves in the social economy in the same manner as the consequences would have been deduced in the mind, in such wise that the industrial movement, following in all the deductions of ideas, divides into a double current, the one of useful effects, the other of subversive results. To constitute harmoniously this two-faced principle and solve this contradiction, society develops a second, which will very soon be followed by a third; and such will be the progress of social genius until, having exhausted all its contradictions—I suppose, but that is not proved, that there is a finality to the contradiction in humanity—it returns, at a bound, upon all its anterior positions, and in a single formula solves all its problems." (Vol. I., p. 135.)

Just as before the antithesis was changed into the antidote, so now the thesis becomes the hypothesis. This change of terms on the part of M. Proudhon can no longer astonish us. Human reason which is nothing less than pure, having only incomplete views, meets at each step fresh problems to solve. Each new thesis which it discovers in absolute reason, and which is the negation of the first thesis, becomes for it a synthesis, which it naively accepts as the solution of the problem in question. It is thus that this reason strives with ever new contradictions, until finding itself as the end of contradictions it perceives that all its theses and syntheses are only contradictory hypotheses. In its perplexity "human reason, the social genius, returns at a bound upon all its anterior positions, and in a single formula solves all its problems." This unique formula, we may say in passing, constitutes the real discovery of M. Proudhon. It is constituted value.
Hypotheses are only made in view of some end. The end proposed to itself in the first place by the social genius which speaks by the mouth of M. Proudhon, was the elimination of that which was evil in each economic category, in order to have only the good. For him good, the supreme good, the true practical end, is equality. And why does the social genius propose equality rather than inequality, fraternity, catholicism, or any other principle? Because "humanity has realised successively so many particular hypotheses only in view of a superior hypothesis," which is precisely equality. In other words: because equality is the ideal of M. Proudhon. He imagines that the division of labor, credit, the workshop, that all the economic relations have been invented only for the benefit of equality, and nevertheless they have always finished by turning against her. From the fact that the history and the fiction of M. Proudhon contradict each other at every step, he concludes that there is a contradiction. If there is a contradiction it exists only between his fixed idea and the real movement.

Henceforth the good side of an economic relation is that which affirms equality, the bad side is that which denies it and affirms inequality. Every new category is a hypothesis of the social genius to eliminate the inequality engendered by the preceding hypothesis. To sum up, equality is the primitive intention, the mystic tendency, the providential end, that the social genius has constantly before its eyes in turning round and round in the circle of economic contradictions. Providence is also the locomotive which conveys all the economic baggage of M. Proudhon better than his pure and heedless reason. He has devoted to Providence a whole chapter which follows that on imposts.

Providence, the providential end, that is the fine word
with which we are presented to-day to explain the progress of history. In actual fact this word explains nothing. It is at most a declamatory form, one manner among others of paraphrasing the facts. It is a fact that the landed proprietors of Scotland obtained a new value by the development of English industry. This industry opened up new markets for wool. In order to produce wool on a large scale it was necessary to turn arable lands into pasture. To effect this transformation it was necessary to concentrate various properties. To concentrate these properties it was necessary to abolish small holdings, drive thousands of tenants from their native land, and put in their place a few herdmen in charge of millions of sheep. Thus by successive transformations, landlordism in Scotland has resulted in the men being driven away by sheep. Say now that the providential end of landlordism in Scotland was to cause men to be driven away by sheep, and you have constructed providential history.

Certainly, the tendency to equality appertains to our century for the men and the means of anterior centuries with wants, means of production, &c., entirely different, worked providentially for the realisation of equality, is to begin by substituting the means and the men of one century for the men and the means of anterior centuries and to misunderstand the historical movement by which successive generations transformed the results acquired from the generations which preceded them. Economists know very well that the same thing which was for one the completed work is for the other only the raw material of further production.

Suppose, as M. Proudhon does, that the social genius has produced, or rather improvised, the feudal barons, with the providential end in view of transforming the
peasants into responsible and equal workmen, and you will have made a substitution of ends and of persons quite worthy of this Providence, which in Scotland established landlordism in order to give itself the malign pleasure of substituting sheep for men.

But since M. Proudhon takes so tender an interest in Providence we will refer him to "The History of Political Economy" of M. de Villeneuve-Bargemont, who also runs after a providential end. This end is no longer equality but catholicism.

_Seventh and Last Observation._

The economists have a singular manner of proceeding. There are for them only two kinds of institutions, those of art and those of nature. Feudal institutions are artificial institutions, those of the bourgeoisie are natural institutions. In this they resemble the theologians, who also establish two kinds of religion. Every religion but their own is an invention of men, while their own religion is an emanation from God. In saying that existing conditions—the conditions of bourgeois production—are natural, the economists give it to be understood that these are the relations in which wealth is created and the productive forces are developed conformably to the laws of nature. Thus these relations are themselves natural laws, independent of the influence of time. They are eternal laws which must always govern society. Thus there has been history, but there is no longer any. There has been history, since there have been feudal institutions, and in these feudal institutions were found conditions of production entirely different to those of bourgeois society, which the economists wish to have accepted as being natural and therefore eternal.
Feudalism also had its proletariat—serfdom, which enclosed all the germs of the bourgeoisie. Feudal production also had two antagonistic elements, which were equally designated by the names of good side and bad side of feudalism, without regard being had to the fact that it is always the evil side which finishes by overcoming the good side. It is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history, by constituting the struggle. If at the epoch of the reign of feudalism the economists, enthusiastic over the virtues of chivalry, the delightful harmony between rights and duties, the patriarchal life of the towns, the prosperous state of domestic industry in the country, of the development of industry organised in corporations, guilds and fellowships, in fine of all which constitutes the beautiful side of feudalism, had proposed to themselves the problem of eliminating all which cast a shadow upon this lovely picture—serfdom, privilege, anarchy—what would have been the result? All the elements which constituted the struggle would have been annihilated, and the development of the bourgeoisie would have been stifled in the germ. They would have set themselves the absurd problem of eliminating history.

When the bourgeoisie had overcome it, it was no longer a question of either the good or the bad side of feudalism. The productive forces which were developed by the bourgeoisie under feudalism had now been acquired by the bourgeoisie itself. All the old economic forms, the civil relations corresponding to them, the political state which was the official expression of the old civil society, were all broken down.

Thus, in order to fairly judge feudal production, it is necessary to consider it as a system of production based on antagonism. It is necessary to show how wealth was
produced within this antagonism, how the productive forces were developed at the same time as the antagonism of classes, how one of the classes, the bad side, the inconvenience of society, continued always to grow until the material conditions necessary to its emancipation had arrived at maturity. Is it not sufficient to say that the mode of production, the relations in which the productive forces are developed, are nothing less than eternal laws, but that they correspond to a determined development of men and of their productive forces, and that any change arising in the productive forces of men necessarily effects a change in their conditions of production? As it is above all important not to be deprived of the fruits of civilisation, of acquired productive forces, it is necessary to break the traditional forms in which they have been produced. From the moment this happens the revolutionary class becomes conservative.

The bourgeoisie commences with a proletariat which is itself a remnant of feudal times. In the course of its historical development, the bourgeoisie necessarily develops its antagonistic character, which at its first appearance was found to be more or less disguised, and existed only in a latent state. In proportion as the bourgeoisie develops, it develops in its bosom a new proletariat, a modern proletariat: it develops a struggle between the proletarian class and the bourgeois class, a struggle which, before it is felt, perceived, appreciated, comprehended, avowed and loudly proclaimed by the two sides, only manifests itself previously by partial and momentary conflicts, by subversive acts. On the other hand, if all the members of the modern bourgeoisie have an identity of interest, inasmuch as they form a class opposed by another class, they have also conflicting, antagonistic interests, inasmuch as they find themselves
opposed by each other. This opposition of interests flows from the economic conditions of their bourgeois life. From day to day it becomes more clear that the relations of production in which the bourgeoisie exists have not a single, a simple character, but a double character, a character of duplicity; that in the same relations in which wealth is produced, poverty is produced also; that in the same relations in which there is a development of productive forces, there is a productive force of repression; that these relations produce bourgeois wealth, that is to say the wealth of the bourgeois class, only in continually annihilating the wealth of integral members of that class and in producing an ever-growing proletariat.

The more this antagonistic character comes to light the more the economists, the scientific representatives of bourgeois production, become excited with their own theories, and different schools are formed.

We have the fatalist economists, who in their theory are as indifferent to what they call the inconveniences of bourgeois production, as the bourgeois themselves are, in actual practice, to the sufferings of the proletarians who assist them to acquire riches. In this fatalist school there are classicists and romanticists. The classicists, like Adam Smith and Ricardo, represents a bourgeoisie which, still struggling with the relics of feudal society, labors only to purify economic relations from the feudal blemishes, to augment the productive forces, and to give to industry and to commerce a fresh scope. The proletariat participating in this struggle, absorbed in this feverish labor, has only passing accidental sufferings to endure, and itself regards them as such. Economists like Adam Smith and Ricardo, who are the
historians of this epoch, have no other mission than to demonstrate how wealth is acquired in the relations of bourgeois production, to formulate these relations in categories, in laws, and to demonstrate how far these laws, these categories, are, for the production of wealth, superior to the laws and categories of feudal society. Poverty in their eyes is only the pain which accompanies all child-birth, in nature as well as in industry.

The romanticists appertain to our epoch, where the bourgeoisie is in direct antagonism to the proletariat; where poverty is engendered in as great abundance as wealth. The economists then pose as satisfied fatalists who, from their lofty position, throw a glance of superb disdain on the active men who manufacture wealth. They copy all the developments given by their predecessors, and the indifference which with those was naïveté becomes for these others mere coquetry.

Afterwards comes the humanitarian school, which takes to heart the evil side of the existing relations of production. This school seeks, as an acquittel for its conscience, to palliate, however little, existing contrasts; it sincerely deplores the distress of the proletariat, the unrestricted competition between the bourgeoisie themselves; it advises the workers to be sober and industrious, and to have but few children; it recommends the bourgeoisie to put thoughtful earnestness into the work of production. The whole theory of this school rests upon interminable distinctions between theory and practice, between principles and results, between the idea and the application, between the content and the form, between the essence and the reality, between right and fact, between the good and the evil side.

The philanthropic school is the humanitarian school
perfected. It denies the necessity of antagonism; it would make all men bourgeois; it would realise the theory in so far as it is distinguished from practice and encloses no antagonism. It goes without saying that, in theory, it is easy to make abstraction of the contradictions that are met with each instant in reality. This theory would become then idealised reality. The philanthropists thus wish to conserve the categories which express bourgeois relations, without having the antagonism which is inseparable from these relations. They fancy they are seriously combatting the bourgeois system, and they are more bourgeois than the others.

As the economists are the scientific representatives of the bourgeois class, so the Socialists and Communists are the theorists of the proletarian class. So long as the proletariat is not sufficiently developed to constitute itself as a class, so long as, in consequence, the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie has not acquired a political character, and while the productive forces are not sufficiently developed in the bosom of the bourgeoisie itself to allow a perception of the material conditions necessary to the emancipation of the proletariat and the formation of a new society, so long these theorists are only utopians who, to obviate the distress of the oppressed classes, improvise systems and run after a regenerative science. But as history develops and with it the struggle of the proletariat becomes more clearly defined, they have no longer any need to seek for such a science in their own minds, they have only to give an account of what passes before their eyes and to make of that their medium. So long as they seek science and only make systems, so long as they are at the beginning of the struggle, they see in poverty only poverty, with-
out seeing therein the revolutionary subversive side which will overturn the old society. From that moment science, produced by the historical movement and linking itself thereto in full knowledge of the facts of the case, has ceased to be doctrinaire and has become revolutionary.

Let us return to M. Proudhon.

Each economic relation has a good and bad side: that is the single point upon which M. Proudhon does not contradict himself. The good side, he sees explained by the economists; the bad side, he sees denounced by the Socialists. He borrows from the economists the necessity of eternal relations; he borrows from the Socialists the illusion of seeing in poverty only poverty. He is in agreement with both in wishing to refer it to the authority of science. Science, for him, is reduced to the insignificant proportion of a scientific formula. It is thus that M. Proudhon flatters himself to have made the criticism of both political economy and of communism: he is below both the one and the other. Below the economists, since as a philosopher, who has under his hand a magic formula, he has believed himself able to do without entering into purely economic details; below the Socialists, since he has neither sufficient courage nor sufficient intelligence to raise himself, were it only speculatively, above the bourgeois horizon.

He wished to be the synthesis, he is a composite error.

He wished to soar as man of science above the bourgeoisie and the proletarians; he is only the petty bourgeois, tossed about constantly between capital and labor, between political economy and communism.
SECTION II.—THE DIVISION OF LABOR AND
MACHINERY.

The division of labor opens, according to M. Proudhon, the series of economic evolutions.

The good side of the division of labor.

"Considered in its essence, the division of labor is the mode according to which is realised the equality of conditions and of intelligences." (Vol. I., p. 93.)

"The division of labor has become for us an instrument of misery." (Vol. I., p. 99.)

VARIANT.

"Labor, in dividing itself according to the law which belongs to it, and which is the first condition of its fecundity, tends to the negation of its ends, and destroys itself." (Vol. I., p. 94.)

The bad side of the division of labor.

To find "the recomposition which will efface the inconveniences of the division of labor while conserving all its useful effects." (Vol. I., p. 97.)

The problem to solve.

The division of labor is, according to M. Proudhon, an eternal law, a simple and abstract category. It is
necessary, then, that the abstraction, the idea, the word, should suffice him to explain the division of labor in the different epochs of history. Castes, corporations, the manufacturing *regime*, the great industry, must be explained by the single word *division*. First study well the meaning of division, and then you will not need to study the numerous influences which give to the division of labor a definite character in each epoch.

Certainly this would be to render things altogether too simple, by merely reducing them to the categories of M. Proudhon. History does not proceed so categorically. Three whole centuries have been necessary in Germany to establish the first great division of labor—that is, the separation of the town from the country. As this single relation, that of town to country, became modified, so the whole society was modified in consequence. To view only this single phase of the division of labor you have the ancient Republics, or Christian feudalism; early England with its barons, or modern England with its cotton-lords. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when yet there were no colonies, when America did not yet exist for Europe, when Asia only existed by the intermediary of Constantinople, when the Mediterranean was the centre of commercial activity, the division of labor had quite another form, quite another aspect, to that which it had in the seventeenth century, when the Spaniards, the Portuguese, the English, and the French had colonies established in all parts of the world. The extent of the market, and its physiognomy, give to the division of labor in the different epochs a physiognomy, a character, which it would be difficult to deduce from the single word division, from the idea, or from the category.

"All the economists," says M. Proudhon, "since Adam Smith have designated the *advantages* and the *incon-"
veniences of the law of division, but have insisted very much more on the first than on the second, because that better served their optimism, and without any one of them ever asking himself what could be the inconveniences of a law. How could the same principle, pursued rigorously to its consequences, conduct to effects diametrically opposed? No single economist, either before or since Adam Smith, has done more than perceive that there was a problem to solve. Say only goes so far as to recognise that in the division of labor the same cause which produces the good engenders the evil."

Adam Smith goes farther than M. Proudhon thinks he does. He has clearly seen that "in reality the difference of natural talents between individuals is much less than is supposed. These dispositions so different, which seem to distinguish the men of different professions when they arrive at mature age, are not so much the cause as the effect of the division of labor." In principle a porter differs less from a philosopher than a mastiff from a greyhound. It is the division of labor which has placed an abyss between the two. All this does not prevent M. Proudhon from saying, in another place, that Adam Smith had no doubt of the inconveniences produced by the division of labor. It is still this which makes him say that J. B. Say was the first to recognise "that in the division of labor the same cause which produces the good engenders the evil."

But let us hear Lemontey: suum cuique. "M. J. B. Say has done me the honor of adopting in his excellent treatise on political economy the principle which I brought to light in this fragment on the moral influence of the division of labor. The somewhat frivolous title of my book has doubtless precluded him from citing me.
I can attribute to no other motive than this the silence of a writer too rich in his own treasures to need to disavow so modest a loan.” (Lemontey, “Œuvres Complètes,” Vol. I., p. 245, Paris, 1840.)

Let us render him this justice: Lemontey has intellectually explained the evil consequences of the division of labor, as it is constituted in our days, and M. Proudhon found nothing to add thereto. But since, by the faults of M. Proudhon, we are now engaged in this question of priority, we may say in passing that long before M. Lemontey, and seventeen years before Adam Smith, the pupil of A. Ferguson, the latter clearly explained the subject in a chapter treating specially of the division of labor.

“There will ever be doubts as to whether the general capacity of a nation grows in proportion to the progress of the arts. Many mechanical arts.... succeed perfectly when they are totally destitute of the assistance of reason or sentiment, and ignorance is the mother of industry as well as of superstition. Reflection and imagination are likely to go astray, but the habit of moving the hand or foot depends upon neither the one or the other. Thus, we might say that perfection, as regards manufacture, consists in its being able to be dismissed from the mind, in such a manner that without an effort of the brain the workshop may be operated like a machine, of which the parts are men.... The general officer may be very accomplished in the art of war while all the merit of the soldier is limited to executing certain movements of the foot or hand. The one may have gained what the other has lost.... In a period where all is separated, the art of thinking may itself form a separate function.” (A. Ferguson, “Essai sur l'histoire de la Société Civile,” Paris, 1783.)
To terminate the literary view, we formally deny that "all the economists have insisted very much more on the advantages than on the inconveniences of the division of labor." It is sufficient to name Sismondi.

Thus, as regards the advantages of the division of labor, M. Proudhon had nothing to do but to paraphrase, more or less pompously, the general phrases which everybody knows.

Let us now see how he derives from the division of labor, taken as a general law, as a category, a thought, the inconveniences which are attached to it. How is it that this category, this law, implies an unequal distribution of labor to the detriment of the equalitarian system of M. Proudhon?

"At this solemn hour of the division of labor the wind of the tempests begins to beat upon humanity. Progress is not accomplished for all in an equal and uniform manner;... it begins by creating a small number of privileged persons.... It is this respect of persons on the part of progress which has created the old-established belief in the natural and providential inequality of conditions, and has given birth to castes, and has hierarchically constituted all societies." (Proudhon, Vol. I., p. 97.)

The division of labor has made castes. But castes are the inconveniences of the division of labor; then it is the division of labor which has engendered inconveniences. Quod erat demonstrandum. Would you go further and ask what causes the division of labor to create castes, hierarchic constitutions and privileged classes? M. Proudhon will tell you: Progress. And what has made this progress? The limit. The limit for M. Proudhon is the respect of persons on the part of progress.

After philosophy comes history. This is no longer
either descriptive history or dialectic history, it is comparative history. M. Proudhon establishes a comparison between the workman printer of to-day and the workman printer of the Middle Ages; between the workman of the Creusot ironworks and the country blacksmith; between the man of letters of our days and the man of letters of the Middle Ages; and he makes the balance lean to the side of those who appertain more or less to the division of labor such as the Middle Ages have constituted or transmitted it. He opposes the division of labor of one historical epoch to the division of labor of another historical epoch. Was this what M. Proudhon had to demonstrate? No. He ought to have shown us the inconveniences of the division of labor in general, of the division of labor as category. But of what use is it further to dwell upon this part of M. Proudhon's work, since a little further on we shall see him formally retract all these pretended developments himself?

"The first effect of divided labor," continues M. Proudhon, "after the degradation of the mind, is the prolongation of the periods of work, which grow in inverse ratio to the amount of intelligence exercised. But, as the duration of these periods cannot exceed sixteen or eighteen hours a day, from the moment when compensation cannot be taken by additional time it will be effected in the price, and wages will fall. This is certain—and that is all we are concerned to note—that the universal conscience does not put at the same rate the work of an overseer and that of a laborer. There is, then, a necessity for a reduction in the price of the day's work, so that the worker, after having been afflicted in his mind by a degrading function, should not fail to be also stricken in the body by the meagreness of the remuneration."
We will pass over the logical value of these syllogisms, which Kant would call paralogisms, and consider them as they are.

Here is their substance:

The division of labor reduces the worker to a degrading function; to this degrading function corresponds a depraved mind; with the depravity of the mind goes a constant reduction of wages. And, in order to prove that this reduction of wages is adapted to a depraved mind, M. Proudhon says, to absolve his own conscience, that it is the universal conscience which wills it thus. Is the soul of M. Proudhon counted in the universal conscience?

Machinery is, for M. Proudhon, “the logical antithesis of the division of labor,” and, in support of his dialectic he begins by transforming machinery into a factory.

After having supposed the modern factory in order to have poverty flow from the division of labor, M. Proudhon supposes poverty engendered by the division of labor in order to arrive at the factory, and to be able to represent it as the dialectic negation of this poverty. After having stricken the worker morally by a degrading function, and physically by the meagreness of his wages, after having put the worker in a position of dependence upon the overseer and reduced his work to the mere manual task of a laborer, he betakes himself again to the factory and to the machines in order to degrade the worker by “giving him a master,” and he finishes his humiliation by causing him to be “reduced from the rank of an artisan to that of a mere laborer.” What beautiful dialectic! And yet if he would only stick to that! But no, he must have a new history of the division of labor, no longer in order to derive contradictions therefrom, but in order to reconstruct the factory after his own
fashion. To arrive at this end he has to forget all that he has just said about this division.

Labor is organised, and divided, variously, according to the instruments which it manipulates. The wind-mill supposes a division of labor quite other than that of the steam mill. To begin by the division of labor in general in order to arrive at a specific instrument of production, machinery, is therefore to fly in the face of history.

Machinery is no more an economic category than is the ox which draws the plough. Machinery is only a productive force. The modern workshop, which is based on the application of machinery, is a social relation of production, an economic category.

Let us see now how these things pass in the brilliant imagination of M. Proudhon.

"In society the incessant apparition of machinery is the antithesis, the inverse formula, of labor; it is the protest of industrial genius against fragmentary and homicidal labor. What, in effect, is a machine? A means of reuniting different particles of labor, which division had separated. Every machine might be defined as a summary of many operations.... Therefore, through the machine, there would be the restoration of the worker.... Machinery standing in political economy in contradiction to the division of labor, represents the synthesis, opposing, in the human mind, the analysis.... The division only separates the different parts of labor, leaving each to the speciality most agreeable to him: The factory groups the workers, according to the relation of each part to the whole .... it introduces the principle of authority into labor.... But that is not all: The machine or the factory, after having degraded the workman by giving him a master, finishes his humiliation by
causing him to be reduced from the rank of an artisan to that of a mere laborer.... The period through which we are now passing, that of machinery, is distinguished by a special character, it is that of the wage-worker. The wage-worker is posterior to the division of labor and exchange."

A simple observation to M. Proudhon. The separation of the different parts of labor, leaving to each man the faculty of devoting himself to the speciality most agreeable to him, a separation which M. Proudhon dates from the beginning of the world, exists only in modern industry, under the régime of competition.

M. Proudhon afterwards gives us a "genealogy," much too "interesting," in order to demonstrate how the workshop is born from the division of labor and the wage-worker from the workshop.

1. He imagines a man who "has remarked that by dividing production into different parts, and causing each to be executed by a separate workman," the forces of production might be multiplied.

2. This man, seizing the thread of this idea, "tells himself that in forming a permanent group of assorted workmen for the special object that he has in view, he will obtain a more regular and more abundant production, &c."

3. This man makes a proposition to other men to get them to grasp his idea, and the thread of his idea.

4. This man, at the inception of the industry, acts as an equal to equals towards the companions who, later, become his workmen.

5. "He is sensible, in fact, that this primitive equality must rapidly disappear through the advantageous position of the master and the dependence of the wage-worker."
That is a further sample of the historical and descriptive method of M. Proudhon.

Let us now examine, from the historical and economic point of view, and see if really the workshop or the machine has introduced the principle of authority into society subsequent to the division of labor; if it has on one hand rehabilitated the worker, while on the other subjecting him to authority; if the machine is the recomposition of divided labor, the synthesis of labor opposed to its analysis.

Society as a whole has this in common with the interior of a factory, that it also has its division of labor. If the division of labor in a modern factory, were taken as a model to be applied to an entire society, the society the best organised for the production of wealth would be incontestably that which had but one single master distributing the work, according to a regulation arranged beforehand, to the various members of the community. But it is not so. While in the interior of the modern factory the division of labor is minutely regulated by the authority of the capitalist, modern society has no other regulation, no other authority, to arrange the distribution of labor, than free competition.

Under the patriarchal régime, under the régime of castes, under the feudal and corporative régime, there was division of labor in the whole of society according to fixed regulations. Were these regulations established by a legislator? No. Originally born of the conditions of material production, it was not till much later that they were established as laws. It was thus that these various forms of the division of labor became to such an extent the bases of social organisation. As to the division of labor in the factory, it was very little developed in all these forms of society.
It might even be set up as a general rule, that the less authority presides over the division of labor in the interior of society, the more will the division of labor be developed inside the factory and the more absolutely will it there be subject to the authority of a single individual. Thus the authority in the factory and that in society, in relation to the division of labor, are in inverse ratio the one to the other.

It is now important to see what is this factory, in which the occupations are greatly separated, where the task of each worker is reduced to a very simple operation, and where the authority, capital, groups and directs the laborers. How has this workshop come into existence? To answer this question we shall have to examine how manufacturing industry, properly so-called, has been developed. I refer now to that industry which is not yet modern industry, with its machinery, but which is, at the same time, neither the industry of the artisans of the Middle Ages nor domestic industry. We will not enter into elaborate details; we will only give some summarised points in order to show that history cannot be made with formulas.

One of the most indispensable conditions for the formation of the manufacturing industry was the accumulation of capitals facilitated by the discovery of America and the introduction of its precious metals.

It has been sufficiently proved that the augmentation of the means of exchange has resulted in, on one side the depreciation of wages and rent, and on the other the increase of industrial profits. In other terms, in proportion as the landlord class and the working class, the feudal lords and the people, fall, so the capitalists class, the bourgeoisie, rises.
There have been other circumstances which have operated simultaneously with the development of the manufacturing industry—the increase of the commodities put in circulation when commerce penetrated to the East Indies by way of the Cape of Good Hope, the colonial régime, and the development of maritime commerce.

Another point which has not yet been sufficiently appreciated in the history of manufacturing industry was the disbanding of the numerous retainers of the feudal lords, the subaltern members of which became vagabonds before entering the factory. The creation of the factory was preceded by an almost universal vagabondage in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The factory found another powerful support in the numerous peasants, who, continually driven from the country districts by the transformation of the fields into pasturage, and through the progress of agriculture rendering a smaller number of hands necessary for cultivation, steadily flocked into the towns during whole centuries.

The growth of the market, the accumulation of capitals, the modification in the social position of classes, a crowd of people who found themselves deprived of their sources of income, these were the various historical conditions for the formation of the manufacturing industry. It was not, as M. Proudhon says, certain amiable stipulations between equals which brought men together in the factory. It was not even in the bosom of the ancient corporations that manufacture had its birth. It was the merchant who became the chief of the modern factory, and not the ancient master of corporations. Almost everywhere there was a furious struggle between the manufacturing industry and the handicrafts.

The accumulation and concentration of instruments of production and of workpeople preceded the development
of the division of labor inside the factory. A manufactory consists very much more in the union of a large number of workpeople and many trades in a single place, in one apartment, under the control of one capital, than in the analysis of the different operations and the adaption of each worker to one simple task.

The utility of a factory consists much less in the division of labor, properly so-called, than in the fact that the work is performed on a much larger scale, that much unproductive expenditure is thereby saved, &c. At the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, there was scarcely any division of labor in Dutch manufactories.

The development of the division of labor presupposes the union of workpeople in a factory. There is not even a single example, either in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, of the different branches of the same trade being separately exploited to such a point that it would have sufficed to bring them together in one place to obtain a complete factory. But once the men and the instruments of production were brought together, the division of labor, as it existed under the form of co-operation, was reproduced, was necessarily reflected, inside the factory.

For M. Proudhon, who sees things upside down, if indeed he always sees them, the division of labor, in the sense given to it by Adam Smith, preceded the factory which was a necessary condition of its existence.

Machinery properly so-called dates from the end of the eighteenth century. Nothing could be more absurd than to see in machinery the antithesis of the division of labor, the synthesis giving unity again to divided labor.

The machine is a union of the instruments of labor,
and not at all a combination of labors for the workman himself. "When, by the division of labor, each separate operation has been reduced to the operation of a simple instrument, the union of all these instruments, put in operation by a single motor, constitutes—a machine." (Babbage, "Traité sur l'Economie des Machines," &c., Paris, 1833.) Simple tools, accumulation of tools, composite tools, the putting in motion of a composite tool by a single manual motor, by man, the putting in motion of these instruments by natural forces, the machine, a system of machines with a single motor, a system of machines with an automaton for motor—such is the development of machinery.

The concentration of the instruments of production and the division of labor are as inseparable the one from the other as are, in the domain of politics, the concentration of the public powers and the division of private interests. England, with the concentration of land, the instrument of agricultural industry, has, at the same time, division of agricultural labor and the application of machinery to the exploitation of the soil. France which has the division of this instrument, the system of small property in land, has, generally speaking, neither division of agricultural labor nor the application of machinery to the cultivation of the soil.

For M. Proudhon the concentration of the instruments of labor is the negation of the division of labor. In reality we find it to be quite the contrary. In proportion as the concentration of these instruments is developed, so also this division is developed, and *vice versa*. To this is due the fact that every great invention in mechanics is followed by a greater division of labor, and each advance in the division of labor brings in its turn new mechanical inventions.
We do not need to recall the fact that the great development of the division of labor began in England after the invention of machinery. Thus the spinners and weavers were, for the most part, peasants, such as we meet them to-day in the more backward countries. The invention of machines has completely separated the manufacturing from the agricultural industry. The spinner and the weaver, hitherto united in one family, were separated by the machine. Thanks to the machine the spinner can live in England while the weaver dwells in India. Before the invention of machinery the industry of a country was exercised principally on the raw material which was the product of its soil; thus in England wool, in Germany flax, in France silk and flax, in India and the Levant cotton, &c. Thanks to the application of machinery and of steam the division of labor has been able to assume such dimensions that the great industry, detached from the national soil, depends only upon the markets of the world, on international exchanges, and on an international division of labor. In fine, the machine exercises such an influence on the division of labor that when in the manufacture of any given product, means have been found to partially introduce mechanical appliances, the manufacture has been immediately divided into two exploitations entirely independent of each other.

Is it necessary to speak of the providential and philanthropic end which M. Proudhon discovers in the original invention and application of machinery?

When in England the market had become so fully developed that manual labor no longer sufficed to supply it, the need for machinery made itself felt. It was then that the application of mechanical science, which had been fully prepared during the eighteenth century, was thought of.
The organised factory marked its appearance by acts which were nothing short of philanthropic. Children were kept to work by blows of the whip; they were made objects of traffic, and were contracted for with orphanages and workhouses. All the laws on the apprenticeship of workpeople were abolished, because, to make use of the phrases of M. Proudhon synthesised workers were no longer needed. In fine, from 1825 all the new inventions were the result of conflicts between the worker and the capitalist, who sought at all costs to depreciate the speciality of the workman. After each strike, however unimportant, a new machine appeared. The workman was so far from seeing in the machines a kind of rehabilitation, of restoration, as M. Proudhon calls it, that, in the eighteenth century, he for a long time resisted the nascent empire of the automaton.

"Wyatt," says Doctor Ure, "invented the series of fluted rollers, the spinning fingers usually ascribed to Arkwright.".... "The main difficulty did not, to my apprehension, lie so much in the invention of a proper self-acting mechanism .... as in training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton. But to devise and administer a successful code of factory discipline suited to the necessities of factory diligence, was the Herculean enterprise. The whole achievement of Arkwright."

In short, by the introduction of machinery the division of labor within society has been developed, the task of the workman within the factory has been simplified, capital has been accumulated, and man has been further dismembered.

If M. Proudhon would be an economist, and leave for
an instant "the evolution in the series of the understanding," he would draw from Adam Smith his knowledge of the time when the automatic factory had scarcely come into existence; in fact, learn the difference between the division of labor as it existed in the time of Adam Smith and as we see it in the automatic factory. In order to make this clearly understood it will be sufficient to cite some passages from the "Philosophy of Manufactures," by Doctor Ure:

"When Adam Smith wrote his immortal elements of economics, automatic machinery being hardly known, he was properly led to regard the division of labor as the grand principle of manufacturing improvement; and he showed, in the example of pin-making, how each handicraftsman, being thereby enabled to perfect himself by practice in one point, became a quicker and cheaper workman. In each branch of manufacture he saw that some parts were, on that principle, of easy execution, like the cutting of pin wires into uniform lengths, and some were comparatively difficult, like the formation and fixation of their heads; and therefore he concluded that to each a workman of appropriate value and cost was naturally assigned. This appropriation forms the very essence of the division of labor.... But what was in Dr. Smith's time a topic of useful illustration, cannot now be used without risk of misleading the public mind as to the right principle of manufacturing industry. In fact, the division, or rather adaptation of labor to the different talents of men, is little thought of in factory employment. On the contrary, wherever a process requires peculiar dexterity and steadiness of hand it is withdrawn as soon as possible from the cunning workman, who is prone to irregularities of many kinds, and it is
placed in charge of a peculiar mechanism so self-regulating that a child may superintend it.... The principle of the factory system, then, is to substitute mechanical science for hand skill, and the partition of a process into its essential constituents, for the division or gradation of labor among artisans. On the handicraft plan, labor, more or less skilled, was usually the most expensive element of production—but on the automatic plan skilled labor gets progressively superseded, and will, eventually, be replaced by mere overlookers of machines. By the infirmity of human nature it happens that the more skilful the workman the more self-willed and intractable he is apt to become, and, of course, the less fit a component of a mechanical system, in which, by occasional irregularities, he may do great damage to the whole. The grand object, therefore, of the modern manufacturer is, through the union of capital and science, to reduce the task of his workpeople to the exercise of vigilance and dexterity—faculties, when concentrated to one process, speedily brought to perfection in the young....

"On the gradation system, a man must serve an apprenticeship of many years before his hand and eye become skilled enough for certain mechanical feats; but on the system of decomposing a process into its constituents, and embodying each part in an automatic machine, a person of common care and capacity may be entrusted with any of the said elementary parts after a short probation, and may be transferred from one to another, on any emergency, at the discretion of the master. Such translations are utterly at variance with the old practice of the division of labor, which fixed one man to shaping the head of a pin, and another to sharpening its point, with most irksome and spiritwasting uniformity for a whole life.... But on the equalisation plan of self-acting
machines, the operative needs to call his faculties only into agreeable exercise.....

"As his business consists in tending the work of a well-regulated mechanism, he can learn it in a short period; and when he transfers his services from one machine to another, he varies his task, and enlarges his views by thinking on those general combinations which result from his and his companions' labors. Thus, that cramping of the faculties, that narrowing of the mind, that stunting of the frame, which were ascribed, and not unjustly, by moral writers, to the division of labor, cannot, in common circumstances, occur under the equable distribution of industry..... It is, in fact, the constant aim and tendency of every improvement in machinery to supersede human labor altogether, or to diminish its cost, by substituting the industry of women and children for that of men; or that of ordinary laborers for trained artisans..... This tendency to employ merely children with watchful eyes and nimble fingers, instead of journeymen of long experience, shows how the scholastic dogma of the division of labor into degrees of skill has been exploded by our enlightened manufacturers." (Andrew Ure, "Philosophy of Manufactures" (1835) pp. 15 and 16.)

That which characterises the division of labor within modern society is that it engenders specialities, species, and with them the stupefying of handicraft.

"We are struck with admiration," says Lemontey, "in seeing among the ancients the same individual being at once, and in an eminent degree, philosopher, poet, orator, historian, priest, administrator and general. Our minds are awe-stricken at the contemplation of so vast a domain. Each one now plants his hedge and fences himself within
his own enclosure. I do not know if by this cutting up the field is extended, but I know very well that man is lessened thereby."

The division of labor in the automatic factory is characterised by this, that labor there has lost all specialised character. But from the moment that all special development ceases, the need of universality, the tendency towards an integral development of the individual begins to make itself felt. The automatic factory effaces species and the stupefying of handicraft.

M. Proudhon, not having so much as comprehended this single revolutionary side of the automatic factory, takes a step backward, and proposes to the workman that he should not only make the twelfth part of a pin, but the whole twelve parts in succession. The workman would thus arrive at the science and conscience of the pin. Such is the synthetic labor of M. Proudhon. No one can deny that to make one movement forward and another backward, is equally to make a synthetic movement.

To sum up, M. Proudhon has not got beyond the ideal of the petty bourgeois. And in order to realise this ideal he thinks of nothing better than to bring us back to the companion, or at most to the master, workman of the Middle Ages. It suffices, he says somewhere in his book, to have made a masterpiece once in a lifetime, to have felt oneself a man for once. Is not that, in its form as well as in its basis, the masterpiece exacted by the trade guild of the Middle Ages?
Section III.—Competition and Monopoly.

The good side of competition.

"Competition is as essential to labor as division.... It is necessary to the advent of equality."

The bad side of competition.

"This principle is the negation of itself. Its most certain effect is to ruin those whom it draws into its train."

"The inconveniences which follow in its train, as well as the good which it procures..., flow logically, the one and the other, from the principle."

General reflection.

"To find the principle of reconciliation, which must be derived from a law superior to liberty itself."

Problem to solve.

"It cannot therefore be here a question of destroying competition, a thing as impossible as to destroy liberty itself; it is a question of finding the equilibrium, I will frankly say the police."

M. Proudhon begins by defending the eternal necessity
of competition against those who would replace it by *emulation*.

There is no "emulation without an object," and as "the object of every passion is necessarily analogous to the passion, a mistress for the lover, power for the ambitious, gold for the avaricious, a crown for the poet; the object of industrial emulation is necessarily *profit*. Emulation is nothing but competition itself."

Competition is emulation in view of profit. Is industrial emulation necessarily emulation in view of profit, that is to say, competition? M. Proudhon proves it in affirming it. We have already seen that to affirm is, for him, to prove, the same as to suppose is to deny.

If the immediate object of the lover is a mistress, the immediate object of industrial emulation is the product and not the profit.

Competition is not industrial emulation, it is commercial emulation. In our days industrial emulation only exists in view of commerce. There are some phases in the economic life of modern peoples in which everybody is seized with a kind of vertigo for making profit without producing. This vertigo of speculation, which reappears periodically, discloses the real character of competition which seeks to escape the necessity of industrial emulation.

If you had told an artisan of the fourteenth century that the privileges and the whole feudal organisation of industry were about to be abrogated, in order to put industrial emulation, called competition, in their place, he would have answered that the privileges of the various corporations, masters and wardens, were organised competition. M. Proudhon says no better in affirming that "emulation is nothing but competition itself."

"Enact that from January 1, 1847, work and wages
shall be guaranteed to everybody: immediately an immense relaxation would succeed to the ardent tension of industry."

In the place of a supposition, an affirmation, and a negation, we have now an ordinance, which M. Proudhon gives expressly in order to prove the necessity of competition, its eternity as a category, &c.

If people were to suppose that it only requires an ordinance to escape from competition, they would never escape from it. And to go so far as to propose the abolition of competition while retaining the wage system is to propose to make nonsense by a royal decree. But the peoples do not proceed by royal decree. Before making these ordinances they have at least to change, from top to bottom, their industrial and political conditions of existence, and, in consequence, all their manner of being.

M. Proudhon would answer with his imperturbable assurance that this is the hypothesis "of a transformation of our nature without historical precedent," and that he would have the right to "put us outside the discussion" in virtue of we know not what ordinance.

M. Proudhon does not know that the whole of history is nothing but a continual transformation of human nature.

"Let us keep to facts. The French Revolution was made for industrial as well as for political liberty; and, although France, in 1789, may not have recognised all the consequences of the principle, the realisation of which she demanded, we may say frankly she was not deceived either in her desires or in her attempt. Whoever should attempt to deny this would in my opinion lose the right of criticism. I will never dispute with an adversary who would lay down as a principle that 25,000,000 of
men had spontaneously been guilty of error.... Why, then, if competition were not a principle of the social economy, a decree of destiny, a necessity of the human mind, why, instead of abolishing corporations, companies and wardenships, did not people rather think of re-establishing the whole of them?"

Thus, since the French people of the eighteenth century abolished corporations, companies and wardenships, instead of modifying them, the French people of the nineteenth century ought to modify competition instead of abolishing it. Since competition was established in France, in the eighteenth century, as a consequence of historical needs, this competition must not be destroyed in the nineteenth century in consequence of other historical needs. M. Proudhon, not comprehending that the establishment of competition was bound up with the actual development of the men of the eighteenth century, makes of competition a necessity of the human mind, in partibus infidelium. What would he have made of the great Colbert for the seventeenth century?

After the Revolution comes the existing state of things. M. Proudhon also draws some facts from that in order to show the eternity of competition, by proving that all the industries in which this category is not yet sufficiently developed, as agriculture, are in a state of inferiority, of decay.

To say that there are some industries which are not yet at the height of competition, that yet others are below the level of bourgeois production, is mere quibbling which by no means proves the eternity of competition.

All the logic of M. Proudhon is summed up in this: Competition is a social relation in which we really develop our productive forces. He gives to this truth, not any
logical developments, but certain forms, often well developed, in saying that competition is industrial emulation, the actual mode of being free, responsibility in labor, the constitution of value, a necessary condition for the future of equality, a principle of social economy, a decree of destiny, a necessity of the human mind, an inspiration of eternal justice, liberty in division, division in liberty, an economic category.

"Competition and association support each other. So far from excluding each other they are not even divergent. Who speaks of competition already supposes a common end. Competition therefore is not egoism, and the most deplorable error of Socialism lay in having regarded it as the overthrow of society."

Who speaks of competition speaks of a common end, and that proves, on the one hand, that competition is association; on the other, that competition is not egoism. And does not he who speaks of egoism, speak of a common end? Each egoism operates in society and by reason of the existence of society. It, therefore, presupposes society, that is to say common ends, common wants, common means of production, &c., &c. Can it by chance be that, therefore, the competition and the association of which the Socialists speak are not even divergent?

The Socialists know very well that modern society is based upon competition. How can they reproach competition with overthrowing the existing society, which they desire to overthrow themselves? And how can they reproach competition with the overthrow of the society of the future in which, on the contrary, they see the overthrow of competition?

M. Proudhon says, further, that competition is the
opposite of monopoly, that, in consequence, it cannot be the opposite of association.

Feudalism was, from its origin, opposed to competition, which did not yet exist. Did it follow that competition was not opposed to feudalism?

In fact, society, association, are denominations which may be given to all societies, to feudal society as well as to bourgeois society, which is association based upon competition. How, then, can there be Socialists who, by the single word association think to be able to dispose of competition? And how can M. Proudhon himself think to defend competition against Socialism, simply by defining competition by the single word association?

All that we have just considered forms the good side of competition, as M. Proudhon understands it. We will now pass on to the evil side, that is to say to the negative side of competition, to its inconveniences, to those qualities in it which are destructive, subversive, maleficent.

The picture of these which M. Proudhon presents to us is a somewhat lugubrious one.

Competition engenders poverty, foments civil war; it "changes the natural zones," confounds nationalities, disturbs families, corrupts the public conscience, "over-turns the notions of equity, of justice," of morality, and what is worse, it destroys honest and free commerce and does not even give in exchange synthetical value, fixed and honest price. It disenchants everybody, even the economists. It forces things on even to its own destruction.

After all the bad that M. Proudhon says of it, can there be, for the relations of bourgeois society, for its principles and its illusions, an element more disintegrating, more destructive, than competition?

Let us observe that competition always becomes more
destructive of bourgeois relations in proportion as it exites to a feverish creation of new productive forces—that is to say, of the material conditions of a new society. In this connection, at least, the evil side of competition should have its good.

"Competition, as an economic position or phase, considered in its origin, is the necessary result . . . of the theory of the reduction of the general cost."

For M. Proudhon, the circulation of the blood must be a consequence of the theory of Harvey.

"Monopoly is the fatal term of competition, which the latter engenders by an incessant negation of itself. This generation of monopoly is already the justification of competition . . . Monopoly is the natural opposite of competition . . . but from the time that competition is necessary it implies the idea of monopoly, since monopoly is as the seat of each competing individuality."

We rejoice with M. Proudhon that he can for once, at least, properly apply his formula of thesis and antithesis. Everybody knows that modern monopoly is engendered by competition.

As to the content, M. Proudhon devotes himself to some poetic images. Competition makes "of each subdivision of labor a sort of sovereignty in which each individual reposes in his strength and his independence." Monopoly is "the seat of each competing individuality." The sovereignty is at least worthy of the seat.

M. Proudhon speaks only of modern monopoly engendered by competition. But we all know that competition was engendered by feudal monopoly. Thus primarily competition has been the contrary of monopoly, and not monopoly the contrary of competition. Therefore modern monopoly is not a simple antithesis; it is, on the contrary, the true synthesis.
**Thesis:** Feudal monopoly anterior to competition.

**Antithesis:** Competition.

**Synthesis:** Modern monopoly, which is the negation of feudal monopoly in so far as it supposes the régime of competition, and which is the negation of competition in so far as it is monopoly.

Thus modern monopoly, bourgeois monopoly, is synthetic monopoly, the negation of the negation, the unity of contraries. It is monopoly in its pure, normal, rational state. M. Proudhon is in contradiction with his own philosophy when he makes of bourgeois monopoly, monopoly in the crude, simple, contradictory, spasmodic state. M. Rossi, whom M. Proudhon often quotes on the subject of monopoly, appears to have more clearly grasped the synthetic character of bourgeois monopoly. In his "Cours d'Économie Politique," he distinguishes between artificial monopolies and natural monopolies. Feudal monopolies, he says, are artificial, that is to say arbitrary; bourgeois monopolies are natural, that is to say rational.

Monopoly is a good thing, reasons M. Proudhon, since it is an economic category, an emanation "from the impersonal reason of humanity." Competition is another good thing since it also is an economic category. But what is not good is the reality of monopoly and the reality of competition. What is worse still is that competition and monopoly devour each other mutually. What is to be done? Seek the synthesis of these two eternal thoughts, drag it from the bosom of God, where it has been deposited from time immemorial.

In practical life we find not only competition, monopoly, and their antagonism, but also their synthesis, which is not a formula but a movement. Monopoly produces competition, competition produces monopoly. The
monopolists are made by competition, the competitors become monopolists. If the monopolists restrict competition among themselves by partial association, competition grows among the workers; and the more the mass of the workers grows as against the monopolists of one nation, the more keen becomes the competition between the monopolists of different nations. The synthesis is such that monopoly can only maintain itself by continually passing through the struggle of competition.

In order to dialectically engender the imposts which follow 

monopoly, M. Proudhon talks to us of the social genius who, after having intrepidly pursued his zigzag route, "after having marched with a firm step, without regret and without halting, and having arrived at the angle of monopoly, casts a melancholy glance backward, and, after profound reflection, fixes imposts on all objects of production, and creates an entire administrative organisation, in order that all employment should be delivered to the proletariat and be paid by the men of monopoly."

What is to be said of this genius, who being fasting, walks zigzag? And what is to be said of this promenade which has no other end than to demolish the bourgeoisie by imposts, while these imposts serve precisely to give the bourgeoisie the means of conserving its position as the dominant class?

In order to get a glimpse of the manner in which M. Proudhon treats economic details, it will suffice to say that, according to him, the impost on articles of consumption must have been established with a view to equality and in order to render assistance to the proletariat.

Imposts on articles of consumption have only had their true development since the advent of the bour-
geoisie. In the hands of industrial capital, that is to say the sober and thrifty wealth which maintained, reproduced, and increased itself by the direct exploitation of labor, the impost on articles of consumption was a means of exploiting the frivolous, joyous, prodigal wealth of the grand lords who did nothing but consume. Sir James Steuart very well explains this primitive object of the impost on articles of consumption in his "Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy," which he published ten years before Adam Smith.

"Under the pure monarchy," he says, "the prince seems jealous as it were, of growing wealth, and therefore imposes taxes upon people who are growing richer. Under the limited Government they are calculated chiefly to affect those who are growing poorer. Thus the monarch imposes a tax upon industry, where everyone is rated in proportion to the gain he is supposed to make by his profession. The poll-tax and taille, are likewise proportioned to the supposed opulence of everyone liable to them. . . . . In limited Governments, impositions are generally laid upon consumption."

As to the logical succession of imposts, of the balance of commerce, of credit—in the understanding of M. Proudhon—we will merely observe that the English bourgeoisie, having, under William of Orange, attained its political constitution, created at a stroke a new system of taxation, public credit, and the system of protective duties, when it was in a position to freely develop its conditions of existence.

This glimpse will suffice to give the reader a fair idea of the lucubrations of M. Proudhon on police and taxation, the balance of commerce, communism, and population. We defy the most indulgent critic to approach these chapters seriously.
Section IV.—Property and Rent.

In each historical epoch property is differently developed, and in a series of social relations entirely different. Thus, to define bourgeois property is nothing other than to explain all the social relations of bourgeois production.

To pretend to give a definition of property as of an independent relation, a separate category, an abstract and eternal idea, can only be an illusion of metaphysics or of jurisprudence.

M. Proudhon, while professing to speak of property in general, deals only with property in land, the rent of land.

"The origin of rent, as property, is, so to speak, extra-economic; it exists in certain psychological and moral considerations which are only remotely connected with the production of wealth." (Vol. II., p. 266.)

Thus M. Proudhon recognises his inability to comprehend the economic origin of rent and of property. He acknowledges that this incapacity obliges him to have recourse to psychological and moral considerations, which are indeed only remotely connected with the production of wealth, being closely allied to the exigencies of his historical views. M. Proudhon affirms that in the origin of property there is something mystic and mysterious. But to see mystery in the origin of property, that is to say, to transform the relation of production itself to the distribution of the instruments of production into a mystery, is that not, to use the language of M. Proudhon, to renounce all pretension to economic science?

M. Proudhon is "compelled to recall that at the seventh epoch of economic evolution—credit—the fiction
having caused the reality to vanish, human activity threatening to lose itself in space, it became necessary to attach it more closely to nature; but rent was the price of this new contract."

"The man with forty crowns" represents a Proudhon to come: "My Lord the creator, if you please: each is master in his world; but you will never make me believe that this world where we are is of glass." In such a world, where credit was a means for losing one's self in space, it is quite possible for property to be necessary in order to attach man to nature. In the world of real people, where property in land always precedes credit, the horror vacui of M. Proudhon could not exist.

The existence of rent once admitted, whatever may have been its origin, it is contradictorily debated between farmer and landlord. What is the last term of this debate—in other words, what is the mean quota of rent? Here is what M. Proudhon says:

"The theory of Ricardo answers this question. At the beginning of society, when man, newly arrived on earth, had before him only immense forests, when the earth was vast and industry was in its infancy, rent was nil. Land, not yet cultivated by labor, was an object of utility; it was not a value in exchange. It was common, not social. Little by little the multiplication of families and the progress of agriculture caused the price of land to make itself felt. Labor gave its value to the soil: from that sprang rent. The more fruitful a field, with the same quantity of labor, the more it was esteemed; moreover, the tendency of the proprietors was always to attribute to themselves the whole of the fruits of the soil, less the wages of the cultivator, that is to say less the cost of production. Thus property followed in the
train of labor to take from it all that which, in the product, exceeded the actual cost. Property fulfilled a mystic duty by representing the community face to face with the cultivator. In the design of Providence the cultivator is nothing but a responsible laborer, who must give an account to society of all that he reaps in excess of his legitimate wages. . . . By essence and destination, therefore, rent is an instrument of distributive justice, one of the thousand means which economic genius puts into operation in order to arrive at equality. It is an immense valuation executed contradictorily by the landlords and farmers, without the possibility of collision, in a superior interest, and the definite result of which must be to equalise the possession of the land between the exploiters of the soil and the industrial community. . . . . It required nothing less than this magic of property to drag from the cultivator the excess of the product which he could not be prevented from regarding as his, and of which he believed himself to be the sole author. Rent, or rather property, broke down agricultural egoism and created a solidarity to which no power, no partition of the land, could have given birth. . . . At present, the moral effect of property secured, it only remains to distribute the rent.”

All this jumble of words may be reduced to this: Ricardo says that the excess of the price of agricultural products over their cost of production, including the ordinary profit and interest of capital, gives the measure of the rent. M. Proudhon does better. He makes the proprietor intervene, as a *deus ex machina*, who drags from the cultivator all the excess of his production over the actual cost of production. He makes use of the intervention of the proprietor, to explain property, of the landlord, to explain rent. He answers the problem by
restating the same problem and increasing it by a syllable.

We may further observe that in determining rent by the difference of fertility of the soil, M. Proudhon assigns to it a new origin, since land, before being estimated according to the different degrees of fertility, "was not," according to him, "a value in exchange, but was common." What has it now become, this fiction of rent which sprang from the necessity of attaching to earth man who was likely to lose himself in the infinity of space?

Let us now extricate the doctrine of Ricardo from the providential, allegorical and mystical phrases in which M. Proudhon has been careful to envelop it.

Rent, in the Ricardian sense, is property in land in the bourgeois state—that is to say, feudal property which has been subjected to the conditions of bourgeois production.

We have seen that, according to Ricardo, the price of all products is finally determined by the cost of production including in that industrial profit—in other terms, by the time of labor employed. In the manufacturing industry the price of the product obtained by the minimum of labor regulates the price of all other commodities of the same kind, provided that the least costly and most productive instruments of production may be multiplied to infinity, and that, therefore, free competition necessarily creates a market price—that is to say, a common price—for all the products of the same kind.

In agricultural industry, on the contrary, it is the price of the product obtained by the greatest amount of labor which regulates the price of all the products of the same kind. In the first place, we cannot, as in manufacturing
industry, multiply at will the instruments of production of the same degree of productivity—that is to say, the soils of the same degree of fertility. Then, in proportion as population grows, it is necessary to exploit soils of inferior quality, or to expend on the same soil additional capital proportionately less productive than the first. In either case a larger quantity of labor is expended in order to obtain a product proportionally smaller. The needs of the population having rendered this increase of labor necessary, the product of the soil more costly to cultivate has its sale forced as well as that of the more cheaply cultivated soil. Competition levels the market price, and the product of the better soil will fetch as high a price as that of the inferior soil. It is the excess of the price of the products of the superior soil over their cost of production which constitutes rent. If there were always at disposal soils of the same degree of fertility, if, as in manufacturing industry, recourse could always be had to the less costly and more productive machinery, or if the second expenditure of capital produced as much as the first, then the price of agricultural products would be determined by the price of the commodities produced by the better instruments of production, as we have seen in the price of manufactured articles. But also, from this moment, rent would have disappeared.

For the theory of Ricardo to be generally true, it is further necessary that capital could be freely applied to the different branches of industry; that a strongly developed competition between the capitalists should have reduced profits to an equal rate; that the farmer should be no more than an industrial capitalist who asks for the employment of his capital upon the land, a profit equal to that which he would draw from his capital applied to any manufacture; that agricultural exploita-
tion should be subject to the régime of the great industry; in fine, that the landed proprietor himself should aim at nothing more than the monetary revenue.

Rent may no longer exist, as is the case in Ireland, although farming there has been developed to an advanced degree. Rent being the excess, not only over wages, but over the industrial profit, it cannot exist where the revenue of the proprietor is only a previous deduction from wages.

But, far from making of the exploiter of the soil, of the farmer, a simple laborer, and "dragging from the peasant the excess of the product which he cannot be prevented from regarding as his own," rent sets before the landed proprietor the industrial capitalist, instead of the slave, the serf, the tributary, the wage-worker.

Further, a considerable time elapsed before the feudal farmer was replaced by the industrial capitalist. In Germany, for example, this transformation did not begin until the last third of the eighteenth century. It is only in England that this relation between the industrial capitalist and the landed proprietor has been fully developed.

So long as there was only the cultivator of M. Proudhon there was no rent. When there is rent the peasant is not the farmer, but the workman, the employé of the farmer. The degradation of the cultivator reduced to the position of simple workman, day-laborer wage-worker, laboring for the industrial capitalist; the intervention of the industrial capitalist, exploiting the land like any other factory; the transformation of the landed proprietor from a petty sovereign into a vulgar usurer: those are the different relations expressed by rent.

Rent, in the Ricardian sense, is patriarchal agricul-
ture transformed into commercial industry, industrial capital applied to the land, the bourgeoisie of the towns transplanted into the country. Rent, instead of "attaching man to nature," has only attached the exploitation of the land to competition. Once constituted as rent, landed property itself is the result of competition, since thenceforward it depends upon the saleable value of agricultural products. As rent, landed property is mobilised and becomes an effect of commerce. Rent is possible only from the moment in which the development of the industry of the towns and the social organisation resulting therefrom force the landlord to have regard only to venal profit, to the monetary relation of his agricultural products; to see, in fine, in his landed property, only a machine for making money. Rent has so perfectly detached the landed proprietor from the soil, from nature, that he scarcely needs to know his lands, as we see in England. As to the farmer, the industrial capitalist and the agricultural laborer, they are no more attached to the soil which they cultivate than the capitalist and the workman in manufacture are attached to the cotton or the wood they use; they have regard only for the price of their exploitation, for the monetary product. To that fact is due the jeremiads of the reactionary parties who fervently pray for the return of feudalism, for the happy patriarchal life, for the simple and noble manners of our ancestors. The subjection of the soil to the laws which rule every other industry is and will always be the subject of interested condolences. Thus we might say that rent is the motive force which has cast idyllism into the historical movement.

Ricardo, after having supposed bourgeois production as necessary in order to determine rent, applies it nevertheless to landed property in every epoch in every coun-
try. These are the errors of all economists who regard the conditions of bourgeois production as eternal categories.

From the providential object of rent, which is, for M. Proudhon, the transformation of the cultivator into a responsible workman, he goes on to the equalitarian reward of rent.

Rent, as we have just seen, is constituted by the equal price of the products of lands of unequal fertility in such wise that a hectolitre of wheat which has cost 10 francs is sold for 20 francs if the cost of production rises, for an inferior soil, to 20 francs. So long as necessity compels the purchase of all the agricultural products put upon the market, the market price is determined by the highest cost of production. It is, therefore, this equalisation of price, resulting from competition and not from the different fertility of soils, which secures for the proprietor of the superior soil a rent of 10 francs for each hectolitre which his farmer sells.

Let us for a moment suppose that the price of the wheat is determined by the labor-time necessary to produce it, and that in consequence the hectolitre of wheat obtained from the superior soil would be sold at 10 francs, while that obtained from the inferior soil would cost 20. That admitted, the mean market price would be 15 francs; while, according to the law of competition, it is 20 francs. If the mean price was 15 francs there would be nothing for distribution, either equalitarian or other, as there would be no rent. Rent exists only in consequence of the fact that the hectolitre of wheat, which cost the producer 10 francs, is sold for 20 francs. M. Proudhon supposes the equality of the market price, with unequal cost of production, in order
to arrive at the equalitarian distribution of the product of inequality.

We can understand such economists as Mill, Cherbulicz, Hilditch, and others, demanding that rent should be handed over to the State to be used for the remission of taxation. That is only the frank expression of the hate which the industrial capitalist feels for the landed proprietor, who appears to him as a useless incumbrance, a superfluity in the otherwise harmonious whole of bourgeois production.

But to first take twenty francs for the hectolitre of wheat in order to afterwards make a general distribution of the ten francs too much charged to the consumers,—that would indeed be sufficient to make the social genius pursue its zigzag way in melancholy, ready to knock its head against any corner.

Rent becomes, under the pen of M. Proudhon, "an immense land valuation made independently by the landlords and the farmers in a superior interest, the definite result of which must be to equalise the possession of the land between the exploiters of the soil and the manufacturing classes."

In order for any valuation whatever, determined by rent, to be of practical utility, it is necessary always to remain in the conditions of existing society.

But we have demonstrated that the farm rent, paid by the farmer to the landlord, expresses almost exactly the rent only in those countries most advanced in industry and commerce. Yet this farm rent often includes the interest paid to the landlord for the capital incorporated in the land. The situation of soils, the neighborhood of towns, and very many other circumstances, influence the farm hire and modify the rent. These
arbitrary reasons will suffice to prove the inexactitude of a land valuation based on rent.

On the other hand rent cannot be a constant indication of the degree of fertility of any land, since the modern application of chemistry constantly changes the nature of the soil, while it is only in recent years that geological knowledge has begun to destroy all the old estimate of relative fertility. It is only about twenty years ago that vast areas in the eastern countries of England were brought into cultivation, they had been left uncultivated for want of appreciating correctly the relations between the nature of the upper soil and of the lower stratum.

Thus history, so far from giving, in rent, a valuation completely formed, simply changes, completely reverses, the valuations already formed.

In fine, fertility is not so much a natural quality as might reasonably be supposed, but is intimately related to existing social conditions. A soil may be very fertile for the raising of corn, yet, nevertheless, the state of the market may induce the cultivator to turn it into an artificial prairie and thus render it barren. M. Proudhon has improvised his valuation, which is not even worth the ordinary valuation, simply in order to give a corporeal form to the providentially equalitarian object of rent.

"Rent," continues M. Proudhon, "is the interest paid for a capital which never perishes, namely land. And as this capital is not susceptible of any increase as to its material but only to an indefinite improvement in its use, it results that, while the interest or profit on a loan (mutuum) tends to constantly diminish in consequence of the abundance of capital, rent tends to constantly increase by the perfection of the industry from
which results the improvement in the usages of the soil. . . . . Such, in its essence, is rent.” (Vol. II., p. 265.)

This time, M. Proudhon sees in rent all the attributes of interest, so far as it arises from a capital of a specific nature. This capital is land, eternal capital, “which is not susceptible of any increase as to its material, but only to an indefinite improvement in its use.” In the progressive march of civilisation interest has a constant tendency to fall, while rent constantly tends to rise. Interest falls on account of the abundance of capital; rent rises with the improvements made in industry which have the effect of constantly improving the use of land.

Such is, in its essence, the opinion of M. Proudhon.

Let us begin by examining at what point it is correct to say that rent is the interest on capital.

For the landowner himself rent represents interest on the capital which the land has cost him, or which it would return to him if he sold it. But in buying or selling land, he only buys or sells rent. The price which he has paid in order to acquire the rent is regulated by the general rate of interest and has nothing to do with the nature of rent itself. The interest on capital invested in land is, in general, less than the interest on capital sunk in manufacture or commerce. Thus for him who does not distinguish the interest which land represents to the proprietor from rent itself, the interest on capital in land diminishes much more than the interest on other capitals. But it is not here a question of the price of the sale or purchase of rent, of the saleable value of rent, of capitalized rent, it is a question of rent itself.

The hire of a farm may imply in addition to the rent properly so-called, interest on capital incorporated in the
land. Then, the proprietor receives this part of the farm hire not as landlord, but as capitalist; that is, however, not the rent, properly speaking, with which we have to deal.

Land, so long as it is not exploited as a means of production, is not capital. Capital in land can be augmented as well as all other means of production. Nothing is added to the material, to speak the language of M. Proudhon, but the soils which serve as instruments of production are multiplied. By merely applying additional capital to land already transformed into means of production land-capital may be augmented without adding anything to the material land, that is to say to the extent of the land. The material land of M. Proudhon has the bounds of the earth for its limits. As to the eternity which he attributes to land we readily grant that, as matter, it has this quality. As capital, land is not more eternal than any other capital.

Gold and silver, which pay interest, are as durable and eternal as land. If the price of gold and silver falls while that of land rises, that is certainly not due to the more or less eternal nature of land.

Land-capital is a fixed capital, but fixed capital is used up as well as circulating capital. The improvements effected in the soil need to be reproduced and maintained; they only last a certain time, a quality which they possess in common with all other improvements of which use is made in order to transform matter into means of production. If land-capital were eternal certain lands would present an entirely different aspect to that which they bear to-day, and we should see the Roman Campagna, Sicily, and Palestine, in all the splendor of their ancient prosperity.

There are, moreover, cases where land-capital may
disappear, even while the improvements remain incorporated in the land.

In the first place this actually happens every time that rent, properly so-called, is extinguished by the competition of new and more fertile soils; further, the improvements which have a value at a certain period, cease to have that value from the moment that they become universal through the development of agricultural science.

The representative of land-capital is not the landowner but the farmer. The revenue which land gives as capital is industrial interest and profit, and not rent. There are some lands which return this interest and profit, but which pay no rent.

To sum up, land in so far as it gives interest, is land-capital, and, as land-capital, it returns no rent, it does not constitute landed property. Rent results from the social relations in which exploitation is carried on. It cannot result from the nature, more or less fixed, more or less durable, of land. Rent proceeds from society and not from the soil.

According to M. Proudhon "the improvement in the use of land"—a result of "the improvement of industry," is the cause of the constant rise of rent. This improvement, on the contrary, causes it to periodically fall.

In what, in general, does all improvement consist, whether it be in agriculture or in manufacture? It is to produce more with the same amount of labor, it is to produce as much, or even more, with less labor. Thanks to these improvements the farmer can dispense with the employment of a greater quantity of labor for a product proportionally less. He has no need then to have recourse to the inferior soils, and the portions of capital successively applied to the same land are equally productive. Therefore these improvements, so far from caus-
ing a constant rise of rent, as M. Proudhon says, are, on the contrary, so many temporary obstacles which oppose its rise.

The English landowners of the seventeenth century were so sensible of this truth that they strenuously opposed all agricultural progress, for fear of seeing their revenues diminish. (See Petty, an English economist of the time of Charles II.)

Section V.—Strikes and the Combination of Workmen.

"Every upward movement in wages can have no other effect than that of a rise in wheat, in wine, &c., that is to say, the effect produced by a dearth. For what are wages? They are the cost price of wheat, &c., the integral price of everything. Let us go further still, wages are the proportion of the elements which compose wealth and which are consumed reproductively each day by the mass of the workers. But, to double wages . . . is to bestow upon each of the producers a part greater than his product, which is contradictory; and if the rise only affects a small number of industries, the result is to provoke a general perturbation in exchanges, in a word, a scarcity . . . . It is impossible, I insist, for the strikes which result in an increase in wages not to lead to a general dearth: that is as certain as that two and two make four." (Proudhon, Vol. I., pp. 110 and 111.)

We deny all these assertions, except that two and two make four.

In the first place there is no such thing as general dearth. If the price of everything is doubled at the
same time as wages, there is no change in prices, there is only a change in terms.

Further, a general rise in wages can never produce a dearness, more or less general, of commodities. In effect, if all industries employed the same number of workmen in proportion to the fixed capital or to the instruments used, a general rise in wages would produce a general reduction of profits, and the current price of commodities would undergo no alteration.

But as the relation of manual labor to fixed capital is not the same in different industries, all the industries which employ relatively a greater mass of fixed capital and less workers will be forced sooner or later to reduce the prices of their commodities. In the contrary case, where the price of their commodities is not reduced, their profit will rise above the common rate of profit. The machines are not wage-workers. Therefore, the general rise in wages will affect those industries less which, compared with the others, employ more machines than workmen. But as competition always tends to level the rate of profits, those which rise above the ordinary rate can only do so temporarily. Thus, apart from some oscillations, a general rise in wages, so far from resulting, as M. Proudhon contends, in a general rise in prices would result in a partial fall, that is to say, a fall in the current price of the commodities which are manufactured chiefly by machinery.

The rise and fall of profit or wages merely expresses the proportion in which the capitalists and the workmen participate in the product of a day of labor without, in most cases, influencing the price of the product. But that "the strikes which are followed by an increase in wages lead to a general rise in prices, to a scarcity even,"
these are ideas which could only be hatched in the brain of an unintelligible poet.

In England strikes have regularly given rise to invention and to the application of new machinery. Machines were, we might say, the arms which the capitalists used to defeat revolted labor. The self-acting mule, the greatest invention in modern industry, put the revolted hand-spinners out of action. Even when combination and strikes have no other effect than to arouse against them the efforts of mechanical genius, they always exercise an immense influence on the development of industry.

"I find," continues M. Proudhon, "from an article published by M. Leon Faucher . . . September, 1845, that for some time English workmen have ceased to form combinations, which is certainly a progress upon which they are to be congratulated. But this improvement in the morality of the workers arises above all from their economic knowledge. 'It is not upon the manufacturers,' cried a working spinner at a meeting at Bolton, 'that wages depend. In periods of depression the masters are only, so to speak, the whips with which necessity is armed, and, whether they will or no, they must strike. The regulating principle is the relation between supply and demand; and the masters have not the power.'"

"Well and good," cries M. Proudhon, "these are well developed model workmen, &c., &c. The poverty we have here does not exist in England; it cannot cross the Channel." (Proudhon, Vol. I., pp. 261 and 262.)

Of all the towns in England, Bolton is one in which Radicalism is as fully developed as anywhere. Than the workers of Bolton there are none more revolutionary. During the great agitation in England for the abolition of the Corn Laws, the English manufacturers felt that
they would be unable to make head against the landowners except by putting the workers in the front of the fight. But, as the interests of the workers were not less opposed to those of the manufacturers than the interests of the manufacturers were opposed to those of the landowners, it was natural to expect that the manufacturers would get the worst of it in the meetings of the workers. But what did the manufacturers do? In order to save appearances they organised meetings composed in great part of foremen and overseers, of the small number of workmen who were devoted to them, and some "friends of commerce," properly so-called. When afterwards the real working people attempted, as at Bolton and Manchester, to take part in such meetings in order to protest against these factitious demonstrations, they were told they were "ticket meetings," to which no one could be admitted without a ticket, and were refused admission. Nevertheless, the placards advertising the meetings had announced them as public demonstrations. Every time these meetings were held the capitalist journals gave glowing accounts, with full and detailed reports of the speeches. It goes without saying that these speeches were made by foremen and overseers. The London newspapers gave literal reproductions of these reports. M. Proudhon is so unfortunate as to take the foremen and overseers for ordinary workmen, and to urge upon them the advice not to cross the Channel.

If in 1844 and in 1845 strikes attracted less attention than formerly, it was because 1844 and 1845 were the two first years of prosperity which English industry had enjoyed since 1837. Nevertheless none of the trade unions were dissolved.

Let us now hear the foremen and overseers of Bolton.
According to them the manufacturers are not the masters of wages because they are not masters of the price of the product, and they are not masters of the world market. By this argument they gave it to be understood that combinations were not necessary to drag from the masters an increase of wages. M. Proudhon, on the contrary, forbids them to combine for fear that combination may be followed by a rise in wages, which would bring in its train a general scarcity. It is not necessary for us to point out that on one point there is perfect agreement between the foremen and M. Proudhon, that is, that a rise in wages is the equivalent of a rise in the price of products.

But is the fear of a scarcity the true cause of M. Proudhon's ill-will towards combination? No. He cordially agrees with the foremen of Bolton because they determine value by supply and demand, and because they scarcely think of "constituted value," of value passed to the state of constitution, of the constitution of value, comprising the "permanent exchangeability," and all the other "proportionalities of relations" and "relations of proportionalities," flanked by Providence.

"For workers to strike is illegal, and it is not only the penal code which says so, it is the economic system, it is the necessity of the established order. . . . That each workman should have the free disposal of his hands and of his person, that can be tolerated, but that workmen should undertake by combination to do violence to monopoly, that is what society can never permit." (Vol. I., pp. 235 and 237.)

M. Proudhon wishes to make an article of the penal code pass for a necessary and general result of bourgeois production.

In England trade combination is permitted by law.
and it is the economic system which has forced Parliament to give this legal authorisation. In 1825 when, under the minister Huskisson, Parliament had to modify the law in order to bring it more into accord with a state of things resulting from free competition, it was necessary to abolish the laws which prohibited the combination of workmen. The more modern industry and competition develop, the more elements are there which provoke and support competition, and as soon as combinations have become an economic fact, acquiring greater consistency day by day, they will not be slow in becoming a legal fact.

Thus the article of the penal code only proves at most that modern industry and competition were not sufficiently developed, under the Constituent Assembly and under the Empire, for the legal recognition of combination.

The economists and the Socialists are agreed on one point. That is, in condemning combinations. Only they have different motives for their act of condemnation.

The economists say to the workers: Do not combine. By combining you hinder the steady progress of industry, you prevent the manufacturers from executing their orders, you disturb commerce and precipitate the introduction of machinery which, by rendering your labor in part useless, forces you to accept still lower wages. Otherwise you may do very well, your wages will be always determined by the relations between the demand for and the supply of hands, and it is an effort as ridiculous as dangerous to revolt against the eternal laws of political economy.

The Socialists say to the workers: Do not combine, because at the end of the account what will you have gained by it? An increase of wages? The economists
prove to demonstration that the few pence which you temporarily gain if you succeed, will be followed by a lasting reduction. Clever statisticians prove to you that it will take you years to recover by the rise in wages the expenditure you have had to make in order to organise and maintain your combination. And we—we, as Socialists tell you, that apart from this question of money, you will be not less workmen, and the masters will be always the masters as before. Therefore, no combinations, no politics; for after all, to form combinations is that not having to do with politics?

The economists desire that the workers should remain in society as it is formed, and as they have recorded and ratified it in their manuals.

The Socialists desire the workers to leave the old society in order to be the better able to enter into the new society which they have prepared with so much foresight.

In spite of the one and the other, in spite of the manuals and the utopias, combinations have not ceased to progress and to grow with the development and growth of modern industry. It is at such a point now that the degree of development of combination in a country marks clearly the degree which that country occupies in the hierarchy of the world market. In England, where industry has attained the highest degree of development, the combinations are the largest and best organised.

In England these combinations are not confined to a partial organisation with no other object than a temporary strike, and which will disappear when that is over. Permanent combinations have been formed—trade unions—which serve as a rampart for the workers in their struggle with the capitalists. And at the present time all these local trade unions have a centre or
union in the “National Association of United Trades,” the central committee of which is in London, and which already numbers 80,000 members.

The organisation of strikes, combinations, trade unions, marches simultaneously with the political struggles of the workers, who now constitute a great political party under the name of Chartists.

It is under the form of these combinations that the first attempts at association among themselves have always been made by the workers.

The great industry masses together in a single place a crowd of people unknown to each other. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of their wages, this common interest which they have against their employer, unites them in the same idea of resistance — combination. Thus combination has always a double end, that of eliminating competition among themselves while enabling them to make a general competition against the capitalist. If the first object of resistance has been merely to maintain wages, in proportion as the capitalists in their turn have combined with the idea of repression, the combinations, at first isolated, have formed in groups, and, in face of constantly united capital, the maintenance of the association became more important and necessary for them than the maintenance of wages. This is so true that the English economists are all astonished at seeing the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages on behalf of the associations which, in the eyes of these economists, were only established in support of wages. In this struggle—a veritable civil war—are united and developed all the elements necessary for a future battle. Once arrived at that point, association takes a political character.

The economic conditions have in the first place trans-
formed the mass of the people of a country into wage-workers. The dominaiton of capital has created for this mass of people a common situation with common interests. Thus this mass is already a class, as opposed to capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have only noted some phases, this mass unites, it is constituted as a class for itself. The interests which it defends are the interests of its class. But the struggle between class and class is a political struggle.

In the bourgeoisie we have two phases to distinguish, that during which it is constituted as a class under the régime of feudalism and absolute monarchy, and that wherein, already constituted as a class, it overthrew feudalism and monarchy in order to make of society a bourgeois society. The first of these phases was the longest and necessitated the greatest efforts. That also commenced with partial combinations against the feudal lords.

Many researches have been made to trace the different historical phases through which the bourgeoisie has passed from the early commune to its constitution as a class.

But when it becomes a question of rendering an account of the strikes, combinations, and other forms in which before our eyes the proletarians effect their organisation as a class, some are seized with fear while others express a transcendental disdain.

An oppressed class is the vital condition of every society based upon the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class therefore necessarily implies the creation of a new society. In order for the oppressed class to be emancipated it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be able to exist side by
side. Of all the instruments of production the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself. The organisation of the revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which can be engendered in the bosom of the old society.

Is that to say that after the fall of the old society there will be a new class domination, comprised in a new political power? No.

The essential condition of the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of all classes, as the condition of the emancipation of the third estate of the bourgeois order, was the abolition of all estates, all orders.

The working class will substitute, in the course of its development, for the old order of civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will no longer be political power, properly speaking, since political power is simply the official form of the antagonism in civil society.

In the meantime, the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle between class and class, a struggle which, carried to its highest expression, is a complete revolution. Would it, moreover, be matter for astonishment if a society, based upon the antagonism of classes, should lead ultimately to a brutal conflict, to a hand-to-hand struggle as its final dénouement?

Do not say that the social movement excludes the political movement. There has never been a political movement which was not at the same time social.

It is only in an order of things in which there will be no longer classes or class antagonism that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions. Until then, on
the eve of each general reconstruction of society, the last word of social science will ever be:—

"Le combat ou la mort; la lutte sanguinaire ou le néant. C'est ainsi que la question est invinciblement posée."*

GEORGE SAND.

FINIS.

* Combat or death; bloody struggle or extinction. It is thus that the question is irresistibly put.
APPENDIX I.

PROUDHON JUDGED BY KARL MARX.*

London, January 24, 1865.

Sir,

You ask me for a detailed criticism of the works of Proudhon. I regret that I have not the time to comply with your request. Moreover, I have none of his writings at hand. However, as proof of my goodwill I send you these few hasty notes.

I do not remember the first essays of Proudhon. His schoolboy work on "A Universal Language" shows with what recklessness he grappled with problems for the solution of which he lacked the most elementary knowledge.

His first work: "What is Property?" is very much his best. It was an epoch-making book, if not from the novelty of what he said, at least by the freshness and boldness of his manner of putting everything. The French Socialists, with whose writings he was ac-

* Extract from the Sozial-Democrat, Nos. 16, 17 and 18 January, 1865.
quainted, had naturally not only criticised property from different points of view, but had, in utopian fashion, suppressed it. In his book Proudhon is to Saint Simon and Fourier almost what Feuerbach is to Hegel. Compared with Hegel, Feuerbach is very poor. Nevertheless, after Hegel, he made an epoch, because he accentuated certain points, disagreeable for the Christian conscience and important for philosophic progress, but which had been left by Hegel in an obscure and mystic light.

The style of this writing of Proudhon is, if I may say so, bold and vigorous, and it is its style, in my opinion, which is its great merit. We see that even when he merely reproduces he discovers; that what he says is new to him, and that it serves him as something new.

The provoking audacity with which he lays hands on the economic sanctuary, the brilliant paradoxes by which he ridicules the dull bourgeois common-sense, his incisive criticism, his bitter irony, with here and there a profound and sincere sentiment of revolt against the established order of things, his revolutionary spirit—this it is which electrifies the readers of "What is Property?" and made the book on its appearance a powerful revolutionary impulse. In a rigorously scientific history of political economy, the work would scarcely be worthy of mention. But these sensational books play a part in the sciences as well as in literature. Take, for example, Malthus's "Essay on Population." The first edition was simply a sensational pamphlet, and a plagiarism from one end to the other into the bargain. Yet what an impression has this pasquinade produced on humanity?

If I had before me this book of Proudhon's it would be easy for me to give some illustrations of his first style. In the chapters which he himself considers the best he imitates the contradictory method of Kant, the only
German philosopher that he knew at that time, from translation, and he leaves a strong impression that for him, as for Kant, the solution of these contradictions is "beyond" the human understanding, that is to say, that his understanding is incapable of solving them.

But in spite of its alluring iconoclasticism, there is to be found, even in this first work, this contradiction that Proudhon, on one hand, deals with society from the point of view of the petty peasant (later of the petty bourgeois) of France, and on the other he applies the standard which the Socialists have transmitted to him.

Beyond that the very title of the book indicates its insufficiency. The question was too baldly put for it to be answered correctly. Graeco-Roman property was replaced by feudal property, and that by bourgeois property. History itself conveys the criticism of the condition of property in the past. The question with which Proudhon had to deal was as to the relations of modern bourgeois property. To the question what were these relations, one could only reply by a critical analysis of political economy, embracing the whole of the relations of property, not in their juridical expression as relations of will, but in their real form as relation of material production. As Proudhon subordinated the whole of these economic relations to the juridical notion of property, he could not go beyond the response which had been already given by Brissot before 1789 and in the same terms: "Property is Robbery."

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that the juridical notions of the bourgeoisie on robbery apply as well to its honest profits. On the other hand, as robbery,

* Brissot de Warville, "Recherches sur le droit de propriété et sur le vol," &c. Berlin 1782. (In the sixth volume of the "Bibliothèque du législateur," by Brissot de Warville.)
being a violation of property, presupposes property, Proudhon embroils himself in all kinds of confused and fantastic notions with regard to true bourgeois property.

During my stay in Paris, in 1844, I had personal relations with Proudhon. I recall this circumstance, because up to a certain point I am responsible for his "sophistication," a word which the English use for the adulteration of a commodity. In our long discussions—often lasting all through the night—I infected him with Hegelianism, to his great prejudice, since, not knowing German, he could not study the matter thoroughly. What I had begun, M. Karl Grün, after my expulsion from France, continued. But this professor of German philosophy had the further advantage over me of understanding nothing of what he taught.

A short time before the publication of his second important work, "Philosophie de la Misère," &c., Proudhon informed me of it in a long and detailed letter, in which among other things he said: "I await the blow of your critical rod." And very soon this fell upon him (in my "Misère de la Philosophie") in such a fashion as to for ever shatter our friendship.

From the foregoing you can see that the "Philosophie de la Misère, ou Système des Contradictions Économiques," ought, in short, to give the answer to the question: "What is property?" As a matter of fact, Proudhon did not begin his economic studies until after the publication of this first book; he then discovered that in order to solve the question he had put, it was necessary to reply, not by invective, but by an analysis of modern political economy. At the same time he endeavored to establish the system of "economic categories" by means of dialectic. Hegelian contradiction had to re-
place the insoluble contradiction of Kant as a means of development.

For a criticism of these two large volumes I must refer you to my reply. I have there, among other things, shown how slightly Proudhon has penetrated the mystery of scientific dialectic, and how far, on the other hand, he shares the illusions of "speculative" philosophy. Instead of regarding the economic categories as the theoretical expressions of the historical relations of production, corresponding to a given degree of the development of material production, his imagination transforms them into "eternal ideas," existing before any reality, and in this manner he arrives, in a round-about way, at the point from which he started, the point of view of bourgeois economy.*

Then I show how defective and rudimentary is his knowledge of political economy, of which nevertheless, he undertakes the criticism, and how, with the utopians, he sets himself to seek for a pretended "science" which may furnish him with a ready-made formula for "the solution of the social question," instead of drawing his science from critical knowledge of the historical movement, the movement which must itself produce the material conditions of social emancipation. What I, above all, denounce, is that M. Proudhon has only imperfect ideas, confused and false with regard to the basis of all political economy—exchange-value—a circum-

* In saying that existing conditions—the conditions of bourgeois production—are natural, the economists give it to be understood that these are the relations in which wealth is created and the productive forces are developed conformably to the laws of nature. Thus these relations are themselves natural laws, independent of the influence of time. They are eternal laws which must always govern society. Thus there has been history, but there is no longer any.
stance which leads him to see the foundation of a new science in a utopian interpretation of the theory of Ricardo. Finally, I sum up my judgment of his point of view in these words:—

Each economic relation has a good and bad side: that is the single point upon which M. Proudhon does not contradict himself. The good side, he sees explained by the economists; the bad side, he sees denounced by the Socialists. He borrows from the economists the necessity of eternal relations; he borrows from the Socialists the illusion of seeing in poverty only poverty. He is in agreement with both in wishing to refer it to the authority of science. Science, for him, is reduced to the insignificant proportions of a scientific formula. It is thus that M. Proudhon flatters himself to have made the criticism of both political economy and of communism: he is below both the one and the other. Below the economists, since as a philosopher, who has under his hand a magic formula, he has believed himself able to do without entering into purely economic details; below the Socialists, since he has neither sufficient courage nor sufficient intelligence to raise himself, were it only speculatively, above the bourgeois horizon.

He wished to soar as man of science above the bourgeoisie and the proletarians; he is only the petty bourgeois, tossed about constantly between capital and labor, between political economy and communism.

However severe this judgment may appear, I am obliged still to maintain it word for word. But it is important to remember that at the time when I declared and proved theoretically that Proudhon’s book was only the code of petty bourgeois Socialism, this same Proudhon was being anathematized as an arch-revolutionist by the economists and the Socialists of the period. That is
the reason why I did not at a later period raise my voice with those who cried out about his "betrayal" of the revolution. It was not his fault if, at first ill-understood by others as well as by himself, he has not fulfilled the hopes which nothing had ever justified.

The "Philosophie de la Misère," as compared with "Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?" displays very unfavorably all the defects of Proudhon's manner of exposition. The style is often what the French call bombastic. A pretentious and "speculative" piece of fustian, which, represented as German philosophy, presents itself everywhere where Gallic perspicacity is at fault. That which he trumpets in your ears, with the voice of a blustering buffoon, is his own glorification, wearisome nonsense and eternal rodomontade about his pretended "science." Instead of the true and natural warmth which illumines his first book, in this Proudhon declaims systematically and fails to excite any feeling. Add to this the awkward and disagreeable didactic pedantry, which serves for erudition, of the man who has lost his former pride of being an independent and original thinker, and who now, as a parvenu of science, thinks he should swagger and boast of what he is not and of what he does not possess. After that his sentiments of a tallow chandler, which lead him to attack in a most unseemly and brutal manner—but which is neither discerning, nor profound, nor even just—a man like Cabet, who was always worthy of respect because of his political rôle in the midst of the proletariat, while he does the amiable towards a Dunnoyer (a Councillor of State, it is true) who has no importance beyond that of having preached, with a comical seriousness, throughout the whole of three great volumes, insupportably tiresome, a hypercriticism thus described by
Helvetius: "We desire that the unfortunate should be perfect."

In fact, the revolution of February happened very unfortunately for Proudhon, who, a few weeks previously, had proved definitely and irrefutably that the "era of revolutions" was past for ever. Nevertheless his attitude in the National Assembly merits nothing but praise, although it proved his lack of intelligence of the situation. After the insurrection of June this attitude was an act of great courage. It had further this happy result, that M. Thiers, in his reply to the propositions of Proudhon, which was afterwards published as a book, revealed the mean, petty pedestal upon which the intellectual pillar of the French bourgeoisie was raised. Compared with Thiers, Proudhon assumed the proportions of an ancient colossus.

The last economic acts and achievements of Proudhon were his discovery of "Free Credit," and of the "People's Bank" which should realise it. In my work "Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie" ("Criticism of Political Economy"), Berlin, 1859 (pp. 59-64), you will find the proof that these Proudhonian ideas are based upon a complete ignorance of the first elements of bourgeois political economy—the relation between commodity and money—while their practical realisation was nothing but the reproduction of better elaborated projects of a much earlier period. There is no doubt, there is indeed evidence to show, that the development of credit, which has served in England in the beginning of the eighteenth century, and more recently in this, to transfer wealth from one class to another, might also serve, in certain political and economic conditions, to accelerate the emancipation of the working class. But to consider interest-bearing capital as the principal form of capital,
APPENDIX

and to wish to make of a particular application of credit—the pretended abolition of the rate of interest—to think to make that the basis of the social transformation—that was indeed a petty chandler's fantasy. Moreover, we find that had been already elaborated con amore among the spokesmen of the small shopkeeping class of England in the seventeenth century. The polemic of Proudhon against Bastiat with reference to interest-bearing capital (1850) is far below his "Philosophie de la Misère." He succeeds in allowing himself to be beaten even by Bastiat, and cries and blusters every time that his adversary deals him a blow.

Some years ago Proudhon wrote a thesis on imposts, published in opposition to my theories by the Government of the Canton of Vaud. In that work was extinguished the last ray of genius; nothing of him remains but the petty bourgeois pure and simple.

The political and philosophical writings of Proudhon have all the same dual and contradictory character which we have found in his economic work. Besides, they have only a local importance, limited to France. His attacks upon the religion and the Church had always a great local value in a period when the French Socialists boasted of their religious sentiments as of something superior to the Voltairianism of the eighteenth century and the German atheism of the nineteenth. If Peter the Great overthrew Russian barbarism by barbarity, Proudhon did his best to overthrow French commonplace by commonplaces.

The works which cannot be regarded merely as bad writings, but are simply vile trash, which, however, were quite in keeping with the petty chandler sentiment—were, his book on the Coup d'Etat, in which he coquets with Louis Bonaparte, and endeavors to make him acceptable
to the French workmen, and that against Poland, which, in honor of the Czar, he treats with the cynicism of an idiot.

Proudhon has often been compared to Jean Jacques Rousseau. Nothing could be more erroneous. He resembles rather Nicolas Linguet, whose "Theorie des Lois Civiles" is, moreover, a work of genius.

The nature of Proudhon leads him to dialectics. But having never comprehended scientific dialectic, he gets no further than sophistry. In fact, that arises from his petty bourgeois point of view. The petty bourgeois, precisely like our own historian Raumer, always speaks of one side and of the other side. Two opposing, contradictory currents dominate his material interests, and in consequence his religious, scientific and artistic views, his morality, and in fact his whole being. If he is besides, like Proudhon, a man of intellect, he will very soon be able to juggle with his own contradictions and to elaborate them in striking, noisy, if sometimes brilliant, paradoxes. Scientific charlatanism and political compromises are inseparable from such a point of view. There is, in such case, only a single motive, individual vanity, and as with all vain people, there is no question of anything beyond the mere effect of the moment, the success of the hour. In this is necessarily lost the simple moral tact which would preserve a Rousseau, for example, from all compromise, even apparent, with the powers that be.

Perhaps posterity will say, to distinguish this most recent phase of French history, that Louis Bonaparte was its Napoleon, and Proudhon its Rousseau-Voltaire.

Yours, &c.,

KARL MARX.
APPENDIX II.*

The theory of labor time as the unity of direct measure of money was developed in a systematic manner for the first time by John Gray.†

A central national bank, by the aid of its branches, would certify the time employed in the production of the different commodities. In exchange for his commodity the producer would receive an official certificate of its value—that is to say, a receipt for the labor time contained in his commodity,** and these notes of a week of

*(Extract from Marx’s work “Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie,” Berlin, 1859, pp. 61-64.)*

† John Gray.—“The Social System, &c: Treatise on the Principle of Exchange,” Edinburgh, 1831. Composed by the same author: “Lectures on the Nature and Use of Money,” Edinburgh, 1848. After the revolution of February, Gray sent to the Provisional Government a memorial in which he informed them that it was not the “organisation of labor” which France needed, but an “organisation of exchange,” a completely elaborated plan of which was to be found in the system of money which he had discovered. The worthy John never imagined that sixteen years after the publication of his “Social System,” a patent would be taken out for the same discovery by Proudhon, that genius so fertile in invention.

,** Gray.—“The Social System,” &c, p. 63. “Money should be merely a receipt, an evidence that the holder of it has either contributed certain value to the national stock of wealth, or that he has acquired a right to the same value from someone who has contributed to it.”
labor, a day of labor, an hour of labor, would represent the equivalent which the holder could receive of any other commodities which were in the stores of the bank.* That is the fundamental principle which he has carefully developed in all its details, based upon existing English institutions. With this system, says Gray, "it would be as easy to sell for money as it is now to buy with money; production would be the uniform and inexhaustible source of the demand."† The precious metals would lose the "privilege" which they have over other commodities, and "would take the place which belongs to them on the market side by side with butter, eggs, cloth, and calico; and their value would interest us no more than that of diamonds."** Ought we to retain our artificial measure of value, gold, and fetter thus the productive forces of the country, or ought we not rather to make use of the natural measure of value, labor, and liberate the productive forces?*** Since labor time is the actual measure of value, why by the side of it should there be another, extrinsic, value? Why should exchange-value be transformed into price? Why do all commodities estimate their value in a single commodity, money, which thus becomes equal to the value of exchange?

That was the problem which Gray had to solve. Instead of solving it, he imagines that commodities can

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* "An estimated value being previously put upon produce, let it be lodged in a bank, and drawn out again, whenever it is required, merely stipulating, by common consent, that he who lodges any kind of property in the proposed national bank may take out of it an equal value of whatever it may contain, instead of being obliged to draw out the self-same thing that he put in."—Ibid, p. 68.

† Ibid, p. 16.


assert themselves, in direct relation with each other, as the products of social labor. But they cannot assert themselves in relation to each other otherwise than as they are. Commodities are the immediate products of individual labors, independent and isolated, which can express themselves as general social labor only by changing themselves in the process of individual exchange; labor, in the production of commodities, only becomes social labor by losing its character of individual labor. In representing the labor time contained in commodities as labor time directly social, Gray represents it as collective labor or as the labor time of individuals directly associated. In such conditions, as a matter of fact, a specific commodity, such as gold or silver, could not be for the other commodities the incarnation of labor in general, value in exchange would not become price, but neither would use-value become value in exchange, the product would not become a commodity, and thus would disappear the basis upon which bourgeois production rests. But that is not the idea of Gray. The products must be produced as commodities, but they must not be exchanged as commodities.

Gray confides to a National Bank the execution of this pious desire. On one side society, by the intermediary of the National Bank, renders the individuals independent of the conditions of individual exchange, and on the other side it leaves them to continue to produce on the basis of individual exchange. Logic compels Gray to successively deny all the conditions of bourgeois production, although he desires merely to "reform" money, the consequence of the exchange of commodities. He transforms capital into national capital,* property in

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* The business of every country ought to be conducted on a national capital.—John Gray "The Social System," p. 71.
land, into national land,* and when we look more closely into it we see that he does not receive in one hand the commodities and deliver with the other certificates for labor received, but that he regulates production itself. In his last work, "Lectures on Money," in which Gray sets himself to present his labor-money as a purely bourgeois reform, he loses himself in still more transparent absurdities.

Every commodity is money, that is Gray's theory, and this is the result of his incomplete and, therefore, mistaken analysis of commodities. The "organic" construction of "labor-money," of the "national bank," and the stores of commodities," is only a dream in which we are enabled to get a glimpse of the dogma as a universal law. The dogma that a commodity is money, or that the labor of an individual contained in it is social labor, does not become a truth simply because a bank believes in it and acts upon it. Failure in this case plays the part of practical criticism. What Gray has not said, and what he has not imagined—that is to say, that labor-money is an alluring economic phrase for those who have a pious desire to dispense with the use of money, with the value of exchange of commodities, with the commodities of bourgeois society—has been loudly proclaimed by English Socialists who have written before and since himself.†

But it was reserved for Proudhon and his school to seriously proclaim the degradation of money and the exaltation of commodities, as the principle of Socialism.

* The land to be transformed into national property.—Ibid, p. 298.
and therefore to reduce Socialism to an elementary misconception of the necessary dependence which exists between commodity and money.*

* As a compendium of this melodramatic theory of money may be cited the work of M. Alfred Darimon, "De la Réforme des Banques," Paris, 1856.
APPENDIX III.

(i.)—FREE TRADE.*

A SPEECH DELIVERED BEFORE THE DEMOCRATIC ASSOCIATION OF BRUSSELS, AT ITS PUBLIC MEETING, JANUARY 9, 1848. BY KARL MARX.

GENTLEMEN,—The Repeal of the Corn Laws in England is the greatest triumph of Free Trade in the nineteenth century. In every country where manufacturers speak of Free Trade, they have in mind chiefly Free Trade in corn or raw material generally. To burden foreign corn with protective duties is infamous, it is to speculate on the hunger of the people.

* The speech on free exchange, by Marx, is reproduced textually from the original pamphlet published in Brussels in 1848, and which has become so rare that we know of no other copy than that of Engels, from which the German, English, Italian, and Russian translations, which appeared later, have been made. [Note by the editor of the French edition, 1896.]
Cheap food, high wages, for this alone the English Free Traders have spent millions, and their enthusiasm has already infected their continental brethren. And, generally speaking, all those who advocate Free Trade do so in the interests of the working class.

But, strange to say, the people for whom cheap food is to be procured at all costs are very ungrateful. Cheap food has as bad a repute in England as cheap government has in France. The people see in these self-sacrificing gentlemen, in Bowring, Bright and Co., their worst enemies and the most shameless hypocrites.

Everyone knows that in England the struggle between Liberals and Democrats takes the name of the struggle between Free Traders and Chartists. Let us see how the English Free Traders have proved to the people the good intentions that animate them.

This is what they said to the factory hands—

"The duty on corn is a tax upon wages; this tax you pay to the landlords, those mediæval aristocrats; if your position is a wretched one, it is so only on account of the high price of the most indispensable articles of food."

The workers in turn asked of the manufacturers,—

"How is it that in the course of the last thirty years, while our commerce and manufacture has immensely increased, our wages have fallen far more rapidly, in proportion, than the price of corn has gone up?"

"The tax which you say we pay the landlords is scarcely threepence a week per worker. And yet the wages of the hand-loom weaver fell, between 1815 and 1843, from 28s. per week to 5s., and the wages of the power-loom weavers, between 1823 and 1843, from 20s. per week to 8s."

"And during the whole of the time that portion of the tax which you say we pay the landlord has never
exceeded threepence. And, then, in the year 1834, when tell us? You said, 'If you are poor, it is only because you tell us? You said, 'If you are poor, it is only because you have too many children, and your marriages are more productive than your labor!'

"These are the very words you spoke to us, and you set about making new Poor Laws, and building workhouses, those bastilles of the proletariat."

To this manufacturers replied,—

"You are right, worthy laborers: it is not the price of corn alone, but competition of the hands among themselves as well, which determines wages.

"But just bear in mind the circumstance that our soil consists of nothing but rocks and sandbanks. You surely do not imagine that corn can be grown in flowerpots! Therefore, if, instead of wasting our labor and capital upon a thoroughly sterile soil, we were to give up agriculture, and devote ourselves exclusively to commerce and manufacture, all Europe would abandon its factories, and England would form one huge factory town, with the whole of the rest of Europe for its agricultural districts."

While thus haranguing his own workingmen, the manufacturer is interrogated by the small tradesmen, who exclaim,—

"If we repeal the Corn Laws, we shall indeed ruin agriculture; but, for all that, we shall not compel other nations to give up their own factories, and buy our goods. What will the consequences be? I lose my customers in the country, and the home market is destroyed."

The manufacturer turns his back upon the working-men and replies to the shopkeeper,—

"As to that, you leave it to us! Once rid of the duty
on corn, we shall import cheaper corn from abroad. Then we shall reduce wages at the very time when they are rising in the countries where we get our corn. Thus in addition to the advantages which we already enjoy we shall have lower wages, and with all these advantages, we shall easily force the Continent to buy of us."

But now the farmers and agricultural laborers join in the discussion.

"And what, pray, is to become of us? Are we to help in passing a sentence of death upon agriculture, when we get our living by it? Are we to let the soil be torn from beneath our feet?"

For all answer the Anti-Corn Law League contented itself with offering prizes for the three best essays upon the wholesome influence of the Repeal of the Corn Laws on English agriculture.

These prizes were carried off by Messrs. Hope, Morse, and Greg, whose essays were distributed by thousands throughout the agricultural districts. One of the prize essayists devotes himself to proving that neither the tenant farmer nor the agricultural laborer would lose by the repeal of the Corn Laws, and that the landlord alone would lose.

"The English tenant farmer," he exclaims, "need not fear repeal, because no other country can produce such good corn so cheaply as England. Thus, even if the price of corn fell, it would not hurt you, because this fall would only affect rent, which would go down, while the profit of capital and the wages of labor would remain stationary."

The second prize essayist, Mr. Morse, maintains, on the contrary, that the price of corn will rise in consequence of repeal. He is at infinite pains to prove that protective
duties have never been able to secure a remunerative price for corn.

In support of his assertion he quotes the fact that, wherever foreign corn has been imported, the price of corn in England has gone up considerably, and that when little corn has been imported the price has fallen greatly. This prize-winner forgets that the importation was not the cause of the high price, but that the high price was the cause of the importation. In direct contradiction of his colleague, he asserts that every rise in the price of corn is profitable to both the tenant farmer and laborer, but does not benefit the landlord.

The third prize essayist, Mr. Greg, who is a large manufacturer and whose work is addressed to the large tenant farmers, could not afford to echo such silly stuff. His language is more scientific.

He admits that the Corn Laws can increase rent only by increasing the price of corn, and that they can raise the price of corn only by inducing the investment of capital upon land of inferior quality, and this is a perfectly natural explanation.

In proportion as population increases, it inevitably follows, if foreign corn cannot be imported, that less fruitful soil must be called into requisition, the cultivation of which involves more expense and the product of which is consequently dearer. There being a demand for all the corn thus produced, it will all be sold. The price for all of it will of necessity be determined by the price of the product of the inferior soil. The difference between this price and the cost of production upon soil of better quality constitutes the rent paid for the use of the better soil.

If, therefore, in consequence of the repeal of the Corn Laws, the price of corn falls, and if, as a matter of
course, rent falls with it, it is because inferior soil will no longer be cultivated. Thus the reduction of rent must inevitably ruin a number of the tenant farmers.

These remarks are necessary in order to make Mr. Greg's language comprehensible.

"The small farmers," he says, "who cannot support themselves by agriculture must take refuge in manufacture. As to the large tenant farmers, they cannot fail to profit by the arrangement; either the landlord will be obliged to sell them their land very cheap, or leases will be made out for very long periods. This will enable tenant farmers to invest more capital in their farms, to use agricultural machinery on a larger scale, and to save manual labor, which will, moreover, be cheaper, on account of the general fall in wages, the immediate consequence of the repeal of the Corn Laws."

Dr. Bowring conferred upon all these arguments the consecration of religion, by exclaiming at a public meeting, "Jesus Christ is Free Trade, and Free Trade is Jesus Christ."

It may be easily understood that all this cant was not calculated to make cheap bread tasteful to working men.

Besides, how should the working men understand the sudden philanthropy of the manufacturers, the very men who were still busy fighting against the Ten Hours Bill, which was to reduce the working day of the mill hands from twelve hours to ten?

To give you an idea of the philanthropy of these manufacturers I would remind you of the factory regulations in force in all their mills.

Every manufacturer has for his own special use a regular penal code by means of which fines are inflicted for every voluntary or involuntary offence. For instance, the operative pays so much when he has the misfortune
to sit down on a chair, or whisper, or speak, or laugh; if he is a few moments late; if any part of a machine breaks, or if he turns out work of an inferior quality, &c. The fines are always greater than the damage really done by the workman. And to give the workman every opportunity for incurring fines the factory clock is set forward, and he is given bad material to make into good stuff. An overseer unskilful in multiplying infractions of rules is soon discharged.

You see gentlemen, this private legislation is enacted for the especial purpose of creating such infractions, and infractions are manufactured for the purpose of making money. Thus the manufacturer uses every means of reducing the nominal wage, and even profiting by accidents over which the workers have no control.

And these manufacturers are the same philanthropists who have tried to persuade the workers that they were capable of going to immense expense for the sole and express purpose of improving the condition of those same workingmen! On the one hand they nibble at the workers' wages in the meanest way by means of factory regulations, and, on the other, they are prepared to make the greatest sacrifices to raise those wages by means of the Anti-Corn Law League.

They build great palaces, at immense expense, in which the league takes up its official residence. They send an army of missionaries to all corners of England to preach the gospel of Free Trade; they print and distribute gratis thousands of pamphlets to enlighten the workingman upon his own interests. They spend enormous sums to buy over the press to their side. They organise a vast administrative system for the conduct of the Free Trade movement, and bestow all the wealth of their eloquence
upon public meetings. It was at one of these meetings that a workingman exclaimed boldly,—

"If the landlords were to sell our bones, you manufacturers would be the first to buy them, and to put them through the mill and make flour of them."

The English workingmen have appreciated to the fullest extent the significance of the struggle between the lords of the land and of capital. They know very well that the price of bread was to be reduced in order to reduce wages, and that the profit of capital would rise in proportion as rent fell.

Ricardo, the apostle of the English Free Traders, the leading economist of our century, entirely agrees with the workers upon this point.

In his celebrated work upon Political Economy he says: "If instead of growing our own corn.... we discover a new market from which we can supply ourselves .... at a cheaper price, wages will fall and profits rise. The fall in the price of agricultural produce reduces the wages, not only of the laborer employed in cultivating the soil, but also of all those employed in commerce or manufacture."

And do not believe, gentlemen, that it is a matter of indifference to the workingman whether he receives only four francs on account of corn being cheaper, when he had been receiving five francs before.

Have not his wages always fallen in comparison with profit? And is it not clear that his social position has grown worse as compared with that of the capitalist? Beside which he loses actually. So long as the price of corn was higher and wages were also higher, a small saving in the consumption of bread sufficed to procure him other enjoyments. But as soon as bread is cheap,
and wages are therefore low, he can save almost nothing on bread for the purchase of other articles.

The English workingmen have shown the English Free Traders that they are not the dupes of their illusions or of their lies; and if, in spite of this, the workers have made common cause with the manufacturers against the landlords, it is for the purpose of destroying the last remnant of feudalism, that henceforth they may have only one enemy to deal with. The workers have not miscalculated, for the landlords, in order to revenge themselves upon the manufacturers, have made common cause with the workers to carry the Ten Hours Bill, which the latter had been vainly demanding for thirty years, and which was passed immediately after the repeal of the Corn Laws.

When Dr. Bowring, at the Congress of Economists, drew from his pocket a long list to show how many head of cattle, how much ham, bacon, poultry, &c., is imported into England, to be consumed—as he asserted—by the workers, he unfortunately forgot to state that at the same time the workers of Manchester and other factory towns were thrown out of work by the beginning of the crisis.

As a matter of principle in Political Economy, the figures of a single year must never be taken as the basis for formulating general laws. We must always take the average of from six to seven years, a period during which modern industry passes through the successive phases of prosperity, over-production, crisis, thus completing the inevitable cycle.

Doubtless, if the price of all commodities falls,—and this is the necessary consequence of Free Trade,—I can buy far more for a franc than before. And the workingman's franc is as good as any other man's. There-
fore, Free Trade must be advantageous to the working-
man. There is only one little difficulty in this, namely,
that the workman, before he exchanges his franc for
other commodities, has first exchanged his labor for the
money of the capitalist. If in this exchange he always
received the said franc while the price of all other com-
modities fell he would always be the gainer by such a
bargain. The difficulty does not lie in proving that,
the price of all commodities falling, more commodities
can be bought for the same sum of money.

Economists always take the price of labor at the
moment of its exchange with other commodities, and
altogether ignore the moment at which labor accom-
plishes its own exchange with capital. When it costs
less to set in motion the machinery which produces
commodities, then the things necessary for the main-
tenance of this machine, called workman, will also cost
less. If all commodities are cheaper, labor, which is a
commodity too, will also fall in price, and we shall see
later that this commodity, labor, will fall far lower in
proportion than all other commodities. If the working-
man still pins his faith to the arguments of the econo-
mists, he will find, one fine morning, that the franc has
dwindled in his pocket, and that he has only five sous
left.

Thereupon the economists will tell you,—

"We admit that competition among the workers will
certainly not be lessened under Free Trade, and will
very soon bring wages into harmony with the low price
of commodities. But, on the other hand, the low price
of commodities will increase consumption, the larger
consumption will increase production, which will in turn
necessitate a larger demand for labor, and this larger
demand will be followed by a rise in wages."
"The whole argument amounts to this: Free Trade increases productive forces. When manufactures keep advancing, when wealth, when the productive forces, when, in a word, productive capital increases, the demand for labor, the price of labor, and consequently the rate of wages, rises also."

The most favorable condition for the workingman is the growth of capital. This must be admitted: when capital remains stationary, commerce and manufacture are not merely stationary but decline, and in this case the workman is the first victim. He will suffer before the capitalist. And in the case of the growth of capital, under the circumstances, which, as we have said, are the best for the workingman, what will be his lot? He will suffer just the same. The growth of capital implies the accumulation and the concentration of capital. This centralisation involves a greater division of labor and a greater use of machinery. The greater division of labor destroys the especial skill of the laborer; and by putting in the place of this skilled work labor which anyone can perform it increases competition among the workers.

This competition becomes more fierce as the division of labor enables a single man to do the work of three. Machinery accomplishes the same result on a much larger scale. The accumulation of productive capital forces the industrial capitalist to work with constantly increasing means of production, ruins the small manufacturer, and throws him into the ranks of the proletariat. Then, the rate of interest falling in proportion as capital accumulates, the people of small means and retired tradespeople, who can no longer live upon their small incomes, will be forced to look out for some business again and ultimately to swell the number of prole-
Finally, the more productive capital grows, the more it is compelled to produce for a market whose requirements it does not know,—the more supply tries to force demand, and consequently crises increase in frequency and in intensity. But every crisis in turn hastens the concentration of capital, adds to the proletariat. Thus, as productive capital grows, competition among the workers grows too, and grows in a far greater proportion. The reward of labor is less for all, and the burden of labor is increased for at least some of them.

In 1829 there were, in Manchester, 1,088 cotton spinners employed in 36 factories. In 1841 there were but 448, and they tended 55,353 more spindles than the 1,088 spinners did in 1829. If manual labor had increased in the same proportion as productive force, the number of spinners ought to have risen to 1,848; improved machinery had, therefore, deprived 1,100 workers of employment.

We know beforehand the reply of the economists—the people thus thrown out of work will find other kinds of employment. Dr. Bowring did not fail to reproduce this argument at the Congress of Economists. But neither did he fail to refute himself. In 1833, Dr. Bowring made a speech in the House of Commons upon the 50,000 hand-loom weavers of London who have been starving without being able to find that new kind of employment which the Free Traders hold out to them in the distance. I will give the most striking portion of this speech of Mr. Bowring.

"The misery of the hand-loom weavers," he says, "is the inevitable fate of all kinds of labor which are easily acquired, and which may, at any moment, be replaced by less costly means. As in these cases competition
amongst the workpeople is very great, the slightest falling-off in demand brings on a crisis. The hand-loom weavers are, in a certain sense, placed on the verge of human existence. One step further, and that existence becomes impossible. The slightest shock is sufficient to throw them on the road to ruin. By more and more superseding manual labor, the progress of mechanical science must result, during the period of transition, in much temporary suffering. National well-being cannot be bought except at the price of some individual evils. The advance of industry is achieved at the expense of those who lag behind, and of all discoveries that of the power-loom weighs most heavily upon the hand-loom weavers. In a great many articles formerly made by hand, the weaver has been completely ousted; but he is sure to be beaten in a good many more stuffs that are now made by hand.”

Further on he says:—“I hold in my hand a correspondence of the Governor-General with the East India Company. This correspondence is concerning the weavers of the Dacca district. The Governor says in his letter:—A few years ago the East India Company received from six to eight million pieces of calico woven upon the looms of the country. The demand fell off gradually and was reduced to about a million pieces. At this moment it has almost entirely ceased. Moreover, in 1800, North America received from India nearly 800,000 pieces of cotton goods. In 1830 it did not take even 4,000. Finally, in 1800 a million of pieces were shipped for Portugal; in 1830 Portugal did not receive above 20,000.

“The reports on the distress of the Indian weavers are terrible. And what is the origin of that distress? The presence on the market of English manufactures,
the production of the same article by means of the power-loom. A great number of the weavers died of starvation; the remainder has gone over to other employment, and chiefly to field labor. Not to be able to change employment amounted to a sentence of death. And at this moment the Dacca district is crammed with English yarns and piece goods. The Dacca muslin, renowned all over the world for its beauty and firm texture, has also been eclipsed by the competition of English machinery. In the whole history of commerce, it would, perhaps, be difficult to find suffering equal to what these whole classes in India had to submit to."

Mr. Bowring's speech is the more remarkable because the facts quoted by him are correct, and the phrases with which he seeks to palliate them are characterised by the hypocrisy common to all Free Trade discourses. He represents the workers as means of production which must be superseded by less expensive means of production, pretends to see in the labor of which he speaks a wholly exceptional kind of labor, and in the machine which has crushed out the weavers an equally exceptional kind of machine. He forgets that there is no kind of manual labor which may not any day share the fate of the hand-loom weavers.

"The constant aim and tendency of every improvement of mechanism is indeed to do entirely without the labor of men, or to reduce its price, by superseding the labor of the adult males by that of women and children, or the work of the skilled by that of the unskilled workman. In most of the throstle mills, spinning is now entirely done by girls of sixteen years and less. The introduction of the self-acting mule has caused the discharge of most of the (adult male) spinners, while the children and young persons have been kept on."
The above words of the most enthusiastic of Free Traders, Dr. Ure, are calculated to complete the confessions of Dr. Bowring. Mr. Bowring speaks of certain individual evils, and, at the same time, says that these individual evils destroy whole classes; he speaks of the temporary sufferings during a transition period, and does not deny that these temporary evils have implied for the majority the transition from life to death, and for the rest a transition from a better to a worse condition. When he asserts, farther on, that the sufferings of the working class are inseparable from the progress of industry, and are necessary to the prosperity of the nation, he simply says that the prosperity of the bourgeois class involves, as a necessary condition, the suffering of the laboring class.

All the comfort which Mr. Bowring offers the workers who perish, and, indeed, the whole doctrine of compensation which the Free Traders propound, amounts to this,—

You thousands of workers who are perishing, do not despair! You can die with an easy conscience. Your class will not perish. It will always be numerous enough for the capitalist class to decimate it without fear of annihilating it. Besides, how could capital be usefully applied if it did not take care to keep up its exploitable material, i.e., the working men, to be exploited over and over again?

But, then, why propound as a problem still to be solved the question: What influence will the adoption of Free Trade have upon the condition of the working class? All the laws formulated by the political economists from Quesnay to Ricardo, have been based upon the hypothesis that the trammels which still interfere with commercial freedom have disappeared. These
laws are confirmed in proportion as Free Trade is adopted. The first of these laws is that competition reduces the price of every commodity to the minimum cost of production. Thus the minimum of wages is the natural price of labor. And what is the minimum of wages? Just so much as is required for production of the articles absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the worker, and for the continued existence more or less poorly of his class.

But do not imagine that the worker receives only this minimum wage, and still less that he always receives it. No, according to this law, the working class will sometimes be more fortunate, will sometimes receive something above the minimum, but this surplus will merely make up for the deficit which they will have received below the minimum in times of industrial depression. That is to say that within a given time which recurs periodically in the cycle which commerce and industry describe while passing through the successive phases of prosperity, over-production, stagnation, and crisis, when reckoning all that the working class has had above and below mere necessaries, we shall see that, after all, they have received neither more nor less than the minimum, i.e., the working class will have maintained itself as a class after enduring any amount of misery and misfortune, and after leaving many corpses upon the industrial battle-field. But what of that? The class will still exist; nay, more, it will have increased.

But this is not all. The progress of industry creates less and less expensive means of subsistence. Thus spirits have taken the place of beer, cotton that of wool and linen, and potatoes that of bread.

Thus, as means are constantly being found for the maintenance of labor on cheaper and more wretched
food, the minimum of wages is constantly sinking. If these wages began by letting the man work to live, they end by forcing him to live the life of a machine. His existence has no other value than that of a simple productive force, and the capitalist treats him accordingly. This law of the commodity labor, of the minimum of wages, will be confirmed in proportion as the supposition of the economists, Free Trade, becomes an actual fact. Thus, of two things one: either we must reject all political economy based upon the assumption of Free Trade, or we must admit that under this same Free Trade the whole severity of the economic laws will fall upon the workers.

To sum up, what is Free Trade under the present conditions of society? Freedom of Capital. When you have torn down the few national barriers which still restrict the free development of capital, you will merely have given it complete freedom of action. So long as the relation of wage-labor to capital is permitted to exist, no matter how favorable the conditions under which you accomplish the exchange of commodities, there will always be a class which exploits and a class which is exploited. It is really difficult to understand the presumption of the Free Traders who imagine that the more advantageous application of capital will abolish the antagonism between industrial capitalists and wage-workers. On the contrary. The only result will be that the antagonism of these two classes will stand out more clearly.

Let us assume for a moment that there are no more Corn Laws or national and municipal import duties; that in a word all the accidental circumstances which to-day the workingman may look upon as a cause of his miserable condition have vanished, and we shall have
removed so many curtains that hide from his eyes his real enemy.

He will see that capital released from all trammels will make him no less a slave than capital trammelled by import duties.

Gentlemen! Do not be deluded by the abstract word Liberty! Whose Liberty? Not the liberty of one individual in relation to another, but the liberty of Capital to crush the worker.

Why should you desire farther to sanction unlimited competition with this idea of freedom, when the idea of freedom itself is only the product of a social condition based upon Free Competition?

We have shown what sort of fraternity Free Trade begets between the different classes of one and the same nation. The fraternity which Free Trade would establish between the nations of the earth would not be more real; to call cosmopolitan exploitation universal brotherhood is an idea that could only be engendered in the brain of the bourgeoisie. Every one of the destructive phenomena which unlimited competition gives rise to within any one nation is reproduced in more gigantic proportions in the market of the world. We need not pause any longer upon Free Trade sophisms on this subject, which are worth just as much as the arguments of our prize essayists, Messrs. Hope, Morse, and Greg.

For instance, we are told that Free Trade would create an international division of labor, and thereby give to each country those branches of production most in harmony with its natural advantages.

You believe, perhaps, gentlemen, that the production of coffee and sugar is the natural destiny of the West Indies.

Two centuries ago, nature, which does not trouble
nor coffee trees there. And it may be that in less than half a century you will find there neither coffee nor sugar, for the East Indies, by means of cheaper production, have already successfully broken down this so-called natural destiny of the West Indies.

And the West Indies, with their natural wealth, are as heavy a burden for England as the weavers of Dacca, who also were destined from the beginning of time to weave by hand.

One other circumstance must not be forgotten, namely, that, just as everything has become a monopoly, there are also nowadays some branches of industry which prevail over all others, and secure to the nations which especially foster them the command of the world market. Thus in the commerce of the world cotton alone has much greater commercial importance than all the other raw materials used in the manufacture of clothing. It is indeed ridiculous for the Free Traders to refer to the few specialities in each branch of industry, throwing them into the scales against the products used in everyday consumption, and produced most cheaply in those countries in which manufacture is most highly developed.

If the Free Traders cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another, we need not wonder, since these same gentlemen also refuse to understand how in the same country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another.

Do not imagine, gentlemen, that in criticising freedom of commerce we have the least intention of defending Protection.

One may be opposed to constitutionalism without being in favor of absolutism.

Moreover, the Protective system is nothing but a
means of establishing manufacture upon a large scale in any given country, that is to say, of making it dependent upon the market of the world; and from the moment that dependence upon the market of the world is established, there is more or less dependence upon Free Trade too. Besides this, the Protective system helps to develop free competition within a nation. Hence we see that in countries where the bourgeoisie is beginning to make itself felt as a class, in Germany for example, it makes great efforts to obtain Protective duties. They serve the bourgeoisie as weapons against feudalism and absolute monarchy, as a means for the concentration of its own powers for the realisation of Free Trade within the country.

But generally speaking, the Free Trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and carries the antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie to the uttermost point. In a word, the system of commercial freedom hastens the Social Revolution. In this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, I am in favor of Free Trade.

THE END.
Foreword

M. Proudhon has the misfortune of being peculiarly misunderstood in Europe. In France, he has the right to be a bad economist, because he is reputed to be a good German philosopher. In Germany, he has the right to be a bad philosopher, because he is reputed to be one of the ablest French economists. Being both German and economist at the same time, we desire to protest against this double error.

The reader will understand that in this thankless task we have often had to abandon our criticism of M. Proudhon in order to criticize German philosophy, and at the same time to give some observations on political economy.

Karl Marx Brussels, June 15, 1847

M. Proudhon’s work is not just a treatise on political economy, an ordinary book; it is a bible. “Mysteries,” “Secrets Wrested from the Bosom of God,” “Revelations” – it lacks nothing. But as prophets are discussed nowadays more conscientiously than profane writers, the reader must resign himself to going with us through the arid and gloomy eruditions of “Genesis,” in order to ascend later, with M. Proudhon, into the ethereal and fertile realm of super-socialism. (See Proudhon, Philosophy of Poverty, Prologue, p. III, line 20.)
Engels’ letters written between August and October 1884 show that he did a great deal of work in preparing Marx’s *Poverty of Philosophy* for publication in German. (The book was written and published in French in 1847 and was not republished in full during Marx’s lifetime.) Engels edited the translation made by Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky and supplied a number of notes to it. The first German edition of Marx’s book appeared in the second half of January 1885 and, a little earlier, at the beginning of January, Engels published his Preface in the magazine *Die Neue Zeit* under the title “Marx und Rodbertus.” It was also included in the second German edition of the book which appeared in 1892 with a special preface written by Engels. – Editors.

The present work was produced in the winter of 1846-47, at a time when Marx had cleared up for himself the basic features of his new historical and economic outlook. Proudhon’s *Système des contradictions économiques, ou Philosophie de la misère*, which had just appeared, gave him the opportunity to develop these basic features, setting them against the views of a man who, from then on, was to occupy the most important place among living French socialists. Since the time in Paris when the two of them had often spent whole nights discussing economic questions, their paths had increasingly diverged: Proudhon’s book proved that there was already an unbridgeable gulf between them. To ignore it was at that time impossible, and so Marx put on record the irreparable rupture in this reply of his.

Marx’s general opinion of Proudhon is to be found in the article which appeared in the Berlin *Social-Demokrat* Nos. 16, 17 and 18 for 1865. It was the only article Marx wrote for that paper; Herr von Schweitzer’s attempts to guide it along feudal and government lines, which became evident soon afterwards, compelled us to publicly terminate our collaboration after only a few weeks.¹

For Germany, the present work has at this precise moment a significance which Marx himself never imagined. How could he have known that, in trouncing Proudhon, he was hitting Rodbertus, the idol of the careerists of today, who was unknown to him even by name at that time?

This is not the place to deal with relations between Marx and Rodbertus; an opportunity for that is sure to present itself to me very soon.² Suffice it to note here that when Rodbertus accuses Marx of having “plundered” him and of having “freely used in his *Capital* without quoting him” his work *Zur Erkenntnis*, he allows himself to indulge in an act of slander which is only explicable by the irksomeness of unrecognised genius and by his remarkable ignorance of things taking place outside Prussia, and especially of socialist and economic literature. Neither these charges, nor the above-mentioned work by Rodbertus ever came to Marx’s sight; all he knew of Rodbertus was the three *Sociale Briefe* and even these certainly not before 1858 or 1859.

With greater reason Rodbertus asserts in these letters that he had already discovered “Proudhon’s constituted value” before Proudhon; but here again it is true he erroneously flatters himself with being the first discoverer. In any case, he is thus one of the targets of criticism in the present work, and this compels me to deal briefly with his “fundamental” piece: *Zur Erkenntnis unsrer staatswirthschaftlichen Zustände*, 1842, insofar as this brings forth anticipations of Proudhon as well as the communism of Weitling likewise (again unconsciously) contained in it.

Insofar as modern socialism, no matter of what tendency, starts out from bourgeois political economy, it almost without exception takes up the Ricardian theory of value. The two propositions which Ricardo proclaimed in 1817 right at the beginning of his *Principles*,

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1. How could he have known that, in trouncing Proudhon, he was hitting Rodbertus, the idol of the careerists of today, who was unknown to him even by name at that time?

2. Suffice it to note here that when Rodbertus accuses Marx of having “plundered” him and of having “freely used in his *Capital* without quoting him” his work *Zur Erkenntnis*, he allows himself to indulge in an act of slander which is only explicable by the irksomeness of unrecognised genius and by his remarkable ignorance of things taking place outside Prussia, and especially of socialist and economic literature. Neither these charges, nor the above-mentioned work by Rodbertus ever came to Marx’s sight; all he knew of Rodbertus was the three *Sociale Briefe* and even these certainly not before 1858 or 1859.
1) That the value of any commodity is purely and solely determined by the quantity of labour required for its production, and
2) That the product of the entire social labour is divided among the three classes: landowners (rent), capitalists (profit) and workers (wages)

These two propositions had ever since 1821 been utilised in England for socialist conclusions, and in part with such pointedness and resolution that this literature, which had then almost been forgotten and was to a large extent only rediscovered by Marx, remained unsurpassed until the appearance of Capital. About this another time. If, therefore, in 1842 Rodbertus for his part drew socialist conclusions from the above propositions, that was certainly a very considerable step forward for a German at that time, but it could rank as a new discovery only for Germany at best. That such an application of the Ricardian theory was far from new was proved by Marx against Proudhon, who suffered from a similar conceit.

“Anyone who is in any way familiar with the trend of political economy in England cannot fail to know that almost all the socialists in that country have, at different periods, proposed the equalitarian (i.e. socialist) application of Ricardian theory. We could quote for M. Proudhon: Hodgskin, Political Economy, 1827; William Thompson, An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness, 1824; T. R. Edmonds, Practical Moral and Political Economy, 1828, etc., etc., and four pages more of etc. We shall content ourselves with listening to an English Communist, Mr. Bray ... in his remarkable work, Labour’s Wrongs and Labour’s Remedy, Leeds, 1839.”

And the quotations given here from Bray on their own put an end to a good part of the priority claimed by Rodbertus.

At that time Marx had never yet entered the reading room of the British Museum. Apart from the libraries of Paris and Brussels, apart from my books and extracts, he had only examined such books as were obtainable in Manchester during a six-week journey to England we made together in the summer of 1845. The literature in question was, therefore, by no means so inaccessible in the forties as it may be now. If, all the same, it always remained unknown to Rodbertus, that is to be ascribed solely to his Prussian local bigotry. He is the actual founder of specifically Prussian socialism and is now at last recognised as such.

However, even in his beloved Prussia, Rodbertus was not to remain undisturbed. In 1859, Marx’s A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Part I, was published in Berlin. Therein, among the economists’ objections to Ricardo, the following was put forward as the second objection (p. 40):

“If the exchange value of a product equals the labour time contained in the product, then the exchange value of a working day is equal to the product it yields, in other words, wages must be equal to the product of labour. But in fact the opposite is true.”

On this there was the following note:

“This objection, which was advanced against Ricardo by economists, was later taken up by socialists. Assuming that the formula was theoretically sound, they alleged that practice stood in conflict with the theory and demanded that bourgeois society should draw the practical conclusions supposedly arising from its theoretical principles. In this way at least English socialists turned Ricardo’s formula of exchange value against political economy.”

In the same note there was a reference to Marx’s Misère de la philosophie, which was then obtainable in all the bookshops.

Rodbertus, therefore, had sufficient opportunity of convincing himself whether his discoveries of 1842 were really new. Instead he proclaims them again and again and regards them as so
incomparable that it never occurs to him that Marx might have drawn his conclusions from Ricardo independently, just as well as Rodbertus himself. Absolutely impossible! Marx had “plundered” him – the man whom the same Marx had offered every opportunity to convince himself how long before both of them these conclusions, at least in the crude form which they still have in the case of Rodbertus, had previously been enunciated in England!

The simplest socialist application of the Ricardian theory is indeed that given above. It has led in many cases to insights into the origin and nature of surplus value which go far beyond Ricardo, as in the case of Rodbertus among others. Quite apart from the fact that on this matter he nowhere presents anything which has not already been said at least as well, before him, his presentation suffers like those of his predecessors from the fact that he adopts, uncritically and without examining their content, economic categories – labour, capital, value, etc. – in the crude form, clinging to their external appearance, in which they were handed down to him by the economists. He thereby not only cuts himself off from all further development – in contrast to Marx who was the first to make something of these propositions so often repeated for the last sixty-four years – but, as will be shown, he opens for himself the road leading straight to utopia.

The above application of the Ricardian theory that the entire social product belongs to the workers as their product, because they are the sole real producers, leads directly to communism. But, as Marx indeed indicates in the above-quoted passage, it is incorrect in formal economic terms, for it is simply an application of morality to economics. According to the laws of bourgeois economics, the greatest part of the product does not belong to the workers who have produced it. If we now say: that is unjust, that ought not to be so, then that has nothing immediately to do with economics. We are merely saying that this economic fact is in contradiction to our sense of morality. Marx, therefore, never based his communist demands upon this, but upon the inevitable collapse of the capitalist mode of production which is daily taking place before our eyes to an ever growing degree; he says only that surplus value consists of unpaid labour, which is a simple fact. But what in economic terms may be formally incorrect, may all the same be correct from the point of view of world history. If mass moral consciousness declares an economic fact to be unjust, as it did at one time in the case of slavery and statute labour, that is proof that the fact itself has outlived its day, that other economic facts have made their appearance due to which the former has become unbearable and untenable. Therefore, a very true economic content may be concealed behind the formal economic incorrectness. This is not the place to deal more closely with the significance and history of the theory of surplus value.

At the same time other conclusions can be drawn, and have been drawn, from the Ricardian theory of value. The value of commodities is determined by the labour required for their production. But now it turns out that in this imperfect world commodities are sold sometimes above, sometimes below their value, and indeed not only as a result of ups and downs in competition. The rate of profit tends just as much to balance out at the same level for all capitalists as the price of commodities does to become reduced to the labour value by agency of supply and demand. But the rate of profit is calculated on the total capital invested in an industrial business. Since now the annual products in two different branches of industry may incorporate equal quantities of labour, and, consequently, may represent equal values and also wages may be at an equal level in both, while the capital advanced in one branch may be, and often is, twice or three times as great as in the other, consequently the Ricardian law of value, as Ricardo himself discovered, comes into contradiction here with the law of the equal rate of profit. If the products of both branches of industry are sold at their values, the rates of profit cannot be equal; if, however, the rates of profit are equal, then the products of the two branches of industry cannot always be sold at their values. Thus, we have here a contradiction, the antinomy of two economic laws, the practical resolution of which takes place according to Ricardo (Chapter I, Section 4 and 5) as a rule in favour of the rate of profit at the cost of value.
But the Ricardian definition of value, in spite of its ominous characteristics, has a feature which makes it dear to the heart of the honest bourgeois. It appeals with irresistible force to his sense of justice. Justice and equality of rights are the cornerstones on which the bourgeois of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would like to erect his social edifice over the ruins of feudal injustice, inequality and privilege. And the determination of value of commodities by labour and the free exchange of the products of labour, taking place according to this measure of value between commodity owners with equal rights, these are, as Marx has already proved, the real foundations on which the whole political, juridical and philosophical ideology of the modern bourgeoisie has been built. Once it is recognised that labour is the measure of value of a commodity, the better feelings of the honest bourgeois cannot but be deeply wounded by the wickedness of a world which, while recognising the basic law of justice in name, still in fact appears at every moment to set it aside without compunction. And the petty bourgeois especially, whose honest labour – even if it is only that of his workmen and apprentices – is daily more and more depreciated in value by the competition of large-scale production and machinery, this small-scale producer especially must long for a society in which the exchange of products according to their labour value is at last a complete and invariable truth. In other words, he must long for a society in which a single law of commodity production prevails exclusively and in full, but in which the conditions are abolished in which it can prevail at all, viz., the other laws of commodity production and, later, of capitalist production.

How deeply this utopia has struck roots in the way of thinking of the modern petty bourgeois – real or ideal – is proved by the fact that it was systematically developed by John Gray back in 1831, that it was tried in practice and theoretically propagated in England in the thirties, that it was proclaimed as the latest truth by Rodbertus in Germany in 1842 and by Proudhon in France in 1846, that it was again proclaimed by Rodbertus as late as 1871 as the solution to the social question and, as, so to say, his social testament, and that in 1884 it again finds adherents among the horde of careerists who in the name of Rodbertus set out to exploit Prussian state socialism.5

The critique of this utopia has been so exhaustively furnished by Marx both against Proudhon and against Gray (see the appendix to this work) that I can confine myself here to a few remarks on the form of substantiating and depicting it peculiar to Rodbertus.

As already noted, Rodbertus adopts the traditional definitions of economic concepts entirely in the form in which they have come down to him from the economists. He does not make the slightest attempt to investigate them. Value is for him

“the valuation of one thing against others according to quantity, this valuation being conceived as measure”

This, to put it mildly, extremely slovenly definition gives us at the best an idea of what value approximately looks like, but says absolutely nothing of what it is. Since this, however, is all that Rodbertus is able to tell us about value, it is understandable that he looks for a measure of value located outside value. After thirty pages in which he mixes up use value and exchange value in higgledy-piggledy fashion with that power of abstract thought so infinitely admired by Herr Adolf Wagner,6 he arrives at the conclusion that there is no real measure of value and that one has to make do with a substitute measure. Labour could serve as such but only if products of an equal quantity of labour were always exchanged against products of an equal quantity of labour whether this “is already the case of itself, or whether precautionary measures are adopted” to ensure that it is. Consequently value and labour remain without any sort of material connection in spite of the fact that the whole first chapter is taken up to expound to us that commodities “cost labour” and nothing but labour, and why this is so.

Labour, again, is taken uncritically in the form in which it occurs among the economists. And not even that. For, although there is a reference in a couple of words to differences in intensity of labour, labour is still put forward quite generally as something which “costs,” hence as something
which measures value, quite irrespective of whether it is expended under normal average social conditions or not. Whether the producers take ten days, or only one, to make products which could be made in one day; whether they employ the best or the worst tools; whether they expend their labour time in the production of socially necessary articles and in the socially required quantity, or whether they make quite undesired articles or desired articles in quantities above or below demand – about all this there is not a word: labour is labour, the product of equal labour must be exchanged against the product of equal labour. Rodbertus, who is otherwise always ready, whether rightly or not, to adopt the national standpoint and to survey the relations of individual producers from the high watchtower of general social considerations, is anxious to avoid doing so here. And this, indeed, solely because from the very first line of his book he makes directly for the utopia of labour money, and because any investigation of labour seen from its property of creating value would be bound to put insuperable obstacles in his way. His instinct was here considerably stronger than his power of abstract thought which, by the by, is revealed in Rodbertus only by the most concrete absence of ideas.

The transition to utopia is now made in the turn of a hand. The “measures,” which ensure exchange of commodities according to labour value as the invariable rule, cause no difficulty. The other utopians of this tendency, from Gray to Proudhon, rack their brains to invent social institutions which would achieve this aim. They attempt at least to solve the economic question in an economic way through the action of the owners themselves who exchange the commodities. For Rodbertus it is much easier. As a good Prussian he appeals to the state: a decree of the state authority orders the reform.

In this way then, value is happily “constituted,” but by no means the priority in this constitution as claimed by Rodbertus. On the contrary, Gray as well as Bray – among many others – before Rodbertus, at length and frequently ad nauseam, repeated this idea, viz. the pious desire for measures by means of which products would always and under all circumstances be exchanged only at their labour value.

After the state has thus constituted value – at least for a part of the products, for Rodbertus is also modest – it issues its labour paper money, and gives advances therefrom to the industrial capitalists, with which the latter pay the workers, whereupon the workers buy the products with the labour paper money they have received, and so cause the paper money to flow back to its starting point. How very beautifully this is effected, one must hear from Rodbertus himself:

“In regard to the second condition, the necessary measure that the value certified in the note should be actually present in circulation is realised in that only the person who actually delivers a product receives a note, on which is accurately recorded the quantity of labour by which the product was produced. Whoever delivers a product of two days’ labour receives a note marked ‘two days’. By the strict observance of this rule in the issue of notes, the second condition too would necessarily be fulfilled. For according to our supposition the real value of the goods always coincides with the quantity of labour which their production has cost and this quantity of labour is measured by the usual units of time, and therefore someone who hands in a product on which two days’ labour has been expended and receives a certificate for two days, has received, certified or assigned to him neither more nor less value than that which he has in fact supplied. Further, since only the person who has actually put a product into circulation receives such a certificate, it is also certain that the value marked on the note is available for the satisfaction of society. However extensive we imagine the circle of division of labour to be, if this rule is strictly followed the sum total of available value must be exactly equal to the sum total of certified value. Since, however, the sum total of certified value is exactly equal to the sum total of value
assigned, the latter must *necessarily coincide with the available value, all claims will be satisfied and the liquidation correctly brought about*” (pp. 166-67).

If Rodbertus has hitherto always had the misfortune to arrive too late with his new discoveries, this time at least he has the merit of *one* sort of originality: none of his rivals has dared to express the stupidity of the labour money utopia in this childishly naive, transparent, I might say truly Pomeranian, form. Since for every paper certificate a corresponding object of value has been delivered, and no object of value is supplied except in return for a corresponding paper certificate, the sum total of paper certificates must always be covered by the sum total of objects of value. The calculation works out without the smallest remainder, it is correct down to a second of labour time, and no governmental chief revenue office accountant, however many years of faithful service he may have behind him, could prove the slightest error in calculation. What more could one want?

In present-day capitalist society each industrial capitalist produces off his own bat what, how and as much as he likes. The social demand, however, remains an unknown magnitude to him, both in regard to quality, the kind of objects required, and in regard to quantity. That which today cannot be supplied quickly enough, may tomorrow be offered far in excess of the demand. Nevertheless, demand is finally satisfied in one way or another, good or bad, and, taken as a whole, production is ultimately geared towards the objects required. How is this evening-out of the contradiction effected? By competition. And how does competition bring about this solution? Simply by depreciating below their labour value those commodities which by their kind or amount are useless for immediate social requirements, and by making the producers feel, through this roundabout means, that they have produced either absolutely useless articles or ostensibly useful articles in unusable, superfluous quantity. Two things follow from this:

First, continual deviations of the prices of commodities from their values are the necessary condition in and through which the value of the commodities as such can come into existence. Only through the fluctuations of competition, and consequently of commodity prices, does the law of value of commodity production assert itself and the determination of the value of the commodity by the socially necessary labour time become a reality. That thereby the form of manifestation of value, the price, as a rule looks somewhat different from the value which it manifests, is a fate which value shares with most social relations. A king usually looks quite different from the monarchy which he represents. To desire, in a society of producers who exchange their commodities, to establish the determination of value by labour time, by forbidding competition to establish this determination of value through pressure on prices in the only way it can be established, is therefore merely to prove that, at least in this sphere, one has adopted the usual utopian disdain of economic laws.

Secondly, competition, by bringing into operation the law of value of commodity production in a society of producers who exchange their commodities, precisely thereby brings about the only organisation and arrangement of social production which is possible in the circumstances. Only through the undervaluation or overvaluation of products is it forcibly brought home to the individual commodity producers what society requires or does not require and in what amounts. But it is precisely this sole regulator that the utopia advocated by Rodbertus among others wishes to abolish. And if we then ask what guarantee we have that necessary quantity and not more of each product will be produced, that we shall not go hungry in regard to corn and meat while we are choked in beet sugar and drowned in potato spirit, that we shall not lack trousers to cover our nakedness while trouser buttons flood us by the million – Rodbertus triumphantly shows us his splendid calculation, according to which the correct certificate has been handed out for every superfluous pound of sugar, for every unsold barrel of spirit, for every unusable trouser button, a calculation which “works out” exactly, and according to which “all claims will be satisfied and the liquidation correctly brought about.” And anyone who does not believe this can apply to governmental chief revenue office accountant X in Pomerania who has checked the calculation
and found it correct, and who, as one who has never yet been caught lacking with the accounts, is thoroughly trustworthy.

And now consider the naiveté with which Rodbertus would abolish industrial and commercial crises by means of his utopia. As soon as the production of commodities has assumed world market dimensions, the evening-out between the individual producers who produce for private account and the market for which they produce, which in respect of quantity and quality of demand is more or less unknown to them, is established by means of a storm on the world market, by a commercial crisis.* If now competition is to be forbidden to make the individual producers aware, by a rise or fall in prices, how the world market stands, then they are completely blindfolded. To institute the production of commodities in such a fashion that the producers can no longer learn anything about the state of the market for which they are producing – that indeed is a cure for the crisis disease which could make Dr. Eisenbart envious of Rodbertus.

It is now comprehensible why Rodbertus determines the value of commodities simply by “labour” and at most allows for different degrees of intensity of labour. If he had investigated by what means and how labour creates value and therefore also determines and measures it, he would have arrived at socially necessary labour, necessary for the individual product, both in relation to other products of the same kind and also in relation to society’s total demand. He would thereby have been confronted with the question as to how the adjustment of the production of separate commodity producers to the total social demand takes place, and his whole utopia would thereby have been made impossible. This time he preferred in fact to “make an abstraction,” namely of precisely that which mattered.

Now at last we come to the point where Rodbertus really offers us something new; something which distinguishes him from all his numerous fellow supporters of the labour money exchange economy. They all demand this exchange organisation for the purpose of abolishing the exploitation of wage labour by capital. Every producer is to receive the full labour value of his product. On this they all agree, from Gray to Proudhon. Not all, says Rodbertus. Wage labour and its exploitation remain.

In the first place, in no conceivable condition of society can the worker receive the full value of his product for consumption. A series of economically unproductive but necessary functions have to be met from the fund produced, and consequently also the persons connected with them maintained. This is only correct so long as the present-day division of labour applies. In a society in which general productive labour is obligatory, which is also “conceivable” after all, this ceases to apply. But the need for a social reserve and accumulation fund would remain and consequently even in that case, the workers, i.e., all, would remain in possession and enjoyment of their total product, but each separate worker would not enjoy the “full returns of his labour.” Nor has the maintenance of economically unproductive functions at the expense of the labour product been overlooked by the other labour money utopians. But they leave the workers to tax themselves for this purpose in the usual democratic way, while Rodbertus, whose whole social reform of 1842 is geared to the Prussian state of that time, refers the whole matter to the decision of the bureaucracy, which determines from above the share of the worker in his own product and graciously permits him to have it.

In the second place, however, rent and profit are also to continue undiminished. For the landowners and industrial capitalists also exercise certain socially useful or even necessary functions, even if economically unproductive ones, and they receive in the shape of rent and

* At least this was the case until recently. Since England’s monopoly of the world market is being increasingly shattered by the participation of France, Germany and, above all, America in world trade, a new form of evening-out appears to come into operation. The period of general prosperity preceding the crisis still fails to appear. If it should remain absent altogether, then chronic stagnation must necessarily become the normal condition of modern industry, with only insignificant fluctuations. – Note by Engels.
Poverty of Philosophy. Introduction

profit a sort of pay on that account – a conception which was, it will be recalled, not new even in 1842. Actually they get at present far too much for the little that they do, and badly at that, but Rodbertus has need, at least for the next five hundred years, of a privileged class, and so the present rate of surplus value, to express myself correctly, is to remain in existence but is not to be allowed to be increased. This present rate of surplus value Rodbertus takes to be 200 per cent, that is to say, for twelve hours of labour daily the worker is to receive a certificate not for twelve hours but only for four, and the value produced in the remaining eight hours is to be divided between landowner and capitalist. Rodbertus’ labour certificates, therefore, are a direct lie. Again, one must be a Pomeranian manor owner in order to imagine that a working class would put up with working twelve hours in order to receive a certificate for four hours of labour. If the hocus-pocus of capitalist production is translated into this naïve language, in which it appears as naked robbery, it is made impossible. Every certificate given to a worker would be a direct instigation to rebellion and would come under § 110 of the German Imperial Criminal Code. One need never have seen any other proletariat than the day-labourer proletariat, still actually in semi-serfdom, of a Pomeranian manor where the rod and the whip reign supreme, and where all the beautiful women in the village belong to his lordship’s harem, in order to imagine one can treat the workers in such a shamefaced manner. But, after all, our conservatives are our greatest revolutionaries.

If, however, our workers are sufficiently docile to be taken in that they have in reality only worked four hours during a whole twelve hours of hard work, they are, as a reward, to be guaranteed that for all eternity their share in their own product will never fall below a third. That is indeed pie in the sky of the most infantile kind and not worth wasting a word over. Insofar, therefore, as there is anything novel in the labour money exchange utopia of Rodbertus, this novelty is simply childish and far below the achievements of his numerous comrades both before and after him.

For the time when Rodbertus’ Zur Erkenntnis, etc., appeared, it was certainly an important book. His development of Ricardo’s theory of value in that one direction was a very promising beginning. Even if it was new only for him and for Germany, still as a whole, it stands on a par with the achievements of the better ones among his English predecessors. But it was only a beginning, from which a real gain for theory could be achieved only by further thorough and critical work. But he cut himself off from further development by also tackling the development of Ricardo’s theory from the very beginning in the second direction, in the direction of utopia. Thereby he surrendered the first condition of all criticism – freedom from bias. He worked on towards a goal fixed in advance, he became a Tendenzökonom. Once imprisoned by his utopia, he cut himself off from all possibility of scientific advance. From 1842 up to his death, he went round in circles, always repeating the same ideas which he had already expressed or suggested in his first work, feeling himself unappreciated, finding himself plundered, where there was nothing to plunder, and finally refusing, not without intention, to recognise that in essence he had only rediscovered what had already been discovered long before.

In a few places the translation departs from the printed French original. This is due to handwritten alterations by Marx, which will also be inserted in the new French edition that is now being prepared.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the terminology used in this work does not entirely coincide with that in Capital. Thus this work still speaks of labour as a commodity, of the purchase and sale of labour, instead of labour power.

Also added as a supplement to this edition are:

1) A passage from Marx’s work A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Berlin, 1859, dealing with the first labour money exchange utopia of John Gray, and
2) A translation of Marx’s speech on free trade in Brussels (1848), which belongs to the same period of the author’s development as the *Misère*.

London, October 23, 1884 Frederick Engels

**Engels’ 1892 Introduction**

For the second edition I have only to remark that the name wrongly written Hopkins in the French text (on page 45) has been replaced by the correct name Hodgskin and that in the same place the date of the work of William Thompson has been corrected to 1824. It is to be hoped that this will appease the bibliographical conscience of Professor Anton Menger.

Frederick Engels London, March 29, 1892

**Notes**

1. Marx wrote the statement about the break with *Der Social-Demokrat* on February 18, 1865 and sent it to Engels, who fully endorsed it and returned it to Marx with his signature; on February 23, 1865 Marx sent the statement to the editors of the newspaper. This was occasioned by Schweitzer’s series of articles *Das Ministerium Bismarck* in which he expressed overt support for Bismarck’s policy of unifying Germany under Prussian supremacy. Marx took measures to make Schweitzer publish the statement. It was published in many papers, among them the *Barmer Zeitung* and *Elberfelder Zeitung* on February 26. Schweitzer was forced to publish this statement in *Der Social Demokrat*, No. 29, March 3, 1865.

2. The reference is to Engels’ Preface to the first German edition of Vol. II of Marx’s *Capital*, which Engels completed on May 5, 1885.

3. See the anonymous pamphlet: The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties, deduced from principles of political economy, in a letter to Lord John Russell, London, 1821.

For more details about the pamphlet see Engels’ Preface to Vol. II of Marx’s Capital.


5. The reference is to the people who took part in publishing the literary legacy of Rodbertus-Jagetzow, in particular his work *Das Kapital*. Vierter socialer Brief an von Kirchmann, Berlin, 1884; the publisher of this work and the author of the introduction to it was Theophil Kozak; the preface was written by the German vulgar economist Adolf Wagner.

6. Engels is referring to the preface to K. Rodbertus-Jagetzow’s work, *Das Kapital*. Vierter socialer Brief an von Kirchmann, Berlin, 1884, pp. VII-VIII, in which Adolf Wagner wrote: “Rodbertus evinces here such a power of abstract thinking as is possessed only by the greatest masters.”

7. § 110 of the German Imperial Criminal Code promulgated in 1871 stipulated a fine of up to 600 marks or imprisonment for a term of up to 2 years for a public appeal in writing to disobey the laws and decrees operating in the German Empire.

8. The second French edition of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which was being prepared by Marx’s daughter Laura Lafargue, appeared in Paris only after Engels’ death, in 1896.
Chapter One: A Scientific Discovery

§ 1. The Antithesis of Use Value and Exchange Value

"The capacity for all products, whether natural or industrial, to contribute to man’s subsistence is specifically termed use value; their capacity to be given in exchange for one another, exchange value. How does value become exchange value?... The genesis of the idea of (exchange) value has not been noted by economists with sufficient care. It is necessary, therefore, for us to dwell upon it. Since a very large number of the things I need occur in nature only in moderate quantities, or even not at all, I am forced to assist in the production of what I lack. And as I cannot set my hand to so many things, I shall propose to other men, my collaborators in various functions, to cede to me a part of their products in exchange for mine.” (Proudhon, Vol. I, Chap. II)

M. Proudhon undertakes to explain to us first of all the double nature of value, the “distinction in value,” the process by which use value is transformed into exchange value. It is necessary for us to dwell with M. Proudhon upon this act of transubstantiation. The following is how this act is accomplished, according to our author.

A very large number of products are not to be found in nature, they are products of industry. If man’s needs go beyond nature’s spontaneous production, he is forced to have recourse to industrial production. What is this industry in M. Proudhon’s view? What is its origin? A single individual, feeling the need for a very great number of things, “cannot set his hand to so many things.” So many things to produce presuppose at once more than one man’s hand helping to produce them. Now, the moment you postulate more than one hand helping in production, you at once presuppose a whole production based on the division of labour. Thus need, as M. Proudhon presupposes it, itself presupposes the whole division of labour. In presupposing the division of labour, you get exchange, and, consequently, exchange value. One might as well have presupposed exchange value from the very beginning.

But M. Proudhon prefers to go the roundabout way. Let us follow him in all his detours, which always bring him back to his starting point.

In order to emerge from the condition in which everyone produces in isolation and to arrive at exchange, “I turn to my collaborators in various functions,” says M. Proudhon. I, myself, then, have collaborators, all with different function. And yet, for all that, I and all the others, always according to M. Proudhon’s supposition, have got no farther than the solitary and hardly social position of the Robinsons. The collaborators and the various functions, the division of labour and the exchange it implies, are already at hand.

To sum up: I have certain needs which are founded on the division of labour and on exchange. In presupposing these needs, M. Proudhon has thus presupposed exchange, exchange value, the very thing of which he purposes to “note the genesis with more care than other economists.”

M. Proudhon might just as well have inverted the order of things, without in any way affecting the accuracy of his conclusions. To explain exchange value, we must have exchange. To explain exchange, we must have the division of labour. To explain the division of labour, we must have needs which render necessary the division of labour. To explain these needs, we must “presuppose” them, which is not to deny them – contrary to the first axiom in M. Proudhon’s prologue: “To presuppose God is to deny him.” (Prologue, p. 1)

How does M. Proudhon, who assumes the division of labour as the known, manage to explain exchange value, which for him is always the unknown?

“A man” sets out to “propose to other men, his collaborators in various functions,” that they establish exchange, and make a distinction between ordinary value and exchange value. In
accepting this proposed distinction, the collaborators have left M. Proudhon no other “care” than that of recording the fact, or marking, of “noting” in his treatise on political economy “the genesis of the idea of value.” But he has still to explain to us the “genesis” of this proposal, to tell us finally how this single individual, this Robinson Crusoe, suddenly had the idea of making “to his collaborators” a proposal of the type known and how these collaborators accepted it without the slightest protest.

M. Proudhon does not enter into these genealogical details. He merely places a sort of historical stamp upon the fact of exchange, by presenting it in the form of a motion, made by a third party, that exchange be established.

That is a sample of the “historical and descriptive method” of M. Proudhon, who professes a superb disdain for the “historical and descriptive methods” of the Adam Smiths and Ricardos.

Exchange has a history of its own. It has passed through different phases. There was a time, as in the Middle Ages, when only the superfluous, the excess of production over consumption, was exchanged.

There was again a time, when not only the superfluous, but all products, all industrial existence, had passed into commerce, when the whole of production depended on exchange. How are we to explain this second phase of exchange – marketable value at its second power?

M. Proudhon would have a reply ready-made: Assume that a man has “proposed to other men, his collaborators in various functions,” to raise marketable value to its second power.

Finally, there came a time when everything that men had considered as inalienable became an object of exchange, of traffic and could be alienated. This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought – virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc. – when everything, in short, passed into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value.

How, again, can we explain this new and last phase of exchange – marketable value at its third power?

M. Proudhon would have a reply ready-made: Assume that a person has “proposed to other persons, his collaborators in various functions,” to make a marketable value out of virtue, love, etc., to raise exchange value to its third and last power.

We see that M. Proudhon’s “historical and descriptive method” is applicable to everything, it answers everything, explains everything. If it is a question above all of explaining historically “the genesis of an economic idea,” it postulates a man who proposes to other men, “his collaborators in various functions,” that they perform this act of genesis and that is the end of it.

We shall hereafter accept the “genesis” of exchange value as an accomplished act; it now remains only to expound the relation between exchange value and use value. Let us hear what M. Proudhon has to say:

“Economists have very well brought out the double character of value, but why they have not pointed out with the same precision is its contradictory nature; there is where our criticism begins.... It is a small thing to have drawn attention to this surprising contrast between use value and exchange value, in which economists have been wont to see only something very simple: we must show that this alleged simplicity conceals a profound mystery into which it is our duty to penetrate.... In technical terms, use value and exchange value stand in inverse ratio to each other.”

If we have thoroughly grasped M. Proudhon’s thought the following are the four points which he sets out to establish:
1. Use value and exchange value form a “surprising contrast,” they are in opposition to each other.
2. Use value and exchange value are in inverse ratio, in contradiction, to each other.
3. Economists have neither observed nor recognised either the opposition or the contradiction.
4. M. Proudhon’s criticism begins at the end.

We, too, shall begin at the end, and, in order to clear the economists from M. Proudhon’s accusations, we shall let two sufficiently well-known economists speak for themselves.

SISMONDI: “It is the opposition between use value and exchange value to which commerce has reduced everything, etc.” (Etudes, Volume II, p. 162, Brussels edition)

LAUDERDALE: “In proportion as the riches of individuals are increased by an augmentation of the value of any commodity, the wealth of the society is generally diminished; and in proportion as the mass of individual riches is diminished, by the diminution of the value of any commodity, its opulence is generally increased.” (Recherches sur la nature et l’origine de la richesse publique, translated by Langentie de Lavaisse, Paris, 1808 [p. 33])

Sismondi founded on the opposition between use value and exchange value his principal doctrine, according to which diminution in revenue is proportional to the increase in production. Lauderdale founded his system on the inverse ratio of the two kinds of value, and his doctrine was indeed so popular in Ricardo’s time that the latter could speak of it as of something generally known.

“It is through confounding the ideas of value and wealth, or riches that it has been asserted, that by diminishing the quantity of commodities, that is to say, of the necessaries, conveniences, and enjoyments of human life, riches may be increased.” (Ricardo, Des Principles de l’économie politique, translated by F. S. Constancio, annotations by J. B. Say, Paris 1835, Volume II, Chapter “Sur la valeur et les richesses.”)

We have just seen that the economists before M. Proudhon had “drawn attention” to the profound mystery of opposition and contradiction. Let us now see how M. Proudhon explains this mystery after the economists.

The exchange value of a product falls as the supply increases, the demand remaining the same; in other words, the more abundant a product is relatively to the demand, the lower is its exchange value, or price. Vice versa: The weaker the supply relatively to the demand, the higher rises the exchange value or the price of the product supplied: in other words, the greater the scarcity in the products supplied, relatively to the demand, the higher the prices. The exchange value of a product depends upon its abundance or its scarcity; but always in relation to the demand. Take a product that is more than scarce, unique of its kind if you will: this unique product will be more than abundant, it will be superfluous, if there is no demand for it. On the other hand, take a product multiplied into millions, it will always be scarce if it does not satisfy the demand, that is, if there is too great a demand for it.

These are what we should almost call truisms, yet we have had to repeat them here in order to render M. Proudhon’s mysteries comprehensible.

“So that, following up the principle to its ultimate consequences, one would come to the conclusion, the most logical in the world, that the things whose use is indispensable and whose quantity is unlimited should be had for nothing, and those whose utility is nil and whose scarcity is extreme should be of incalculable worth. To cap the difficulty, these extremes are impossible in practice: on the one hand, no human product could ever be unlimited in magnitude; on the other, even
the scarcest things must performe be useful to a certain degree, otherwise they would be quite valueless. Use value and exchange value are thus inexorably bound up with each other, although by their nature they continually tend to be mutually exclusive.” (Volume I, p. 39)

What caps M. Proudhon’s difficulty? That he has simply forgotten about demand, and that a thing can be scarce or abundant only in so far as it is in demand. The moment he leaves out demand, he identifies exchange value with scarcity and use value with abundance. In reality, in saying that things “whose utility is nil and scarcity extreme are of incalculable worth,” he is simply declaring that exchange value is merely scarcity. “Scarcity extreme and utility nil” means pure scarcity. “Incalculable worth” is the maximum of exchange value, it is pure exchange value. He equates these two terms. Therefore exchange value and scarcity are equivalent terms. In arriving at these alleged “extreme consequences,” M. Proudhon has in fact carried to the extreme, not the things, but the terms which express them, and, in so doing, he shows proficiency in rhetoric rather than in logic. He merely rediscovers his first hypotheses in all their nakedness, when he thinks he has discovered new consequences. Thanks to the same procedure he succeeds in identifying use value with pure abundance.

After having equated exchange value and scarcity, use value and abundance, M. Proudhon is quite astonished not to find use value in scarcity and exchange value, nor exchange value in abundance and use value; and seeing that these extremes are impossible in practice, he can do nothing but believe in mystery. Incalculable worth exists for him, because buyers do not exist, and he will never find any buyers, so long as he leaves out demand.

On the other hand, M. Proudhon’s abundance seems to be something spontaneous. He completely forgets that there are people who produce it, and that it is to their interest never to lose sight of demand. Otherwise, how could M. Proudhon have said that things which are very useful must have a very low price, or even cost nothing? On the contrary, he should have concluded that abundance, the production of very useful things, should be restricted if their price, their exchange value is to be raised.

The old vine-growers of France in petitioning for a law to forbid the planting of new vines; the Dutch in burning Asiatic spices, in uprooting clove trees in the Moluccas, were simply trying to reduce abundance in order to raise exchange value. During the whole of the Middle Ages this same principle was acted upon, in limiting by laws the number of journeymen a single master could employ and the number of implements he could use. (See Anderson, History of Commerce.) [A. Anderson, An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time. First edition appeared in London in 1764. p. 33]

After having represented abundance as use value and scarcity as exchange value – nothing indeed is easier than to prove that abundance and scarcity are in inverse ratio – M. Proudhon identifies use value with supply and exchange value with demand. To make the antithesis even more clear-cut, he substitutes a new term, putting “estimation value” instead of exchange value. The battle has now shifted its ground, and we have on one side utility (use value, supply), on the other side, estimation (exchange value, demand).

Who is to reconcile these two contradictory forces? What is to be done to bring them into harmony with each other? Is it possible to find in them even a single point of comparison?

“Certainly,” cries M. Proudhon, “there is one – free will. The price resulting from this battle between supply and demand, between utility and estimation will not be the expression of eternal justice.”

M. Proudhon goes on to develop this antithesis.

“In my capacity as a free buyer, I am judge of my needs, judge of the desirability of an object, judge of the price I am willing to pay for it. On the other hand, in
your capacity as a free producer, you are master of the means of execution, and in consequence, you have the power to reduce your expenses.” (Volume I, p. 41)

And as demand, or exchange value, is identical with estimation, M. Proudhon is led to say:

“It is proved that it is man’s free will that gives rise to the opposition between use value and exchange value. How can this opposition be removed, so long as free will exists? And how can the latter be sacrificed without sacrificing mankind?” (Volume I, p. 41)

Thus there is no possible way out. There is a struggle between two as it were incommensurable powers, between utility and estimation, between the free buyer and the free producer.

Let us look at things a little more closely.

Supply does not represent exclusively utility, demand does not represent exclusively estimation. Does not the demander also supply a certain product or the token representing all products – viz., money; and as supplier, does he not represent, according to M. Proudhon, utility or use value?

Again, does not the supplier also demand a certain product or the token representing all products – viz., money? And does he not thus become the representative of estimation, of estimation value or of exchange value?

Demand is at the same time a supply, supply is at the same time a demand. Thus M. Proudhon’s antithesis, in simply identifying supply and demand, the one with utility, the other with estimation, is based only on a futile abstraction.

What M. Proudhon calls use value is called estimation value by other economists, and with just as much right. We shall quote only Storch (Cours d’économie politique, Paris 1823, pp. 48 and 49).

According to him, needs are the things for which we feel the need; values are things to which we attribute value. Most things have value only because they satisfy needs engendered by estimation. The estimation of our needs may change; therefore the utility of things, which expresses only the relation of these things to our needs, may also change. Natural needs themselves are continually changing. Indeed, what could be more varied than the objects which form the staple food of different peoples!

The conflict does not take place between utility and estimation; it takes place between the marketable value demanded by the supplier and the marketable value supplied by the demander. The exchange value of the product is each time the resultant of these contradictory appreciations.

In final analysis, supply and demand bring together production and consumption, but production and consumption based on individual exchanges.

The product supplied is not useful in itself. It is the consumer who determines its utility. And even when its quality of being useful is admitted, it does not exclusively represent utility. In the course of production, it has been exchanged for all the costs of production, such as raw materials, wages of workers, etc., all of which are marketable values. The product, therefore, represents, in the eyes of the producer, a sum total of marketable values. What he supplies is not only a useful object, but also and above all a marketable value.

As to demand, it will only be effective on condition that it has means of exchange at its disposal. These means are themselves products, marketable value.

In supply and demand, then, we find on the one hand a product which has cost marketable values, and the need to sell; on the other, means which have cost marketable values, and the desire to buy.

M. Proudhon opposes the free buyer to the free producer. To the one and to the other he attributes purely metaphysical qualities. It is this that makes him say: “It is proved that it is man’s free will that gives rise to the opposition between use value and exchange value.” (Vol. I, p. 41)
The producer, the moment he produces in a society founded on the division of labour and on
exchange (and that is M. Proudhon’s hypothesis), is forced to sell. M. Proudhon makes the
producer master of the means of production; but he will agree with us that his means of
production do not depend on free will. Moreover, many of these means of production are
products which he gets from the outside, and in modern production he is not even free to produce
the amount he wants. The actual degree of development of the productive forces compels him to
produce on such or such a scale.

The consumer is no freer than the producer. His judgment depends on his means and his needs.
Both of these are determined by his social position, which itself depends on the whole social
organization. True, the worker who buys potatoes and the kept woman who buys lace both follow
their respective judgments. But the difference in their judgments is explained by the difference in
the positions which they occupy in the world, and which themselves are the product of social
organization.

Is the entire system of needs on estimation or on the whole organization of production? Most
often, needs arise directly from production or from a state of affairs based on production. Thus, to
choose another example, does not the need for lawyers suppose a given civil law which is but the
expression of a certain development of property, that is to say, of production?

It is not enough for M. Proudhon to have eliminated the elements just mentioned from the relation
of supply and demand. He carries abstraction to the furthest limits when he fuses all producers
into one single producer, all consumers into one single consumer, and sets up a struggle between
these two chimerical personages. But in the real world, things happen otherwise. The competition
among the suppliers and the competition among the demanders form a necessary part of the
struggle between buyers and sellers, of which marketable value is the result.

After having eliminated competition and the cost of production, M. Proudhon can at his ease
reduce the formula of supply and demand to an absurdity.

“Supply and demand,” he says, “are merely two ceremonial forms that serve to
bring use value and exchange value face to face, and to lead to their
reconciliation. They are the two electric poles which, when connected, must
produce the phenomenon of affinity called exchange.” (Volume I, pp. 49 and 50)

One might as well say that exchange is merely a “ceremonial form” for introducing the consumer
to the object of consumption. One might as well say that all economic relations are “ceremonial
forms” serving immediate consumption as go-betweens. Supply and demand are neither more nor
less relations of a given production than are individual exchanges.

What, then, does all M. Proudhon’s dialectic consist in? In the substitution for use value and
exchange value, for supply and demand, of abstract and contradictory notions like scarcity and
abundance, utility and estimation, one producer and one consumer, both of them *knights of free
will*.

And what was he aiming at?

At arranging for himself a means of introducing later on one of the elements he had set aside, the
cost of production, as the synthesis of use value and exchange value. And it is thus that in his eyes
the cost of production constitutes synthetic value or constituted value.

§ 2. Constituted Value or Synthetic Value

Value (marketable value) is the corner-stone of the economic structure. “Constituted” value is the
corner-stone of the system of economic contradictions.

What then is this “constituted value” which is all M. Proudhon has discovered in political
economy?

Once utility is admitted, labour is the source of all value. The measure of labour is time. The
relative value of products is determined by the labour time required for their production. Price is
the monetary expression of the relative value of a product. Finally, the constituted value of a product is purely and simply the value which is constituted by the labour time incorporated in it. Just as Adam Smith discovered the division of labour, so he, M. Proudhon, claims to have discovered “constituted value.” This is not exactly “something unheard of,” but then it must be admitted that there is nothing unheard of in any discovery of economic science. M. Proudhon, who fully appreciates the importance of his own invention, seeks nevertheless to tone down the merit therefore “in order to reassure the reader as to his claims to originality, and to win over minds whose timidity renders them little favourable to new ideas.” But in apportioning the contribution made by each of his predecessors to the understanding of value, he is forced to confess openly that the largest portion, the lion’s share, of the merit falls to himself.

“The synthetic idea of value had been vaguely perceived by Adam Smith.... But with Adam Smith the idea of value was entirely intuitive. Now, society does not change its habits merely on the strength of intuitions: its decisions are made only on the authority of facts. The antinomy had to be stated more palpably and more clearly: J.B. Say was its chief interpreter.”

Here, in a nutshell, is the history of the discovery of synthetic value: Adam Smith – vague intuition; J. B. Say – antinomy; M. Proudhon – constituting and “constituted” truth. And let there be no mistake about it: all the other economists, from Say to Proudhon, have merely been trudging along in the rut of antinomy.

“It is incredible that for the last 40 years so many men of sense should have fumed and fretted at such a simple idea. But no, values are compared without there being any point of comparison between them and with no unit of measurements; this, rather than embrace the revolutionary theory of equality, is what the economists of the 19th century are resolved to uphold against all comers. What will posterity say about it?” (Volume I, p. 68)

Posterity, so abruptly invoked, will begin by getting muddled over the chronology. It is bound to ask itself: are not Ricardo and his school economists of the 19th century? Ricardo’s system, putting as a principle that “the relative value of commodities corresponds exclusively to their production,” dates from 1817. Ricardo is the head of a whole school dominant in England since the Restoration. [The Restoration began after the termination of the Napoleonic wars and the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in France in 1815.] The Ricardian doctrine summarizes severely, remorselessly, the whole of the English bourgeoisie. “What will posterity say about it?” It will not say that M. Proudhon did not know Ricardo, for he talks about him, he talks at length about him, he keeps coming back to him, and concludes by calling his system “trash.” If ever posterity does interfere, it will say perhaps that M. Proudhon, afraid of offending his readers’ Anglophobia, preferred to make himself the responsible editor of Ricardo’s ideas. In any case, it will think it very naive that M. Proudhon should give as a “revolutionary theory of the future” what Ricardo expounded scientifically as the theory of present-day society, of bourgeois society, and that he should thus take for the solution of the antinomy between utility and exchange value what Ricardo and his school presented long before him as the scientific formula of one single side of this antinomy, that of exchange value. But let us leave posterity alone once and for all, and confront M. Proudhon with his predecessor Ricardo. Here are some extracts from this author which summarize his doctrine on value:

“Utility then is not the measure of exchangeable value, although it is absolutely essential to it.” (Volume I, p. 3, Principes de l’économie politique, etc., translated from the English by F. S. Constancio, Paris 1835)

“Possessing utility, commodities derive their exchangeable value from two sources: from their scarcity, and from the quantity of labour required to obtain them. There are some commodities, the value of which is determined by their
Poverty of Philosophy. Chapter One

scarcity alone. No labour can increase the quantity of such goods, and therefore their value cannot be lowered by an increased supply. Some rare statues and pictures, scarce books... are all of this description. Their value... varies with the varying wealth and inclinations of those who are desirous to possess them.” (Volume I, pp. 4 and 5, l. c.) “These commodities, however, form a very small part of the mass of commodities daily exchanged in the market. By far the greatest part of these goods which are the objects of desire, are procured by labour; and they may be multiplied, not in one country alone, but in many, almost without any assignable limit, if we are disposed to bestow the labour necessary to obtain them.” (Volume I, pp. 5, l. c.)

“In speaking then of commodities, of their exchangeable value, and of the laws which regulate their relative prices, we mean always such commodities only as can be increased in quantity by the exertion of human industry, and on the production of which competition operates without restraint.” (Volume I, p. 5)

Ricardo quotes Adam Smith, who, according to him, “so accurately defined the original source of exchangeable value” (Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations, Book I, Chap 5 [An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, first edition appearing in London, 1776]), and he adds:

“That this (i.e., labour time) is really the foundation of the exchangeable value of all things, excepting those which cannot be increased by human industry, is a doctrine of the utmost importance in political economy; for from no source do so many errors, and so much difference of opinion in that science proceed, as from the vague ideas which are attached to the word value.” (Volume I, p. 8)

“If the quantity of labour realised in commodities regulate their exchangeable value, every increase of the quantity of labour must augment the value of that commodity on which it is exercised, as every diminution must lower it.” (Volume I, p. 8)

Ricardo goes on to reproach Smith:

1. With having “himself erected another standard measure of value” than labour. “Sometimes he speaks of corn, at other times of labour, as a standard measure; not the quantity of labour bestowed on the production of any object, but the quantity it can command in the market.” (Vol. I, pp. 9 and 10)

2. With having “admitted the principle without qualification and at the same time restricted its application to that early and rude state of society, which precedes both the accumulation of stock and the appropriation of land.” (Vol. I, p. 21)

Ricardo sets out to prove that the ownership of land, that is, ground rent, cannot change the relative value of commodities and that the accumulation of capital has only a passing and fluctuating effect on the relative values determined by the comparative quantity of labour expended on their production. In support of this thesis, he gives his famous theory of ground rent, analyses capital, and ultimately finds nothing in it but accumulated labour. Then he develops a whole theory of wages and profits, and proves that wages and profits rise and fall in inverse ratio to each other, without affecting the relative value of the product. He does not neglect the influence that the accumulation of capital and its different aspects (fixed capital and circulating capital), as also the rate of wages, can have on the proportional value of products. In fact, they are the chief problems with which Ricardo is concerned.
“Economy in the use of labour never fails to reduce the relative value* of a commodity, whether the saving be in the labour necessary to the manufacture of the commodity itself, or in that necessary to the formation of the capital, by the aid of which it is produced.” (Vol. I, p. 28) “Under such circumstance the value of the deer, the produce of the hunter’s day’s labour, would be exactly equal to the value of the fish, the produce of the fisherman’s day’s labour. The comparative value of the fish and the game would be entirely regulated by the quantity of labour realised in each, whatever might be the quantity of production, or however high or low general wages or profits might be.” (Vol. I, p. 28) “In making labour the foundation of the value of commodities and the comparative quantity of labour which is necessary to their production, the rule which determines the respective quantities of goods which shall be given in exchange for each other, we must not be supposed to deny the accidental and temporary deviations of the actual or market price of commodities from this, their primary and natural price.” (Vol. I, p. 105, l. c.) “It is the cost of production which must ultimately regulate the price of commodities, and not, as has been often said, the proportion between supply and demand.” (Vol. II, p. 253)

Lord Lauderdale had developed the variations of exchange value according to the law of supply and demand, or of scarcity and abundance relatively to demand. In his opinion the value of a thing can increase when its quantity decreases or when the demand for it increases; it can decrease owing to an increase of its quantity or owing to the decrease in demand. Thus the value of a thing can change through eight different causes, namely, four causes that apply to money or to any other commodity which serves as a measure of its value. Here is Ricardo’s refutation:

“Commodities which are monopolised, either by an individual, or by a company, vary according to the law which Lord Lauderdale has laid down: they fall in proportion as the sellers augment their quantity, and rise in proportion to the eagerness of the buyers to purchase them; their price has no necessary connexion with their natural value; but the prices of commodities, which are subject to competition, and whose quantity may be increased in any moderate degree, will ultimately depend, not on the state of demand and supply, but on the increased or diminished cost of their production.” (Vol. II, p. 259)

We shall leave it to the reader to make the comparison between this simple, clear, precise language of Ricardo’s and M. Proudhon’s rhetorical attempts to arrive at the determination of relative value by labour time.

Ricardo shows us the real movement of bourgeois production, which constitutes value. M. Proudhon, leaving the real movement out of account, “fumes and frets” in order to invent new processes and to achieve the reorganisation of the world on a would-be new formula, which formula is no more than the theoretical expression of the real movement which exists and which is so well described by Ricardo. Ricardo takes his starting point from present-day society to demonstrate to us how it constitutes value – M. Proudhon takes constituted value as his starting point to construct a new social world with the aid of this value. For him, M. Proudhon, constituted value must move around and become once more the constituting factor in a world already completely constituted according to this mode of evaluation. The determination of value by labour time is, for Ricardo, the law of exchange value; for M. Proudhon, it is the synthesis of

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* Ricardo, as is well known, determines the value of a commodity by the quantity of labour necessary for its production. Owing, however, to the prevailing form of exchange in every mode of production based on production of commodities, including therefore the capitalist mode of production, this value is not expressed directly in quantities of labour but in quantities of some other commodity. The value of a commodity expressed in a quantity of some other commodity (whether money or not) is termed by Ricardo its relative value. [Note by Engels to 1885 German edition]
use value and exchange value. Ricardo’s theory of values is the scientific interpretation of actual economic life; M. Proudhon’s theory of values is the utopian interpretation of Ricardo’s theory. Ricardo establishes the truth of his formula by deriving it from all economic relations, and by explaining in this way all phenomena, even those like ground rent, accumulation of capital and the relation of wages to profits, which at first sight seems to contradict it; it is precisely that which makes his doctrine a scientific system: M. Proudhon, who has rediscovered this formula of Ricardo’s by means of quite arbitrary hypotheses, is forced thereafter to seek out isolated economic facts which he twists and falsifies to pass them off as examples, already existing applications, beginning of realization of his regenerating idea. (See our §3. Application of Constituted Value)

Now let us pass on to the conclusions M. Proudhon draws from value constituted (by labour time).

– A certain quantity of labour is equivalent to the product created by this same quantity of labour.

– Each day’s labour is worth as much as another day’s labour; that is to say, if the quantities are equal, one man’s labour is worth as much as another man’s labour: there is no qualitative difference. With the same quantity of work, one man’s product can be given in exchange for another man’s product. All men are wage workers getting equal pay for an equal time of work. Perfect equality rules the exchanges.

Are these conclusions the strict, natural consequences of value “constituted” or determined by labour time?

If the relative value of a commodity is determined by the quantity of labour required to produce it, it follows naturally that the relative value of labour, or wages, is likewise determined by the quantity of labour needed to produce the wages. Wages, that is, the relative value or the price of labour, are thus determined by the labour time needed to produce all that is necessary for the maintenance of the worker.

“Diminish the cost of production of hats, and their price will ultimately fall to their own new natural price, although the demand should be doubled, trebled, or quadrupled. Diminish the cost of subsistence of men, by diminishing the natural price of food and clothing, by which life is sustained, and wages will ultimately fall, notwithstanding the demand for labourers may very greatly increase.”

(Ricardo, Vol. II, p. 253)

Doubtless, Ricardo’s language is as cynical as can be. To put the cost of manufacture of hats and the cost of maintenance of men on the same plane is to turn men into hats. But do not make an outcry at the cynicism of it. The cynicism is in the facts and not in the words which express the facts. French writers like M.M. Droz, Blanqui, Rossi and others take an innocent satisfaction in proving their superiority over the English economists, by seeking to observe the etiquette of a “humanitarian” phraseology; if they reproach Ricardo and his school for their cynical language, it is because it annoys them to see economic relations exposed in all their crudity, to see the mysteries of the bourgeoisie unmasked.

To sum up: Labour, being itself a commodity, is measured as such by the labour time needed to produce the labour-commodity. And what is needed to produce this labour-commodity? Just enough labour time to produce the objects indispensable to the constant maintenance of labour, that is, to keep the worker alive and in a condition to propagate his race. The natural price of labour is no other than the minimum wage.” If the current rate of wages rises above this natural

* The thesis that the “natural,” i.e., normal, price of labour power coincides with the minimum wage, i.e., with the equivalent in value of the means of subsistence absolutely indispensable for the life and procreation of the worker, was first put forward by me in Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy (Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, Paris, 1844)
price, it is precisely because the law of value put as a principle by M. Proudhon happens to be counterbalanced by the consequences of the varying relations of supply and demand. But the minimum wage is nonetheless the centre towards which the current rates of wages gravitate.

Thus relative value, measured by labour time, is inevitably the formula of the present enslavement of the worker, instead of being, as M. Proudhon would have it, the “revolutionary theory” of the emancipation of the proletariat.

Let us now see to what extent the application of labour time as a measure of value is incompatible with the existing class antagonism and the unequal distribution of the product between the immediate worker and the owner of accumulated labour.

Let us take a particular product: broadcloth, which has required the same quantity of labour as the linen.

If there is an exchange of these two products, there is an exchange of equal quantities of labour. In exchanging these equal quantities of labour time, one does not change the reciprocal position of the producers, any more than one changes anything in the situation of the workers and manufacturers among themselves. To say that this exchange of products measured by labour time results in an equality of payment for all the producers is to suppose that equality of participation in the product existed before the exchange. When the exchange of broadcloth for linen has been accomplished, the producers of broadcloth will share in the linen in a proportion equal to that in which they previously shared in the broadcloth.

M. Proudhon’s illusion is brought about by his taking for a consequence what could be at most but a gratuitous supposition.

Let us go further.

Does labour time, as the measure of value, suppose at least that the days are equivalent, and that one man’s day is worth as much as another’s? No.

Let us suppose for a moment that a jeweller’s day is equivalent to three days of a weaver; the fact remains that any change in the value of jewels relative to that of woven materials, unless it be the transitory result of the fluctuations of supply and demand, must have as its cause a reduction or an increase in the labour time expended in the production of one or the other. If three working days of different workers be related to one another in the ratio of 1:2:3, then every change in the relative value of their products will be a change in this same proportion of 1:2:3. Thus values can be measured by labour time, in spite of the inequality of value of different working days; but to apply such a measure we must have a comparative scale of the different working days: it is competition that sets up this scale.

Is your hour’s labour worth mine? That is a question which is decided by competition.

Competition, according to an American economist, determines how many days of simple labour are contained in one day’s compound labour. Does not this reduction of days of compound labour to days of simple labour suppose that simple labour is itself taken as a measure of value? If the mere quantity of labour functions as a measure of value regardless of quality, it presupposes that simple labour has become the pivot of industry. It presupposes that labour has been equalized by the subordination of man to the machine or by the extreme division of labour; that men are effaced by their labour; that the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the
relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Therefore, we should not say that one man’s hour is worth another man’s hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcass. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything; hour for hour, day for day; but this equalising of labour is not by any means the work of M. Proudhon’s eternal justice; it is purely and simply a fact of modern industry.

In the automatic workshop, one worker’s labour is scarcely distinguishable in any way from another worker’s labour: workers can only be distinguished one from another by the length of time they take for their work. Nevertheless, this quantitative difference becomes, from a certain point of view, qualitative, in that the time they take for their work depends partly on purely material causes, such as physical constitution, age and sex; partly on purely negative moral causes, such as patience, imperturbability, diligence. In short, if there is a difference of quality in the labour of different workers, it is at most a quality of the last kind, which is far from being a distinctive speciality. This is what the state of affairs in modern industry amounts to in the last analysis. It is upon this equality, already realised in automatic labour, that M. Proudhon wields his smoothing-plane of “equalisation,” which he means to establish universally in “time to come!”

All the “equalitarian” consequences which M. Proudhon deduces from Ricardo’s doctrine are based on a fundamental error. He confounds the value of commodities measured by the quantity of labour embodied in them with the value of commodities measured by “the value of labour.” If these two ways of measuring the value of commodities were equivalent, it could be said indifferently that the relative value of any commodity is measured by the quantity of labour embodied in it; or that it is measured by the quantity of labour it can buy; or again that it is measured by the quantity of labour which can acquire it. But this is far from being so. The value of labour can no more serve as a measure of value than the value of any other commodity. A few examples will suffice to explain still better what we have just stated.

If a quarter of corn cost two days’ labour instead of one, it would have twice its original value; but it would not set in operation double the quantity of labour, because it would contain no more nutritive matter than before. Thus the value of the corn, measured by the quantity of labour used to produce it, would have doubled; but measured either by the quantity of labour it can buy or the quantity of labour with which it can be bought, it would be far from having doubled. On the other hand, if the same labour produced twice as many clothes as before, their relative value would fall by half; but, nevertheless, this double quantity of clothing would not thereby be reduced to disposing over only half the quantity of labour, nor could the same labour command the double quantity of clothing; for half the clothes would still go on rendering the worker the same service as before.

Thus it is going against economic facts to determine the relative value of commodities by the value of labour. It is moving in a vicious circle, it is to determine relative value by a relative value which itself needs to be determined.

It is beyond doubt that M. Proudhon confuses the two measures, measure by the labour time needed for the production of a commodity and measure by the value of the labour.

“Any man’s labour,” he says, “can buy the value it represents.”

Thus, according to him, a certain quantity of labour embodied in a product is equivalent to the worker’s payment, that is, to the value of labour. It is the same reasoning that makes him confuse cost of production with wages.

“What are wages? They are the cost price of corn, etc., the integral price of all things. Let us go still further. Wages are the proportionality of the elements which compose wealth.”

What are wages? They are the value of labour.
Adam Smith takes as the measure of value, now the time of labour needed for the production of a commodity, now the value of labour. Ricardo exposes this error by showing clearly the disparity of these two ways of measuring. M. Proudhon goes one better than Adam Smith in error by identifying the two things which the latter had merely put in juxtaposition.

It is in order to find the proper proportion in which workers should share in the products, or, in other words, to determine the relative value of labour, that M. Proudhon seeks a measure for the relative value of commodities. To find out the measure for the relative value of commodities he can think of nothing better than to give as the equivalent of a certain quantity of labour the sum total of the products it has created, which is as good as supposing that the whole of society consists merely of workers who receive their own produce as wages. In the second place, he takes for granted the equivalence of the working days of different workers. In short, he seeks the measure of the relative value of commoditising order to arrive at equal payment for the workers, and he takes the equality of wages as an already established fact, in order to go off on the search for the relative value of commodities. What admirable dialectics!

“Say and the economists after him have observed that labour being itself subject to valuation, being a commodity like any other commodity, it is moving in a vicious circle to treat it as the principle and the determining cause of value. In so doing, these economists, if they will allow me to say so, show a prodigious carelessness. Labour is said to have value not as a commodity itself, but in view of the values which it is supposed potentially to contain. The value of labour is a figurative expression, an anticipation of the cause for the effect. It is a fiction of the same stamp as the productivity of capital. Labour produces, capital has value... By a sort of ellipsis one speaks of the value of labour.... Labour like liberty ... is a thing vague and indeterminate by nature, but defined qualitatively by its object, that is to say, it becomes a reality by the product.”

“But is there any need to dwell on this? The moment the economist (read M. Proudhon) changes the name of things, vera rerum vocabula (the true name of things), he is implicitly confessing his impotence and proclaiming himself not privy to the cause.” (Proudhon, Vol. I, p. 188)

We have seen that M. Proudhon makes the value of labour the “determining cause” of the value of products to such an extent that for him wages, the official name for the “value of labour,” form the integral price of all things: that is why Say’s objection troubles him. In labour as a commodity, which is a grim reality, he sees nothing but a grammatical ellipsis. Thus the whole of existing society, founded on labour as a commodity, is henceforth founded on a poetic licence, a figurative expression. If society wants to “eliminate all the drawbacks” that assail it, well, let it eliminate all the ill-sounding terms, change the language; and to this end it has only to apply to the Academy for a new edition of its dictionary. After all that we have just seen, it is easy for us to understand why M. Proudhon, in a work on political economy, has to enter upon long dissertations on etymology and other parts of grammar. Thus he is still learnedly discussing the antiquated derivation of servus [a slave, servant] from servare [To preserve]. These philological dissertations have a deep meaning, an esoteric meaning – they form an essential part of M. Proudhon’s argument.

Labour,* inasmuch as it is bought and sold, is a commodity like any other commodity, and has, in consequence, an exchange value. But the value of labour, or labour as a commodity, produces as little as the value of wheat, or wheat as a commodity, serves as food.

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* In the copy Marx presented to N. Utina in 1876 after this word “labour” Marx adds “labour power;” this addition is found in the 1896 French edition.
Labour “is worth” more or less, according to whether food commodities are more or less dear, whether the supply and demand of hands exist to such or such a degree, etc., etc.

Labour is not a “vague thing”; it is always some definite labour, it is never labour in general that is bought and sold. It is not only labour that is qualitatively defined by the object; but also the object which is determined by the specific quality of labour.

Labour, in so far as it is bought and sold, is itself a commodity. Why is it bought? “Because of the values it is supposed potentially to contain.” But if a certain thing is said to be a commodity, there is no longer any question as to the reason why it is bought, that is, as to the utility to be derived from it, the application to be made of it. It is a commodity as an object of traffic. All M. Proudhon’s arguments are limited to this: labour is not bought as an immediate object of consumption. No, it is bought as an instrument of production, as a machine would be bought. As a commodity, labour has no value and does not produce. M. Proudhon might just as well have said that there is no such thing as a commodity, since every commodity is obtained merely for some utilitarian purpose, and never as a commodity in itself.

In measuring the value of commodities by labour, M. Proudhon vaguely glimpses the impossibility of excluding labour from this same measure, in so far as labour has a value, as labour is a commodity. He has a misgiving that it is turning the wage minimum into the natural and normal price of immediate labour, that it is accepting the existing state of society. So, to get away from this fatal consequence, he faces about and asserts that labour is not a commodity, that it cannot have value. He forgets that he himself has taken the value of labour as a measure, he forgets that his whole system rests on labour as a commodity, on labour which is bartered, bought, sold, exchanged for produce, etc., on labour, in fact, which is an immediate source of income for the worker. He forgets everything.

To save his system, he consents to sacrifice its basis.

*Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas!* [And for the sake of life to lose the reasons for living]

We now come to a new definition of “constituted value.”

“Value is the proportional relation of the products which constitute wealth.”

Let us note in the first place that the single phrase “relative or exchange value” implies the idea of some relation in which products are exchanged reciprocally. By giving the name “proportional relation” to this relation, no change is made in the relative value, except in the expression. Neither the depreciation nor the enhancement of the value of a product destroys its quality of being in some “proportional relation” with the other products which constitute wealth.

Why then this new term, which introduces no new idea?

“Proportional relation” suggests many other economic relations, such as proportionality in production, the true proportion between supply and demand, etc., and M. Proudhon is thinking of all that when he formulates this didactic paraphrase of marketable value.

In the first place, the relative value of products being determined by the comparative amount of labour used in the production of each of them, proportional relations, applied to this special case, stand for the respective quota of products which can be manufactured in a given time, and which in consequence are given in exchange for one another.

Let us see what advantage M. Proudhon draws from this proportional relation.

Everyone knows that when supply and demand are evenly balanced, the relative value of any product is accurately determined by the quantity of labour embodied in it, that is to say, that this relative value expresses the proportional relation precisely in the sense we have just attached to it. M. Proudhon inverts the order of things. Begin, he says, by measuring the relative value of a product by the quantity of labour embodied in it, and supply and demand will infallibly balance one another. Production will correspond to consumption, the product will always be
exchangeable. Its current price will express exactly its true value. Instead of saying like everyone else: when the weather is fine, a lot of people are to be seen going out for a walk. M. Proudhon makes his people go out for a walk in order to be able to ensure them fine weather.

What M. Proudhon gives as the consequence of marketable value determined a priori by labour time could be justified only by a law couched more or less in the following terms:

Products will in future be exchanged in the exact ratio of the labour time they have cost. Whatever may be the proportion of supply to demand, the exchange of commodities will always be made as if they had been produced proportionately to the demand. Let M. Proudhon take it upon himself to formulate and lay down such a law, and we shall relieve him of the necessity of giving proofs. If, on the other hand, he insists on justifying his theory, not as a legislator, but as an economist, he will have to prove that the time needed to create a commodity indicates exactly the degree of its utility and marks its proportional relation to the demand, and in consequence, to the total amount of wealth. In this case, if a product is sold at a price equal to its cost of production, supply and demand will always be evenly balanced; for the cost of production is supposed to express the true relation between supply and demand.

Actually, M. Proudhon sets out to prove that labour time needed to create a product indicates its true proportional relation to needs, so that the things whose production costs the least time are the most immediately useful, and so on, step by step. The mere production of a luxury object proves at once, according to this doctrine, that society has spare time which allows it to satisfy a need for luxury.

M. Proudhon finds the very proof of his thesis in the observation that the most useful things cost the least time to produce, that society always begins with the easiest industries and successively “starts on the production of objects which cost more labour time and which correspond to a higher order of needs.”

M. Proudhon borrows from M. Dunoyer the example of extractive industry – fruit-gathering, pasturage, hunting, fishing, etc. – which is the simplest, the least costly of industries, and the one by which man began “the first day of his second creation.” The first day of his first creation is recorded in Genesis, which shows God as the world’s first manufacturer.

Things happen in quite a different way from what M. Proudhon imagines. The very moment civilisation begins, production begins to be founded on the antagonism of orders, estates, classes, and finally on the antagonism of accumulated labour and actual labour. No antagonism, no progress. This is the law that civilisation has followed up to our days. Till now the productive forces have been developed by virtue of this system of class antagonisms. To say now that, because all the needs of all the workers were satisfied, men could devote themselves to the creation of products of a higher order – to more complicated industries – would be to leave class antagonism out of account and turn all historical development upside down. It is like saying that because, under the Roman emperors, muraena were fattened in artificial fishponds, therefore there was enough to feed abundantly the whole Roman population. Actually, on the contrary, the Roman people had not enough to buy bread with, while the Roman aristocrats had slaves enough to throw as fodder to the muraena.

The price of food has almost continuously risen, while the price of manufactured and luxury goods has almost continuously fallen. Take the agricultural industry itself; the most indispensable objects, like corn, meat, etc., rise in price, while cotton, sugar, coffee, etc., fall in a surprising proportion. And even among comestibles proper, the luxury articles, like artichokes, asparagus, etc., are today relatively cheaper than foodstuffs of prime necessity. In our age, the superfluous is easier to produce than the necessary. Finally, at different historical epochs, the reciprocal price relations are not only different, but opposed to one another. In the whole of the Middle Ages, agricultural products were relatively cheaper than manufactured products; in modern times they
are in inverse ratio. Does this mean that the utility of agricultural products has diminished since the Middle Ages?

The use of products is determined by the social conditions in which the consumers find themselves placed, and these conditions themselves are based on class antagonism.

Cotton, potatoes and spirits are objects of the most common use. Potatoes have engendered scrofula; cotton has to a great extent driven out flax and wool, although wool and flax are, in many cases, of greater utility, if only from the point of view of hygiene; finally, spirits have got the upper hand of beer and wine, although spirits used as an alimentary substance are everywhere recognised to be poison. For a whole century, governments struggled in vain against the European opium; economics prevailed, and dictated its orders to consumption.

Why are cotton, potatoes and spirits the pivots of bourgeois society? Because the least amount of labour is needed to produce them, and, consequently, they have the lowest price. Why does the minimum price determine the maximum consumption? Is it by any chance because of the absolute utility of these objects, their intrinsic utility, their utility insomuch as they correspond, in the most useful manner, in the needs of the worker as a man, and not to the man as a worker? No, it is because in a society founded on poverty the poorest products have the fatal prerogative of being used by the greatest number.

To say now that because the least costly things are in greater use, they must be of greater utility, is saying that the wide use of spirits, because of their low cost of production, is the most conclusive proof of their utility; it is telling the proletarian that potatoes are more wholesome for him than meat; it is accepting the present state of affairs; it is, in short, making an apology, with M. Proudhon, for a society without understanding it.

In a future society, in which class antagonism will have ceased, in which there will no longer be any classes, use will no longer be determined by the minimum time of production; but the time of production devoted to different articles will be determined by the degree of their social utility.

To return to M. Proudhon’s thesis: the moment the labour time necessary for the production of an article ceases to be the expression of its degree of utility, the exchange value of this same article, determined beforehand by the labour time embodied in it, becomes quite usable to regulate the true relation of supply to demand, that is, the proportional relation in the sense M. Proudhon at the moment attributes to it.

It is not the sale of a given product at the price of its cost of production that constitutes the “proportional relation” of supply to demand, or the proportional quota of this product relatively to the sum total of production; it is the variations in supply and demand that show the producer what amount of a given commodity he must produce in order to receive in exchange at least the cost of production. And as these variations are continually occurring, there is also a continual movement of withdrawal and application of capital in the different branches of industry.

“It is only in consequence of such variations that capital is apportioned precisely, in the requisite abundance and no more, to the production of the different commodities which happen to be in demand. With the rise or fall of price, profits are elevated above, or depressed below their general level, and capital is either encouraged to enter into, or is warned to depart from, the particular employment in which the variation has taken place.”

“When we look at the markets of a large town, and observe how regularly they are supplied both with home and foreign commodities, in the quantity in which they are required, under all the circumstances of varying demand, arising from the caprice of taste, or a change in the amount of population, without often producing either the effects of a glut from a too abundant supply, or an enormously high price from the supply being unequal to the demand, we must confess that the principle which apportions capital to each trade in the precise amount that is required, is more active than is generally supposed.” (Ricardo, Vol. I, pp. 105 and 108)
If M. Proudhon admits that the value of products is determined by labour time, he should equally admit that it is the fluctuating movement alone that in societies founded on individual exchanges make labour the measure of value. There is no ready-made constituted “proportional relation,” but only a constituting movement.

We have just seen in what sense it is correct to speak of “proportion” as of a consequence of value determined by labour time. We shall see now how this measure by time, called by M. Proudhon the “law of proportion,” becomes transformed into a law of disproportion.

Every new invention that enables the production in one hour of that which has hitherto been produced in two hours depreciates all similar products on the market. Competition forces the producer to sell the product of two hours as cheaply as the product of one hour. Competition carries into effect the law according to which the relative value of a product is determined by the labour time needed to produce it. Labour time serving as the measure of marketable value becomes in this way the law of the continual depreciation of labour. We will say more. There will be depreciation not only of the commodities brought into the market, but also of the instruments of production and of whole plants. This fact was already pointed out by Ricardo when he said:

“By constantly increasing the facility of production, we constantly diminish the value of some of the commodities before produced.” (Vol. II, p. 59)

Sismondi goes further. He sees in this “value constituted” by labour time, the source of all the contradictions of modern industry and commerce.

“Mercantile value,” he says, “is always determined in the long run by the quantity of labour needed to obtain the thing evaluated: it is not what it has actually cost, but what it would cost in the future with, perhaps, perfected means; and this quantity, although difficult to evaluate, is always faithfully established by competition.... It is on this basis that the demand of the seller as well as the supply of the buyer is reckoned. The former will perhaps declare that the thing has cost him 10 days’ labour; but if the latter realises that it can henceforth be produced with eight days’ labour, in the event of competition proving this to the two contracting parties, the value will be reduced, and the market price fixed at eight days only. Of course, each of the parties believes that the thing is useful, that it is desired, that without desire there would be no sale; but the fixing of the price has nothing to do with utility.” (Etudes, etc., Vol. II, p. 267)

It is important to emphasise the point that what determines value is not the time taken to produce a thing, but the minimum time it could possibly be produced in, and the minimum is ascertained by competition. Suppose for a moment that there is no more competition and consequently no longer any means to ascertain the minimum of labour necessary for the production of a commodity; what will happen? It will suffice to spend six hours’ work on the production of an object, in order to have the right, according to M. Proudhon, to demand in exchange six times as much as the one who has taken only one hour to produce the same object.

Instead of a “proportional relation,” we have a disproportional relation, at any rate if we insist on sticking to relations, good or bad.

The continual depreciation of labour is only one side, one consequence of the evaluation of commodities by labour time. The excessive raising of prices, overproduction and many other features of industrial anarchy have their explanation in this mode of evaluation.

But does labour time used as a measure of value give rise at least to the proportional variety of products that so delights M. Proudhon?

On the contrary, monopoly in all its monotony follows in its wake and invades the world of products, just as to everybody’s knowledge monopoly invades the world of the instruments of production. It is only in a few branches of industry, like the cotton industry, that very rapid
progress can be made. The natural consequence of this progress is that the products of cotton manufacture, for instance, fall rapidly in price: but as the price of cotton goes down, the price of flax will be replaced by cotton. In this way, flax has been driven out of almost the whole of North America. And we have obtained, instead of the proportional variety of products, the dominance of cotton.

What is left of this “proportional relation”? Nothing but the pious wish of an honest man who would like commodities to be produced in proportions which would permit of their being sold at an honest price. In all ages good-natured bourgeois and philanthropic economists have taken pleasure in expressing this innocent wish.

Let us hear what old Boisguillebert says:

“The price of commodities,” he says, “must always be proportionate; for it is such mutual understanding alone that can enable them to exist together so as to give themselves to one another at any moment (here is M. Proudhon’s continual exchangeability) and reciprocally give birth to one another. ... “As wealth, then, is nothing but this continual intercourse between man and man, craft and craft, etc., it is a frightful blindness to go looking for the cause of misery elsewhere than in the cessation of such traffic brought about by a disturbance of proportion in prices.” (Dissertation sur la nature des richesses, Daïre’s ed. [pp. 405 and 408]) [Boisguillebert’s work is quoted from the symposium Economistes-financiers du XVIII siecle. Prefaced by a historical sketch on each author and accompanied by commentaries and explanatory notes by Eugene Daïre, Paris, 1843.]

Let us listen also to a modern economist:

“The great law as necessary to be affixed to production, that is, the law of proportion, which alone can preserve the continuity of value.... The equivalent must be guaranteed.... All nations have attempted, at various periods of their history, by instituting numerous commercial regulations and restrictions, to effect, in some degree, the object here explained.... But the natural and inherent selfishness of man... has urged him to break down all such regulations. Proportionate production is the realisation of the entire truth of the Science of Social Economy.” (W. Atkinson, Principles of Political Economy, London 1840, pp. 170-95)

_Fuit Troja._ [Troy is no more.] This true proportion between supply and demand, which is beginning once more to be the object of so many wishes, ceased long ago to exist. It has passed into the stage of senility. It was possible only at a time when the means of production were limited, when the movement of exchange took place within very restricted bounds. With the birth of large-scale industry this true proportion had to come to an end, and production is inevitably compelled to pass in continuous succession through vicissitudes of prosperity, depression, crisis, stagnation, renewed prosperity, and so on.

Those who, like Sismondi, wish to return to the true proportion of production, while preserving the present basis of society, are reactionary, since, to be consistent, they must also wish to bring back all the other conditions of industry of former times.

What kept production in true, or more or less true, proportions? It was demand that dominated supply, that preceded it. Production followed close on the heels of consumption. Large-scale industry, forced by the very instruments at its disposal to produce on an ever-increasing scale, can no longer wait for demand. Production precedes consumption, supply compels demand.

In existing society, in industry based on individual exchange, anarchy of production, which is the source of so much misery, is at the same time the source of all progress.

Thus, one or the other:
Either you want the true proportions of past centuries with present-day means of production, in which case you are both reactionary and utopian.

Or you want progress without anarchy: in which case, in order to preserve the productive forces, you must abandon individual exchange.

Individual exchange is suited only to the small-scale industry of past centuries with its corollary of “true proportion,” or else to large-scale industry with all its train of misery and anarchy.

After all, the determination of value by labour time – the formula M. Proudhon gives us as the regenerating formula of the future – is therefore merely the scientific expression of the economic relations of present-day society, as was clearly and precisely demonstrated by Ricardo long before M. Proudhon.

But does the “equalitarian” application of this formula at least belong to M. Proudhon? Was he the first to think of reforming society by transforming all men into actual workers exchanging equal amounts of labour? Is it really for him to reproach the Communists – these people devoid of all knowledge of political economy, these “obstinately foolish men,” these “paradise dreamers” – with not having found, before him, this “solution of the problem of the proletariat”?

Anyone who is in any way familiar with the trend of political economy in England cannot fail to know that almost all the Socialists in that country have, at different periods, proposed the equalitarian application of the Ricardian theory. We quote for M. Proudhon: Hodgskin, Political Economy, 1827; William Thompson, An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness, 1824; T. R. Edmonds, Practical Moral and Political Economy, 1828 [18], etc., etc., and four pages more of etc. We shall content ourselves with listening to an English Communist, Mr. Bray. We shall give the decisive passages in his remarkable work, Labour’s Wrongs and Labour’s Remedy, Leeds, 1839, and we shall dwell some time upon it, firstly, because Mr. Bray is still little known in France, and secondly, because we think that we have discovered in him the key to the past, present and future works of M. Proudhon.

“The only way to arrive at truth is to go at once to First Principles…. Let us... go at once to the source from whence governments themselves have arisen.... By thus going to the origin of the thing, we shall find that every form of government, and every social and governmental wrong, owes its rise to the existing social system – to the institution of property as it at present exists – and that, therefore, if we would end our wrongs and our miseries at once and for ever, the present arrangements of society must be totally subverted.... By thus fighting them upon their own ground, and with their own weapons, we shall avoid that senseless clatter respecting ‘visionaries’ and ‘theorists’, with which they are so ready to assail all who dare move one step from that beaten track which ‘by authority’, has been pronounced to be the right one. Before the conclusions arrived at by such a course of proceeding can be overthrown, the economists must unsay or disprove those established truths and principles on which their own arguments are founded.” (Bray, pp. 17 and 41) “It is labour alone which bestows value.... Every man has an undoubted right to all that his honest labour can procure him. When he thus appropriates the fruits of his labour, he commits no injustice upon any other human being; for he interferes with no other man’s right of doing the same with the produce of his labour.... All these ideas of superior and inferior – of master and man – may be traced to the neglect of First Principles, and to the consequent rise of inequality of possessions; and such ideas will never be subverted, so long as this inequality is maintained. Men have hitherto blindly hoped to remedy the present unnatural state of things... by destroying existing inequality; but it will be shortly seen... that misgovernment is not a cause, but a consequence – that it is not
the creator, but the created – that is the offspring of inequality of possessions; and that the inequality of possessions is inseparably connected with our present social system.” (Bray, pp. 33, 36 and 37)

“Not only are the greatest advantages, but strict justice also, on the side of a system of equality.... Every man is a link, in the chain of effects – the beginning of which is but an idea, and the end, perhaps, the production of a piece of cloth. Thus, although we may entertain different feelings towards the several parties, it does not follow that one should be better paid for his labour than another. The inventor will ever receive, in addition to his just pecuniary reward, that which genius only can obtain from us – the tribune of our admiration....

“From the very nature of labour and exchange, strict justice not only requires that all exchangers should be mutually, but that they should likewise be equally, benefited. Men have only two things which they can exchange with each other, namely, labour, and the produce of labour.... If a just system of exchanges were acted upon, the value of articles would be determined by the entire cost of production; and equal values should always exchange for equal values. If, for instance, it takes a hatter one day to make a hat, and a shoemaker the same time to make a pair of shoes – supposing the material used by each to be of the same value – and they exchange these articles with each other, they are not only mutually but equally benefitted: the advantage derived by either party cannot be a disadvantage to the other, as each has given the same amount of labour, and the materials made use of by each were of equal value. But if the hatter should obtain two pair of shoes for one hat – time and value of material being as before – the exchange would clearly be an unjust one. The hatter would defraud the shoemaker of one day’s labour; and were the former to act thus in all his exchanges, he would receive, for the labour of half a year, the product of some other person’s whole year. We have heretofore acted upon no other than this most unjust system of exchanges – the workmen have given the capitalist the labour of a whole year, in exchange for the value of only half a year – and from this, and not from the assumed inequality of bodily and mental powers in individuals, has arisen the inequality of wealth and power which at present exists around us. It is an inevitable condition of inequality of exchanges – of buying at one price and selling at another – that capitalists shall continue to be capitalists, and working men to be working men – the one a class of tyrants and the other a class of slaves – to eternity....

“The whole transaction, therefore, plainly shews that the capitalists and proprietors do no more than give the working man, for his labour of one week, a part of the wealth which they obtained from him the week before! – which amounts to giving him nothing for something.... The whole transaction, therefore, between the producer and the capitalist is a palpable deception, a mere farce: it is, in fact, in thousands of instances, no other than a barefaced though legalized robbery.” (Bray, pp. 45, 48, 49 and 50)

”.”. the gain of the employer will never cease to be the loss of the employed – until the exchanges between the parties are equal; and exchanges never can be equal while society is divided into capitalists and producers – the last living upon their labour and the first bloating upon the profit of that labour.

“It is plain that, establish whatever form of government we will... we may talk of morality and brotherly love... no reciprocity can exist where there are unequal exchanges. Inequality of exchanges, as being the cause of inequality of possessions, is the secret enemy that devours us.” (Bray, pp. 51 and 52)
“It has been deduced, also, from a consideration of the intention and end of society, not only that all men should labour, and thereby become exchangers, but that equal values should always exchange for equal values – and that, as the gain of one man ought never to be the loss of another, value should be determined by cost of production. But we have seen, that, under the present arrangements of society... the gain of the capitalist and the rich man is always the loss of the workman – that this result will invariably take place, and the poor man be left entirely at the mercy of the rich man, under any and every form of government, so long as there is inequality of exchanges – and that equality of exchanges can be ensured only under social arrangements in which labour is universal.... If exchanges were equal, would the wealth of the present capitalists gradually go from them to the working classes.” (Bray, pp. 53-55)

“So long as this system of unequal exchanges is tolerated, the producers will be almost as poor and as ignorant and as hardworked as they are at present, even if every governmental burthen be swept away and all taxes be abolished... nothing but a total change of this system – an equality of labour and exchanges – can alter this state of rights.... The producers have but to make an effort – and by them must every effort for their own redemption be made – and their chains will be snapped asunder forever.... As an end, the political equality is there a failure, as a means, also, it is there a failure.

“Where equal exchanges are maintained, the gain of one man cannot be the loss of another; for every exchange is then simply a transfer, and not a sacrifice of labour and wealth. Thus, although under a social system based on equal exchanges, a parsimonious man may become rich, his wealth will be no more than the accumulated produce of his own labour. He may exchange his wealth, or he may give it to others... but a rich man cannot continue wealthy for any length of time after he has ceased to labour. Under equality of exchanges, wealth cannot have, as it now has, a procreative and apparently self-generating power, such as replenishes all waste from consumption; for, unless it be renewed by labour, wealth, when once consumed, is given up for ever. That which is now called profit and interest cannot exist as such in connection with equality of exchanges; for producer and distributor would be alike remunerated, and the sum total of their labour would determine the value of the article created and brought to the hands of the consumer.

“The principle of equal exchanges, therefore, must from its very nature ensure universal labour.” (Bray, pp. 67, 88, 89, 94, 109 and 10)

After having refuted the objections of the economists to communism, Mr. Bray goes on to say:

“If, then a changed character be essential to the success of the social system of community in its most perfect form – and if, likewise, the present system affords no circumstances and no facilities for effecting the requisite change of character and preparing man for the higher and better state desired – it is evident that these things must necessarily remain as they are.... or else some preparatory step must be discovered and made use of – some movement partaking partly of the present and partly of the desired system – some intermediate resting place, to which society may go with all its faults and its follies, and from which it may move forward, imbued with those qualities and attributes without which the system of community and equality cannot as such have existence.” (Bray, p. 134)

“The whole movement would require only co-operation in its simplest form.... Cost of production would in every instance determine value; and equal values
would always exchange for equal values. If one person worked a whole week, and another worked only half a week, the first would receive double the remuneration of the last; but this extra pay of the one would not be at the expense of the other, nor would the loss incurred by the last man fall in any way upon the first. Each person would exchange the wages he individually received for commodities of the same value as his respective wages; and in no case could the gain of one man or one trade be a loss to another man or another trade. The labour of every individual would alone determine his gains of his losses....

"...By means of general and local boards of trade... the quantities of the various commodities required for consumption – the relative value of each in regard to each other – the number of hands required in various trades and descriptions of labour – and all other matters connected with production and distribution, could in a short time be as easily determined for a nation as for an individual company under the present arrangements.... As individuals compose families, and families towns, under the existing system, so likewise would they after the joint-stock change had been effected. The present distribution of people in towns and villages, bad as it is, would not be directly interfered with.... Under this joint-stock system, the same as under that now existing, every individual would be at liberty to accumulate as much as he pleased, and to enjoy such accumulations when and where he might think proper.... The great productive section of the community... is divided into an indefinite number of smaller sections, all working, producing and exchanging their products on a footing of the most perfect equality.... And the joint-stock modification (which is nothing but a concession to present-day society in order to obtain communism), by being so constituted as to admit of individual property in productions in connection with a common property in productive powers – making every individual dependent on his own exertions, and at the same time allowing him an equal participation in every advantage afforded by nature and art – is fitted to take society as it is, and to prepare the way for other and better changes.” (Bray, pp. 158, 160, 162, 168 and 194)

We now only need to reply in a few words to Mr. Bray who without us and in spite of us had managed to supplant M. Proudhon, except that Mr. Bray, far from claiming the last word on behalf of humanity, proposes merely measures which he thinks good for a period of transition between existing society and a community regime.

One hour of Peter’s labour exchanges for one hour of Paul’s labour. That is Mr. Bray’s fundamental axiom.

Let us suppose Peter has 12 hours’ labour before him, and Paul only six. Peter will consequently have six hours’ labour left over. What will he do with these six hours’ labour?

Either he will do nothing with them – in which case he will have worked six hours for nothing; or else he will remain idle for another six hours to get even; or else, as a last resource, he will give these six hours’ labour, which he has no use for, to Paul into the bargain.

What in the end will Peter have earned more than Paul? Some hours of labour? No! He will have gained only hours of leisure; he will be forced to play the loafer for six hours. And in order that this new right to loaf might be not only relished but sought after in the new society, this society would have to find in idleness its highest bliss, and to look upon labour as a heavy shackle from which it must break free at all costs. And indeed, to return to our example, if only these hours of leisure that Peter had gained in excess of Paul were really a gain! Not in the least. Paul, beginning by working only six hours, attains by steady and regular work a result that Peter secures only by beginning with an excess of work. Everyone will want to be Paul, there will be a competition to occupy Paul’s position, a competition in idleness.
Well, then! What has the exchange of equal quantities of labour brought us? Overproduction, depreciation, excess of labour followed by unemployment; in short, economic relations such as we see in present-day society, minus the competition of labour.

No! We are wrong! There is still an expedient which may save this new society of Peters and Pauls. Peter will consume by himself the product of the six hours’ labour which he has left. But since he has no longer to exchange because he has produced, he has no need to produce for exchange; and the whole hypothesis of a society founded on the exchange and division of labour will fall to the ground. Equality of exchange will have been saved by the simple fact that exchange will have ceased to be: Paul and Peter would arrive at the position of Robinson.

Thus, if all the members of society are supposed to be actual workers, the exchange of equal quantities of hours of labour is possible only on condition that the number of hours to be spent on material production is agreed on beforehand. But such an agreement negates individual exchange.

We still come to the same result, if we take as our starting point not the distribution of the products created but the act of production. In large-scale industry, Peter is not free to fix for himself the time of his labour, for Peter’s labour is nothing without the co-operation of all the Peters and all the Pauls who make up the workshop. This explains very well the dogged resistance which the English factory owners put up to the Ten Hours’ Bill. They knew only too well that a two-hours’ reduction of labour granted to women and children would carry with it an equal reduction of working hours for adult men. It is in the nature of large-scale industry that working hours should be equal for all. What is today the result of capital and the competition of workers among themselves will be tomorrow, if you sever the relation between labour and capital, an actual agreement based upon the relation between the sum of productive forces and the sum of existing needs.

But such an agreement is a condemnation of individual exchange, and we are back again at our first conclusion!

In principle, there is no exchange of products – but there is the exchange of the labour which co-operates in production. The mode of exchange of products depends upon the mode of exchange of the productive forces. In general, the form of exchange of products corresponds to the form of production. Change the latter, and the former will change in consequence. Thus in the history of society we see that the mode of exchanging products is regulated by the mode of producing them. Individual exchange corresponds also to a definite mode of production which itself corresponds to class antagonism. There is thus no individual exchange without the antagonism of classes.

But the respectable conscience refuses to see this obvious fact. So long as one is a bourgeois, one cannot but see in this relation of antagonism a relation of harmony and eternal justice, which allows no one to gain at the expense of another. For the bourgeois, individual exchange can exist without any antagonism of classes. For him, these are two quite unconnected things. Individual exchange, as the bourgeois conceives it, is far from resembling individual exchange as it is practised.

Mr. Bray turns the illusion of the respectable bourgeois into an ideal he would like to attain. In a purified individual exchange, freed from all the elements of antagonism he finds in it, he sees an “equalitarian” relation which he would like society to adopt generally.

Mr. Bray does not see that this equalitarian relation, this corrective ideal that he would like to apply to the world, is itself nothing but the reflection of the actual world; and that therefore it is totally impossible to reconstitute society on the basis of what is merely an embellished shadow of

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1 The Ten Hours’ Bill, which applied only to women and children, was passed by the British Parliament on June 8, 1847. Many manufacturers, however, ignored the law in practice. – Ed.
it. In proportion as this shadow takes on substance again, we perceive that this substance, far from being the transfiguration dreamt of, is the actual body of existing society.

§ 3. Application of the Law of the Proportionality of Value

A) Money

“Gold and silver were the first commodities to have their value constituted.” (Vol. I, p. 69)

Thus, gold and silver are the first applications of “value constituted” ... by M. Proudhon. And as M. Proudhon constitutes the value of products determining it by the comparative amount of labour embodied in them, the only thing he had to do was to prove that variations in the value of gold and silver are always explained by variations in the labour time taken to produce them. M. Proudhon has no intention of doing so. He speaks of gold and silver not as commodities, but as money.

His only logic, if logic it be, consists in juggling with the capacity of gold and silver to be used as money for the benefit of all the commodities which have the property of being evaluated by labour time. Decidedly there is more naiveté than malice in this jugglery.

A useful product, once it has been evaluated by the labour time needed to produce it, is always acceptable in exchange; witness, cries M. Proudhon, gold and silver, which exist in my desired conditions of “exchangeability”! Gold and silver, then, are value which has reached a state of constitution: they are the incorporation of M. Proudhon’s idea. He could not have been happier in his choice of an example. Gold and silver, apart from their capacity of being commodities, evaluated like other commodities, in labour time, have also the capacity of being the universal agents of exchange, of being money. By now considering gold and silver as an application of “value constituted” by labour time, nothing is easier than to prove that all commodities whose value is constituted by labour time will always be exchangeable, will be money.

A very simple question occurs to M. Proudhon. Why have gold and silver the privilege of typifying “constituted value?”

“The special function which usage has devolved upon the precious metal, that of serving as a medium for trade, is purely conventional, and any other commodity could, less conveniently perhaps, but just as reliably, fulfil this function. Economists recognize this, and cite more than one example. What then is the reason for this universal preference for metals as money? And what is the explanation of this specialization of the function of money – which has no analogy in political economy?... Is it possible to reconstruct the series from which money seems to have broken away, and hence to trace it back to its true principle?” (Vol. I, pp. 68-69)

Straight away, by formulating the question in these terms, M. Proudhon has presupposed the existence of money. The first question he should have asked himself was, why, in exchanges as they are actually constituted, it has been necessary to individualize exchangeable value, so to speak, by the creation of a special agent of exchange. Money is not a thing, it is a social relation. Why is the money relation a production relation like any other economic relation, such as the division of labour, etc.? If M. Proudhon had properly taken account of this relation, he would not

* Mr. Bray’s theory, like all theories, has found supporters who have allowed themselves to be deluded by appearances. Equitable labour-exchange bazaars have been set up in London, Sheffield, Leeds and many other towns in England. These bazaars have all ended in scandalous failures after having absorbed considerable capital. The taste for them has gone for ever. You are warned, M. Proudhon! [Note by Marx]

It is known that Proudhon did not take this warning to heart. In 1849 he himself made an attempt with a new Exchange Bank in Paris. The bank, however, failed before it had got going properly; a court case against Proudhon had to serve to cover its collapse. [Note by F. Engels to the German edition of 1885]
have seen in money an exception, an element detached from a series unknown or needing reconstruction.

He would have realized, on the contrary, that this relation is a link, and, as such, closely connected with a whole chain of other economic relations; that this relation corresponds to a definite mode of production neither more nor less than does individual exchange. What does he do? He starts off by detaching money from the actual mode of production as a whole, and then makes it the first member of an imaginary series, of a series to be reconstructed.

Once the necessity for a specific agency of exchange, that is, for money, has been recognized, all that remains to be explained is why this particular function has developed upon gold and silver rather than upon any commodity. This is a secondary question, which is explained not by the chain of production relations, but by the specific qualities inherent in gold and silver as substances. If all this has made economists for once “go outside the domains of their own science, to dabble in physics, mechanics, history and so on,” as M. Proudhon reproaches them with doing, they have merely done what they were compelled to do. The question was no longer within the domain of political economy.

“What no economist,” says M. Proudhon, “has either seen or understood is the economic reason which has determined, in favour of the precious metals, the favour they enjoy.” (Vol. I, p. 69)

This economic reason which nobody – with good ground indeed – has seen or understood, M. Proudhon has seen, understood and bequeathed to posterity.

“What nobody else has noticed is that, of all commodities, gold and silver were the first to have their value attain constitution. In the patriarchal period, gold and silver were still bartered and exchanged in ingots but even then they showed a visible tendency to become dominant and received a marked degree of preference. Little by little the sovereigns took possession of them and affixed their seal to them: and of this sovereign consecration was born money, that is, the commodity par excellence, which, notwithstanding all the shocks of commerce, retains a definite proportional value and makes itself accepted for all payments.... The distinguishing characteristic of gold and silver is due, I repeat, to the fact that, thanks to their metallic properties, to the difficulties of their production, and above all to the intervention of state authority, they early won stability and authenticity as commodities.”

To say that, of all commodities, gold and silver were the first to have their value constituted, is to say, after all that has gone before, that gold and silver were the first to attain the status of money. This is M. Proudhon’s great revelation, this is the truth that none had discovered before him.

If, by these words, M. Proudhon means that of all commodities, gold and silver are the ones whose time of production was known the earliest, this would be yet another of the suppositions with which he is so ready to regale his readers. If we wished to harp on this patriarchal erudition, we would inform M. Proudhon that it was the time needed to produce objects of prime necessity, such as iron, etc., which was the first to be known. We shall spare him Adam Smith’s classic bow.

But, after all that, how can M. Proudhon go on talking about the constitution of a value, since a value is never constituted by itself? It is constituted, not by the time needed to produce it by itself, but in relation to the quota of each and every other product which can be created in the same time. Thus the constitution of the value of gold and silver presupposes an already completed constitution of a number of other products.

It is then not the commodity that has attained, in gold and silver, the status of “constituted value,” it is M. Proudhon’s “constituted value” that has attained, in gold and silver, the status of money.
Let us now make a closer examination of these “economic reasons” which, according to M. Proudhon, have bestowed upon gold and silver the advantage of being raised to the status of money sooner than other products, thanks to their having passed through the constitutive phase of value.

These economic reasons are: the “visible tendency to become dominant,” the “marked preferences” even in the “patriarchal period,” and other circumlocutions about the actual fact – which increase the difficulty, since they multiply the fact by multiplying the incidents which M. Proudhon brings in to explain the fact. M. Proudhon has not yet exhausted all the so-called economic reasons. Here is one of sovereign, irresistible force:

“Money is born of sovereign consecration: the sovereigns take possession of gold and silver and affix their seal to them.” (Vol. I, p. 69)

Thus, the whim of sovereigns is for M. Proudhon the highest reason in political economy.

Truly, one must be destitute of all historical knowledge not to know that it is the sovereigns who in all ages have been subject to economic conditions, but they have never dictated laws to them. Legislation, whether political or civil, never does more than proclaim, express in words, the will of economic relations.

Was it the sovereign who took possession of gold and silver to make them the universal agents of exchange by affixing his seal to them? Or was it not, rather, these universal agents of exchange which took possession of the sovereign and forced him to affix his seal to them and thus give them a political consecration?

The impress which was and is still given to money is not that of its value but of its weight. The stability and authenticity M. Proudhon speaks of apply only to the standard of the money; and this standard indicates how much metallic matter there is in a coined piece of money.

“The sole intrinsic value of a silver mark,” says Voltaire, with his habitual good sense, “is a mark of silver, half a pound weighing eight ounces. The weight and the standard alone form this intrinsic value.” (Voltaire, Système de Law)

[Marx quotes a chapter from Voltaire’s Historie de parlement. It is entitled “France in the Period of the Regency and Law’s System.”]

But the question: how much is an ounce of gold or silver worth, remains nonetheless. If a cashmere from the Grand Colbert stores bore the trademark pure wool, this trademark would not tell you the value of the cashmere. There would still remain the question: how much is wool worth?

“Philip I, King of France,” says M. Proudhon, “mixes with Charlemagne’s gold pound a third of alloy, imagining that, having the monopoly of the manufacture of money, he could do what is done by every tradesman who has the monopoly of a product. What was actually this debasement of the currency from which Philip and his successors have been so much blamed? It was perfectly sound reasoning from the point of view of commercial practice, but very unsound economic science, viz., to suppose that, as supply and demand regulate value, it is possible, either by producing an artificial scarcity or by monopolizing manufacture, to increase the estimation and consequently the value of things; and that this is true of gold and silver as of corn, wine, oil or tobacco. But Philip’s fraud was no sooner suspected than his money was reduced to its true value, and he himself lost what he had thought to gain from his subjects. The same thing has happened as a result of every similar attempt.” (Vol. I, pp. 70-71)

It has been proved times without number that, if a prince takes into his head to debase the currency, it is he who loses. What he gains once at the first issue he loses every time the falsified coinage returns to him in the form of taxes, etc. But Philip and his successors were able to protect
themselves more or less against this loss, for, once the debased coinage was put into circulation, they hastened to order a general re-minting of money on the old footing.

And besides, if Philip I had really reasoned like M. Proudhon, he would not have reasoned well “from the commercial point of view.” Neither Philip I nor M. Proudhon displays any mercantile genius in imagining that it is possible to alter the value of gold as well as that of every other commodity merely because their value is determined by the relation between supply and demand.

If King Philip had decreed that one quarter of corn was in future to be called two quarters of wheat, he would have been a swindler. He would have deceived all the rentiers, all the people who were entitled to receive 100 quarters of corn. He would have been the cause of all these people receiving only 50 quarters of corn; he would have had to pay only 50. But in commerce 100 such quarters would never have been worth more than 50. By changing the name we do not change the thing. The quantity of corn, whither supplied or demanded, will be neither decreased nor increased by this mere change of name. Thus, the relation between supply and demand being just the same in spite of this change of name, the price of corn will undergo no real change. When we speak of the supply and demand of things, we do not speak of the supply and demand of the name of things. Philip I was not a maker of gold and silver, as M. Proudhon says; he was a maker of names for coins. Pass off your French cashmeres as Asiatic cashmeres, and you may deceive a buyer or two; but once the fraud becomes known, your so-called Asiatic cashmeres will drop to the price of French cashmeres. When he put a false label on gold and silver, King Philip could deceive only so long as the fraud was not known. Like any other shopkeeper, he deceived his customers by a false description of his wares, which could not last for long. He was bound sooner or later to suffer the rigour of commercial laws. Is this what M. Proudhon wanted to prove? No. According to him, it is from the sovereign and not from commerce that money gets its value. And what has he really proved? That commerce is more sovereign than the sovereign. Let the sovereign decree that one mark shall in future be two marks, commerce will keep on saying that these two marks are worth no more than one mark was formerly.

But, for all that, the question of value determined by the quantity of labour has not been advanced a step. It still remains to be decided whether the value of these two marks (which have become what one mark was once) is determined by the cost of production or by the law of supply and demand.

M. Proudhon continues:

“It should even be borne in mind that if, instead of debasing the currency, it had been in the king’s power to double its bulk, the exchange value of gold and silver would immediately have dropped by half, always from reasons of proportion and equilibrium.” (Vol. I, p. 71)

If this opinion, which M. Proudhon shares with the other economists, is valid, it argues in favour of the latter’s doctrine of supply and demand, and in no way in favour of M. Proudhon’s proportionality. For, whatever the quantity of labour embodied in the doubled bulk of gold and silver, its value would have dropped by half, the demand having remained the same and the supply having doubled. Or can it be, by any chance, that the “law of proportionality” would have become confused this time with the so much disdained law of supply and demand? This true proportion of M. Proudhon’s is indeed so elastic, is capable of so many variations, combinations and permutations, that it might well coincide for once with the relation between supply and demand.

To make “every commodity acceptable in exchange, if not in practice then at least by right,” on the basis of the role of gold and silver is, then, to misunderstand this role. Gold and silver are acceptable by law only because they are acceptable in practice; and they are acceptable in practice because the present organization of production needs a universal medium of exchange. Law is only the official recognition of fact.
We have seen that the example of money as an application of value which has attained
collection was chosen by M. Proudhon only to smuggle through his whole doctrine of
exchangeability, that is to say, to prove that every commodity assessed by its cost of production
must attain the status of money. All this would be very fine, were it not for the awkward fact that
precisely gold and silver, as money, are of all commodities the only ones not determined by their
cost of production; and this is so true that in circulation they can be replaced by paper. So long as
there is a certain proportion observed between the requirements of circulation and the amount of
money issued, be it paper, gold, platinum, or copper money, there can be no question of a
proportion to be observed between the intrinsic value (cost of production) and the nominal value
of money. Doubtless, in international trade, money is determined, like any other commodity, by
labour time. But it is also true that gold and silver in international trade are means of exchange as
products and not as money. In other words, they lose this characteristic of “stability and
authenticity,” of “sovereign consecration,” which, for M. Proudhon, forms their specific
characteristic. Ricardo understood the truth so well that, after basing his whole system on value
determined by labour time, and after saying: “Gold and silver, like all other commodities, are
valuable only in proportion to the quantity of labour necessary to produce them, and bring them
to market.”

He adds, nevertheless, that the value of money is not determined by the labour time its substance
embodies, but by the law of supply and demand only.

“Though it [paper money] has no intrinsic value, yet, by limiting its quantity, its
value in exchange is as great as an equal denomination of coin, or of bullion in
that coin. On the same principle, too, namely, by limitation of its quantity, a
debased coin would circulate at the value it should bear, if it were of the legal
weight and fineness, and not at the value of the quantity of metal which it actually
contained. In the history of the British coinage, we find, accordingly, that the
currency was never depreciated in the same proportion that it was debased; the
reason of which was, that it never was increased in quantity, in proportion to its
diminished intrinsic value.” (Ricardo, loc. cit., pp. 206-07)

This is what J. B. Say observes on this passage of Ricardo’s:

“This example should suffice, I think, to convince the author that the basis of all
value is not the amount of labour needed to make a commodity, but the need felt
for that commodity, balanced by its scarcity.” [The reference is to Say’s note on

Thus money, which for Ricardo is no longer a value determined by labour time, and which J. B.
Say therefore takes as an example to convince Ricardo that the other values could not be
determined by labour time either, this money, I say, taken by J. B. Say as an example of a value
determined exclusively by supply and demand, becomes for M. Proudhon the example par
excellence of the application of value constituted... by labour time.

To conclude, if money is not a value “constituted” by labour time, it is all the less likely that it
could have anything in common with M. Proudhon’s true “proportion.” Gold and silver are
always exchangeable, because they have the special function of serving as the universal agent of
exchange, and in no wise because they exist in a quantity proportional to the sum total of wealth;
or, to put it still better, they are always proportional because, alone of all commodities, they serve
as money, the universal agent of exchange, whatever their quantity in relation to the sum total of
wealth.

“A circulation can never be so abundant as to overflow; for by diminishing its
value, in the same proportion you will increase its quantity, and by increasing its
value, diminish its quantity.” (Ricardo, Vol. II, p. 205)

“What an imbroglio this political economy is!” cries M. Proudhon. (Vol. I, p. 72)
“Cursed gold!” cries a Communist flippantly [through the mouth of M. Proudhon]. You might as well say: “Cursed wheat, cursed vines, cursed sheep! – for just like gold and silver, every commercial value must attain its strictly exact determination.” (Vol. I, p. 73)

The idea of making sheep and vines attain the status of money is not new. In France, it belongs to the age of Louis XIV. At that period, money having begun to establish its omnipotence, the depreciation of all other commodities was being complained of, and the time when “every commercial value” might attain its strictly exact determination, the status of money, was being eagerly invoked. Even in the writings of Boisguillebert, one of the oldest of French economists, we find:

“Money, then, by the arrival of innumerable competitors in the form of commodities themselves, re-established in their true values, will be thrust back again within its natural limits.” (Économistes financiers du dix-huitième siècle, Daire edition, p. 422)

One sees that the first illusions of the bourgeoisie are also their last.

B) Surplus Labour

“In works on political economy we read this absurd hypothesis: If the price of everything were doubled.... As if the price of everything were not the proportion of things – and one could double a proportion, a relation, a law!” (Proudhon, Vol. I, p. 81)

Economists have fallen into this error through not knowing how to apply the “law of proportionality” and of “constituted value.”

Unfortunately in the very same work by M. Proudhon, Volume I, p. 110, we read the absurd hypothesis that, “if wages rose generally, the price of everything else would rise.” Furthermore, if we find the phrase in question in works on political economy, we also find as explanation of it.


Let us pass now to the second application of “constituted value,” and of other proportions – whose only defect is their lack of proportion. And let us see whether M. Proudhon is happier here than in the monetarization of sheep.

“An axiom generally admitted by economists is that all labour must leave a surplus. In my opinion this proposition is universally and absolutely true: it is the corollary of the law of proportion, which may be regarded as the summary of the whole of economic science. But, if the economists will permit me to say so, the principle that all labour must leave a surplus is meaningless according to their theory, and is not susceptible of any demonstration.” (Proudhon, Vol. I, p. 73)

To prove that all labour must leave a surplus, M. Proudhon personifies society; he turns it into a person, Society – a society which is not by any means a society of persons, since it has its law apart, which have nothing in common with the persons of which society is composed, and its “own intelligence,” which is not the intelligence of common men, but an intelligence devoid of common sense. M. Proudhon reproaches the economists with not having understood the
Poverty of Philosophy. Chapter One

personality of this collective being. We have pleasure in confronting him with the following passage from an American economist, who accuses the economists of just the opposite:

“The moral entity – the grammatical being called a nation, has been clothed in attributes that have no real existence except in the imagination of those who metamorphose a word into a thing.... This has given rise to many difficulties and to some deplorable misunderstanding in political economy.” (Th. Cooper, Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy, Colombia, 1826) [The first edition of the book was published in Colombia in 1826. A second, enlarged edition appeared in London in 1831.]

“This principle of surplus labour,” continues M. Proudhon, “is true of individuals only because it emanates from society, which thus confers on them the benefit of its own laws.” (Vol. I, p. 75)

Does M. Proudhon mean thereby merely that the production of the social individual exceeds that of the isolated individual? Is M. Proudhon referring to this excess of the production of associated individuals over that of non-associated individuals? If so, we could quote for him a hundred economists who have expressed this simple truth without any of the mysticism with which M. Proudhon surrounds himself. This, for example, is what Mr. Sadler says:

“Combined labour produces results which individual exertion could never accomplish. As mankind, therefore, multiply in number, the products of their united industry would greatly exceed the amount of any mere arithmetical addition calculated on such an increase.... In the mechanical arts, as well as in pursuits of science, a man may achieve more in a day... than a solitary... individual could perform in his whole life.... Geometry says... that the whole is only equal to the sum of all its parts; as applied to the subject before us, this axiom would be false. Regarding labour, the great pillar of human existence, it may be said that the entire product of combined exertion almost infinitely exceeds all which individual and disconnected efforts could possibly accomplish.” (T. Sadler, The Law of Population, Vol. I, pp. 83 and 84, London, 1830)

To return to M. Proudhon. Surplus labour, he says, is explained by the person, Society. The life of this person is guided by laws, the opposite of those which govern the activities of man as an individual. He desires to prove this by “facts.”

“The discovery of an economic process can never provide the inventor with a profit equal to that which he procures for society.... It has been remarked that railway enterprises are much less a source of wealth for the contractors than for the state.... The average cost of transporting commodities by road is 18 centimes per ton per kilometre, from the collection of the goods to their delivery. It has been calculated that at this rate an ordinary railway enterprise would not obtain 10 per cent net profit, a result approximately equal to that of a road-transport enterprise. But let us suppose that the speed of rail transport compared with that of road transport is as 4 is to 1. Since in society time is value itself, the railway would, prices being equal, present an advantage of 400 per cent over road-transport. Yet this enormous advantage, very real for society, is far from being realized in the same proportion for the carrier, who, while bestowing upon society an extra value of 400 per cent, does not for his own part draw 10 per cent. To bring the matter home still more pointedly, let us suppose, in fact, that the railway puts up its rate to 25 centimes, the cost of road transport remaining at 18: it would instantly lose all its consignments. Senders, receivers, everybody would return to the van, to the primitive waggon if necessary. The locomotive would be abandoned. A social advantage of 400 per cent would be sacrificed to a private
loss of 35 per cent. The reason for this is easily grasped: the advantage resulting from the speed of the railway is entirely social, and each individual participates in it only in a minute proportion (it must be remembered that at the moment we are dealing only with the transport of goods), while the loss strikes the consumer directly and personally. A social profit equal to 400 represents for the individual, if society is composed only of a million men, four ten-thousandths; while a loss of 33 per cent for the consumer would suppose a social deficit of 33 million.” (Proudhon Vol. I, p. 75-76)

Now, we may even overlook the fact that M. Proudhon expresses a quadrupled speed as 400 per cent of the original speed; but that he should bring into relation the percentage of speed and the percentage of profit and establish a proportion between two relations which, although measured separately by percentages, are nevertheless incommensurate with each other, is to establish a proportion between the percentages without reference to denominations.

Percentages are always percentages, 10 per cent and 400 per cent are commensurable; they are to each other as 10 is to 400. Therefore, concludes M. Proudhon, a profit of 10 per cent is worth 40 times less than a quadrupled speed. To save appearances, he says that, for society, time is money. This error arises from his recollecting vaguely that there is a connexion between labour value and labour time, and he hastens to identify labour time with transport time; that is, he identifies the few firemen, drivers and others, whose labour time is actually transport time, with the whole of society. Thus at one blow, speed has become capital, and in this case he is fully right in saying: “A profit of 400 per cent will be sacrificed to a loss of 35 per cent.” After establishing this strange proposition as a mathematician, he gives us the explanation of it as an economist.

“A social profit equal to 400 represents for the individual, in a society of only a million men, four ten-thousandths.” Agreed; but we are dealing not with 400, but with 400 per cent, and a profit of 400 per cent represents for the individual 400 per cent, neither more nor less. Whatever be the capital, the dividends will always be in the ratio of 400 per cent. What does M. Proudhon do? He takes percentages for capital, and, as if he were afraid of his confusion not being manifest enough, “pointed” enough, he continues:

“A loss of 33 per cent for the consumer would suppose a social deficit of 33 million.” A loss of 33 per cent for the consumer remains a loss of 33 per cent for a million consumers. How then can M. Proudhon say pertinent that the social deficit in the case of a 33 per cent loss amounts to 33 million, when he knows neither the social capital nor even the capital of a single one of the persons concerned? Thus it was not enough for M. Proudhon to have confused capital with percentage; he surpasses himself by identifying the capital sunk in an enterprise with the number of interested parties.

“To bring the matter home still more pointedly let us suppose in fact” a given capital. A social profit of 400 per cent divided among a million participants, each of them interested to the extent of one franc, would give 4 francs profit per head – and not 0.0004, as M. Proudhon alleges. Likewise a loss of 33 per cent for each of the participants represents a social deficit of 330,000 francs and not of 33 million (100:33 = 1,000,000:330,000).

M. Proudhon, preoccupied with his theory of the person, Society, forgets to divide by 100, which entails a loss of 330,000 francs; but 4 francs profit per head make 4 million francs profit for society. There remains for society a net profit of 3,670,000 francs. This accurate calculation proves precisely the contrary of what M. Proudhon wanted to prove: namely, that the profits and losses of society are not in inverse ratio to the profits and losses of individuals.

Having rectified these simple errors of pure calculation, let us take a look at the consequences which we would arrive at, if we admitted this relation between speed and capital in the case of railways, as M. Proudhon gives it – minus the mistakes in calculation. Let us suppose that a transport four times as rapid costs four times as much; this transport would not yield less profit
than cartage, which is four times slower and costs a quarter the amount. Thus, if cartage takes 18 centimes, rail transport could take 72 centimes. This would be, according to “the rigor of mathematics,” the consequence of M. Proudhon’s suppositions – always minus his mistakes in calculation. But here he is all of a sudden telling us that if, instead of 72 centimes, rail transport takes only 25, it would instantly lose all its consignments. Decidedly we should have to go back to the van, to the primitive waggon even. Only, if we have any advice to give M. Proudhon, it is not to forget, in his Programme of the Progressive Association, to divide by 100. But, alas! it is scarcely to be hoped that our advice will be listened to, for M. Proudhon is so delighted with his “progressive association,” that he cries most emphatically:

“I have already shown in Chapter II, by the solution of the antinomy of value, that the advantage of every useful discovery is incomparably less for the inventor, whatever he may do, than for society. I have carried the demonstration in regard to this point in the rigor of mathematics!”

Let us return to the fiction of the person, Society, a fiction which has no other aim than that of proving this simple truth – that a new invention which enables a given amount of labour to produce a greater number of commodities, lowers the marketable value of the product. Society, then, makes a profit, not by obtaining more exchange values, but by obtaining more commodities for the same value. As for the inventor, competition makes his profit fall successively to the general level of profits. Has M. Proudhon proved this proposition as he wanted to? No. This does not prevent him from reproaching the economists with failure to prove it. To prove to him on the contrary that they have proved it, we shall cite only Ricardo and Lauderdale – Ricardo, the head of the school which determines value by labour time, and Lauderdale, one of the most uncompromising defenders of the determination of value by supply and demand. Both have expounded the same proposition:

“By constantly increasing the facility of production, we constantly diminish the value of some of the commodities before produced, though by the same means we not only add to the national riches, but also to the power of future production.... As soon as by the aid of machinery, or by the knowledge of natural philosophy, you oblige natural agents to do the work which was before done by man, the exchangeable value of such work falls accordingly. If 10 men turned a corn mill, and it be discovered that by the assistance of wind, or of water, the labour of these 10 men may be spared, the flour which is the produce partly of the work performed by the mill, would immediately fall in value, in proportion to the quantity of labour saved; and the society would be richer by the commodities which the labour of the 10 men could produce, the funds destined for their maintenance being in no degree impaired.” (Ricardo Vol. II, p. 59)

Lauderdale, in his turn, says:

“In every instance where capital is so employed as to produce a profit, it uniformly arises, either – from its supplanting a portion of labour, which would otherwise be performed by the hand of man; or – from its performing a portion of labour, which is beyond the reach of the personal exertion of man to accomplish. The small profit which the proprietors of machinery generally acquire, when compared with the wages of labour, which the machine supplants, may perhaps create a suspicion of the rectitude of this opinion. Some fire-engines, for instance, draw more water from a coalpit in one day than could be conveyed on the shoulder of 300 men, even assisted by the machinery of buckets; and a fire-engine undoubtedly performs its labour at a much smaller expense than the amount of the wages of those whose labour it thus supplants. This is, in truth, the case with all machinery. All machines must execute the labour that was antecedently performed at a cheaper rate than it could be done by the hand of man.... If such a privilege is
given for the invention of a machine, which performs, by the labour of one man, a quantity of work that used to take the labour of four; as the possession of the exclusive privilege prevents any competition in doing the work, but what proceeds from the labour of the workmen, their wages, as long as the patent continues, must obviously form the measure of the patentee’s charge; that is to secure employment, he has only to charge a little less than the wages of the labour which the machine supplants. But when the patent expires, other machines of the same nature are brought into competition; and then his charge must be regulated on the same principle as every other, according to the abundance of machines.... The profit of capital employed..., though it arises from supplanting labour, comes to be regulated, not by the value of the labour it supplants but, as in all other cases, by the competition among the proprietors of capital that presents itself for performing the duty, and the demand for it.” (Pp. 119, 123, 124, 125, 134)

Finally, then, so long as the profit is greater than in other industries, capital will be thrown into the new industry until the rate of profit falls to the general level.

We have just seen that the example of the railway was scarcely suited to throw any light on his fiction of the person, Society. Nevertheless, M. Proudhon boldly resumes his discourse:

“With these points cleared up, nothing is easier than to explain how labour must leave a surplus for each producer.” (Vol. I, p. 77)

What now follows belongs to classical antiquity. It is a poetical narrative intended to refresh the reader after the fatigue which the rigor of the preceding mathematical demonstrations must have caused him. M. Proudhon gives the person, Society, the name of Prometheus, whose high deeds he glorifies in these terms:

“First of all, Prometheus emerging from the bosom of nature awakens to life, in a delightful inertia, etc., etc. Prometheus sets to work, and on this first day, the first day of the second creation, Prometheus’ product, that is, his wealth, his well-being, is equal to 10. On the second day, Prometheus divides his labour, and his product becomes equal to 100. On the third day and on each of the following days, Prometheus invents machines, discovers new utilities in bodies, new forces in nature.... With every step of his industrial activity, there is an increase in the number of his products, which marks an enhancement of happiness for him. And since, after all, to consume is for him to produce, it is clear that every day’s consumption, using up only the product of the day before, leaves a surplus product for the next day.” (Vol. I, pp. 77-78)

This Prometheus of M. Proudhon’s is a queer character, as weak in logic as in political economy. So long as Prometheus merely teaches us the division of labour, the application of machinery, the exploitation of natural forces and scientific power, multiplying the productive forces of men and giving a surplus compared with the produce of labour in isolation, this new Prometheus has the misfortune only of coming too late. But the moment Prometheus starts talking about production and consumption he becomes really ludicrous. To consume, for him, is to produce; he consumes the next day what he produced the day before, so that he is always one day in advance; this day in advance is his “surplus labour.” But, if he consumes the next day what he has produced the day before, he must, on the first day, which had no day before, have done two days’ work in order to be one day in advance later on. How did Prometheus earn this surplus on the first day, when there was neither division of labour, nor machinery, nor even any knowledge of physical forces other than fire? Thus the question, for all its being carried back “to the first day of the second creation,” has not advanced a single step forward. This way of explaining things savours both of Greek and of Hebrew, it is at once mystical and allegorical. It gives M. Proudhon a perfect right to say:
“I have proved by theory and by facts the principle that all labour must have a surplus.”

The “facts” are the famous progressive calculation; the theory is the myth of Prometheus.

“But,” continues M. Proudhon, “this principle, while being as certain as an arithmetical proposition, is as yet far from being realized by everyone. Whereas, with the progress of collective industry, every day’s individual labour produces a greater and greater product, and whereas therefore, by a necessary consequence, the worker with the same wage ought to become richer every day, there actually exist estates in society which profit and others which decay.” (Vol. I, pp. 79-80)

In 1770 the population of the United Kingdom of Great Britain was 15 million, and the productive population was 3 million. The scientific power of production equalled a population of about 12 million individuals more. Therefore there were, altogether, 15 million of productive forces. Thus the productive power was to the population as 1 is to 1; and the scientific power was to the manual power as 4 is to 1.

In 1840 the population did not exceed 30 million: the productive population was 6 million. But the scientific power amounted to 650 million; that is, it was to the whole population as 21 is to 1, and to manual power as 108 is to 1.

In English society the working day thus acquired in 70 years a surplus of 2,700 per cent productivity; that is, in 1840 it produced 27 times as much as in 1770. According to M. Proudhon, the following question should be raised: why was not the English worker of 1840 27 times as rich as the one of 1770? In raising such a question one would naturally be supposing that the English could have produced this wealth without the historical conditions in which it was produced, such as: private accumulation of capital, modern division of labour, automatic workshops, anarchical competition, the wage system – in short, everything that is based upon class antagonism. Now, these were precisely the necessary conditions of existence for the development of productive forces and of surplus labour. Therefore, to obtain this development of productive forces and this surplus labour, there had to be classes which profited and classes which decayed.

What then, ultimately, is this Prometheus resuscitated by M. Proudhon? It is society, social relations based on class antagonism. These relations are not relations between individual and individual, but between worker and capitalist, between farmer and landlord, etc. Wipe out these relations and you annihilate all society, and your Prometheus is nothing but a ghost without arms or legs; that is, without automatic workshops, without division of labour – in a word, without everything that you gave him to start with in order to make him obtain this surplus labour.

If then, in theory, it sufficed to interpret, as M. Proudhon does, the formula of surplus labour in the equalitarian sense, without taking into account the actual conditions of production, it should suffice, in practice, to share out equally among the workers all the wealth at present acquired, without changing in any way the present conditions of production. Such a distribution would certainly not assure a high degree of comfort to the individual participants.

But M. Proudhon is not so pessimistic as one might think. As proportion is everything for him, he has to see in his fully equipped Prometheus, that is, in present-day society, the beginnings of a realization of his favourite idea.

“But everywhere, too, the progress of wealth, that is, the proportion of values, is the dominant law; and when economists hold up against the complaints of the social party the progressive growth of the public wealth, and the improved conditions of even the most unfortunate classes, they unwittingly proclaim a truth which is the condemnation of their theories.” (Vol. I, p. 80)

What is, exactly, collective wealth, public fortune? It is the wealth of the bourgeoisie – not that of each bourgeois in particular. Well, the economists have done nothing but show how, in the
existing relations of production, the wealth of the bourgeoisie has grown and must grow still further. As for the working classes, it still remains a very debatable question whether their condition has improved as a result of the increase in so-called public wealth. If economists, in support of their optimism, cite the example of the English workers employed in the cotton industry, they see the condition of the latter only in the rare moments of trade prosperity. These moments of prosperity are to the periods of crisis and stagnation in the “true proportion” of 3 to 10. But perhaps also, in speaking of improvement, the economists were thinking of the millions of workers who had to perish in the East Indies so as to procure for the million and a half workers employed in England in the same industry three years’ prosperity out of ten.

As for the temporary participation in the increase of public wealth, that is a different matter. The fact of temporary participation is explained by the theory of the economists. It is the confirmation of this theory and not its “condemnation,” as M. Proudhon calls it. If there were anything to be condemned, it would surely be the system of M. Proudhon, who would reduce the worker, as we have shown, to the minimum wage, in spite of the increase of wealth. It is only by reducing the worker to the minimum wage that he would be able to apply the true proportion of values, of “value constituted” by labour time. It is because wages, as a result of competition, oscillate now above, now below, the price of food necessary for the sustenance of the worker, that he can participate to a certain extent in the development of collective wealth, and can also perish from want. This is the whole theory of the economists who have no illusions on the subject.

After his lengthy digressions on railways, on Prometheus, and on the new society to be reconstituted on “constituted value,” M. Proudhon collects himself; emotion overpowers him and he cries in fatherly tones:

“I beseech the economists to ask themselves for one moment, in the silence of their hearts – far from the prejudices that trouble them and regardless of the employment they are engaged in or hope to obtain, of the interests they subserve, or the approbation to which they aspire, of the honours which nurse their vanity – let them say whether before this day the principle that all labour must leave a surplus appeared to them with this chain of premises and consequences that we have revealed.” (Vol. I, p. 80)
Chapter Two:
The Metaphysics of Political Economy

§ 1. The Method
Here we are, right in Germany! We shall now have to talk metaphysics while talking political economy. And in this again we shall but follow M. Proudhon’s “contradictions.” Just now he forced us to speak English, to become pretty well English ourselves. Now the scene is changing. M. Proudhon is transporting us to our dear fatherland and is forcing us, whether we like it or not, to become German again.

If the Englishman transforms men into hats, the German transforms hats into ideas. The Englishman is Ricardo, rich banker and distinguished economist; the German is Hegel, simple professor at the University of Berlin.

Louis XV, the last absolute monarch and representative of the decadence of French royalty, had attached to his person a physician who was himself France’s first economist. This doctor, this economist, represented the imminent and certain triumph of the French bourgeoisie. Doctor Quesnay made a science out of political economy; he summarized it in his famous Tableau économique. Besides the thousand and one commentaries on this table which have appeared, we possess one by the doctor himself. It is the *Analysis of the Economic Table* followed by “seven important observations.”

M. Proudhon is another Dr. Quesnay. He is the Quesnay of the metaphysics of political economy. Now metaphysics – indeed all philosophy – can be summed up, according to Hegel, in method. We must, therefore, try to elucidate the method of M. Proudhon, which is at least as foggy as the *Economic Table*. It is for this reason that we are making seven more or less important observations. If Dr. Proudhon is not pleased with our observations, well, then, he will have to become an Abbe Baydeau and give the “explanation of the economico-metaphysical method” himself.

First Observation

“We are not giving a history according to the order in time, but according to the sequence of ideas. Economic phases or categories are in their manifestation sometimes contemporary, sometimes inverted…. Economic theories have nonetheless their logical sequence and their serial relation in the understanding: it is this order that we flatter our- selves to have discovered.” (Proudhon, Vol. I, p. 146)

M. Proudhon most certainly wanted to frighten the French by flinging quasi-Hegelian phrases at them. So we have to deal with two men: firstly with M. Proudhon, and then with Hegel. How does M. Proudhon distinguish himself from other economists? And what part does Hegel play in M. Proudhon’s political economy?

Economists express the relations of bourgeois production, the division of labour, credit, money, etc., as fixed, immutable, eternal categories. M. Proudhon, who has these ready-made categories before him, wants to explain to us the act of formation, the genesis of these categories, principles, laws, ideas, thoughts.

Economists explain how production takes place in the above-mentioned relations, but what they do not explain is how these relations themselves are produced, that is, the historical movement which gave them birth. M. Proudhon, taking these relations for principles, categories, abstract thoughts, has merely to put into order these thoughts, which are to be found alphabetically.
arranged at the end of every treatise on political economy. The economists’ material is the active, energetic life of man; M. Proudhon’s material is the dogmas of the economists. But the moment we cease to pursue the historical movement of production relations, of which the categories are but the theoretical expression, the moment we want to see in these categories no more than ideas, spontaneous thoughts, independent of real relations, we are forced to attribute the origin of these thoughts to the movement of pure reason. How does pure, eternal, impersonal reason give rise to these thoughts? How does it proceed in order to produce them?

If we had M. Proudhon’s intrepidity in the matter of Hegelianism we should say: it is distinguished in itself from itself. What does this mean? Impersonal reason, having outside itself neither a base on which it can pose itself, nor an object to which it can oppose itself, nor a subject with which it can compose itself, is forced to turn head over heels, in posing itself, opposing itself and composing itself – position, opposition, composition. Or, to speak Greek – we have thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. For those who do not know the Hegelian formula: affirmation, negation and negation of the negation. That is what language means. It is certainly not Hebrew (with due apologies M. Proudhon); but it is the language of this pure reason, separate from the individual. Instead of the ordinary individual with his ordinary manner of speaking and thinking we have nothing but this ordinary manner in itself – without the individual.

Is it surprising that everything, in the final abstraction – for we have here an abstraction, and not an analysis – presents itself as a logical category? Is it surprising that, if you let drop little by little all that constitutes the individuality of a house, leaving out first of all the materials of which it is composed, then the form that distinguishes it, you end up with nothing but a body; that, if you leave out of account the limits of this body; you soon have nothing but a space – that if, finally, you leave out of the account the dimensions of this space, there is absolutely nothing left but pure quantity, the logical category? If we abstract thus from every subject all the alleged accidents, animate or inanimate, men or things, we are right in saying that in the final abstraction, the only substance left is the logical category. Thus the metaphysicians who, in making these abstractions, think they are making analyses, and who, the more they detach themselves from things, imagine themselves to be getting all the nearer to the point of penetrating to their core – these metaphysicians in turn are right in saying that things here below are embroideries of which the logical categories constitute the canvas. This is what distinguishes the philosopher from the Christian. The Christian, in spite of logic, has only one incarnation of the Logos; the philosopher has never finished with incarnations. If all that exists, all that lives on land, and under water, can be reduced by abstraction to a logical category – if the whole real world can be drowned thus in a world of abstractions, in the world of logical categories – who need be astonished at it?

All that exists, all that lives on land and under water, exists and lives only by some kind of movement. Thus, the movement of history produces social relations; industrial movement gives us industrial products, etc.

Just as by means of abstraction we have transformed everything into a logical category, so one has only to make an abstraction of every characteristic distinctive of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition – purely formal movement, the purely logical formula of movement. If one finds in logical categories the substance of all things, one imagines one has found in the logical formula of movement the absolute method, which not only explains all things, but also implies the movement of things.

It is of this absolute method that Hegel speaks in these terms:

“Method is the absolute, unique, supreme, infinite force, which no object can resist; it is the tendency of reason to find itself again, to recognize itself in every object.” (Logic, Vol. III, p. 29)

All things being reduced to a logical category, and every movement, every act of production, to method, it follows naturally that every aggregate of products and production, of objects and of
movement, can be reduced to applied metaphysics. What Hegel has done for religion, law, etc., M. Proudhon seeks to do for political economy.

So what is this absolute method? The abstraction of movement. What is the abstraction of movement? Movement in abstract condition. What is movement in abstract condition? The purely logical formula of movement or the movement of pure reason. Wherein does the movement of pure reason consist? In posing itself, opposing itself, composing itself; in formulating itself as thesis, antithesis, synthesis; or, yet, in affirming itself, negating itself, and negating its negation.

How does reason manage to affirm itself, to pose itself in a definite category? That is the business of reason itself and of its apologists.

But once it has managed to pose itself as a thesis, this thesis, this thought, opposed to itself, splits up into two contradictory thoughts – the positive and the negative, the yes and no. The struggle between these two antagonistic elements comprised in the antithesis constitutes the dialectical movement. The yes becoming no, the no becoming yes, the yes becoming both yes and no, the no becoming both no and yes, the contraries balance, neutralize, paralyse each other. The fusion of these two contradictory thoughts constitutes a new thought, which is the synthesis of them. This thought splits up once again into two contradictory thoughts, which in turn fuse into a new synthesis. Of this travail is born a group of thoughts. This group of thoughts follows the same dialectic movement as the simple category, and has a contradictory group as antithesis. Of these two groups of thoughts is born a new group of thoughts, which is the antithesis of them.

Just as from the dialectic movement of the simple categories is born the group, so from the dialectic movement of the groups is born the series, and from the dialectic movement of the series is born the entire system.

Apply this method to the categories of political economy and you have the logic and metaphysics of political economy, or, in other words, you have the economic categories that everybody knows, translated into a little-known language which makes them look as if they had never blossomed forth in an intellect of pure reason; so much do these categories seem to engender one another, to be linked up and intertwined with one another by the very working of the dialectic movement. The reader must not get alarmed at these metaphysics with all their scaffolding of categories, groups, series, and systems. M. Proudhon, in spite of all the trouble he has taken to scale the heights of the system of contradictions, has never been able to raise himself above the first two rungs of simple thesis and antithesis; and even these he has mounted only twice, and on one of these two occasions he fell over backwards.

Up to now we have expounded only the dialectics of Hegel. We shall see later how M. Proudhon has succeeded in reducing it to the meanest proportions. Thus, for Hegel, all that has happened and is still happening is only just what is happening in his own mind. Thus the philosophy of history is nothing but the history of philosophy, of his own philosophy. There is no longer a "history according to the order in time," there is only "the sequence of ideas in the understanding." He thinks he is constructing the world by the movement of thought, whereas he is merely reconstructing systematically and classifying by the absolute method of thoughts which are in the minds of all.

**Second Observation**

Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production, M. Proudhon, holding this upside down like a true philosopher, sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of the principles, of these categories, which were slumbering – so M. Proudhon the philosopher tells us – in the bosom of the “impersonal reason of humanity.”

M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen, or silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound
up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist. The same men who establish their social relations in conformity with the material productivity, produce also principles, ideas, and categories, in conformity with their social relations. Thus the ideas, these categories, are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products.

There is a continual movement of growth in productive forces, of destruction in social relations, of formation in ideas; the only immutable thing is the abstraction of movement – *mors immortalis*.

[Marx quotes these words from the following passage of Lucretius’s poem *On The Nature of Things* (Book III, line 869): “mortalem vitam mors cum immortalis ademit” (“when mortal life has been taken away by immortal death”).]

**Third Observation**

The production relations of every society form a whole. M. Proudhon considers economic relations as so many social phases, engendering one another, resulting one from the other like the antithesis from the thesis, and realizing in their logical sequence the impersonal reason of humanity.

The only drawback to this method is that when he comes to examine a single one of these phases, M. Proudhon cannot explain it without having recourse to all the other relations of society; which relations, however, he has not yet made his dialectic movement engender. When, after that, M. Proudhon, by means of pure reason, proceeds to give birth to these other phases, he treats them as if they were new-born babes. He forgets that they are of the same age as the first.

Thus, to arrive at the constitution of value, which for him is the basis of all economic evolutions, he could not do without the division of labour, competition, etc. Yet in the series, in the understanding of M. Proudhon, in the logical sequence, these relations did not yet exist.

In constructing the edifice of an ideological system by means of the categories of political economy, the limbs of the social system are dislocated. The different limbs of society are converted into so many separate societies, following one upon the other. How, indeed, could the single logical formula of movement, of sequence, of time, explain the structure of society, in which all relations coexist simultaneously and support one another?

**Fourth Observation**

Let us see now to what modifications M. Proudhon subjects Hegel’s dialectics when he applies it to political economy.

For him, M. Proudhon, every economic category has two sides – one good, the other bad. He looks upon these categories as the petty bourgeois looks upon the great men of history: Napoleon was a great man; he did a lot of good; he also did a lot of harm.

The good side and the bad side, the advantages and drawbacks, taken together form for M. Proudhon the contradiction in every economic category.

The problem to be solved: to keep the good side, while eliminating the bad. Slavery is an economic category like any other. Thus it also has its two sides. Let us leave alone the bad side and talk about the good side of slavery. Needless to say, we are dealing only with direct slavery, with Negro slavery in Surinam, in Brazil, in the Southern States of North America. Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave
the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.

Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of the world, and you will have anarchy – the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations.‘

Thus slavery, because it is an economic category, has always existed among the institutions of the peoples. Modern nations have been able only to disguise slavery in their own countries, but they have imposed it without disguise upon the New World.

What would M. Proudhon do to save slavery? He would formulate the problem thus: preserve the good side of this economic category, eliminate the bad.

Hegel has no problems to formulate. He has only dialectics. M. Proudhon has nothing of Hegel’s dialectics but the language. For him the dialectic movement is the dogmatic distinction between good and bad.

Let us for a moment consider M. Proudhon himself as a category. Let us examine his good and bad side, his advantages and his drawbacks.

If he has the advantage over Hegel of setting problems which he reserves the right of solving for the greater good of humanity, he has the drawback of being stricken with sterility when it is a question of engendering a new category by dialectical birth-throes. What constitutes dialectical movement is the coexistence of two contradictory sides, their conflict and their fusion into a new category. The very setting of the problem of eliminating the bad side cuts short the dialectic movement. It is not the category which is posed and opposed to itself, by its contradictory nature, it is M. Proudhon who gets excited, perplexed and frets and fumes between the two sides of the category.

Caught thus in a blind alley, from which it is difficult to escape by legal means, M. Proudhon takes a real flying leap which transports him at one bound into a new category. Then it is that, to his astonished gaze, is revealed the serial relation in the understanding.

He takes the first category that comes handy and attributes to it arbitrarily the quality of supplying a remedy for the drawbacks of the category to be purified. Thus, if we are to believe M. Proudhon, taxes remedy the drawbacks of monopoly; the balance of trade, the drawbacks of taxes; landed property, the drawbacks of credit.

By taking the economic categories thus successively, one by one, and making one the antidote to the other, M. Proudhon manages to make with this mixture of contradictions and antidotes to contradictions, two volumes of contradictions, which he rightly entitles: Le Système des contradictions économiques. [The System of Economic Contradictions]

Fifth Observation

“In the absolute reason all these ideas... are equally simple, and general.... In fact, we attain knowledge only by a sort of scaffolding of our ideas. But truth in itself is

* This was perfectly correct for the year 1847. At that time the world trade of the United States was limited mainly to import of immigrants and industrial products, and export of cotton and tobacco, i.e., of the products of southern slave labour. The Northern States produced mainly corn and meat for the slave states. It was only when the North produced corn and meat for export and also became an industrial country, and when the American cotton monopoly had to face powerful competition, in India, Egypt, Brazil, etc., that the abolition of slavery became possible. And even then this led to the ruin of the South, which did not succeed in replacing the open Negro slavery by the disguised slavery of Indian and Chinese coolies. [Note by Engels to the 1885 German edition]
independent of these dialectical symbols and freed from the combinations of our minds.” (Proudhon, Vol. II, p. 97)

Here all of a sudden, by a kind of switch-over of which we now know the secret, the metaphysics of political economy has become an illusion! Never has M. Proudhon spoken more truly. Indeed, from the moment the process of the dialectic movement is reduced to the simple process of opposing good to bad, and of administering one category as an antidote to another, the categories are deprived of all spontaneity; the idea “ceases to function”; there is no life left in it. It is no longer posed or decomposed into categories. The sequence of categories has become a sort of scaffolding. Dialectics has ceased to be the movement of absolute reason. There is no longer any dialectics but only, at the most, absolutely pure morality.

When M. Proudhon spoke of the **serial relation in understanding**, of the **logical sequence of categories**, he declared positively that he did not want to give history according to the order in time, that is, in M. Proudhon’s view, the historical sequence in which the categories have manifested themselves. Thus for him everything happened in the pure ether of reason. Everything was to be derived from this ether by means of dialectics. Now that he has to put this dialectics into practice, his reason is in default. M. Proudhon’s dialectics runs counter to Hegel’s dialectics, and now we have M. Proudhon reduced to saying that the order in which he gives the economic categories is no longer the order in which they engender one another. Economic evolutions are no longer the evolutions of reason itself.

What then does M. Proudhon give us? Real history, which is, according to M. Proudhon’s understanding, the sequence in which the categories have manifested themselves in order of time? No! History as it takes place in the idea itself? Still less! That is, neither the profane history of categories, nor their sacred history! What history does he give us then? The history of his own contradictions. Let us see how they go, and how they drag M. Proudhon in their train.

Before entering upon this examination, which gives rise to the sixth important observation, we have yet another, less important observation to make.

Let us admit with M. Proudhon that real history, history according to the order in time, is the historical sequence in which ideas, categories and principles have manifested themselves.

Each principle has had its own century in which to manifest itself. The principle of authority, for example, had the 11th century, just as the principle of individualism had the 18th century. In logical sequence, it was the century that belonged to the principle, and not the principle which belonged to the century. When, consequently, in order to save principles as much as to save history, we ask ourselves why a particular principle was manifested in the 11th century or in the 18th century rather than in any other, we are necessarily forced to examine minutely what men were like in the 11th century, what they were like in the 18th, what were their respective needs, their productive forces, their mode of production, the raw materials of their production – in short, what were the relations between man and man which resulted from all these conditions of existence. To get to the bottom of all these questions – what is this but to draw up the real, profane history of men in every century and to present these men as both the authors and the actors of their own drama? But the moment you present men as the actors and authors of their own history, you arrive – by detour – at the real starting point, because you have abandoned those eternal principles of which you spoke at the outset.

M. Proudhon has not even gone far enough along the crossroad which an ideologist takes to reach the main road of history.

**Sixth Observation**

Let us take the sideroad with M. Proudhon.

We shall concede that economic relations, viewed as immutable laws, eternal principles, ideal categories, existed before active and energetic men did; we shall concede further that these laws,
principles and categories had, since the beginning of time, slumbered “in the impersonal reason of humanity.” We have already seen that, with all these changeless and motionless eternities, there is no history left; there is at most history in the idea, that is, history reflected in the dialectic movement of pure reason. M. Proudhon, by saying that, in the dialectic movement ideas are no longer “differentiated,” has done away with both the shadow of movement and the movement of shadows, by means of which one could still have created at least a semblance of history. Instead of that, he imputes to history his own impotence. He lays the blame on everything, even the French language.

“It is not correct then,” says M. Proudhon, the philosopher, “to say that something appears, that something is produced: in civilization as in the universe, everything has existed, has acted, from eternity. This applies to the whole of social economy.” (Vol. II, p. 102)

So great is the productive force of the contradictions which function and which made M. Proudhon function, that, in trying to explain history, he is forced to deny it; in trying to explain the successive appearance of social relations, he denies that anything can appear: in trying to explain production, with all its phases, he questions whether anything can be produced!

Thus, for M. Proudhon, there is no longer any history: no longer any sequence of ideas. And yet his book still exists; and it is precisely that book which is, to use his own expression, “history according to the sequence of ideas.” How shall we find a formula, for M. Proudhon is a man of formulas, to help him to clear all these contradictions in one leap?

To this end he has invented a new reason, which is neither the pure and virgin absolute reason, nor the common reason of men living and acting in different periods, but a reason quite apart – the reason of the person, Society – of the subject, Humanity – which under the pen of M. Proudhon figures at times also as “social genius,” “general reason,” or finally as “human reason.” This reason, decked out under so many names, betrays itself nevertheless, at every moment, as the individual reason of M. Proudhon, with its good and its bad side, its antidotes and its problems.

“Human reason does not create truth,” hidden in the depths of absolute, eternal reason. It can only unveil it. But such truths as it has unveiled up to now are incomplete, insufficient, and consequently contradictory. Hence, economic categories, being themselves truths discovered, revealed by human reason, by social genius, are equally incomplete and contain within themselves the germ of contradictions. Before M. Proudhon, social genius saw only the antagonistic elements, and not the synthetic formula, both hidden simultaneously in absolute reason. Economic relations, which merely realize on earth these insufficient truths, these incomplete ideas, are consequently contradictory in themselves, and present two sides, one good, the other bad.

To find complete truth, the idea, in all its fullness, the synthetic formula that is to annihilate the contradiction, this is the problem of social genius. This again is why, in M. Proudhon’s illusion, this same social genius has been harried from one category to another without ever having been able, despite all its battery of categories, to snatch from God or from absolute reason, a synthetic formula.

“At first, society” (social genius) “states a primary fact, puts forward a hypothesis... a veritable antinomy, whose antagonistic results develop in the social economy in the same way as its consequences could have been deduced in the mind; so that industrial movement, following in all things the deduction of ideas, splits up into two currents, one of useful effects, the other of subversive results. To bring harmony into the constitution of this two-side principle, and to solve this antinomy, society gives rise to a second, which will soon be followed by a third; and progress of social genius will take place in this manner, until, having
exhausted all its contradictions – I suppose, but it is not proved that there is a limit to human contradictions – it returns in one leap to all its former positions and with a single formula solves all its problems.” (Vol. I, p. 133)

Just as the antithesis was before turned into an antidote, so now the thesis becomes a hypothesis. This change of terms, coming from M. Proudhon, has no longer anything surprising for us! Human reason, which is anything but pure, having only incomplete vision, encounters at every step new problems to be solved. Every new thesis which it discovers in absolute reason and which is the negation of the first thesis, becomes for it a synthesis, which it accepts rather naively as the solution of the problem in question. It is thus that this reason frets and fumes in ever renewing contradictions until, coming to the end of the contradictions, it perceives that all its theses and syntheses are merely contradictory hypotheses. In its perplexity, “human reason, social genius, returns in one leap to all its former positions, and in a single formula, solves all its problems.” This unique formula, by the way, constitutes M. Proudhon’s true discovery. It is constituted value.

Hypotheses are made only in view of a certain aim. The aim that social genius, speaking through the mouth of M. Proudhon, set itself in the first place, was to eliminate the bad in every economic category, in order to have nothing left but the good. For it, the good, the supreme well-being, the real practical aim, is equality. And why did the social genius aim at equality rather than inequality, fraternity, Catholicism, or any other principle? Because “humanity has successively realized so many separate hypotheses only in view of a superior hypothesis,” which precisely is equality. In other words: because equality is M. Proudhon’s ideal. He imagines that the division of labour, credit, the workshop – all economic relations – were invented merely for the benefit of equality, and yet they always ended up by turning against it. Since history and the fiction of M. Proudhon contradict each other at every step, the latter concludes that there is a contradiction. If there is a contradiction, it exists only between his fixed idea and real movement.

Henceforth, the good side of an economic relation is that which affirms equality; the bad side, that which negates it and affirms inequality. Every new category is a hypothesis of the social genius to eliminate the inequality engendered by the preceding hypothesis. In short, equality is the primordial intention, the mystical tendency, the providential aim that the social genius has constantly before its eyes as it whirls in the circle of economic contradictions. Thus, Providence is the locomotive which makes the whole of M. Proudhon’s economic baggage move better than his pure and volatized reason. He has devoted to Providence a whole chapter, which follows the one on taxes.

Providence, providential aim, this is the great word used today to explain the movement of history. In fact, this word explains nothing. It is at most a rhetorical form, one of the various ways of paraphrasing facts.

It is a fact that in Scotland landed property acquired a new value by the development of English industry. This industry opened up new outlets for wool. In order to produce wool on a large scale, arable land had to be transformed into pasture. To effect this transformation, the estates had to be concentrated. To concentrate the estates, small holdings had first to be abolished, thousands of tenants had to be driven from their native soil and a few shepherds in charge of millions of sheep to be installed in their place. Thus, by successive transformations, landed property in Scotland has resulted in the driving out of men by sheep. Now say that the providential aim of the institution of landed property in Scotland was to have men driven out by sheep, and you will have made providential history.

Of course, the tendency towards equality belongs to our century. To say now that all former centuries, with entirely different needs, means of production, etc., worked providentially for the realization of equality is, firstly, to substitute the means and the men of our century for the men and the means of earlier centuries and to misunderstand the historical movement by which the
successive generations transformed the results acquired by the generations that preceded them. Economists know very well that the very thing that was for the one a finished product was for the other but the raw material for new production.

Suppose, as M. Proudhon does, that social genius produced, or rather improvised, the feudal lords with the providential aim of transforming the settlers into responsible and equally-placed workers: and you will have effected a substitution of aims and of persons worthy of the Providence that instituted landed property in Scotland, in order to give itself the malicious pleasure of driving out men by sheep.

But since M. Proudhon takes such a tender interest in Providence, we refer him to the *Histoire de l'économie politique* of M. de Villeneuve-Bargemont, who likewise goes in pursuit of a providential aim. This aim, however, is not equality, but Catholicism.

**Seventh and Last Observation**

Economists have a singular method of procedure. There are only two kinds of institutions for them, artificial and natural. The institutions of feudalism are artificial institutions, those of the bourgeoisie are natural institutions. In this, they resemble the theologians, who likewise establish two kinds of religion. Every religion which is not theirs is an invention of men, while their own is an emanation from God. When the economists say that present-day relations—the relations of bourgeois production—are natural, they imply that these are the relations in which wealth is created and productive forces developed in conformity with the laws of nature. These relations therefore are themselves natural laws independent of the influence of time. They are eternal laws which must always govern society. Thus, there has been history, but there is no longer any. There has been history, since there were the institutions of feudalism, and in these institutions of feudalism we find quite different relations of production from those of bourgeois society, which the economists try to pass off as natural and as such, eternal.

Feudalism also had its proletariat—serfdom, which continued all the germs of the bourgeoisie. Feudal production also had two antagonistic elements which are likewise designated by the name of the good side and the bad side of feudalism, irrespective of the fact that it is always the bad side that in the end triumphs over the good side. It is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history, by providing a struggle. If, during the epoch of the domination of feudalism, the economists, enthusiastic over the knightly virtues, the beautiful harmony between rights and duties, the patriarchal life of the towns, the prosperous condition of domestic industry in the countryside, the development of industry organized into corporations, guilds and fraternities, in short, everything that constitutes the good side of feudalism, had set themselves the problem of eliminating everything that cast a shadow on the picture—serfdom, privileges, anarchy—what would have happened? All the elements which called forth the struggle would have been destroyed, and the development of the bourgeoisie nipped in the bud. One would have set oneself the absurd problem of eliminating history.

After the triumph of the bourgeoisie, there was no longer any question of the good or the bad side of feudalism. The bourgeoisie took possession of the productive forces it had developed under feudalism. All the old economic forms, the corresponding civil relations, the political state which was the official expression of the old civil society, were smashed.

Thus, feudal production, to be judged properly, must be considered as a mode of production founded on antagonism. It must be shown how wealth was produced within this antagonism, how the productive forces were developed at the same time as class antagonisms, how one of the classes, the bad side, the drawback of society, went on growing until the material conditions for its emancipation had attained full maturity. Is not this as good as saying that the mode of production, the relations in which productive forces are developed, are anything but eternal laws, but that they correspond to a definite development of men and of their productive forces, and that a change in men’s productive forces necessarily brings about a change in their relations of
production? As the main thing is not to be deprived of the fruits of civilization, of the acquired productive forces, the traditional forms in which they were produced must be smashed. From this moment, the revolutionary class becomes conservative.

The bourgeoisie begins with a proletariat which is itself a relic of the proletariat [In the copy presented by Marx to N. Utina, the words “working class” are written here. - Ed.] of feudal times. In the course of its historical development, the bourgeoisie necessarily develops its antagonistic character, which at first is more or less disguised, existing only in a latent state. As the bourgeoisie develops, there develops in its bosom a new proletariat, a modern proletariat; there develops a struggle between the proletarian class and the bourgeoisie class, a struggle which, before being felt, perceived, appreciated, understood, avowed, and proclaimed aloud by both sides, expresses itself, to start with, merely in partial and momentary conflicts, in subversive acts. On the other hand, if all the members of the modern bourgeoisie have the same interests inasmuch as they form a class as against another class, they have opposite, antagonistic interests inasmuch as they stand face-to-face with one another. This opposition of interests results from the economic conditions of their bourgeois life. From day to day it thus becomes clearer that the production relations in which the bourgeoisie moves have not a simple, uniform character, but a dual character; that in the selfsame relations in which wealth is produced, poverty is also produced; that in the selfsame relations in which there is a development of the productive forces, there is also a force producing repression; that these relations produce bourgeois wealth – i.e., the wealth of the bourgeois class – only by continually annihilating the wealth of the individual members of this class and by producing an ever-growing proletariat.

The more the antagonistic character comes to light, the more the economists, the scientific representatives of bourgeois production, find themselves in conflict with their own theory; and different schools arise.

We have the fatalist economists, who in their theory are as indifferent to what they call the drawbacks of bourgeois production as the bourgeois themselves are in practice to the sufferings of the proletarians who help them to acquire wealth. In this fatalist school, there are Classics and Romantics. The Classics, like Adam Smith and Ricardo, represent a bourgeoisie which, while still struggling with the relics of feudal society, works only to purge economic relations of feudal taints, to increase the productive forces and to give a new upsurge to industry and commerce. The proletariat that takes part in this struggle and is absorbed in this feverish labour experiences only passing, accidental sufferings, and itself regards them as such. Economists like Adam Smith and Ricardo, who are the historians of this epoch, have no other mission than that of showing how wealth is acquired in bourgeois production relations, of formulating these relations into categories, into laws, and of showing how superior these laws, these categories, are for the production of wealth to the laws and categories of feudal society. Poverty is in their eyes merely the pang which accompanies every childbirth, in nature as in industry.

The Romantics belong to our own age, in which the bourgeoisie is in direct opposition to the proletariat; in which poverty is engendered in as great abundance as wealth. The economists now pose as blasé fatalists, who, from their elevated position, cast a proudly disdainful glance at the human machines who manufacture wealth. They copy all the developments given by their predecessors, and the indifference which in the latter was merely naïveté becomes in them coquetry.

Next comes the humanitarian school, which sympathizes with the bad side of present-day production relations. It seeks, by way of easing its conscience, to palliate even if slightly the real contrasts; it sincerely deplores the distress of the proletariat, the unbridled competition of the bourgeois among themselves; it counsels the workers to be sober, to work hard and to have few children; it advises the bourgeois to put a reasoned ardour into production. The whole theory of this school rests on interminable distinctions between theory and practice, between principles and
results, between ideas and application, between form and content, between essence and reality, between right and fact, between the good side and the bad side.

The *philanthropic school* is the humanitarian school carried to perfection. It denies the necessity of antagonism; it wants to turn all men into bourgeois; it wants to realize theory in so far as it is distinguished from practice and contains no antagonism. It goes without saying that, in theory, it is easy to make an abstraction of the contradictions that are met with at every moment in actual reality. This theory would therefore become idealized reality. The philanthropists, then, want to retain the categories which express bourgeois relations, without the antagonism which constitutes them and is inseparable from them. They think they are seriously fighting bourgeois practice, and they are more bourgeois than the others.

Just as the *economists* are the scientific representatives of the bourgeois class, so the *socialists* and *communists* are the theoreticians of the proletarian class. So long as the proletariat is not yet sufficiently developed to constitute itself as a class, and consequently so long as the struggle itself of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie has not yet assumed a political character, and the productive forces are not yet sufficiently developed in the bosom of the bourgeoisie itself to enable us to catch a glimpse of the material conditions necessary for the emancipation of the proletariat and for the formation of a new society, these theoreticians are merely utopians who, to meet the wants of the oppressed classes, improvise systems and go in search of a regenerating science. But in the measure that history moves forward, and with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines, they no longer need to seek science in their minds; they have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece. So long as they look for science and merely make systems, so long as they are at the beginning of the struggle, they see in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society. From this moment, science, which is a product of the historical movement, has associated itself consciously with it, has ceased to be doctrinaire and has become revolutionary.

Let us return to M. Proudhon.

Every economic relation has a good and a bad side; it is the one point on which M. Proudhon does not give himself the lie. He sees the good side expounded by the economists; the bad side he sees denounced by the socialists. He borrows from the economists the necessity of eternal relations; he borrows from the socialists the illusion of seeing in poverty nothing but poverty. He is in agreement with both in wanting to fall back upon the authority of science. Science for him reduces itself to the slender proportions of a scientific formula; he is the man in search of formulas. Thus it is that M. Proudhon flatters himself on having given a criticism of both political economy and communism: he is beneath them both. Beneath the economists, since, as a philosopher who has at his elbow a magic formula, he thought he could dispense with going into purely economic details; beneath the socialists, because he has neither courage enough nor insight enough to rise, be it even speculatively, above the bourgeois horizon.

He wants to be the synthesis – he is a composite error.

He wants to soar as the man of science above the bourgeois and proletarians; he is merely the petty bourgeois, continually tossed back and forth between capital and labour, political economy and communism.

### § 2. Division of Labour and Machinery

The division of labour, according to M. Proudhon, opens the series of economic evolutions.

| Good side of the division of labour | “Considered in its essence, the division of labour is the manner in which equality of conditions and intelligence is realized.” (Tome I, p. 93.) |
“The division of labour has become for us an instrument of poverty.” (Tome I, p. 94.)

The division of labour is, according to M. Proudhon, an eternal law, a simple, abstract category. Therefore the abstraction, the idea, the word must suffice for him to explain the division of labour at different historical epochs. Castes, corporations, manufacture, large-scale industry, must be explained by the single word divide. First study carefully the meaning of “divide,” and you will have no need to study the numerous influences which give the division of labour a definitive character in every epoch.

Certainly, things would be made much too easy if they were reduced to M. Proudhon’s categories. History does not proceed so categorically. It took three whole centuries in Germany to establish the first big division of labour, the separation of the towns from the country. In proportion, as this one relation of town and country was modified, the whole of society was modified. To take only this one aspect of the division of labour, you have the old republics, and you have Christian feudalism; you have old England with its barons and you have modern England with its cotton lords. In the 14th and 15th centuries, when there were as yet no colonies, when America did not yet exist for Europe, when Asia existed only through the intermediary of Constantinople, when the Mediterranean was the centre of commercial activity, the division of labour had a very different form, a very different aspect from that of the 17th century, when the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, and the French had colonies established in all parts of the world. The extent of the market, its physiognomy, give to the division of labour at different periods a physiognomy, a character, which it would be difficult to deduce from the single word divide, from the idea, from the category.

“All economists since Adam Smith,” says M. Proudhon, “have pointed out the advantages and drawbacks of the law of division, but insist much more on the first than on the second, because that was more serviceable for their optimism, and none of them has ever wondered what could be the drawbacks to a law.... How does the same principle, pursued vigorously to its consequences, lead to diametrically opposite results? Not one economist before or since A. Smith has even perceived that here was a problem to elucidate. Say goes to the length of recognizing that in the division of labour the same cause that produces the good engenders the bad.” (Vol. I, p. 95-96)

Adam Smith goes further than M. Proudhon thinks. He saw clearly that

“the difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not so much the cause as the effect of the division of labour.” (Vol. I, p. 20)
In principle, a porter differs less from a philosopher than a mastiff from a greyhound. It is the division of labour which has set a gulf between them. All this does not prevent M. Proudhon from saying elsewhere that Adam Smith has not the slightest idea of the drawbacks produced by the division of labour. It is this again that makes him say that J. B. Say was the first to recognize “that in the division of labour the same cause that produces the good engenders the bad.” (Vol. I, p. 96)

But let us listen to Lemontey; *Suum cuique*. [To each his own.]

“M. J. B. Say has done me the honour of adopting in his excellent treatise on political economy the principle that I brought to light in this fragment on the moral influence of the division of labour. The somewhat frivolous title of my book doubtless prevented him from citing me. It is only to this motive that I can attribute the silence of a writer too rich in his own stock to disavow so modest a loan.” (Lemontey, Oeuvres completes, Vol. I, p. 245, Paris, 1840)

Let us do him this justice: Lemontey wittily exposed the unpleasant consequences of the division of labour as it is constituted today, and M. Proudhon found nothing to add to it. But now that, through the fault of M. Proudhon, we have been drawn into this question of priority, let us say again, in passing, that long before M. Lemontey, and 17 years before Adam Smith, who was a pupil of A. Ferguson, the last-named gave a clear exposition of the subject in a chapter which deals specifically with the division of labour.

“It may even be doubted, whether the measure of national capacity increases with the advancement of arts. Many mechanical arts... succeed best under a total suppression of sentiment and reason; and ignorance is the mother of industry as well as superstition. Reflection and fancy are subject to err; but a habit of moving the hand, or the foot, is independent of either. Manufactures, accordingly, prosper most, where the mind is least consulted, and where the workshop may, without any great effort of imagination, be considered as an engine, the parts of which are men.... The general officer may be a great proficient in the knowledge of war, while the skill of the soldier is confined to a few motions of the hand and the foot. The former may have gained what the latter has lost.... And thinking itself, in this age of separations, may become a peculiar craft.” (A. Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society, Edinburgh, 1783 (Vol. II, pp. 108, 109, 110)

To bring this literary survey to a close, we expressly deny that “all economists have insisted far more on the advantages than on the drawbacks of the division of labour.” It suffices to mention Sismondi.

Thus, as far as the advantages of the division of labour are concerned, M. Proudhon had nothing further to do than to paraphrase the general phrases known to everybody.

Let us now see how he derives from the division of labour, taken as a general law, as a category, as a thought, the drawbacks which are attached to it. How is it that this category, this law implies an unequal distribution of labour to the detriment of M. Proudhon’s equalitarian system?

“At this solemn hour of the division of labour, the storm winds begin to blow over humanity. Progress does not take place for all in an equal and uniform manner.... It begins by taking possession of a small number of the privileged.... It is this preference for person on the part of progress that has for so long kept up the belief

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*Lemontey alludes to his book: Raison, folie, chacun son mot; petit cours de morale mis à la portée des vieux enfants (Reason, Folly, to Each His Own Word; a Short Course in Morality Within the Mental Reach of Old Children), Paris, 1801. Marx quotes Lemontey’s work Influence morale de la division du travail (The Moral Influence of the Division of Labour), in which Lemontey refers to the above book.*
in the natural and providential inequality of conditions, has given rise to castes, and hierarchically constituted all societies.” (Proudhon, Vol. I, p. 94)

The division of labour created castes. Now, castes are the drawbacks of the division of labour; thus, it is the division of labour that has engendered the drawbacks. *Quod erat demonstrandum.* [Which was the thing to be proved.] Will you go further and ask what made the division of labour create castes, hierarchical constitutions and privileged persons? M. Proudhon will tell you: Progress. And what made progress? Limitation. Limitation, for M. Proudhon, is acceptance of persons on the part of progress.

After philosophy comes history. It is no longer either descriptive history or dialectical history, it is comparative history. M. Proudhon establishes a parallel between the present-day printing worker and the printing worker of the Middle Ages; between the man of letters of today and the man of letters of the Middle Ages, and he weighs down the balance on the side of those who belong more or less to the division of labour as the Middle Ages constituted or transmitted it. He opposes the division of labour of one historical epoch. Was that what M. Proudhon had to prove? No. He should have shown us the drawbacks of the division of labour in general, of the division of labour as a category. Besides, why stress this part of M. Proudhon’s work, since a little later we shall see him formally retract all these alleged developments?

“The first effect of fractional labour,” continues M. Proudhon, “after the depravation of the soul, is the prolongation of the shifts, which grow in inverse ratio to the sum total of intelligence expended.... But as the length of the shifts cannot exceed 16 to 18 hours per day, the moment the compensation cannot be taken out of the time, it will be taken out of the price, and the wages will diminish.... What is certain, and the only thing for us to note, is that the universal conscience does not assess at the same rate the work of a foreman and the labour of a mechanic’s assistant. It is therefore necessary to reduce the price of the day’s work; so that the worker, after having been afflicted in his soul by a degrading function, cannot escape being struck in his body by the meagreness of his remuneration.” (Vol. I, p. 97-98)

We pass over the logical value of these syllogisms, which Kant would call paralogisms which lead astray.

This is the substance of it:

The division of labour reduces the worker to a degrading function; to this degrading function corresponds a depraved soul; to the depravation of the soul is befitting an ever-increasing wage reduction. And to prove that this reduction is befitting to a depraved soul, M. Proudhon says, to relieve his conscience, that the universal conscience wills it thus. Is M. Proudhon’s soul to be reckoned as a part of the universal conscience?

*Machinery* is, for M. Proudhon, “the logical antithesis of the division of labour,” and with the help of his dialectics, he begins by transforming machinery into the workshop.

After presupposing the modern workshop, in order to make poverty the outcome of the division of labour, M. Proudhon presupposes poverty engendered by the division of labour, in order to come to the workshop and be able to represent it as the dialectical negation of that poverty. After striking the worker morally by a degrading function, physically by the meagreness of the wage, after putting the worker under the dependence of the foreman, and debasing his work to the labour of a mechanic’s assistant, he lays the blame again on the workshop and the machinery for degrading the worker “by giving him a master,” and he completes his abasement by making him “sink from the rank of artisan to that of common labourer.” Excellent dialectics! And if he only stopped there! But no, he has to have a new history of the division of labour, not any longer to derive the contradictions from it, but to reconstruct the workshop after his own fashion. To attain this end he finds himself compelled to forget all he has just said about division.
Labour is organised, is divided differently according to the instruments it disposes over. The hand-mill presupposes a different division of labour from the steam-mill. Thus, it is slapping history in the face to want to begin by the division of labour in general, in order to get subsequently to a specific instrument of production, machinery.

Machinery is no more an economic category than the bullock that drags the plough. Machinery is merely a productive force. The modern workshop, which depends on the application of machinery, is a social production relation, an economic category.

Let us see now how things happen in M. Proudhon’s brilliant imagination.

“In society, the incessant appearance of machinery is the antithesis, the inverse formula of the division of labour: it is the protest of the industrial genius against fractional and homicidal labour. What, actually, is a machine? A way of uniting different portions of labour which had been separated by the division of labour. Every machine can be defined as a summary of several operations. Thus, through the machine there will be a restoration of the worker. Machinery, which in political economy places itself in contradiction to the division of labour, represents synthesis, which in the human mind is opposed to analysis. Division merely separated the different parts of labour, letting each one devote himself to the speciality which most suited him; the workshop groups the workers according to the relation of each part to the whole. It introduces the principle of authority in labour. But this is not all; the machine or the workshop, after degrading the worker by giving him a master, completes his abasement by making him sink from the rank of artisan to that of common labourer. The period we are going through at the moment, that of machinery, is distinguished by a special characteristic, the wage worker. The wage worker is subsequent to the division of labour and to exchange.” (Vol. I, p. 135, 136, 161)

Just a simple remark to M. Proudhon. The separation of the different parts of labour, leaving to each one the opportunity of devoting himself to the speciality best suited to him – a separation which M. Proudhon dates from the beginning of the world – exists only in modern industry under the rule of competition.

M. Proudhon goes on to give us a most “interesting genealogy,” to show how the workshop arose from the division of labour and the wage worker from the workshop.

1) He supposes a man who “noticed that by dividing up production into its different parts and having each one performed by a separate worker,” the forces of production would be multiplied.

2) This man, grasping the thread of this idea, tells himself that, by forming a permanent group of workers selected for the special purpose he sets himself, he will obtain a more sustained production, etc.” (Vol. I, p. 161)

3) This man makes a proposal to other men, to make them grasp his idea and the thread of his idea.

4) This man, at the beginning of industry, deals on terms of equality with his companions who later become his workmen.

5) “One realises, in fact, that this original equality had rapidly to disappear in view of the advantageous position of the master and the dependence of the wage-earner.” (Vol. I. p.163)

That is another example of M. Proudhon’s historical and descriptive method.

Let us now examine, from the historical and economic point of view, whether the workshop of the machine really introduced the principle of authority in society subsequently to the division of labour; whether it rehabilitated the worker on the one hand, while submitting him to authority on the other; whether the machine is the recomposition of divided labour, the synthesis of labour as opposed to its analysis.
Society as a whole has this in common with the interior of a workshop, that it too has its division of labour. If one took as a model the division of labour in a modern workshop, in order to apply it to a whole society, the society best organized for the production of wealth would undoubtedly be that which had a single chief employer, distributing tasks to different members of the community according to a previously fixed rule. But this is by no means the case. While inside the modern workshop the division of labour is meticulously regulated by the authority of the employer, modern society has no other rule, no other authority for the distribution of labour than free competition.

Under the patriarchal system, under the caste system, under the feudal and corporative system, there was division of labour in the whole of society according to fixed rules. Were these rules established by a legislator? No. Originally born of the conditions of material production, they were raised to the status of laws only much later. In this way, these different forms of the division of labour became so many bases of social organization. As for the division in the workshop, it was very little developed in all these forms of society.

It can even be laid down as a general rule that the less authority presides over the division of labour inside society, the more the division of labour develops inside the workshop, and the more it is subjected there to the authority of a single person. Thus authority in the workshop and authority in society, in relation to the division of labour, are in inverse ratio to each other.

The question now is what kind of workshop it is in which the occupations are very much separated, where each worker’s task is reduced to a very simple operation, and where the authority, capital, groups and directs the work. How was this workshop brought into existence? In order to answer this question, we shall have to examine how manufacturing industry, properly so-called, has developed. I am speaking here of that industry which is not yet industry, with its machinery, but which is already no longer the industry of the artisans of the Middle Ages, nor domestic industry. We shall not go into great detail: we shall merely give a few main points to show that history is not to be made with formulas.

One of the most indispensable conditions for the formation of manufacturing industry was the accumulation of capital, facilitated by the discovery of America and the import of its precious metals.

It is sufficiently proved that the increase in the means of exchange resulted in the depreciation of wages and land rents, on the one hand, and the growth of industrial profits on the other. In other words: to the extent that the propertied class and the working class, the feudal lords and the people, sank, to that extent the capitalist class, the bourgeoisie, rose.

There were yet other circumstances which contributed simultaneously to the development of manufacturing industry: the increase of commodities put into circulation from the moment that trade had penetrated to the East Indies by way of the Cape of Good Hope; the colonial system; the development of maritime trade.

Another point which has not yet been sufficiently appreciated in the history of manufacturing industry is the disbanding of the numerous retinues of feudal lords, whose subordinate ranks became vagrants before entering the workshop. The creation of the workshop was preceded by an almost universal vagrancy in the 15th and 16th centuries. The workshop found, besides, a powerful support in the many peasants who, continually driven from the country owing to the transformation of the fields into pastures and to the progress in agriculture which necessitated fewer hands for the tillage of the soil, went on congregating in the towns during whole centuries.

The growth of the market, the accumulation of capital, the modification in the social position of the classes, a large number of persons being deprived of their sources of income, all these are historical preconditions for the formation of manufacture. It was not, as M. Proudhon says, friendly agreements between equals that brought men into the workshop. It was not even in the bosom of the old guilds that manufacture was born. It was the merchant that became head of the
modern workshop, and not the old guildmaster. Almost everywhere there was a desperate struggle between manufacture and crafts.

The accumulation and concentration of instruments and workers preceded the development of the division of labour inside the workshop. Manufacture consisted much more in the bringing together of many workers and many crafts in one place, in one room under the command of one capital, than in the analysis of labour and the adaptation of a special worker to a very simple task.

The utility of a workshop consisted much less in the division of labour as such than in the circumstances that work was done on a much larger scale, that many unnecessary expenses were saved, etc. At the end of the 16th and at the beginning of the 17th century, Dutch manufacture scarcely knew any division of labour.

The development of the division of labour supposes the assemblage of workers in a workshop. There is not one single example, whether in the 16th or in the 17th century, of the different branches of one and the same craft being exploited separately to such an extent that it would have sufficed to assemble them all in one place so as to obtain a complete, ready-made workshop. But once the men and the instruments had been brought together, the division of labour, such as it had existed in the form of the guilds, was reproduced, necessarily reflected inside the workshop.

For M. Proudhon, who sees things upside down, if he sees them at all, the division of labour, in Adam Smith’s sense, precedes the workshop, which is a condition of its existence.

Machinery, properly so-called, dates from the end of the 18th century. Nothing is more absurd than to see in machinery the antithesis of the division of labour, the synthesis restoring unity to divided labour.

The machine is a unification of the instruments of labour, and by no means a combination of different operations for the worker himself.

“When, by the division of labour, each particular operation has been simplified to the use of a single instrument, the linking up of all these instruments, set in motion by a single engine, constitutes – a machine.” (Babbage, Traité sur l’économie des machines [et des manufactures], p. 230, Paris, 1833)

Simple tools; accumulation tools; composite tools; setting in motion of a composite tool by a single hand engine, by man; setting in motion of these instruments by natural forces, machines; system of machines having one motor; system of machines having one automatic motor – this is the progress of machinery.

The concentration of the instruments of production and the division of labour are as inseparable one from the other as are, in the political sphere, the concentration of public authority and the division of private interests. England, with the concentration of the land, this instrument of agricultural labour, has at the same time division of agricultural labour and the application of machinery to the exploitation of the soil. France, which has the division of the instruments, the small holdings system, has, in general, neither division of agricultural labour nor application of machinery to the soil.

For M. Proudhon the concentration of the instruments of labour is the negation of the division of labour. In reality, we find again the reverse. As the concentration of instruments develops, the division develops also, and vice versa. This is why every big mechanical invention is followed by a greater division of labour, and each increase in the division of labour gives rise in turn to new mechanical inventions.

We need not recall the fact that the great progress of the division of labour began in England after the invention of machinery. Thus, the weavers and spinners were for the most part peasants like those one still meets in backward countries. The invention of machinery brought about the separation of manufacturing industry from agricultural industry. The weaver and the spinner, united but lately in a single family, were separated by the machine. Thanks to the machine, the
spinner can live in England while the weaver resides in the East Indies. Before the invention of machinery, the industry of a country was carried on chiefly with raw materials that were the products of its own soil; in England – wool, in Germany – flax, in France – silks and flax, in the East Indies and the Levant – cottons, etc. Thanks to the application of machinery and of steam, the division of labour was about to assume such dimensions that large-scale industry, detached from the national soil, depends entirely on the world market, on international exchange, on an international division of labour. In short – the machine has so great an influence on the division of labour, that when, in the manufacture of some object, a means has been found to produce parts of it mechanically, the manufacture splits up immediately into two works independent of each other.

Need we speak of the philanthropic and providential aim that M. Proudhon discovers in the invention and first application of machinery?

When in England the market had become so far developed that manual labour was no longer adequate, the need for machinery was felt. Then came the idea of the application of mechanical science, already quite developed in the 18th century.

The automatic workshop opened its career with acts which were anything but philanthropic. Children were kept at work at the whip’s end; they were made an object of traffic and contracts were undertaken with the orphanages. All the laws on the apprenticeship of workers were repealed, because, to use M. Proudhon’s phraseology, there was no further need for synthetic workers. Finally, from 1825 onwards, almost all the new inventions were the result of collisions between the worker and the employer who sought at all costs to depreciate the worker’s specialised ability. After each new strike of any importance, there appeared a new machine. So little indeed did the worker see in the application of machinery a sort of rehabilitation, restoration – as M. Proudhon would say – that in the 18th century he stood out for a very long time against the incipient domination of the automaton.

“Wyatt,” says Doctor Ure, “invented the series of fluted rollers... (the spinning fingers usually ascribed to Awkright)... The main difficulty did not, to my apprehension, lie so much in the invention of a proper self-acting mechanism... as in training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton. But to devise and administer a successful code of factory discipline, suited to the necessities of factory diligence, was the Herculean enterprise, the noble achievement of Awkright.” (Vol. I, pp. 21-22, 23)

In short, by the introduction of machinery, the division of labour inside society has grown up, the task of the worker inside the workshop has been simplified, capital has been concentrated, human beings have been further dismembered.

When M. Proudhon wants to be an economist, and to abandon for a moment the “evolution of ideas in serial relation in the understanding,” then he goes and draws erudition from Adam Smith, from a time when the automatic workshop was only just coming into existence. Indeed, what a difference between the division of labour as it existed in Adam Smith’s day and as we see it in the automatic workshop! In order to make this properly understood, we need only quote a few passages from Dr. Ure’s The Philosophy of Manufactures.

“When Adam Smith wrote his immortal elements of economics, automatic machinery being hardly known, he was properly led to regard the division of labour as the grand principle of manufacturing improvement; and he showed, in the example of pin-making, how each handicraftsman, being thereby enabled to perfect himself by practice in one point, became a quicker and cheaper workman. In each branch of manufacture he saw that some parts were, on that principle, of easy execution, like the cutting of pin wires into uniform lengths, and some were comparatively difficult, like the formation and fixation of their heads; and
therefore he concluded that to each a workman of appropriate value and cost was naturally assigned. This appropriation forms the very essence of the division of labour....

“But what was in Dr. Smith’s time a topic of useful illustration, cannot now be used without risk of misleading the public mind as to the right principle of manufacturing industry. In fact, the division, or rather adaptation of labour to the different talents of men, is little thought of in factory employment. On the contrary, wherever a process requires a peculiar dexterity and steadiness of hand, it is withdrawn as soon as possible from the cunning workman, who is prone to irregularities of many kinds, and it is placed in charge of a peculiar mechanism, so self-regulating, that a child may superintend it.

“The principle of the factory system then is, to substitute mechanical science for hand skill, and the partition of a process into its essential constituents, for the division or gradation of labour among artisans. On the handicraft plan, labour more or less skilled, was usually the most expensive element of production... but on the automatic plan, skilled labour gets progressively superseded, and will, eventually, be replaced by mere overlookers of machines.

“By the infirmity of human nature it happens, that the more skilful the workman, the more self-willed and intractable he is apt to become, and, of course, the less fit a component of a mechanical system, in which, by occasional irregularities, he may do great damage to the whole. The grand object therefore of the modern manufacturer is, through the union of capital and science, to reduce the task of his workpeople to the exercise of vigilance and dexterity – faculties, when concentrated to one process, speedily brought to perfection in the young.

“On the gradation system, a man must serve an apprenticeship of many years before his hand and eye become skilled enough for certain mechanical feats; but on the system of decomposing a process into its constituents, and embodying each part in an automatic machine, a person of common care and capacity may be entrusted with any of the said elementary parts after a short probation, and may be transferred from one to another, on any emergency, at the discretion of the master. Such translations are utterly at variance with the old practice of the division of labour, which fixed one man to shaping the head of a pin, and another to sharpening its point, with the most irksome and spirit-wasting uniformity, for a whole life.... But on the equalisation plan of self-acting machines, the operative needs to call his faculties only into agreeable exercise.... As his business consists in ending the work of a well-regulated mechanism, he can learn it in a short period; and when he transfers his services, from one machine to another, he varies his task, and enlarges his views, by thinking on those general combinations which result from his and his companions’ labours. Thus, that cramping of the faculties, that narrowing of the mind, that stunting of the frame, which were ascribed, and not unjustly, by moral writers, to the division of labour, cannot, in common circumstances, occur under the equable distribution of industry.... It is, in fact, the constant aim and tendency of every improvement in machinery to supersede human labour altogether, or to diminish its cost, by substituting the industry of women and children for that of men; or that of ordinary labourers for trained artisans.... This tendency to employ merely children with watchful eyes and nimble fingers, instead of journeymen of long experience, shows how the scholastic dogma of the division of labour into degrees of skill has been exploded by our enlightened manufacturers.” (Andre Ure, Philosophie des manufactures ou Economie industrielle, Vol. I, Chap. 1, pp. 34-35)
What characterises the division of labour inside modern society is that it engenders specialised functions, specialists, and with them craft-idiocy.

“We are struck with admiration,” says Lemontey, “when we see among the Ancients the same person distinguishing himself to a high degree as philosopher, poet, orator, historian, priest, administrator, general of an army. Our souls are appalled at the sight of so vast a domain. Each one of us plants his hedge and shuts himself up in his enclosure. I do not know whether by this parcellation the field is enlarged, but I do know that man is belittled.” (Lemontey, op. cit., p. 213)

What characterises the division of labour in the automatic workshop is that labour has there completely lost its specialised character. But the moment every special development stops, the need for universality, the tendency towards an integral development of the individual begins to be felt. The automatic workshop wipes out specialists and craft-idiocy.

M. Proudhon, not having understood even this one revolutionary side of the automatic workshop, takes a step backward and proposes to the worker that he make not only the 12th part of a pin, but successively all 12 parts of it. The worker would thus arrive at the knowledge and the consciousness of the pin. This is M. Proudhon’s synthetic labour. Nobody will contest that to make a movement forward and another movement backward is to make a synthetic movement.

To sum up, M. Proudhon has not gone further than the petty-bourgeois ideal. And to realise this ideal, he can think of nothing better than to take us back to the journeyman or, at most, to the master craftsman of the Middle Ages. It is enough, he says somewhere in his book, to have created a masterpiece once in one’s life, to have felt oneself just once to be a man. Is not this, in form as in content, the masterpiece demanded by the trade guild of the Middle Ages?
§ 3. Competition and Monopoly

Good side of competition
“Competition is as essential to labour as division... It is necessary ... for the advent of equality.” (Vol. I, pp. 186, 188)

Bad side of competition
“The principle is the negation of itself. Its most certain result is to ruin those whom it drags in its train.” (Vol. I, p. 185)

General reflection
“The drawbacks which follow in its wake, just as the good it provides... both flow logically from the principle.” (Vol. I, pp. 185-86)

Problem to be solved
“To seek the principle of accommodation, which must be derived from a law superior to liberty itself.” (Vol. I, p. 185)

M. Proudhon begins by defending the eternal necessity of competition against those who wish to replace it by emulation.

There is no “purposeless emulation,” and as “the object of every passion is necessarily analogous to the passion itself – a woman for the lover, power for the ambitious, gold for the miser, a garland for the poet – the object of industrial emulation is necessarily profit. Emulation is nothing but competition itself.” (Vol. I, p. 187)

Competition is emulation with a view to profit. Is industrial emulation necessarily emulation with a view to profit, that is, competition?? M. Proudhon proves it by affirming it. We have seen that, for him, to affirm is to prove, just as to suppose is to deny.

If the immediate object of the lover is the woman, the immediate object of industrial emulation is the product and not the profit.

Competition is not industrial emulation, it is commercial emulation. In our time industrial emulation exists only in view of commerce. There are even phases in the economic life of modern nations when everybody is seized with a sort of craze for making profit without producing. This speculation craze, which recurs periodically, lays bare the true character of competition, which seeks to escape the need for industrial emulation.

If you had told an artisan of the 14th century that the privileges and the whole feudal organization of industry were going to be abrogated in favour of industrial emulation, called competition, he would have replied that the privileges of the various corporations, guilds and fraternities were

* The Fourierists. [Note by Engels to 1885 German edition]
organized competition. M. Proudhon does not impose upon this when he affirms that “emulation
is nothing but competition itself.”

“Decree that from the first of January 1847, labour and wages shall be guaranteed
to everybody: immediately an immense relaxation will succeed the high tension of
industry.” (Vol. I. p. 189)

Instead of a supposition, an affirmation and a negation, we have now a decree that M. Proudhon
issues purposely to prove the necessity of competition, its eternity as a category, etc.

If we imagine that decrees are all that is needed to get away from competition, we shall never get
away from it. And if we go so far as to propose to abolish competition while retaining wages, we
shall be proposing nonsense by royal decree. But nations do not proceed by royal decree. Before
framing such ordinances, they must at least have changed from top to bottom the conditions of
their industrial and political existence, and consequently their whole manner of being.

M. Proudhon will reply, with his imperturbable assurance, that it is the hypothesis of “a
transformation of our nature without historical antecedents,” and that he would be right in
“excluding is from the discussion,” we know not in virtue of which ordinance.

M. Proudhon does not know that all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human
nature.

“Let us stick to the facts. The French Revolution was made for industrial liberty as
much as for political liberty; and although France, in 1789, had not perceived – let
us say it openly – all the consequences of the principle whose realisation it
demanded, it was mistaken neither in its wishes nor in its expectations. Whoever
attempts to deny this loses, in my view, the right to criticism. I will never dispute
with an adversary who puts as principle the spontaneous error of 25 million
men....

“Why then, if competition had not been a principle of social economy, a decree of fate, a
necessity of the human soul, why, instead of abolishing corporations, guilds and brotherhoods,
did nobody think rather of repairing the whole?” (Vol. I. p. 191, 192)

So, since the French of the 18th century abolished corporations, guilds, and fraternities instead of
modifying them, the French of the 19th century must modify competition instead of abolishing it.
Since competition was established in France in the 18th century as a result of historical needs,
this competition must not be destroyed in the 19th century because of other historical needs. M.
Proudhon, not understanding that the establishment of competition was bound up with the actual
development of the men of the 18th century, makes of competition a necessity of the human soul,
in partibus infidelium [literally, territory of the infidels; here, meaning, beyond the realm of
reality.] What would he have made of the great Colbert for the 17th century?

After the revolution comes the present state of affairs. M. Proudhon equally draws facts from it to
show the eternity of competition, by proving that all industries in which this category is not yet
sufficiently developed, as in agriculture, are in a state of inferiority and decrepitude.

To say that there are industries which have not yet reached the stage of competition, that others
again are below the level of bourgeois production, is drivel which gives not the slightest proof of
the eternity of competition.

All M. Proudhon’s logic amounts to is this: competition is a social relation in which we are now
developing our productive forces. To this truth, he gives no logical development, but only forms,
often very well developed, when he says that competition is industrial emulation, the present-day
mode of freedom, responsibility in labour, constitution of value, a condition for the advent of
equality, a principle of social economy, a decree of fate, a necessity of the human soul, an
inspiration of eternal justice, liberty in division, division in liberty, an economic category.
“Competition and association support each other. Far from excluding each other they are not even divergent. Whoever says competition already supposes a common aim. Competition is therefore not egoism, and the most deplorable error committed by socialism is to have regarded it as the overthrow of society.” (Vol. I, p. 223)

Whoever says competition says common aim, and that proves, on the one hand, that competition is association; on the other, that competition is not egoism. And whoever says egoism, does he not say common aim? Every egoism operates in society and by the fact of society. Hence it presupposes society, that is to say, common aims, common needs, common means of production, etc., etc. Is it, then, by mere chance that the competition and association which the socialists talk about are not even divergent?

Socialists know well enough that present-day society is founded on competition. How could they accuse competition of overthrowing present-day society which they want to overthrow themselves? And how could they accuse competition of overthrowing the society to come, in which they see, on the contrary, the overthrow of competition?

M. Proudhon says, later on, that competition is the opposite of monopoly, and consequently cannot be the opposite of association.

Feudalism was, from its origins, opposed to patriarchal monarchy; it was thus not opposed to competition, which was not yet in existence. Does it follow that competition is not opposed to feudalism?

In actual fact, society, association are denominations which can be given to every society, to feudal society as well as to bourgeois society which is association founded on competition. How then can there be socialists, who, by the single word association, think they can refute competition? And how can M. Proudhon himself wish to defend competition against socialism by describing competition by the single word association?

All we have just said makes up the beautiful side of competition as M. Proudhon sees it. Now let us pass on to the ugly side, that is the negative side, of competition, its drawbacks, its destructive, subversive elements, its injurious qualities.

There is something dismal about the picture M. Proudhon draws of it. Competition engenders misery, it foments civil war, it “changes natural zones,” mixes up nationalities, causes trouble in families, corrupts the public conscience, “subverts the notion of equity, of justice,” of morality, and what is worse, it destroys free, honest trade, and does not even give in exchange synthetic value, fixed, honest price. It disillusions everyone, even economists. It pushes things so far as to destroy its very self.

After all the ill M. Proudhon says of it, can there be for the relations of bourgeois society, for its principles and its illusions, a more disintegrating, more destructive element than competition?

It must be carefully noted that competition always becomes the more destructive for bourgeois relations in proportion as it urges on a feverish creation of new productive forces, that is, of the material conditions of a new society. In this respect at least, the bad side of competition would have its good points.

“Competition as an economic position or phase, considered in its origin, is the necessary result... of the theory of the reduction of general expenses.” (Vol. I, p. 235)

For M. Proudhon, the circulation of the blood must be a consequence of Harvey’s theory.

“Monopoly is the inevitable end of competition, which engenders it by a continual negation of itself. This generation of monopoly is in itself a justification of it.... Monopoly is the natural opposite of competition... but as soon as competition is
necessary, it implies the idea of monopoly, since monopoly is, as it were, the seat of each competing individuality." (Vol. I, pp. 236, 237)

We rejoice with M. Proudhon that he can for once at least properly apply his formula to thesis and antithesis. Everyone knows that modern monopoly is engendered by competition itself.

As for the content, M. Proudhon clings to poetic images. Competition made “of every subdivision of labour a sort of sovereignty in which each individual stood with his power and his independence.” Monopoly is “the seat of every competing individuality.” The sovereignty is worth at least as much as the seat.

M. Proudhon talks of nothing but modern monopoly engendered by competition. But we all know that competition was engendered by feudal monopoly. Thus competition was originally the opposite of monopoly and not monopoly the opposite of competition. So that modern monopoly is not a simple antithesis, it is on the contrary the true synthesis.

*Thesis:* Feudal monopoly, before competition.

*Antithesis:* Competition.

*Synthesis:* Modern monopoly, which is the negation of feudal monopoly, in so far as it implies the system of competition, and the negation of competition in so far as it is monopoly.

Thus modern monopoly, bourgeois monopoly, is synthetic monopoly, the negation of the negation, the unity of opposites. It is monopoly in the pure, normal, rational state.

M. Proudhon is in contradiction with his own philosophy when he turns bourgeois monopoly into monopoly in the crude, primitive, contradictory, spasmodic state. M. Rossi, whom M. Proudhon quotes several times on the subject of monopoly, seems to have a better grasp of the synthetic character of bourgeois monopoly. In his Cours d’économie politique, he distinguishes between artificial monopolies and natural monopolies. Feudal monopolies, he says, are artificial, that is, arbitrary; bourgeois monopolies are natural, that is, rational.

Monopoly is a good thing, reasons M. Proudhon, since it is an economic category, an emanation “from the impersonal reason of humanity.” Competition, again, is a good thing since it also is an economic category. But what is not good is the reality of monopoly and the reality of competition. What is still worse is that competition and monopoly devour each other. What is to be done? Look for the synthesis of these two eternal thoughts, wrest it from the bosom of God, where is has been deposited from time immemorial.

In practical life we find not only competition, monopoly and the antagonism between them, but also the synthesis of the two, which is not a formula, but a movement. Monopoly produces competition, competition produces monopoly. Monopolists are made from competition; competitors become monopolists. If the monopolists restrict their mutual competition by means of partial associations, competition increases among the workers; and the more the mass of the proletarians grows as against the monopolists of one nation, the more desperate competition becomes between the monopolists of different nations. The synthesis is of such a character that monopoly can only maintain itself by continually entering into the struggle of competition.

To make the dialectical transition to the taxes which come after monopoly, M. Proudhon talks to us about the social genius which, after zigzagging intrepidly onward,

“after striding with a jaunty step, without repenting and without halting, reaches the corner of monopoly, casts backward a melancholy glance, and, after profound reflection, assails all the objects of production with taxes, and creates a whole administrative organisation, in order that all employments be given to the proletariat and paid by the men of monopoly.” (Vol. I, pp. 284, 285)

What can we say of this genius, which, while fasting, walks about in a zigzag? And what can we say of this walking which has no other object in view than that of destroying the bourgeois by
taxes, whereas taxes are the very means of giving the bourgeois the wherewithal to preserve themselves as the ruling class?

Merely to give a glimpse of the manner in which M. Proudhon treats economic details, it suffices to say that, according to him, the tax on consumption was established with a view to equality, and to relieve the proletariat.

The tax on consumption has assumed its true development only since the rise of the bourgeoisie. In the hands of industrial capital, that is, of sober and economical wealth, which maintains, reproduces, and increases itself by the direct exploitation of labour, the tax on consumption was a means of exploiting the frivolous, gay, prodigal wealth of the fine lords who did nothing but consume. James Steuart clearly developed this original purpose of the tax on consumption in his Recherches des principes de l’économie politique, which he published 10 years before Adam Smith.

“As under the pure monarchy, the prince seems jealous, as it were, of growing wealth, and therefore imposes taxes upon people who are growing richer. Under the limited government they are calculated chiefly to affect those who from rich are growing poorer. Thus the monarch imposes a tax upon industry, where everyone is rated in proportion to the gain he is supposed to make by his profession. The poll-tax and taille are likewise proportioned to the supposed opulence of everyone liable to them.... In limited governments, impositions are more generally laid upon consumption.” (Vol. II, pp. 190-91)

As for the logical sequence of taxes, of the balance of trade, of credit – in the understanding of M. Proudhon – we could only remark that the English bourgeoisie, on attaining its political constitution under William of Orange, created all at once a new system of taxes, public credit, and the system of protective duties, as soon as it was in a position freely to develop its conditions of existence.

This brief summary will suffice to give the reader a true idea of M. Proudhon’s lucubrations on the police or on taxes, the balance of trade, credit, communism, and population. We defy the most indulgent criticism to treat these chapters seriously.

§ 4. Property or Ground Rent

In each historical epoch, property has developed differently and under a set of entirely different social relations. Thus to define bourgeois property is nothing else than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production.

To try to give a definition of property as of an independent relation, a category apart, an abstract and eternal idea, can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence.

M. Proudhon, while seeming to speak of property in general, deals only with landed property, with ground rent.

“The origin of rent, as property, is, so to speak, extra-economic: it rests in psychological and moral considerations which are only very distantly connected with the production of wealth.” (Vol. II, p. 265)

So M. Proudhon declares himself incapable of understanding the economic origin of rent and of property. He admits that this incapacity obliges him to resort to psychological and moral considerations, which, indeed, while only distantly connected with the production of wealth, have yet a very close connection with the narrowness of his historical views. M. Proudhon affirms that there is something mystical and mysterious about the origin of property. Now, to see mystery in the origin of property – that is, to make a mystery of the relation between production itself and the distribution of the instruments of production – is not this, to use M. Proudhon’s language, a renunciation of all claims to economic science?

M. Proudhon
“confines himself to recalling that at the seventh epoch of economic evolution –
credit – when fiction had caused reality to vanish, and human activity threatened
to lose itself in empty space, it had become necessary to bind man more closely to
nature. Now, rent was the price of this new contract.” (Vol. II, p. 269)

*L’homme aux quarante écus* foresaw a M. Proudhon of the future:

“Mr. Creator, by your leave: everyone is master in his own world: but you will
never make me believe that the one we live in is made of glass.”

In your world, where credit was a means of *losing oneself in empty space*, it is very possible that
property became necessary in order to *bind man to nature*. In the world of real production, where
landed property always precedes credit, M. Proudhon’s *horror vacui* [horror of a vacuum] could
not exist.

The existence of rent once admitted, whatever its origin, it becomes a subject of mutually
antagonistic negotiations between the farmer and the landed proprietor. What is the ultimate
result of these negotiations, in other words, what is the average amount of rent? This is what M.
Proudhon says:

“Ricardo’s theory answers this question. In the beginning of society, when man,
new to earth, had before him nothing but huge forests, when the earth was vast
and when industry was beginning to come to life, rent must have been nil. Land,
as yet unformed by labour, was an object of utility; it was not an exchange value,
it was common, not social. Little by little, the multiplication of families and the
progress of agriculture caused the price of land to make itself felt. Labour came to
give the soil its worth; from this, rent came into being. The more fruit a field
yielded with the same amount of labour, the higher it was valued; hence the
tendency of proprietors was always to arrogate to themselves the whole amount of
the fruits of the soil, less the wages of the farm – that is, less the costs of
production. Thus property followed on the heels of labour to take from it all the
product that exceeded the actual expenses. As the proprietor fulfils a mystic duty
and represents the community as against the colonus, that farmer is, by the
dispensation of Providence, no more than a responsible labourer, who must
account to society for all he reaps above his legitimate wage.... In essence and by
destination, then, rent is an instrument of distributive justice, one of the thousand
means that the genius of economy employs to attain to equality. It is an immediate
land valuation which is carried out contradictorily by landowners and farmers,
without any possible collusion, in a higher interest, and whose ultimate result
must be to equalise the possession of the land between the exploiters of the soil
and the industrialists.... It needed no less than this magic of property to snatch
from the colonus the surplus of his product which he cannot help regarding as his
own and of which he considers himself to be exclusively the author. Rent, or
rather property, has broken down agricultural egoism and created a solidarity that
no power, no partition of the land could have brought into being.... The moral
effect of property having been secured, at present what remains to be done is to
distribute the rent.” (Vol. II, pp. 270-72)

All this tumult of words may be reduced firstly to this: Ricardo says that the excess of the price of
agricultural products over their cost of production, including the ordinary profit and interest on
the capital, gives the measure of the rent. M. Proudhon does better. He makes the landowner

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*The Man of Forty Ecus is the hero of Voltaire’s story of the same name. He is a modest, hard-working peasant with
an annual income of 40 écus (silver coins used in France in the 17th-18th centuries). The next passage is quoted from
the story.*
interfere, like a Deus ex machina, and snatch from the colonus all the surplus of his production over the cost of production. He makes use of the intervention of the landowner to explain property, of the intervention of the rent-receiver to explain rent. He answers the problem by formulating the same problem and adding an extra syllable.

Let us note also that in determining rent by the difference in fertility of the soil, M. Proudhon assigns a new origin to it, since land, before being assessed according to different degrees of fertility, “was not,” in his view, “an exchange value, but was common.” What, then, has happened to the fiction about rent having come into being through the necessity of bringing back to the land man who was about to lose himself in the infinity of empty space?

Now let us free Ricardo’s doctrine from the providential, allegorical, and mystical phrases in which M. Proudhon has been careful to wrap it.

Rent, in the Ricardian sense, is property in land in its bourgeois state; that is, feudal property which has become subject to the conditions of bourgeois production.

We have seen that, according to the Ricardian doctrine, the price of all objects is determined ultimately by the cost of production, including the industrial profit; in other words, by the labour time employed. In manufacturing industry, the price of the product obtained by the minimum of labour regulates the price of all other commodities of the same kind, seeing that the cheapest and most productive instruments of production can be multiplied to infinity and that competition necessarily gives rise to a market price – that is, a common price for all products of the same kind.

In agricultural industry, on the contrary, it is the price of the product obtained by the greatest amount of labour which regulates the price of all products of the same kind. In the first place, one cannot, as in manufacturing industry, multiply at will the instruments of production possessing the same degree of productivity, that is, plots of land with the same degree of fertility. Then, as population increases, land of an inferior quality begins to be exploited, or new outlays of capital, proportionately less productive than before, are made upon the same plot of land. In both cases a greater amount of labour is expended to obtain a proportionately smaller product. The needs of the population having rendered necessary this increase of labour, the product of the land whose exploitation is the more costly has as certain a sale as that of a piece of land whose exploitation is cheaper. As competition levels the market price, the product of the better soil will be paid for as dearly as that of the inferior. It is the excess of the price of the products of the better soil over the cost of their production that constitutes rent. If one could always have at one’s disposal plots of land of the same degree of fertility; if one could, as in manufacturing industry, have recourse continually to cheaper and more productive machines, or if the subsequent outlays of capital produced as much as the first, then the price of agricultural products would be determined by the price of commodities produced by the best instruments of production, as we have seen with the price of manufactured products. But, from this moment rent would have disappeared also.

For the Ricardian doctrine to be generally true, it is moreover essential that capital should be freely applicable to different branches of industry; that a strongly developed competition among the capitalists should have brought profits to an equal level; that the farmer should be no more than an industrial capitalist claiming for the use of his capital on the land, a profit equal to that

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2 Literally, god out of the machine, a reference to actors in theatres of antiquity who made their appearance by stage machinery. Figuratively, a person who appears unexpectedly to save a situation. – Ed.
3 Propriété (property) is explained by the intervention of the propriétaire (proprietor), and rente (rent), by the intervention of the rentier (rent-receiver). – Ed.
4 In the copy presented by Marx to N. Utina, the beginning of the sentence was altered as follows: “For the Ricardian doctrine, once the premises granted, to be generally true, it is moreover essential that...” – Ed.
5 In the copy presented to N. Utina, the words “on inferior land” were altered to “on the land.” – Ed.
which he would draw from his capital if it were applied in any kind of manufacture; that agricultural exploitation should be subjected to the regime of large-scale industry; and finally, that the landowner himself should aim at nothing beyond the money return.

It may happen, as in Ireland, that rent does not yet exist, although the letting of land has reached an extreme development there. Rent being the excess not only over wages, but also over industrial profit, it cannot exist where the landowner’s revenue is nothing but a mere levy on wages.

Thus, far from converting the exploiter of the land, the farmer, into a simple labourer, and “snatching from the cultivator the surplus of his product, which he cannot help regarding as his own,” rent confronts the landowner, not with the slave, the serf, the payer of tribute, the wage labourer, but with the industrial capitalist.

Once constituted as ground rent, ground property has in its possession only the surplus over production costs, which are determined not only by wages but also by industrial profit. It is therefore from the landowner that ground rent snatched a part of his income. Thus, there was a big lapse of time before the feudal farmer was replaced by the industrial capitalist. In Germany, for example, this transformation began only in the last third of the 18th century. It is in England alone that this relation between the industrial capitalist and the landed proprietor has been fully developed.

So long as there was only M. Proudhon’s colonus, there was no rent. The moment rent exists, the colonus is no longer the farmer, but the worker, the farmer’s colonus. The abasement of the labourer, reduced to the role of a simple worker, day labourer, wage-earner, working for the industrial capitalist; the invention of the industrial capitalist, exploiting the land like any other factory; the transformation of the landed proprietor from a petty sovereign into a vulgar usurer; these are the different relations expressed by rent.

Rent, in the Ricardian sense, is patriarchal agriculture transformed into commercial industry, industrial capital applied to land, the town bourgeoisie transplanted into the country. Rent, instead of binding man to nature, has merely bound the exploitation of the land to competition. Once established as rent, landed property itself is the result of competition, since from that time onwards it depends on the market value of agricultural produce. As rent, landed property is mobilised and becomes an article of commerce. Rent is possible only from the moment when the development of urban industry, and the social organisation resulting therefrom, force the landowner to aim solely at cash profits, at the monetary relation of his agricultural products – in fact to look upon his landed property only as a machine for coining money. Rent has so completely divorced the landed proprietor from the soil, from nature, that he has no need even to know his estates, as is to be seen in England. As for the farmer, the industrial capitalist and the agricultural worker, they are no more bound to the land they exploit than are the employer and the worker in the factories to the cotton and wool they manufacture; they feel an attachment only for the price of their production, the monetary product. Hence the jeremiads of the reactionary parties, who offer up all their prayers for the return of feudalism, of the good old patriarchal life, of the simple manners and the fine virtues of our forefathers. The subjection of the soil to the laws which dominate all other industries is and always will be the subject of interested condolences. Thus it may be said that rent has become the motive power which has introduced idyll into the movement of history.

Ricardo, after postulating bourgeois production as necessary for determining rent, applies the conception of rent, nevertheless, to the landed property of all ages and all countries. This is an error common to all the economists, who represent the bourgeois relations of production as eternal categories.

From the providential aim of rent – which is, for M. Proudhon, the transformation of the colonus into a responsible worker, he passes to the equalised reward of rent.
Rent, as we have just seen, is constituted by the equal price of the products of lands of unequal fertility, so that a hectolitre of corn which has cost 10 francs is sold for 20 francs if the cost of production rises to 20 francs upon soil of inferior quality.

So long as necessity forces the purchase of all the agricultural products brought into the market, the market price is determined by the cost of the most expensive product. Thus it is this equalisation of price, resulting from competition and not from the different fertilities of the lands, that secures to the owner of the better soil a rent of 10 francs for every hectolitre that his tenant sells.

Let us suppose for a moment that the price of corn is determined by the labour time needed to produce it, and at once the hectolitre of corn obtained from the better soil will sell at 10 francs, while the hectolitre of corn obtained on the inferior soil will cost 20 francs. This being admitted, the average market price will be 15 francs, whereas, according to the law of competition, it is 20 francs. If the average price were 15 francs, there would be no occasion for any distribution, whether equalised or otherwise, for there would be no rent. Rent exists only when one can sell for 20 francs the hectolitre of corn which has cost the producer 10 francs. M. Proudhon supposes equality of the market price, with unequal costs of production, in order to arrive at an equalised sharing out of the product of inequality.

We understand such economists as Mill, Cherbuliez, Hilditch, and others demanding that rent should be handed over to the state to serve in place of taxes. That is a frank expression of the hatred the industrial capitalist bears towards the landed proprietor, who seems to him a useless thing, an excrescence upon the general body of bourgeois production.

But first to make the price of the hectolitre of corn 20 francs in order then to make a general distribution of the 10 francs overcharge levied on the consumer, is indeed enough to make the social genius pursue its zigzag course mournfully – and knock its head against some corner.

Rent becomes, under M. Proudhon’s pen,

“an immense land valuation, which is carried out contradictorily by land-owners and farmers... in a higher interest, and whose ultimate result must be to equalise the possession of land between exploiters of the soil and the industrialists.” (Vol. II, p. 271)

For any land valuation based upon rent to be of practical value, the conditions of present society must not be departed from.

Now, we have shown that the farm rent paid by the farmer to the landlord expresses the rent with any exactitude only in the countries most advanced in industry and commerce. And even this rent often includes interest paid to the landlord on capital incorporated in the land. The location of the land, the vicinity of towns, and many other circumstances influence the farm rent and modify the ground rent. These peremptory reasons would be enough to prove the inaccuracy of a land valuation based on rent.

Thus history, far from supplying, in rent, a ready-made land valuation, does nothing but change and turn topsy-turvy the land valuations already made.

Finally, fertility is not so natural a quality as might be thought; it is closely bound up with the social relations of the time. A piece of land may be very fertile for corn growing, and yet the market price may decide the cultivator to turn it into an artificial pastureland and thus render it infertile.

M. Proudhon has improvised his land valuation, which has not even the value of an ordinary land valuation, only to give substance to the providentially equalitarian aim of rent.

“Rent,” continues M. Proudhon, “is the interest paid on a capital which never perishes, namely – land. And as the capital is capable of no increase in matter, but only of an indefinite improvement in its use, it comes about that while the interest
or profit on a loan (mutuum) tends to diminish continually through abundance of capital, rent tends always to increase through the perfecting of industry, from which results the improvement in the use of the land.... Such, in its essence, is rent.” (Vol. II, p. 265)

This time, M. Proudhon sees in rent all the characteristics of interest, save that it is derived from capital of a specific nature. This capital is land, an eternal capital, “which is capable of no increase in matter, but only an indefinite improvement in its use.” In the progressive advance of civilisation, interest has a continual tendency to fall, whilst rent continually tends to rise. Interest falls because of the abundance of capital; rent rises owing to the improvements brought about in industry, which results in an ever better utilisation of land.

Such, in its essence, is the opinion of M. Proudhon.

Let us first examine how far it is true to say that rent is interest on capital.

For the landed proprietor himself, rent represents the interest on the capital that the land has cost him, or that he would draw from it if he sold it. But in buying or selling land he only buys or sells rent. The price he pays to make himself a receiver of rent is regulated by the rate of interest in general and has nothing to do with actual nature of rent. The interest on capital invested in land is in general lower than the interest on capital invested in manufacture or commerce. Thus, for those who make no distinction between the interest that the land represents to the owner and the rent itself, the interest on land capital diminishes still more than does the interest on other capital. But it is not a question of the purchase or sale price of rent, of the marketable value of rent, of capitalised rent, it is a question of rent itself.

Farm rent can imply again, apart from rent proper, the interest on the capital incorporated in the land. In this instance the landlord receives this part of the farm rent, not as a landlord but as a capitalist; but this is not the rent proper that we are to deal with.

Land, so long as it is not exploited as a means of production, is not capital. Land as capital can be increased just as much as all the other instruments of production. Nothing is added to its matter, to use M. Proudhon’s language, but the lands which serve as instruments of production are multiplied. The very fact of applying further outlays of capital to land already transformed into means of production increases land as capital without adding anything to land as matter – that is, to the extent of the land. M. Proudhon’s land as matter is the Earth in its limitation. As for the eternity he attributes to land, we grant readily it has this virtue as matter. Land as capital is no more eternal than any other capital.

Gold and silver, which yield interest, are just as lasting and eternal as land. If the price of gold and silver falls, while that of land keeps rising, this is certainly not because of its more or less eternal nature.

Land as capital is fixed capital; but fixed capital gets used up just as much as circulating capital. Improvements to the land need production and upkeep; they last only for a time; and this they have in common with all other improvements used to transform matter into means of production. If land as capital were eternal, some lands would present a very different appearance from what they do today, and we should see the Roman Campagna, Sicily, Palestine, in all the splendour of their former prosperity.

There are even instances when land as capital might disappear, even though the improvements remain incorporated in the land.

In the first place, this occurs every time rent proper is wiped out by the competition of new and more fertile soils; secondly, the improvements which might have been valuable at one time cease to be of value the moment they become universal owing to the development of agronomy.
The representative of land as capital is not the landlord, but the farmer. The proceeds yielded by land as capital are interest and industrial profit, not rent. There are lands which yield such interest and profit but still yield no rent.

Briefly, land in so far as it yields interest, is land capital, and as land capital it yields no rent, it is not landed property. Rent results from the social relations in which the exploitation of the land takes place. It cannot be a result of the more or less solid, more or less durable nature of the soil. Rent is a product of society and not of the soil.

According to M. Proudhon, “improvement in the use of the land” – a consequence “of the perfecting of industry” – causes the continual rise in rent. On the contrary, this improvement causes its periodic fall.

Wherein consists, in general, any improvement, whether in agriculture or in manufacture? In producing more with the same labour; in producing as much, or even more, with less labour. Thanks to these improvements, the farmer is spared from using a greater amount of labour for a relatively smaller product. He has no need, therefore, to resort to inferior soils, and instalments of capital applied successively to the same soil remain equally productive.

Thus, these improvements, far from continually raising rent as M. Proudhon says, become on the contrary so many temporary obstacles preventing its rise.

The English landowners of the 17th century were so well aware of this truth, that they opposed the progress of agriculture for fear of seeing their incomes diminish. (See Petty, an English economist of the time of Charles II.)

§ 5. Strikes and Combinations of Workers

“Every upward movement in wages can have no other effect than a rise in the price of corn, wine, etc., that is, the effect of a dearth. For what are wages? They are the cost price of corn, etc.; they are the integrant price of everything. We may go even further: wages are the proportion of the elements composing wealth and consumed reproductively every day by the mass of the workers. Now, to double wages ... is to attribute to each one of the producers a greater share than his product, which is contradictory, and if the rise extends only to a small number of industries, it brings a general disturbance in exchange; in a word, a dearth.... It is impossible, I declare, for strikes followed by an increase in wages not to culminate in a general rise in prices: this is as certain as that two and two make four.” (Proudhon, Vol. I, pp. 110 and 111)

We deny all these assertions, except that two and two make four.

In the first place, there is no general rise in prices. If the price of everything doubles at the same time as wages, there is no change in price, the only change is in terms.

Then again, a general rise in wages can never produce a more or less general rise in the price of goods. Actually, if every industry employed the same number of workers in relation to fixed capital or to the instruments used, a general rise in wages would produce a general fall in profits and the current price of goods would undergo no alteration.

But as the relation of manual labour to fixed capital is not the same in different industries, all the industries which employ a relatively greater mass of capital and fewer workers, will be forced sooner or later to lower the price of their goods. In the opposite case, in which the price of their goods is not lowered, their profit will rise above the common rate of profits. Machines are not wage-earners. Therefore, the general rise in wages will affect less those industries, which, compared with the others, employ more machines than workers. But as competition always tends to level the rate of profits, those profits which rise above the average rate cannot but be transitory. Thus, apart from a few fluctuations, a general rise in wages will lead, not as M. Proudhon says, to
a general increase in prices, but to a partial fall – that is a fall in the current price of the goods that are made chiefly with the help of machines.

The rise and fall of profits and wages expresses merely the proportion in which capitalists and workers share in the product of a day’s work, without influencing in most instances the price of the product. But that “strikes followed by an increase in wages culminate in a general rise in prices, in a dearth even” – those are notions which can blossom only in the brain of a poet who has not been understood.

In England, strikes have regularly given rise to the invention and application of new machines. Machines were, it may be said, the weapon employed by the capitalist to quell the revolt of specialised labour. The self-acting mule, the greatest invention of modern industry, put out of action the spinners who were in revolt. If combinations and strikes had no other effect than that of making the efforts of mechanical genius react against them, they would still exercise an immense influence on the development of industry.

“I find,” continues M. Proudhon, “in an article published by M. Leon Faucher... September 1845, that for some time the British workers have got out of the habit of combination, which is assuredly a progress for which one cannot but congratulate them: but this improvement in the morale of the workers comes chiefly from their economic education. ‘It is not on the manufacturers,’ cries a spinning-mill worker at a Bolton meeting, ‘that wages depend. In periods of depression the masters are, so to speak, merely the whip with which necessity arms itself, and whether they want to or not, they have to deal blows. The regulative principle is the relation of supply and demand; and the masters have not this power’.... “Well done!” cries M. Proudhon. “These are well-trained workers, model workers, etc., etc., etc. Such poverty did not exist in Britain; it will not cross the Channel.” (Proudhon, Vol. I, pp. 261 and 262)

Of all the towns in England, Bolton is the one in which the radicalism is the most developed. The Bolton workers are known to be the most revolutionary of all. At the time of the great agitation in England for the abolition of the Corn Laws, the English manufacturers thought that they could cope with the landowners only by thrusting the workers to the fore. But as the interests of the workers were no less opposed to those of the manufacturers than the interests of the manufacturers were to those of the landowners, it was natural that the manufacturers should fare badly in the workers’ meetings. What did the manufacturers do? To save appearances they organised meetings composed, to a large extent, of foremen, of the small number of workers who were devoted to them, and of the real friends of trade. When later on the genuine workers tried, as in Bolton and Manchester, to take part in these sham demonstrations, in order to protest against them, they were forbidden admittance on the ground that it was a ticket meeting – a meeting to which only persons with entrance cards were admitted. Yet the posters placarded on the walls had announced public meetings. Every time one of these meetings was held, the manufacturers’ newspapers gave a pompous and detailed account of the speeches made. It goes without saying that it was the foremen who made these speeches. The London papers reproduced them word for word. M. Proudhon has the misfortune to take foremen for ordinary workers, and enjoins them not to cross the Channel.

If in 1844 and 1845 strikes drew less attention than before, it was because 1844 and 1845 were the first two years of prosperity that British industry had had since 1837. Nevertheless none of the trades unions had been dissolved.

Now let us listen to the foremen of Bolton. According to them manufacturers have no command over wages because they have no command over the price of products, and they have no command over the price of products because they have no command over the world market. For this reason, they wish it to be understood that combinations should not be formed to extort an
increase in wages from the masters. M. Proudhon, on the contrary, forbids combinations for fear they should be followed by a rise in wages which would bring with it a general dearth. We have no need to say that on one point there is an *entente cordiale* between the foremen and M. Proudhon: that a rise in wages is equivalent to a rise in the price of products.

But is the fear of a dearth the true cause of M. Proudhon's rancour? No. Quite simple, he is annoyed with the Bolton foremen because they determine value by supply and demand and hardly take any account of constituted value, of value which has passed into the state of constitution, of the constitution of value, including permanent exchangeability and all the other proportionalities of relations and relations of proportionality, with Providence at their side.

“A workers’ strike is illegal, and it is not only the Penal Code that says so, it is the economic system, the necessity of the established order.... That each worker individually should dispose freely over his person and his hands, this can be tolerated, but that workers should undertake by combination to do violence to monopoly, is something society cannot permit.” (Vol. I, pp. 334 and 335)

M. Proudhon wants to pass off an article of the Penal Code as a necessary and general result of bourgeois relations of production.

In England, combination is authorised by an Act of Parliament, and it is the economic system which has forced Parliament to grant this legal authorisation. In 1825, when, under the Minister Huskisson, Parliament had to modify the law in order to bring it more and more into line with the conditions resulting from free competition, it had of necessity to abolish all laws forbidding combinations of workers. The more modern industry and competition develop, the more elements there are which call forth and strengthen combination, and as soon as combination becomes an economic fact, daily gaining in solidity, it is bound before long to become a legal fact.

Thus the article of the Penal Code proves at the most that modern industry and competition were not yet well developed under the Constituent Assembly and under the Empire. Economists and socialists are in agreement on one point: the condemnation of combination. Only they have different motives for their act of condemnation.

The economists say to workers:

Do not combine. By combination you hinder the regular progress of industry, you prevent manufacturers from carrying out their orders, you disturb trade and you precipitate the invasion of machines which, by rendering your labour in part useless, force you to accept a still lower wage. Besides, whatever you do, your wages will always be determined by the relation of hands demanded to hands supplied, and it is an effort as ridiculous as it is dangerous for you to revolt against the eternal laws of political economy.

The socialists say to the workers:

Do not combine, because what will you gain by it anyway? A rise in wages? The economists will prove to you quite clearly that the few ha’pence you may gain by it for a few moments if you succeed will be followed by a permanent fall. Skilled calculators will prove to you that it would take you years merely to recover, through the increase in your wages, the expenses incurred for the organisation and upkeep of the combinations.

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6 The laws in operation at that time in France – the so-called Le Chapelier law adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1791 during the revolution and the criminal code elaborated under the Napoleonic Empire – forbade the workers to form labour unions or to go on strike. The prohibition of trade unions was abolished in France in 1884.

7 That is, the socialists of that time: the Fourierists in France, the Owenites in England. [Note by Engels to the 1885 German edition]
And we, as socialists, tell you that, apart from the money question, you will continue nonetheless to be workers, and the masters will still continue to be the masters, just as before. So no combination! No politics! For is not entering into combination engaging in politics?

The economists want the workers to remain in society as it is constituted and as it has been signed and sealed by them in their manuals.

The socialists want the workers to leave the old society alone, the better to be able to enter the new society which they have prepared for them with so much foresight.

In spite of both of them, in spite of manuals and utopias, combination has not yet ceased for an instant to go forward and grow with the development and growth of modern industry. It has now reached such a stage, that the degree to which combination has developed in any country clearly marks the rank it occupies in the hierarchy of the world market. England, whose industry has attained the highest degree of development, has the biggest and best organised combinations.

In England, they have not stopped at partial combinations which have no other objective than a passing strike, and which disappear with it. Permanent combinations have been formed, trades unions, which serve as ramparts for the workers in their struggles with the employers. And at the present time all these local trades unions find a rallying point in the National Association of United Trades, the central committee of which is in London, and which already numbers 80,000 members. The organisation of these strikes, combinations, and trades unions went on simultaneously with the political struggles of the workers, who now constitute a large political party, under the name of Chartists.

The first attempt of workers to associate among themselves always takes place in the form of combinations.

Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance – combination. Thus combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among the workers, so that they can carry on general competition with the capitalist. If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in the face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages. This is so true that English economists are amazed to see the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages in favour of associations, which, in the eyes of these economists, are established solely in favour of wages. In this struggle – a veritable civil war – all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character.

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.

In the bourgeoisie we have two phases to distinguish: that in which it constituted itself as a class under the regime of feudalism and absolute monarchy, and that in which, already constituted as a class, it overthrew feudalism and monarchy to make society into a bourgeois society. The first of these phases was the longer and necessitated the greater efforts. This too began by partial combinations against the feudal lords.

Much research has been carried out to trace the different historical phases that the bourgeoisie has passed through, from the commune up to its constitution as a class.
But when it is a question of making a precise study of strikes, combinations and other forms in which the proletarians carry out before our eyes their organisation as a class, some are seized with real fear and others display a transcendental disdain.

An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society. For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself, it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side. Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself. The organisation of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society.

Does this mean that after the fall of the old society there will be a new class domination culminating in a new political power? No.

The condition for the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of every class, just as the condition for the liberation of the third estate, of the bourgeois order, was the abolition of all estates and all orders.¹

The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society.

Meanwhile the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution. Indeed, is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition of classes should culminate in brutal contradiction, the shock of body against body, as its final dénouement?

Do not say that social movement excludes political movement. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social.

It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions. Till then, on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be:

“Le combat ou la mort; la lutte sanguinaire ou le néant. C’est ainsi que la question est invinciblement posée.” [From the novel Jean Ziska by George Sand: “Combat or Death: bloody struggle or extinction. It is thus that the question is inexorably put.”]
Karl Marx

Misère de la philosophie

Réponse à la Philosophie de la misère de Proudhon
## Table des matières

Avant-Propos .................................................................................................................................................. 3  
Préface de Friedrich Engels à la I° édition allemande.................................................................................. 9  
Préface à la II° édition allemande.................................................................................................................. 14  
MISÈRE DE LA PHILOSOPHIE ....................................................................................................................... 15  
I. Une découverte scientifique....................................................................................................................... 16  
   1. Opposition de la valeur d’utilité et de la valeur d’échange .................................................................... 16  
   2. La valeur constituée ou la valeur synthétique ....................................................................................... 21  
   3. Application de la loi des proportionnalités de valeur ......................................................................... 35  
II. La métaphysique de l’économie politique ............................................................................................... 44  
   1. La méthode........................................................................................................................................... 44  
   2. La division du travail et les machines ................................................................................................... 51  
   3. La concurrence et le monopole .............................................................................................................. 58  
   4. La propriété ou la rente......................................................................................................................... 61  
   5. Les grèves et les coalitions des ouvriers ............................................................................................. 65  
ANNEXES ....................................................................................................................................................... 69  
   I. Proudhon jugé par K. Marx .................................................................................................................... 69  
   II. John Gray et les bons du travail .......................................................................................................... 73  
   III. Discours sur la question du libre-échange ........................................................................................ 75  
INDEX DES PRINCIPAUX NOMS CITÉS ....................................................................................................... 82
Avant-Propos 1

Marx écrivit cet ouvrage dans le courant de l’hiver 1846-1847, alors qu'il résidait à Bruxelles. C'est une réponse à l'étude que Proudhon avait tait paraître en octobre 1846, sous le titre général de : Contradictions économiques, ou Philosophie de la misère. Comme on le voit dans sa correspondance avec Engels, Marx avait d'abord conçu sa réponse à Proudhon comme une brochure; puis, à la rédaction, cette brochure est devenue un véritable volume. Marx l'écrit en français; les difficultés d'édition furent grandes et l'on connaît par la correspondance d'Engels un certain nombre des incidents qui l'accompagnèrent: difficultés avec l'éditeur, difficultés pour obtenir des comptes rendus dans les journaux et revues de l'époque, etc...

Proudhon, qui, dès cette époque, jouait les personnages importants, lit le silence sur l'œuvre de Marx. C'était habile; Marx était alors à Paris un inconnu. (Le Journal des économistes, d’août 1846, le prenait pour un cordonnier : “ M. Marx est cordonnier ”, écrivait-il.) Le silence de Proudhon était donc habile, mais d'une habileté à courte vue. Ici, comme ailleurs, l'histoire a prononcé son jugement; dans une lettre qui doit dater de novembre 1847, Engels rapporte une conversation qu'il eut avec Louis Blanc :

Je lui avais écrit que je venais avec un mandat formel de la démocratie londonienne, bruxelloise, et rhénane et comme agent des chartistes... Je lui, dépeignis la situation de notre parti comme très brillante; je lui dis que tu es notre chef : vous pouvez regarder M. Marx comme le chef de notre parti, c'est-à-dire de la fraction la plus avancée de la démocratie allemande, et son récent livre contre M. Proudhon comme notre programme.

C'est Engels qui avait raison. D'ailleurs Proudhon devait s'en douter, lui qui faisait le silence au dehors sur l'œuvre de Marx, mais qui l'annotait avec beaucoup de soin dans le privé.

Misère de la philosophie est dans l'ensemble de l'œuvre de Marx une étape d'une grande importance, c'est une oeuvre à la fois de transition et de maturité. Elle constitue chez lui la première synthèse entre une philosophie méthodique et une économie politique à la fois objective et concrète. Jusque là, Marx avait eu tendance à traiter de ces deux disciplines de façon séparée; il s'agissait pour lui de les mettre au point. L'expérience plus générale qu'il a acquise depuis son départ d'Allemagne, à Paris et à Bruxelles, sa participation à l'organisation du mouvement ouvrier à Paris, puis ses premières liaisons ouvrières internationales, et aussi, sans doute, la réflexion sur les erreurs de Proudhon lui permettent, pour la première fois, d'écrire une œuvre où l'explication marxiste appréhende la réalité la plus complète et se révèle décisive et totale, parce que, pour la première fois, elle ne renvoie pas à plus tard pour la mise en lumière de liaisons ouvrières internationales, et aussi, sans doute, la réflexion sur les erreurs de Proudhon lui permettent, pour la première fois, d'écrire une œuvre où l'explication marxiste appréhende la réalité la plus complète et se révèle décisive et totale.

L'œuvre présente en plus un intérêt particulier pour nous, français. C'est proprement une œuvre de chez nous; et le fait qu'elle fut écrite dans notre langue n'est que le symbole de son importance pour le mouvement français. C'est qu'en effet, sous le nom permanent de proudhonisme, on a constamment tiré de chez nous la doctrine qui, depuis un siècle, a servi de paravent et de recommandation à tout ce qui déviait le mouvement ouvrier révolutionnaire vers l'aventure vaine et vers la négation de soi. Proudhoniens, ceux qui participèrent comme délégués français à la création de la première Internationale, et aussi, sans doute, la réflexion sur les erreurs de Proudhon lui permettent, pour la première fois, d'écrire une œuvre où l'explication marxiste appréhende la réalité la plus complète et se révèle décisive et totale, parce que, pour la première fois, elle ne renvoie pas à plus tard pour la mise en lumière d'autres aspects. La méthode marxiste se révèle; elle peut commencer à s'appliquer au réel, dans la lutte réelle comme dans l'explication de la vie réelle.

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Les défenseurs de Proudhon affirment qu'il n'est pas responsable de ceux qui se revendiquent de lui. Mais, enfin, s'ils se revendiquent de lui dans leur lutte contre les organisations ouvrières, c'est bien parce que Proudhon leur donne des moyens de le faire.

C'est dire l'importance fondamentale, pour le mouvement français, de cette œuvre de Marx. Après plus de cent ans, elle constitue toujours la meilleure défense doctrinale contre la confusion proudhonienne; et l'étude des rapports entre Proudhon et Marx constitue toujours une expérience, à la fois historique et personnelle, dont on peut retirer le plus grand profit.


2 Membre du parti socialiste avant la guerre de 1914, anarchosyndicaliste, Lagardelle devenait un idéologue du corporatisme fasciste.
Dans une lettre, publiée le 24 janvier 1865, par le Sozial-Demokrat, et qu'on trouvera en appendice, Marx raconte ses premiers rapports avec Proudhon. C’était à Paris en 1844 et, dit Marx,

jusqu’à un certain point, je suis responsable de sa “sophistication”, mot qu’emploient les Anglais pour désigner la falsification d’une marchandise. Dans nos longues discussions, souvent prolongées toute la nuit, je l’injextais d’hégélianisme.

Proudhon s’est prononcé, à plusieurs reprises, sur Hegel; et, en examinant les dates, on mesure quelle fut sur lui l’influence de ces conversations avec Marx. Avant d’avoir eu par le moyen de Marx le contact avec la dialectique hégélienne il écrivait :

Je ne me laisse point abuser par la métaphysique et les formules de Hegel... Cela pour moi, mon cher, est puérilité, ce n’est pas science. (Lettre du 23 mai 1842.)

Le 20 décembre 1843, envoyant sa Création de l’ordre dans l’humanité au même correspondant, il lui mande :

Vous trouverez dans ce volume toute une métaphysique autrement simple, claire et féconde, que celle de vos Allemands.

et l’ouvrage lui-même révèle une ignorance, assez exceptionnelle, de la doctrine de Hegel.

Mais, en 1844, après la rencontre avec Marx, Proudhon a complètement changé d’avis. Dans une lettre du 4 octobre au même correspondant, il s’indigne du retard “où se trouve le public français relativement aux études philosophiques” et il se donne désormais pour tâche de “populariser la métaphysique”. “Pour cela, ajoute-t-il, j’emploie la dialectique la plus profonde, celle de Hegel.” Le 19 janvier 1845, dans une lettre à Bergmann, il présente ainsi l’ouvrage qu’il prépare et auquel Marx devait répondre :

J’espère, à la fin, apprendre au public français ce que c’est que la dialectique... D’après les nouvelles connaissances que j’ai faites cet hiver, j’ai été très bien compris d’un grand nombre d’Allemands qui ont admiré le travail que j’ai fait pour arriver seul à ce qu’ils prétendent exister chez eux. Je ne puis encore juger de la parenté qu’il y a entre ma métaphysique et la logique de Hegel, puisque je n’ai jamais lu Hegel; mais je suis persuadé que c’est sa logique que je vais employer dans mon prochain ouvrage; or, cette logique n’est qu’un cas particulier ou, si tu veux, le cas le plus simple de la mienne.

Deux mois après la publication de sa Philosophie de la misère, le 13 décembre 1846, il exprime toujours la même opinion :

La logique de Hegel, telle que je la comprends, satisfait infiniment plus ma raison que tous les vieux apophtegmes dont on nous a bourrés pour nous rendre compte de certains accidents de la raison et de la société.

Mais, dès juin 1847, date où Marx publie sa réponse, Proudhon fait à propos de son ouvrage une première réserve :

J’ai fait une critique, rien de plus; critique méthodique, il est vrai, et qui contient tous les éléments de ma synthèse, bien que cette synthèse ne se découvre pas. (Lettre du 4 juin 1847.)

Et, si l’on suit dans sa correspondance au cours de la même époque ce qu’il a dit de la synthèse, on s’aperçoit qu’il est encore loin de compte : la synthèse hégélienne est pour lui “la réconciliation universelle par la contradiction universelle” (Lettre du 7 novembre 1846) et :

pour qui n’aura compris il n’y aura plus lieu à embrasser d’opinion exclusive, ce serait un ridicule. (Lettre du 24 octobre 1844.)

Pour lui la synthèse est une conciliation, une façon de conserver, réconcilier, sans aucune exclusive, toutes les antinomies prétendues.

Plus tard, il refusera purement et simplement la synthèse hégélienne :

La formule hégélienne n’est une triade que par le bon plaisir ou l’erreur du maître, qui compte trois termes là où il n’en existe véritablement que deux, et qui n’a pas vu que l’antinomie ne se résout point, mais qu’elle indique une oscillation, ou antagonisme susceptible seulement d’équilibre.

Et, revenant sur sa Philosophie de la misère, il précise

A l’exemple de Hegel j’avais adopté l’idée que l’antinomie devait se résoudre en un terme supérieur, la synthèse, distinct des deux premiers, la thèse et l’antithèse; erreur de logique, autant que d’expérience, dont je suis aujourd’hui revenu. L’antinomie ne se résout pas; là est le vice fondamental de toute la philosophie hégélienne. Les deux termes dont elle se compose se balancent... Une balance n’est point une synthèse, telle que l’entendait Hegel et comme je l’avais supposé après lui.

Proudhon essayait d’ailleurs, depuis longtemps, de trouver le terme que décrirait cette opération toute particulière par laquelle,
pour que le pouvoir social agisse dans sa plénitude il faut que les forces en fonction dont il se compose soient en équilibre... Cet équilibre doit résulter du balancement des forces, agissant les unes sur les autres en toute liberté et se faisant mutuellement équation.

Équation se trouvant déjà dans la Philosophie de la misère; Proudhon y voulait faire “équation générale de toutes nos contradictions”. Balance et contre-poids se trouvaient déjà dans La Création de l’ordre en 1843. En 1849, Proudhon opine pour transformer la contradiction hégélienne en balance du droit et de l’avoir; ailleurs il propose la notion de “mutuum”; les forces sociales en présence, en balance, en équilibre, sont ainsi en état de soutien mutuel; ailleurs encore, en 1858, il fera de la synthèse une moyenne entre les termes contradiétaires, présentés comme un maximum et un minimum.

On voit ce qu’il cherche : substituer à la dialectique hégélienne qui élimine les contradictoires, pour qui l’antithèse est la négation de la thèse et la synthèse la négation de celle négation, un système conformiste, où, comme le dit Marx, la contradiction s’étèrnera et arrive à un équilibre, à un modus vivendi parfaitement acceptable, à un état d’égalité et de soutien mutuel.

Le second professeur d’hégélanisme de Proudhon, Grün, qui continuait les leçons après que Marx eut été expulsé de France, pouvait bien écrire :

Cette vérité colossale [de l’hégélanisme] où mille crânes français ont trouvé leur Waterloo.... cette vérité Proudhon l’a pleinement saisie.

L’avis de Marx était tout différent. Dans sa lettre de 1865 au Sozial-Demokrat, il écrit :

La nature de Proudhon le portait à la dialectique. Mais, n’ayant jamais compris la dialectique scientifique, il ne parvint qu’au sophisme. En fait, cela découvrait de son point de vue petit-bourgeois.

Le petit bourgeois dit toujours : d’un côté et de l’autre côté... il est la contradiction vivante : s’il est, de plus, comme Proudhon, un homme d’esprit, il saura bien tôt jongler avec ses propres contradictions et les élaborer selon les circonstances en paradoxes frappants, tapageurs, parfois brillants. Charlatanisme scientifique et accommodements politiques sont inséparables d’un pareil point de vue.

C’est pourquoi Marx pouvait, dans le Manifeste communiste, classer Proudhon dans la catégorie du socialisme conservateur ou bourgeois :

Les socialistes bourgeois veulent les conditions de la société moderne sans les luttes et les dangers qui en découlent nécessairement; ils veulent la société actuelle après élimination des éléments qui la révolutionnent et la désagrègent. Ils veulent la bourgeoisie sans le prolétariat.

Et sous une farine “moins systématique et plus pratique”, ils s’efforcent de dégoûter la classe ouvrière de tout mouvement révolutionnaire, en lui démontrant que ce qui peut lui profiter, ce n’est pas tel ou tel changement politique, mais uniquement un changement des conditions matérielles d’existence, des conditions économiques. Mais par changement des conditions matérielles de l’existence, ce socialisme n’entend pas du tout l’abolition des conditions bourgeoisées de production, abolition qui n’est réalisable que par la voie révolutionnaire, mais des réformes administratives qui s’accomplissent dans le cadre de ces conditions de production, qui ne modifient donc en rien le rapport du capital et du travail salarié, mais, en mettant les choses au mieux, diminuent pour la bourgeoisie les frais de gouvernement et simplifient la gestion économique.

Les ennemis de Marx se sont fièrement émus de cette “contradiction” : Marx classe Proudhon dans les petits bourgeois et le socialisme de Proudhon dans la catégorie bourgeoise ou conservatrice !

Comment, écrit Charles Andler, celui que Marx traite de petit bourgeois est-il rangé parmi les tenants du grand capitalisme ?

Mais il est bien obligé de parler à la suite de :

cette transformation singulière par où la déduction du capitalisme [chez Proudhon] était devenue une apologie des capitalistes.

Et même, de rappeler à ce sujet la phrase de Marx dans la préface du 18 Brumaire, montrant à propos de Proudhon comment sa “construction historique du coup d’État se transforment en apologie de Bonaparte”.

Il n’y a pas de secret dans le fait que Proudhon, petit-bourgeois, a proposé un socialisme bourgeois ou conservateur. S’il y avait un secret, il résiderait dans la volonté de ne pas comprendre ce qu’il y a derrière la pseudo-dialectique de Proudhon. En face de la contradiction bourgeoisie-prolétariat, Marx opte pour la solution révolutionnaire : la synthèse dialectique, celle où les termes contradictoires s’expliquent et, après négation de la négation, sont remplacés par la société collectiviste et sans classe. Le petit bourgeois Proudhon opte pour l’équilibre, le soutien mutuel des termes antagonistes : il n’y a pas impossibilité de la bourgeoisie, mais équilibrer obtenu par la collaboration de classe. C’est pourquoi il y a dans la dialectique un bon et un mauvais côté : le mauvais côté est le côté révolutionnaire. L’équilibre sera assuré en persuadant le prolétariat qu’il n’y a pas de mouvement révolutionnaire, ni d’abolition des conditions bourgeoisées de production. Amener la classe ouvrière à renoncer à ses tâches révolutionnaires, c’est maintenir l’équilibre par la suppression du mauvais côté.
Au surplus, Marx et Engels avaient, dès 1846, vérifié pratiquement l'opposition absolue qui se révélait entre la position proudhonienne et l'action révolutionnaire. Ils se trouvaient tous les deux en plein travail d'organisation l'un à Paris, l'autre à Bruxelles. Ils s'efforçaient d'organiser, autour d'une doctrine utile, tous les groupes qui avaient, jusqu'en 1845, mené une existence aventurée et secrète. Dans tous ces groupes, les meilleurs des adhérents sentaient à la fois quelles erreurs politiques avaient été commises et quelle situation politique nouvelle se dessinait, celle qui devait aboutir en 1848. Marx et Engels considéraient comme nécessaires un travail d'épuration du parti, d'élimination de toute sentimentalité, et la liquidation de toutes les pseudo-doctrines qui désarmaient l'avant-garde ouvrière dans l'action qu'elle allait avoir à mener. Leur attitude ferme et juste devait aboutir au printemps de 1847 quand, le travail doctrinal et pratique d'épuration achevé, ils purent accepter la proposition d'un congrès qui s'occupuerait de la réorganisation politique autour d'une doctrine d'action pratique. Ce congrès devait avoir lieu pendant l'été de 1847. Marx et Engels y purent chargés de rédiger le manifeste du Parti.

Au cours de ce travail de réorganisation, Marx avait écrit de Bruxelles pour demander à Proudhon de faire partie d'un bureau international d'informations :

Au moment de l'action, écrivait-il, il est certainement d'un grand intérêt pour chacun d'être instruit de l'état des affaires, à l'étranger aussi bien que chez lui.

Proudhon lui répondait de Lyon le 17 mai 1846 ; il acceptait, disait-il, de devenir l'un des aboutissants " de votre correspondance ". Mais il faisait immédiatement des réserves capitales :

Je ne vous promets pas pourtant de vous écrire ni beaucoup ni souvent, mes occupations de toute nature, jointes à une paresse naturelle, ne me permettent pas ces efforts épistolaires. Je prendrai aussi la liberté de faire quelques réserves qui me sont suggérées par divers passages de votre lettre.

Voici en quoi consistaient ces réserves :

1. Quoique mes idées en fait d'organisation et de réalisation soient, en ce moment, tout à fait arrêtées, au moins en ce qui regarde les principes, je crois qu'il est de mon devoir, du devoir de tout socialiste de conserver pour quelque temps encore la forme antique ou dubitative, - en un mot, je fais profession avec le public d'un antidogmatisme économique presque absolu.

2. Cherchons ensemble, si vous voulez, les lois de la société, le mode dont ces lois se réalisent, le progrès suivant lequel nous parvenons à les découvrir, mais, pour Dieu ! après avoir démonté tous les dogmatismes a priori, ne songeons point à notre tour à endoctriner le peuple... ne taillons pas au printemps de 1847 quand, le travail doctrinal et pratique d'épuration achevé, ils purent accepter la proposition d'un congrès qui s'occupuerait de la réorganisation politique autour d'une doctrine d'action pratique. Ce congrès devait avoir lieu pendant l'été de 1847. Marx et Engels y purent chargés de rédiger le manifeste du Parti.

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Voici enfin la réserve la plus grave :

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Proudhon ajoutait :

Mon prochain ouvrage, qui en ce moment en est à moitié de son impression, vous en dira davantage.

Proudhon annonçait ainsi sa Philosophie de la misère.

Marx avait donc réçu, de la main même de Fauteur, l'aveu que les utopies réformistes en matière économique, qu'allait proposer Proudhon, étaient faites pour nier la portée " de l'action révolutionnaire comme moyen de réforme sociale. " Il lui suffisait alors de montrer, comme il le fait dans Misère de la philosophie, que les projets économiques de Proudhon étaient proprement utopiques. Il le fait de main de maître. Proudhon, à la fin de sa lettre. ajoutait :

Sauf à me tromper, et s'il y a lieu, à recevoir la fureur de votre main, ce à quoi je me soumets de bonne grâce, en attendant ma revanche !

La fureur lui fut appliquée, Mais d'une sorte telle qu'il préfèrera se taire définitivement que de prendre sa revanche.
Quant à Engels, qui, à la même époque, continuait à Paris le travail méthodique d'organisation révolutionnaire que Marx avait commencé avant son expulsion, il pouvait vérifier lui aussi à quoi servait le proudhonisme : il voyait tous les liquidateurs du mouvement et de l'organisation se réfugier chez Proudhon, au moment où les nécessités les plus évidentes rendaient intenable leur position; le 19 septembre 1846, il écrivait au comité de Bruxelles :

Dans son nouvel ouvrage, encore à l'état de manuscrit, dont Grün se fait l'Interprète, Proudhon expose le plan génial de faire de l'argent de rien et de mettre le paradis à la portée de tous les ouvriers. Personne ne savait jusqu'ici ce qu'il en était. Grün se montrait très réservé, mais faisait grand état de sa propre philosophie. L'attente était générale : enfin le papa Eisemann s'est trouvé chez les menuisiers en même temps que moi, et petit à petit, le vieux beau s'est mis à déballer très naïvement tout le secret. M. Grün lui a confié tout le plan. Admirez donc la grandeur de ce projet destiné à émanciper le monde : il ne s'agit ni plus ni moins que des bazars ouvriers ou marchés ouvriers créés depuis longtemps en Angleterre et dix fois en déconvenue : association de tous les ouvriers de toutes les branches, grand dépôt, tous les ouvrages fournis par les associés taxés exactement d'après le prix du produit brut, augmenté du travail, et payés en d'autres produits de l'association, également taxés. Ce qui sera fourni en sus des besoins de l'association sera vendu sur le marché mondial et l'argent versé aux producteurs. De cette façon, spécule ce malin de Proudhon, lui et ses associés évitent le bénéfice de l'intermédiaire. Mais qu'il évite en même temps le bénéfice sur son capital d'association; que ce capital et ce bénéfice doivent être exactement égaux au capital et au bénéfice des intermédiaires évincés, qu'il donne donc de la main droite ce qu'il reçoit de la main gauche, tout cela notre madré compère n'y a pas songé. Que ses ouvriers ne pourront jamais réunir le capital nécessaire parce qu'autrement ils pourraient s'établir chacun à son compte; que l'économie éventuelle, résultant de l'association, se trouve plus que contre-balancée par le risque énorme; que toute la combinaison aboutit à faire, par un tour de passe-passe, disparaître le bénéfice du monde actuel et à laisser subsister tous les producteurs de ce bénéfice; que tout cela n'est qu'une idylle qui exclut de prime abord toute grande industrie, tout travail du bâtiment, toute agriculture, etc...; que ces corps de métiers n'auront à supporter que les pertes des bourgeois sans participer à leurs gains; tout cela, et cent autres objections qui crèvent les yeux, il les oublie dans l'ivresse de son illusion plausible... Proudhon se rend ridicule à tout jamais et avec lui tous les socialistes et communistes français, aux yeux des économistes bourgeois s'il publie ce travail. D'où ces larmes, cette polémique contre la révolution : il avait, in petto, un remède pacifique !

Le livre de Proudhon travaillait donc contre une organisation ouvrière militante avant même que d'avoir été édité.

Il est indispensable en terminant de retracer rapidement la série de jugements que Proudhon a portés sur les événements politiques de son temps, et sur les différentes interventions historiques de la clam ouvrière. On vérifie ainsi combien le pronostic porté par Marx contre Proudhon dès 1847 était parfaitement objectif.

En 1847, Proudhon, en prévision des événements qui mûrissent, voudrait avoir une tribune. On trouve dans ses carnets intimes la note suivante :

Tâcher de m'entendre avec le Moniteur industriel, journal des maîtres, tandis que le Peuple sera le journal des ouvriers.

Au début de 1848, Guizot suspend les cours de Michelet, comme il avait suspendu ceux de Mickiewicz et de Quinet; Proudhon se félicite qu'on ait imposé silence à ces " empaumeurs de niais " et quand les étudiants protestent, il note :

Quand est-ce que l'on casmera cette jeunesse débauchée et tapageuse ? courage, Guizot !

La montée révolutionnaire au cours de février 1848 lui inspire cette seule note :

Le trouble et le scandale augmentent. La France, si elle ne renvoie pas son opposition, est perdue.

Dans un article de journal du 19 février 1849, Proudhon a d'ailleurs retraité son " anxiété dévorante " devant les événements :

Je me révoltais contre la marche des événements... Mon âme était à l'agonie. Je portais par avance le poids des douleurs de la République et le fardeau des calomnies qui allaient frapper le socialisme. Le 21 février au soir, j'exhortais encore mes amis à ne pas combattre.

Il ajoute que la fusillade du 23 " changea ses dispositions en un instant ". C'est fort bien dit. Malheureusement c'est inexact puisque le 24 février il notait dans ses carnets intimes :

Le gâchis est désormais inextricable... Je n'ai rien à faire là-dedans... Cela va être effroyable...

et puisqu'il écrivait le 25 :

Mon corps est au milieu du peuple, mais ma pensée est ailleurs. J'en suis venu, par le cours de mes idées, à n'avoir presque plus de communauté d'idées avec mes contemporains.
Le 26 septembre 1848, il rendait visite à Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte et le trouvait "bien intentionné : tête et cœur chevaleresques ". L’indifférence en matière politique l’amènera à écrire quelques semaines après le coup d’État : " En aucun lieu de la terre, l’esprit qui est tout l’homme n’est aussi libre que chez toi. " (Il s’agit de la France.) Et encore :

Louis-Napoléon est, de même que son oncle, un dictateur révolutionnaire; mais avec cette différence que le premier consul venait clore la première phase de la révolution, tandis que le président ouvre la seconde.

Le 12 janvier 1853, il sollicite du prince Napoléon une intervention pour la concession du chemin de fer de Besançon à Mulhouse. Si la concession était obtenue, il confesse qu’il y trouverait l’occasion de faire une étude sur le thème suivant : " satisfaire aux justes exigences du prolétariat sans blesser les droits acquis de la classe bourgeoise ". Cette formule lui avait été suggérée par le prince au cours d’un entretien, comme répondant exactement aux vœux de l’empereur. Il importe peu, dans ces conditions, qu’il ait noté, en même temps, dans ses journaux intimes que Louis-Napoléon était un infâme aventurier, bâtard d’une princesse, débauché, crapuleux… destructeur des libertés publiques, usurpateur du pouvoir, voleur du trésor, mystificateur du peuple, puisqu’à la même date, comme il le dit lui-même dans une lettre:

J’ai été aux Tuileries, au Sénat, à la Préfecture, voir quelques connaissances que j’ai parmi les amis de Louis-Napoléon. (10 novembre 1852.)

Il importe peu qu’il ait été condamné à la prison pour son ouvrage sur la Justice dans la révolution et dans l’Église, prison qu’il ne fit point, pour laquelle il présentait au prince Napoléon comme l’explication d’un principe nouveau : " l’incarnation dans une famille élue du droit humain ou de la pensée rationnelle de la Révolution ". Quant à son attitude réelle à l’égard du prolétariat, " j’ai préché la conciliation des classes, symbole de la réconciliation des classes " (instructions pour la rédaction de La Voix du Peuple), elle résulte de sa correspondance comme de ses carnets :

J’ai assez de la vile multitude et des démagogues… la classe la plus pauvre est, par cela même qu’elle est la plus pauvre, la plus ingrate, la plus envieuse, la plus immorale et la plus lâche. (Lettre du 26 avril 1852.)

Ce qu’il y a de plus arriéré, de plus rétrograde, en tous pays, c’est la masse, c’est ce que vous appelez la démocratie.

Dans sa lettre de 1865 au Sozial-Demokrat, Marx rappelait son jugement de 1847 qui résume tout ce que dans sa Philosophie de la misère, Proudhon montre de lui-même:

Il veut planer en homme de science au-dessus des bourgeois et des prolétaires; il n’est que le petit bourgeois ballotté constamment entre le Capital et le Travail. (16 mai 1853;)

Nous avons jugé utile de rappeler ces faits. Nous ne nous sommes livrés à aucune interprétation : nous avons laissé Proudhon témoigner strictement pour lui-même. Il ne s’agissait pas pour nous de déconsidérer l’homme, mais de montrer exactement où il se situe, et de dissiper la légende selon laquelle ceux qui se sont inspirés de lui contre le développement normal du mouvement ouvrier, n’engageaient pas la responsabilité de leur maître. En fait, il apparaît dans la correspondance et dans le carnet intime de Proudhon, qu’il ressemblait de très près à ceux qui se sont inspirés de lui.

Henri MOUGIN.
Préface de Friedrich Engels à la 1° édition allemande

Le présent ouvrage fût composé dans l'hiver 1846-1847, alors que Marx était arrivé à élaborer les principes de sa nouvelle conception historique et économique. Le Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère, de Proudhon, qui venait de paraître, lui donna l'occasion de développer ses principes en les opposant aux idées de l'homme qui, dès lors, devait prendre une place prépondérante parmi les socialistes français de l'époque. Depuis le moment où tous deux à Paris avaient longuement discuté ensemble des questions économiques, souvent pendant des nuits entières, leur direction était allée s'écartant de plus en plus; l'ouvrage de Proudhon montrait qu'il y avait déjà un abîme infranchissable entre eux; faire le silence n'était pas possible; Marx constata cette rupture irréparable dans la réponse qu'il lui fit.

Le jugement d'ensemble de Marx sur Proudhon se trouve exprimé dans l'article qui est reproduit en appendice et qui a paru pour la première fois dans le Sozial-Demokrat de Berlin, n° 16, 17 et 18. Ce fut le seul article écrit par Marx dans cette feuille. Les tentatives de M. von Schweitzer pour amener le journal dans les eaux gouvernementales et féodales s'étant presque immédiatement manifestées, cela nous contraignit de retirer publiquement notre collaboration au bout de peu de semaines.

Le présent ouvrage a pour l'Allemagne maintenant une importance que Marx n'a jamais prévue. Comment aurait-il pu savoir qu'en s'attaquant à Proudhon, il frappait par là même l'idole des arrivistes d'aujourd'hui, Rodbertus qu'il ne connaissait même pas de nom.

Ce n'est pas ici le lieu de s'étendre sur le rapport entre Marx et Rodbertus; J'aurai bientôt l'occasion de le faire. Il suffit de dire ici que quand Rodbertus accuse Marx de l'avoir " pillé " et " d'avoir dans son Capital fort bien tiré profit sans le citer " de son ouvrage : Zür Erkenntniss, etc., il se laisse entraîner à une calomnie qui n'est explicable que par la mauvaise humeur naturelle à un génie méconnu et sa remarquable ignorance des choses qui se produisent hors de Prusse, et notamment de la littérature économique et socialiste. Ces accusations, pas plus que l'ouvrage de Rodbertus déjà cité, ne sont jamais venues sous les yeux de Marx; il ne connaissait de Rodbertus que les trois Sozialen Briefe et celles-là même en aucun cas avant 1858 ou 1859.

C'est avec plus de fondement que Rodbertus prétend dans ces lettres avoir découvert " la valeur constituée de la valeur de Proudhon " bien avant Proudhon. Mais il se flatte encore à tort en croyant l'avoir découverte le premier. En tout cas, notre ouvrage et le critique avec Proudhon, et cela me force à m'étendre un peu sur son opuscule " fondamental " : Zür Erkenntniss unserer staatswirtschaftlichen Zustaende, 1842, du moins dans la mesure où celui-ci, en outre du communisme à la Weitling qu'il contient aussi, d'ailleurs inconsciemment, anticipé Proudhon.

En tant que le socialisme moderne, à quelque tendance d'ailleurs qu'il appartienne, procède de l'économie politique bourgeoise, il se rattache presque exclusivement à la théorie de la valeur de Ricardo. Les deux propositions que Ricardo, en 1817, pose au début de ses principes : 1° que la valeur de chaque marchandise est seulement et uniquement déterminée par la quantité de travail exigée pour sa production, et 2° que le produit de la totalité du travail social est partagé entre les trois classes des propriétaires fonciers (rente), des capitalistes (profit) et des travailleurs (salaire), ces deux propositions avaient déjà, dès 1821, en Angleterre, donné matière à des conclusions socialistes. Elles avaient été déduites avec tant de profondeur et de clarté que cette littérature, maintenant presque disparue et que Marx avait en main pour un Allemand certes un pas important, mais ce n'était une découverte que pour l'Allemagne. Marx montre le peu de nouveauté d'une telle application de la théorie de Ricardo à Proudhon, qui souffrait d'une imagination semblable.

Quiconque est tant soit peu familiarisé avec le mouvement de l'économie politique en Angleterre, n'est pas sans savoir que presque tous les socialistes de ce pays ont, à différentes époques, proposé l'application égaleitaire [c'est-à-dire socialiste] de la théorie ricardienne. Nous pourrons citer à M. Proudhon l'Economie politique de Hodgskins, 1822; William Thompson, An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth most conducive to human Happiness, 1824; T. R. Edmonds, Pratical, moral and political Economy, 1826, etc., etc., et quatre pages d'ouvrage remarquable : Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy, Leeds, 1839.

Et les seules citations de Bray suppriment, pour une bonne partie, la priorité que revendique Rodbertus. À cette époque, Marx n'était pas encore entré dans la salle de lecture du British Museum. Outre les bibliothèques de Paris et de Bruxelles, outre mes livres et mes extraits, qu'il lui fallut pendant un voyage de six semaines que nous avons fait ensemble en Angleterre dans l'été de 1845, il n'avait parcouru que les livres que l'on pouvait se procurer à Manchester. La littérature dont nous parlons n'était donc nullement aussi inaccessible alors qu'elle peut l'être actuellement. Si malgré cela elle est restée inconnue à Rodbertus, cela est dû exclusivement à ce qu'il était un Prussien borné. Il est le fondateur véritable du socialisme spécifiquement prussien et il est enfin reconnu comme tel.
Cependant, même dans sa Prusse bien-aimée, Rodbertus ne devait pas rester à l'abri. En 1859, parut à Berlin le premier livre de la *Critique de l'économie politique* de Marx. On y relève, parmi les objections élevées par les économistes contre Ricardo, comme deuxième objection p. 40 3:

Si la valeur d'échange d'un produit est égale au temps de travail qu'il contient, la valeur d'échange d'un jour de travail est égale au produit d'une journée de travail. Ou encore, il faut que le salaire du travail soit égal au produit du travail. Or, c'est le contraire qui se produit.

En note :

Cette objection faite à Ricardo par les économistes bourgeois fut plus tard reprise par des socialistes. L'exactitude théorique de la formule étant admise, on reprocha à la pratique d'être en contradiction avec la théorie, et l'on demanda à la société bourgeoise de tirer pratiquement la prémise conséquence de son principe théorique. C'est de cette façon que des socialistes anglais tournèrent contre l'économie politique la formule de la valeur d'échange de Ricardo.

On renvoie dans cette note à *Miseère de la philosophie* de Marx, qui alors était encore partout en librairie.

Il était donc assez facile à Rodbertus de se convaincre lui-même de la nouvelle réelle de ses découvertes de 1842. Au lieu de cela, il ne cesse de les proclamer et les croit tellement incomparables qu'il ne lui vient pas une seule fois à l'esprit que Marx ait pu tirer tout seul ses conclusions de Ricardo tout aussi bien que Rodbertus lui-même. Cela est impossible. Marx l'a "pillé" - lui à qui le même Marx offrait toute facilité de se convaincre que bien longtemps avant eux ces conclusions, au moins sous la forme grossière qu'elles ont encore chez Rodbertus, avaient été déjà énoncées en Angleterre.

L'application socialiste la plus simple de la théorie de Ricardo est celle que nous avons donnée ci-dessus. En bien des cas, elle a conduit à des apercus sur l'origine et la nature de la plus-value qui dépassent de beaucoup Ricardo. Il en est également ainsi chez Rodbertus. Outre que dans cet ordre d'idées, il n'offre jamais rien qui n'ait déjà été au moins aussi bien dit avant lui, son exposition a encore les mêmes défauts que celle de ses prédécesseurs : il accepte les catégories économiques de travail, capital, valeur, dans la forme brute où les lui ont transmises les économistes, forme qui s'attache à leur appareance, sans en rechercher le contenu. Il s'interdit ainsi non seulement tout moyen de les développer plus complètement - contrairement à Marx qui, pour la première fois, a fait quelque chose de ces propositions souvent reproduites depuis soixante-quatre ans - mais il prend le chemin qui mène droit à l'utopie, comme on le montrera.

L'application précédente de la théorie de Ricardo, qui montre aux travailleurs que la totalité de la production sociale, qui est leur produit, leur appartient parce qu'ils sont les seuls producteurs réels conduit droit au communisme. Mais elle est aussi, comme Marx le fait entendre, formellement fausse économiquement parlant, parce qu'elle est simplement une application de la morale à l'économie. D'après les lois de l'économie bourgeoise, la plus grande partie du produit n'appartient pas aux travailleurs qui l'ont créé. Si nous disons alors : c'est injuste, ce ne doit pas être, cela n'a rien à voir avec l'économie. Nous disons seulement que ce fait économique est en contradiction avec notre sentiment moral. C'est pourquoi Marx n'a jamais fondé là-dessus ses revendications communistes, mais bien sur la ruine nécessaire, qui se consomme sous nos yeux, tous les jours et de plus en plus, du mode de production capitaliste. Il se contente de dire que la plus-value se compose de travail non payé : c'est un fait pur et simple. Mais ce qui peut être formellement faux au point de vue économique, peut être encore exact au point de vue de l'histoire universelle. Si le sentiment moral de la masse regarde un fait économique, autrefois l'esclavage ou le servage, comme injuste, cela prouve que ce fait lui-même est une survivance; que d'autres faits économiques se sont produits grâce auxquels le premier est devenu insupportable, insoutenable. Derrière l'inexactitude économique formelle peut donc se cacher un contenu économique très réel. Il serait déplacé ici de s'étendre davantage sur l'importance et l'histoire de la théorie de la plus-value.

On peut encore tirer d'autres conséquences de la théorie de la valeur de Ricardo et on l'a faite. La valeur des marchandises est déterminée par le travail nécessaire à leur production. Or, si l'on se trouve que dans ce méchant monde, les marchandises sont achetées tantôt au-dessus, tantôt au-dessous de leur valeur et sans qu'il y ait là simplement rapport avec les variations de la concurrence. De même que le taux de profit a une forte tendance à se maintenir au même niveau pour tous les capitalistes, les prix des marchandises tendent aussi à se réduire à la valeur de travail par l'intermédiaire de l'offre et de la demande. Mais le taux de profit se calcule d'après le capital total employé dans une exploitation industrielle; or, comme dans deux branches d'industries différentes, la production annuelle peut incorporer des masses de travail égales, c'est-à-dire présenter des valeurs égales, et que, si le salaire peut être également élevé dans ces deux branches, les capitaux avancés peuvent être, et le sont souvent, doubles ou triples dans l'une ou dans l'autre branche; la loi de la valeur de Ricardo, comme Ricardo lui-même l'a déjà découvert, est en contradiction avec la loi d'égalité du taux de profit. Si les produits des deux branches d'industrie sont vendus à leurs valeurs, les taux de profit ne peuvent pas être égaux; mais si les taux de profit sont égaux, les produits des deux branches de l'industrie ne sont pas vendus à leurs valeurs partout et toujours. Nous avons donc ici une contradiction, une antinomie entre deux lois économiques. La solution pratique s'opère, d'après Ricardo (chap. 1er, sections 4 et 5), régulièrement en faveur du taux de profit aux dépens de la valeur.

Mais la détermination de la valeur de Ricardo, malgré ses caractères néfastes, a un côté qui la rend chère à nos braves bourgeois. C'est le côté par où elle fait appel avec une force irrésistible à leur sentiment de justice. Justice et égalité

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3 Karl Marx : Contribution à la critique de l'économie politique, Éditions sociales, 1957, p. 38. (N. R.)
des droits, voilà les piliers à l'aide desquels le bourgeois du XVIIIe et du XIXe siècle voudrait élever son édifice social sur les ruines des injustices, des inégalités et des privilèges féodaux. Là détermination de la valeur des marchandises par le travail et l'échange libre qui se produis après celle mesure de valeur entre les possesseurs égaux en droit, tels sont, comme Marx l'a déjà montré, les fondements réels sur lesquels toute l'idéologie politique, juridique et philosophique de la bourgeoisie moderne s'est édifiée. Dès que l'on sait que le travail est la mesure des marchandises, les bons sentiments du brave bourgeois doivent se sentir profondément blessés par la méchanceté d'un monde qui reconnaît bien nominalement ce principe de justice, mais qui, réellement, à chaque instant, sans se gêner, paraît le mettre de côté. Surtout le petit bourgeois, dont le travail honnête - alors même que ce n'est que celui de ses ouvriers ou de ses apprentis - perd tous les jours de plus en plus de sa valeur par l'effet de la concurrence de la grande production et des machines, surtout le petit producteur doit désirer ardemment une société où l'échange des produits d'après leur valeur de travail sera une réalité entière et sans exception; en d'autres termes, il doit désirer ardemment une société où régnera exclusivement et pleinement une loi unique de production des marchandises, mais où seront supprimées les conditions qui, seules, rendent cette loi effective, c'est-à-dire les autres lois de la production des marchandises et mieux de la production capitaliste.

Cette utopie a jeté des racines très profondes dans la pensée du petit bourgeois moderne - réel ou idéal. Ce qui le démontre, c'est qu'elle a déjà été, en 1831, systématiquement développée par John Gray, essayée pratiquement et répandue en Angleterre à cette époque, proclamée comme la vérité la plus récente en 1842 par Rodbertus en Allemagne et en 1846 par Proudhon en France, publiée encore en 1871 par Rodbertus comme solution de la question sociale et pour ainsi dire son testament social; et, en 1894, elle récolte l'adhésion de la clique qui s'efforce, sous le nom de Rodbertus, d'exploiter le socialisme d'État prussien.

La critique de cette utopie a été faite si complètement par Marx, aussi bien contre Proudhon que contre Gray 4, que je puis ici me borner à quelques remarques sur la forme spéciale que Rodbertus a adoptée pour la fonder et l'exprimer.

Comme nous l'avons dit : Rodbertus accepte les concepts économiques traditionnels sous la forme exacte où ils lui ont été transmis par les économistes. Il ne fait pas la plus légère tentative pour les vérifier. La valeur est pour lui L'évaluation quantitative d'une chose relativement aux autres, cette évaluation étant prise pour mesure.

Celle définition peut rigoureusement, pour le moins, nous donner tout au plus une idée de ce que la valeur paraît à peu près être, mais ne dit absolument pas ce qu'elle est. Mais, comme c'est tout ce que Rodbertus sait nous dire sur la valeur, il est compréhensible qu'il cherche une mesure de la valeur hors de la valeur. Après avoir tourné au hasard, sans ordre, la valeur d'usage et la valeur d'échange sous une centaine de laces, avec celle puissance d'abstraction qu'admire infiniment M. Adolphe Wagner, il arrive à ce résultat qu'il n'y a pas de mesure réelle de la valeur et qu'il faut se contenter d'une mesure surérogatoire. Le travail pourrait être celle-ci, mais seulement dans le cas d'un échange entre produits d'égaules quantités de travail, que le cas soit d'ailleurs tel en lui-même, ou qu'on ait pris des dispositions que l'assurent. Valeur et travail restent ainsi sans le moindre rapport réel, bien que tout le premier chapitre soit employé à nous expliquer comment et pourquoi les marchandises coûtent du travail et rien que du travail.

Le travail est encore une fois pris sous la forme on le rencontre chez les économistes. Et pas même cela. Car bien qu'on dise deux mots sur les différences d'intensité du travail, le travail est très généralement représenté comme quelque chose qui "coûte", c'est-à-dire qui est mesure de valeur, qu'il soit d'ailleurs dépense ou non dans la moyenne des conditions normales de la société. Que les producteurs emploient dix jours à la fabrication de produits qui peuvent être fabriqués en un jour, ou qu'ils n'en emploient qu'un; qu'ils emploient le meilleur ou le plus mauvais des outillages; qu'ils appliquent leur temps de travail à la fabrication d'articles socialement nécessaires ou dans la quantité socialement exigée, qu'ils fabriquent des articles que l'on ne demande pas du tout, ou des articles demandés plus ou moins qu'il n'est besoin - de tout cela il n'est pas question : le travail est le travail, le produit d'un travail égal doit être échangé contre un produit de travail égal. Rodbertus qui, dans tout autre cas, est toujours prêt, que ce soit d'ailleurs "tel en lui-même, ou qu'on ait pris des dispositions" qui l'assurent. Valeur et travail restent ainsi sans le moindre rapport réel, bien que tout le premier chapitre soit employé à nous expliquer comment et pourquoi les marchandises coûtent du travail et rien que du travail.

Le passage à l'utopie s'effectue en un tour de main. Les "dispositions" qui fixent l'échange des marchandises d'après la valeur de travail comme suivant une règle absolue ne font pas de difficulté. Tous les autres utopistes de cette tendance, de Gray jusqu'à Proudhon, se tournent pour élaborer des mesures sociales qui doivent atteindre ce but. Ils cherchent au moins à résoudre la question économique par des voies économiques, grâce à l'action du possesseur des marchandises qui les échange. Pour Rodbertus c'est bien plus simple. En bon Prussien, il en appelle à l'État. Un décret du pouvoir public ordonne la réforme.

La valeur est donc ainsi heureusement "constituée", mais non la priorité de cette Constitution que réclamait Rodbertus. Au contraire, Gray ainsi que Bray - entre beaucoup d'autres - longtemps et souvent avant Rodbertus, ont repéré à satiété la même pensée : ils souhaitaient pieusement les mesures par lesquelles les produits s'échangeraient, malgré tous les obstacles, toujours et seulement à leur valeur de travail.

4 Voir l'annexe n° 2 de cet ouvrage.
Après que l'État a ainsi constitué la valeur - au moins d'une partie des produits, car Rodbertus est modesté - il émet son bon de travail, en fait des avances aux capitalistes industriels avec lesquels ils paient les ouvriers ; les ouvriers achètent alors les produits avec les bons de travail qu'ils ont reçus et permettent ainsi le retour du papier-monnaie à son point de départ. C'est Rodbertus lui-même qui nous apprend comme cela se déroule admirablement.

Pour ce qui est de cette seconde condition, on atteindra la disposition qui exige que la valeur attestée sur le billet soit réellement en circulation en ne donnant qu'à celui qui livre vraiment un produit un billet sur lequel sera marquée exactement la quantité de travail nécessaire par la fabrication du produit. Celui qui livre un produit de deux journées de travail reçoit un billet où sera marqué " 2 journées ". La seconde condition sera nécessairement remplie, car l'observance de cette règle dans l'émission. D'après notre hypothèse, la valeur véritable des biens coïncide avec la quantité de travail qu'a coûtée leur fabrication, et cette quantité de travail a pour mesure l'unité de temps habituelle ; celui qui livre un produit auxquels deux jours de travail ont été consacrés, s'obtient qu'il lui soit certifié deux journées de travail, n'a donc obtenu qu'il lui soit assigné ou certifié ni plus ni moins de valeur qu'il en a livré en fait, - et de plus, comme celui-là seul obtient une pareille attestation qui a pu réellement un produit en circulation, il est également certain que la valeur inscrite sur le billet est capable de payer la société. Que l'on élargisse autant qu'on le veut la sphère de la division du travail, si la règle est bien suivie, la somme de valeur disponible doit être exactement égale à la somme de valeur certifiée : et comme la somme de valeur assignée est exactement la somme de valeur assignée, celle-ci doit nécessairement se résoudre à la valeur disponible, toutes les exigences sont satisfaites et la liquidation exacte. (pages 166-167)

Si Rodbertus a eu jusqu'à présent le malheur d'arriver trop tard avec ses découvertes, cette fois au moins il a le mérite d'une espèce d'originalité : aucun de ses rivaux n'avait osé donner à l'utopie insensée du bon de travail cette forme naïvement enfantine, je dirais même véritablement pomérienne. Parce que pour chaque bon on livre un objet de valeur correspondante, qu'aucun objet de valeur n'est plus délivré que contre un bon correspondant, nécessairement la somme des bons est couverte par la somme des objets de valeur. Le calcul se fait sans le moindre reste, il est juste à une seconde de travail près, et il n'y a pas d'employé supérieur de la caisse de la dette publique qui, quoique blanchi dans sa fonction, puisse y reproduire la plus légère erreur. Que désirer de plus ?

Dans la société capitaliste actuelle, chaque capitaliste industriel produit de son propre chef ce qu'il veut, comme il veut, et autant qu'il veut. La quantité socialement exigée reste pour lui une grandeur inconnue et il ignore la qualité des objets demandés aussi bien que leur quantité. Ce qui auparavant ne peut être livré assorti d'une quantité de travail à une autre sorte de produit ou de travail, peut être livré assorti d'une quantité de travail près, et il n'y a pas d'employé supérieur de la caisse de la dette publique qui, quoique blanchi dans sa fonction, puisse y reproduire la plus légère erreur. Que désirer de plus ?

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D'abord que les déviations continues des prix des marchandises par rapport aux valeurs des marchandises sont la condition nécessaire et par laquelle seule la valeur des marchandises peut exister. Ce n'est que par les fluctuations de la concurrence et, par suite, des prix des marchandises que la loi de valeur se réalise dans la production des marchandises, et que la détermination de la valeur par le temps de travail socialement nécessaire devient une réalité. Que la forme de représentation de la valeur, que le prix ait, en règle générale, un tout autre aspect qu'il manifeste, c'est une fortune qu'il partage avec la plupart des rapports sociaux. Le roi le plus souvent ressemble peu à la monarchie qu'il représente. Dans une société de producteurs, qui échangent leurs marchandises, vouloir déterminer la valeur par le temps de travail en interdisant à la concurrence d'établir celle détermination de la valeur dans la seule forme par où elle puisse se faire, en influant sur les prix, c'est montrer qu'on s'est, au moins sur ce terrain, permis la méconnaissance utopique habituelle des lois économiques.

En second lieu, la concurrence, en réalisant la loi de la valeur de la production des marchandises dans une société de producteurs échangeant leurs marchandises, fonde par cela même et de certaines conditions le seul ordre et la seule organisation possibles de la production sociale. Ce n'est que par la dépréciation ou la majoration des prix des produits que les producteurs de marchandises isolés apprennent à leurs dépens de quels produits, et en quelle quantité, la société a besoin. Mais c'est précisément ce seul régulateur que l'utopie partagée par Rodbertus veut supprimer. Et si nous demandons quelle garantie nous avons que l'on ne produira que la quantité nécessaire de chaque produit, que nous ne manquerons ni de blé ni de viande, pendant que le sucre de betterave surabondera et que nous regretterons d'eau-de-vie de pomme de terre, que les pantalons ne nous feront pas défaut pour couvrir notre nudité, pendant que les boutons de culotte se multiplieront par milliers - Rodbertus triomphe nous montre alors son fameux compte dans lequel on a établi un certificat exact pour chaque livre de sucre superflu, pour chaque tonneau d'eau-de-vie non acheté, pour chaque bouton de culotte inutilisable, compte qui est " juste ", qui satisfaire toutes les exigences et où la liquidation est exacte ". Et qui ne le croit pas n'a qu'à s'adresser à M. X... l'employé supérieur de la caisse de la dette publique en Poméranie, qui a revu le calcul et l'a trouvé juste et que l'on peut considérer comme n'ayant jamais été coupable d'une faute dans ses comptes de caisse.
Et maintenant voyons un peu la naïveté avec laquelle Rodbertus veut supprimer les crises industrielles et commerciales, au moyen de son utopie. Dès que la production des marchandises a pris les dimensions du marché mondial, c'est par un cataclysme de ce marché, par une crise commerciale, que s’établirait l’équilibre entre les producteurs isolés, produisant selon un calcul particulier, et le marché pour lequel ils produisent, dont ils ignorent plus ou moins la demande en qualité et en quantité. Si l'on interdit à la concurrence de faire connaître aux producteurs isolés l'état du marché par la hausse ou la baisse des prix, on les aveugle tout à fait. Diriger la production des marchandises de façon que les producteurs ne puissent plus rien savoir de l'état du marché pour lequel ils produisent, - c'est soigner les crises d'une façon que le docteur Eisenhart pourrait envier à Rodbertus.

On comprend maintenant pourquoi Rodbertus détermine la valeur des marchandises par le travail, et tout au plus admet des degrés différents d'intensité de travail. S'il s'était demandé pourquoi et comment le travail crée de la valeur et, par suite, la détermine et la mesure, il serait arrivé au travail socialement nécessaire, nécessaire pour le produit isolé aussi bien à l'égard des autres produits de même espèce, qu'à l'égard de la quantité totale socialement exigée. Il serait arrivé à la question : comment la production des producteurs isolés s’adapte-t-elle à la demande sociale totale et toute son utopie devenait impossible. Cette fois, en fait, il a préféré formuler : il a fait abstraction du problème à résoudre.

Nous en venons enfin au point où Rodbertus nous offre vraiment quelque chose de neuf, point qui le distingue de tous ses nombreux camarades de l'organisation de l'échange par les bons de travail. Ils réclament tous ce mode d'échange dans le but de détruire l’exploitation du travail salarié par le capital. Chaque producteur doit obtenir la valeur de travail totale de son produit. Ils sont unanimes là-dessus, deGRAY jusqu'à Proudhon. Pas du tout, dit au contraire Rodbertus. Le travail salarié et son exploitation subsistent.

D’abord, il n’y a pas d’état social possible où le travailleur puisse recevoir pour sa consommation la valeur totale de son produit. Le fonds produit doit subvenir à une quantité de fonctions économiquement improductives mais nécessaires; il doit par suite entretenir les gens qui les remplissent. Cela n'est vrai qu’autant que vaudra la division actuelle du travail. Dans une société où le travail productif général serait obligatoire, société que l'on peut d’ailleurs " imaginer ", l'observation tombe. Resterait encore la nécessité d’un fonds social de réserve et d’accumulation, et alors les travailleurs, c’est-à-dire tout le monde, resteraient en possession et en jouissance de leur produit total, mais chaque travailleur isolé ne jouirait pas du produit intégral de son travail. L'entretien de fonctions économiquement improductives par le produit du travail n’a pas été négligé par les autres utopistes du bon de travail. Mais ils laissent les ouvriers effectuer eux-mêmes le prélèvement dans ce but, suivant en cela le mode démocratique coutumier tandis que Rodbertus, dont toute la réforme sociale de 1842 est taillée sur le patron de l'Etat prussien d'alors, remet tout au jugement de la bureaucratie, qui détermine souverainement la part de l'ouvrier au produit de son propre travail et le lui abandonne gracieusement.

Puis la rente foncière et le profit doivent continuer à subsister. En effet, les propriétaires fonciers et les capitalistes industriels remplissent certaines fonctions, socialement utiles, ou même nécessaires, encore bien qu'économiquement improductives, et reçoivent en échange une sorte de traitement, rente et profit - ce qui est une conception nullement nouvelle, même en 1842. A vrai dire, ils reçoivent maintenant beaucoup trop pour le peu qu'ils ont, et qu'ils font suffisamment mal; mais Rodbertus a besoin d’une classe privilégiée, au moins pour les cinq cents ans à venir, aussi le taux de la plus-value pour m’exprimer correctement, doit-il subsister, mais sans pouvoir être augmenté. Rodbertus accepte comme taux actuel de la plus-value 200 %, cela veut dire que pour un travail journalier de douze heures l'ouvrier n'obtiendra pas une inscription de douze heures, mais de quatre heures seulement, et la valeur produite dans les huit heures restantes devra être partagée entre propriétaire foncier et capitalistes. Les bons de travail de Rodbertus mentent donc absolument, mais il faut être propriétaire féodal de Poméranie pour se figurer qu’y aurait une classe ouvrière à qui il conviendrait de travailler douze heures pour obtenir un bon de travail de quatre heures. Si l'on traduit les jonpapers de la production capitaliste dans cette langue naïve, où elle apparait comme un vol manifeste, on la rend impossible. Chaque bon donné au travailleur serait une provocation directe à la rébellion et tomberait sous le coup dit paragraphe 110 du code pénal de l’Empire allemand. Il ne faut jamais avoir vu un autre prolétariat que celui d’une propriété de hobereau poméranien, prolétariat de journaliers, en fait presque en servage, où règnent le bâton et le fouet, et où toutes les jolies filles du village appartiennent au harem de leur gracieux seigneur, pour se figurer pouvoir offrir de pareilles impertinences.

Mais si les ouvriers ont assez de menséoude pour se laisser raconter qu’ayant travaillé pendant douze heures pleines d’un dur travail ils n’ont travaillé en réalité que quatre heures, il leur sera garanti comme récompense que, dans toute l’éternité, leur part au produit de leur propre travail ne tombera pas au-dessous du tiers. En réalité, c’est jouer l’air de la société future sur une trompette d’enfant. Cela ne vaut pas la peine de gaspiller un mot de plus sur cette question. Par conséquent, tout ce que Rodbertus offre de nouveau dans l’utopie des bons de travail est enfantin et bien inférieur aux travaux de ses nombreux rivaux, avant comme après lui.

Pour l’époque où parut Zur Erkenntnis, etc., de Rodbertus, c’était un livre certainement important. Poursuivre la théorie de Ricardo dans cette direction était un commencement qui promettait. Si, pour lui et pour l'Allemagne seules, c’était une nouveauté, son travail en somme arrive à la même hauteur que ceux des meilleurs de ses précurseurs anglais. Mais...
ce n'était qu'un commencement dont la théorie ne pouvait espérer un réel profit que par un travail ultérieur, fondamental, critique. Ce développement s'arrête pourtant là, parce que, dès le début, on dirige le développement de Ricardo dans l'autre sens, dans le sens de l'utopie. C'est perdre, dès lors, la condition de toute critique - l'indépendance. Rodbertus travailla alors avec un but préconçu, il devint un économiste tendancieux. Une fois saisi par son utopie, il s'est interdit toute possibilité de progrès scientifique. A partir de 1842 jusqu'à sa mort, il tourne dans le même cercle, reproduit les mêmes idées, déjà exprimées ou indiquées dans ses précédents ouvrages, se sent méconnu, se trouve pillé, alors qu'il n'y avait rien à piller; et se refuse enfin, non sans intention, à l'évidence qu'au fond il n'avait pourtant découvert que ce qui l'était déjà depuis longtemps.

Il est à peine nécessaire de faire remarquer que dans cet ouvrage la langue ne coïncide pas avec celle du Capital. Il y est encore parlé du travail comme marchandise, d'achat et de vente de travail au lieu de force de travail.

Comme complément, on a ajouté à cette édition : 1° un passage de l'ouvrage de Marx (Critique de l'économie politique, Berlin 1859), à propos de la première utopie des bons de travail de John Gray; et 2° le discours de Marx sur le libre-échange, qui a été prononcé en français à Bruxelles (1847), et qui appartient à la même période du développement de l'auteur que la Misère.

Londres, 25 octobre 1884.
Friedrich ENGELS.

Préface à la II° édition allemande

Pour cette 2° édition allemande, j'ajouterai simplement que le nom d'Hopkins doit être remplacé par celui exact d'Hodgskins et que la date de l'ouvrage de William Thompson (même page) doit être changée en 1824. Le savoir bibliophile de M. le professeur Anion Menger sera ainsi, nous l'espérons, satisfait.

Londres, 29 mars 1892.
F. E.
M. Proudhon a le malheur d'être singulièrement méconnu en Europe. En France, il a le droit d'être mauvais économiste, parce qu'il passe pour être bon philosophe allemand. En Allemagne, il a le droit d'être mauvais philosophe, parce qu'il passe pour être économiste français des plus forts. Nous, en notre qualité d'Allemand et d'économiste à la fois, nous avons voulu protester contre cette double erreur.

Le lecteur comprendra que, dans ce travail ingrat, il nous a fallu souvent abandonner la critique de M. Proudhon pour faire celle de la philosophie allemande, et donner en même temps des aperçus sur l'économie politique.

Karl Marx.
Bruxelles, le 15 juin 1847.

L'ouvrage de M. Proudhon n'est pas tout simplement un traité d'économie politique, un livre ordinaire, c'est une Bible : "Mystères", "Secrèts arrachés au sein de Dieu", "Révélations", rien n'y manque. Mais comme, de nos jours, les prophètes sont discutés plus consciencieusement que les auteurs profanes, il faut bien que le lecteur se résigne à passer avec nous par l'érudition aride et ténébreuse de la "génèse", pour s'élever plus tard avec M. Proudhon dans les régions éthérées et fécondes du supra-socialisme. (Voir Proudhon: Philosophie de la misère, prologue, p. III, ligne 20.)
I. **Une découverte scientifique**

I. **Opposition de la valeur d’utilité et de la valeur d’échange**

La capacité qu’ont tous les produits, soit naturels, soit industriels, de servir à la subsistance de l’homme, se nomme particulièrement valeur d’utilité; la capacité qu’ils ont de se donner l’un pour l’autre, valeur en échange... Comment la valeur d’utilité devient-elle valeur en échange ?... La génération de l’idée de la valeur (en échange) n’a pas été notée par les économistes avec assez de soin : il importe de nous y arrêter. Puis donc que, pâmi les objets dont j’ai besoin, un très grand nombre ne se trouve dans la nature qu’en une quantité médiocre, ou même ne se trouve pas du tout, je suis forcéd’aider à la production de ce qui me manque, et comme je ne puis mettre la main à tant de choses, je proposerai à d’autres hommes, mes collaborateurs dans des fonctions diverses, de me céder une partie de leurs produits en échange du bien ?

M. Proudhon se propose de nous expliquer avant tout la double nature de la valeur, la “ distinction dans la valeur ”, le mouvement qui fait de la valeur d’utilité la valeur d’échange. Il importe de nous arrêter avec M. Proudhon à cet acte de transsubstitution. Voici comment cet acte s’accomplit d’après notre auteur.

Un très grand nombre de produits ne se trouvent pas dans la nature, ils se trouvent au bout de l’industrie. Supposez que les besoins dépassent la production spontanée de la nature, l’homme est forcé de recourir à la production industrielle. Qu’est-ce que cette industrie, dans la supposition de M. Proudhon ? Quelle en est l’origine ? Un seul homme éprouvant le besoin d’un très grand nombre de choses “ ne peut mettre la main à tant de choses ”. Tant de besoins à satisfaire supposent tant de choses à produire - il n’y a pas de produits sans production - tant de choses à produire ne supposent déjà plus la main d’un seul homme aidant à les produire. Or, du moment que vous supposerez plus d’une main aidant à la production, vous avez déjà supposé toute une production, basée sur la division du travail. Ainsi le besoin, tel que M. Proudhon le suppose, suppose lui-même toute la division du travail. En supposant la division du travail, vous avez l’échange et conséquemment la valeur d’échange. Autant aurait valu supposer de prime abord la valeur d’échange.

Mais M. Proudhon a mieux aimé faire le tour. Suivons-le dans tous ses détours, pour revenir toujours à son point de départ.


Résumons : j’ai des besoins fondés sur la division du travail et sur l’échange. En supposant ces besoins, M. Proudhon se trouve avoir supposé l’échange, la valeur d’échange, dont il se propose précisément de “ noter la génération avec plus de soin que les autres économistes ”.

M. Proudhon aurait pu tout aussi bien intervertir l’ordre des choses, sans intervertir pour cela la justesse de ses conclusions. Pour expliquer la valeur en échange, il faut l’échange. Pour expliquer l’échange, il faut la division du travail. Pour expliquer la division du travail, il faut des besoins qui nécessitent la division du travail. Pour expliquer ces besoins, il faut les “ supposer ”, ce qui n’est pas les nier, contrairement au premier axiome du prologue de M. Proudhon : “ Supposer Dieu c’est le nier ”.

Comment M. Proudhon, pour lequel la division du travail est supposée connue, s’y prend-il pour expliquer la valeur d’échange, qui pour lui est toujours l’inconnu ?

“ Un homme ” s’en va “ proposer à d’autres hommes, ses collaborateurs dans des fonctions diverses ”, d’établir l’échange et de faire une distinction entre la valeur usuelle et la valeur échangeable. En acceptant cette distinction proposée, les collaborateurs n’ont laissé à M. Proudhon d’autre “ soin ” que de prendre acte du fait, de marquer, “ de noter " dans son traité d’économie politique la “ génération de l’idée de la valeur ”. Mais il nous doit toujours, à nous, d’expliquer la " génération " de cette proposition, de nous dire enfin comment ce seul homme, ce Robinson, a eu tout a coup l’idée de faire " à ses collaborateurs " une proposition du genre connu et comment ces collaborateurs l’ont acceptée sans protestation aucune.

M. Proudhon n’entre pas dans ces détails généalogiques. Il donne simplement au fait de l’échange une manière de cachet historique en le présentant sous la forme d’une motion, qu’un tiers aurait faite, tendant à établir l’échange.

Voilà un échantillon de “ la méthode historique et descriptive ” de M. Proudhon, qui professe un dédain superbe pour la “ méthode historique et descriptive ” des Adam Smith et des Ricardo.

L’échange a son histoire à lui. Il a passé par différentes phases.

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7 Proudhon : *système des contradictions, ou philosophie de la misère*, tome I, chap. II.

Il fut un temps, comme au moyen-âge, où l'on n'échangeait que le superflu, l'excédent de la production sur la consommation.

Il fut encore un temps où non seulement le superflu, mais tous les produits, toute l'existence industrielle était passée dans le commerce, où la production tout entière dépendait de l'échange. Comment expliquer cette deuxième phase de l'échange - la valeur vénale à sa deuxième puissance ?

M. Proudhon aurait une réponse toute prête : mettez qu'un homme ait " proposé à d'autres hommes, ses collaborateurs dans des fonctions diverses ", d'élever la valeur vénale à sa deuxième puissance.

Vint enfin un temps où tout ce que les hommes avaient regardé comme inaliénable devint objet d'échange, de trafic et pouvait s'allier. C'est le temps où les choses mêmes qui jusqu'alors étaient communiquées, mais jamais échangées; données mais jamais vendues; acquises, mais jamais achetées - vertu, amour, opinion, science, conscience, etc., - où tout enfin passa dans le commerce. C'est le temps de la corruption générale, de la véralité universelle, ou, pour parler en termes d’économie politique, le temps où toute chose, morale ou physique, étant devenue valeur vénale, est portée au marché pour être appréciée à sa plus juste valeur.

Comment expliquer encore cette nouvelle et dernière phase de l'échange - la valeur vénale à sa troisième puissance ?

M. Proudhon aurait une réponse toute prête : Mettez qu'une personne ait " proposé à d'autres personnes, ses collaborateurs dans des fonctions diverses ", de faire de la vertu, de l'amour, etc., une valeur vénale, d'élever la valeur d'échange à sa troisième et dernière puissance.

On le voit, la " méthode historique et descriptive " de M. Proudhon est bonne à tout, elle répond à tout, elle explique tout. S'agit-il surtout d'expliquer historiquement la " génération d'une idée économique ", il suppose un homme qui propose à d'autres hommes, ses collaborateurs dans des fonctions diverses, d'accomplir cet acte de génération, et tout est dit.

Désormais, nous acceptons la " génération " de la valeur d'échange comme un acte accompli; il ne reste maintenant qu'à exposer le rapport de la valeur d'échange à la valeur d'utilité. Écoutons M. Proudhon.

Les économistes ont très bien fait ressortir le double caractère de la valeur; mais ce qu'ils n'ont pas rendu avec la même netteté, c'est sa nature contradictoire; ici commence notre critique... C'est peut-être signalé dans la valeur utile et dans la valeur échangeable cett étonnant contraste, où les économistes sont accoutumés à ne voir rien que de très simple : il faut montrer que cette prétendue simplicité cache un mystère profond que notre devoir est de pénétrer... En termes techniques, la valeur utile et la valeur échangeable sont en raison inverse l'une de l'autre.

Si nous avons bien saisi la pensée de M. Proudhon, voici les quatre points qu'il se propose d'établir :

1. La valeur utile et la valeur échangeable forment un " contraste étonnant ", se font opposition;
2. La valeur utile et la valeur échangeable sont en raison inverse l'une de l'autre, en contradiction;
3. Les économistes n'ont ni vu ni connu l'opposition ni la contradiction;
4. La critique de M. Proudhon commence par la fin.

Nous aussi nous commencerons par la fin, et pour disculper les économistes des accusations de M. Proudhon, nous laisserons parler deux économistes assez importants.

Sismondi :

C'est l'opposition entre la valeur usuelle et la valeur échangeable à laquelle le commerce a réduit toute chose, etc. 9.

Lauderdale :

En général, la richesse nationale [la valeur utile] diminue à proportion que les fortunes individuelles s'accroissent par l'augmentation de la valeur vénale; et à mesure que celles-ci se réduisent par la diminution de cette valeur, la première augmente généralement 10.

Sismondi a fondé sur l'opposition entre la valeur usuelle et la valeur échangeable, sa principale doctrine, d'après laquelle la diminution du revenu est proportionnelle à l'accroissement de la production.

Lauderdale a fondé son système sur la raison inverse des deux espèces de valeur et sa doctrine était même tellement populaire du temps de Ricardo, que celui-ci pouvait en parler comme d'une chose généralement connue.

C'est en confondant les idées de la valeur vénale et des richesses (valeur utile) qu'on a prétendu qu'en diminuant la quantité des choses nécessaires, utiles ou agréables à la vie, on pouvait augmenter les richesses 11.

Nous venons de voir que les économistes, avant M. Proudhon, ont " signalé " le mystère profond d'opposition et de contradiction. Voyons maintenant comment M. Proudhon explique à son tour ce mystère après les économistes.

9 Sismondi : Études, tome II, page 162, édition de Bruxelles.
11 Ricardo : Principes d’économie politique, traduits par Constancio, annotés par J.-B. Say, Paris, 1835; tome II, chapitre " Sur la valeur et les richesses ".

17 / 83
La valeur échangeable d’un produit baisse à mesure que l’offre va croissant, la demande restant la même; en d’autres termes : plus un produit est abondant relativement à la demande, plus sa valeur échangeable ou son prix est bas. Vice-versa : plus l’offre est faible relativement à la demande, plus la valeur échangeable ou le prix du produit offert hausse; en d’autres termes, plus il y a rareté des produits offerts relativement à la demande, plus il y a cherté. La valeur d’échange d’un produit dépend de son abondance ou de sa rareté, mais toujours par rapport à la demande. Supposons un produit plus que rare, unique dans son genre, je le veux bien : ce produit unique sera plus qu’abondant, il sera superflu, s’il n’est pas demandé. En revanche, supposons un produit multiplié à millions : il sera toujours rare, s’il ne suffit pas à la demande, c’est-à-dire s’il est trop demandé.

Ce sont là des vérités, nous dirons presque banales, et qu’il a fallu cependant reproduire ici pour faire comprendre les mystères de M. Proudhon. Teillelement qu’en suivant le principe jusqu’aux dernières conséquences on arriverait à conclure, le plus logiquement du monde, que les choses dont l’usage est nécessaire et la quantité infinie, doivent être pour rien, et celles dont l’utilité est nulle et la rareté extrême, d’un prix inestimable. Pour comble d’embarras, la pratique n’admet point ces extrêmes : d’un côté, aucun produit humain ne saurait jamais atteindre l’infini en grandeur; de l’autre, les choses les plus rares ont besoin à un degré quelconque d’être utiles. Sans quoi elles ne seraient susceptibles d’aucune valeur. La valeur utile et la valeur échangeable restent donc faiblement enchainées l’une à l’autre, bien que par leur nature elles tendent continuellement à s’exclure 12.

Qu’est-ce qui met le comble à l’embarras de M. Proudhon ? C’est qu’il a tout simplement oublié la demande, et qu’une chose ne saurait être rare ou abondante qu’autant qu’elle est demandée. Une fois la demande mise de côté, il assimile la valeur échangeable à la rareté et la valeur utile à l’abondance. Effectivement, en disant que les choses “ dont l’utilité est nulle et la rareté extrême ” sont “ d’un prix inestimable ”, il dit tout simplement que la valeur en échange n’est que la rareté. “ Rareté extrême et utilité nulle ”, c’est la rareté pure. “ Prix inestimable ”, c’est le maximum de la valeur échangeable, c’est la valeur échangeable toute pure. Ces deux termes, il les met en équation. Donc, valeur échangeable et rareté sont des termes équivalents. En arrivant à ces prétendues “ conséquences extrêmes ”, M. Proudhon se trouve en effet avoir poussé à l’extrême, non, pas les choses, mais les termes qui les expriment, et en cela il fait preuve de rhétorique bien plus que de logique. Il retrouve ses hypothèses premières dans toute leur nudité, quand il croit avoir trouvé de nouvelles conséquences. Grâce au même procédé, il réussit à identifier la valeur utile avec l’abondance pure.

Après avoir mis en équation la valeur échangeable et la rareté, la valeur utile et l’abondance, M. Proudhon est tout étonné de ne trouver ni la valeur utile dans la rareté et la valeur échangeable, ni la valeur échangeable dans l’abondance et la valeur utile; et en voyant que la pratique n’admet point ces extrêmes il ne peut plus faire autrement que de croire au mystère. Il y a pour lui prix inestimable, parce qu’il n’y a pas d’acheteurs, et il n’en trouvera jamais, tant qu’il fait abstraction de la demande.

D’un autre côté, l’abondance de M. Proudhon semble être quelque chose de spontané. Il oublié tout à fait qu’il y a des gens qui la produisent, et qu’il est de l’intérêt de ceux-ci de ne jamais perdre de vue la demande. Sinon, comment M. Proudhon aurait-il pu dire que les choses qui sont très utiles doivent être à très bas prix ou même ne coûter rien ? Il lui aurait fallu conclure, au contraire, qu’il faut restreindre l’abondance, la production des choses très utiles, si l’on veut en élever le prix, la valeur d’échange.

Les anciens vignerons de France, en sollicitant une loi qui interdisait la plantation de nouvelles vignes; les Hollandais, en brûlant les épices de l’Asie, en déracinant les girofliers dans les Moluques, voulaient tout simplement réduire l’abondance pour élever la valeur d’échange. Si l’on veut racheter l’infini en grandeur; de l’autre, les choses les plus rares ont besoin à un degré quelconque d’être utiles. Sans quoi elles ne seraient susceptibles d’aucune valeur. La valeur utile et la valeur échangeable restent donc faiblement enchainées l’une à l’autre, bien que par leur nature elles tendent continuellement à s’exclure 12.

Après avoir représenté l’abondance comme la valeur utile, et la rareté comme la valeur échangeable, M. Proudhon est tout étonné de ne trouver ni la valeur utile dans la rareté et la valeur échangeable, ni la valeur échangeable dans l’abondance et la valeur utile; et en voyant que la pratique n’admet point ces extrêmes il ne peut plus faire autrement que de croire au mystère. Il y a pour lui prix inestimable, parce qu’il n’y a pas d’acheteurs, et il n’en trouvera jamais, tant qu’il fait abstraction de la demande.

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Après avoir représenté l’abondance comme la valeur utile, et la rareté comme la valeur échangeable, - rien de plus facile que de démontrer que l’abondance et la rareté sont en raison inverse - M. Proudhon identifie la valeur utile à l’offre et la valeur échangeable à la demande. Pour rendre l’antithèse encore plus tranchée, il fait une substitution de termes en mettant “ valeur d’opinion ” à la place de valeur échangeable. Voilà donc que la lutte a changé de terrain, et nous avons d’un côté l’utilité (la valeur en usage, l’offre), de l’autre l’opinion (la valeur échangeable, la demande).

Ces deux puissances opposées l’une à l’autre, qui les conciliera ? Comment faire pour les mettre d’accord ? Pourrait-on seulement établir entre elles un point de comparaison ? Certes, s’écrie M. Proudhon, il y en a un; c’est l’arbitraire. Le prix qui résultera de cette lutte entre l’offre et la demande, entre l’utilité et l’opinion, ne sera pas l’expression de la justice éternelle.

M. Proudhon continue à développer cette antithèse :

En ma qualité d’acheteur libre, je suis juge de mon besoin, juge de la convenance de l’objet, du prix que je veux y mettre. D’autre part, en votre qualité de producteur libre, vous êtes maître des moyens d’exécution, et, en conséquence, vous avez la faculté de réduire vos frais 13.

13 Proudhon: Ouvrage cité, tome I. p. 41.
Et comme la demande ou la valeur en échange est identique avec l'opinion, M. Proudhon est amené à dire :

Il est prouvé que c'est le libre arbitre de l'homme qui donne lieu à l'opposition entre la valeur utile et la valeur en échange. Comment résoudre cette opposition tant qu'une subsistera le libre arbitre ? Et comment sacrifier celui-ci, à moins de sacrifier l'homme ?

Ainsi, il n'y a pas de résultat possible. Il y a une lutte entre deux puissances pour ainsi dire incommensurables, entre l'utilité et l'opinion, entre l'acheteur libre et le producteur libre.

Voyons les choses d'un peu plus près.

L'offre ne représente pas exclusivement l'utilité, la demande ne représente pas exclusivement l'opinion. Celui qui demande n'offre-t-il pas aussi un produit quelconque ou le signe représentatif de tous les produits, l'argent, et en offrant ne représente-t-il pas, d'après M. Proudhon, l'utilité ou la valeur en usage ?

D'un autre côté, celui qui offre ne demande-t-il pas aussi un produit quelconque ou le signe représentatif de tous les produits, de l'argent ? Et ne devient-il pas ainsi le représentant de l'opinion, de la valeur d'opinion ou de la valeur en échange ?

La demande est en même temps une offre, l'offre est en même temps une demande. Ainsi l'antithèse de M. Proudhon, en identifiant simplement l'offre et la demande, l'une à l'utilité, l'autre à l'opinion, ne repose que sur une abstraction futile.

Ce que M. Proudhon appelle valeur utile, d'autres économistes l'appellent avec autant de raison valeur d'opinion. Nous ne citerons que Storch.

Selon lui, on appelle besoins les choses dont nous sentons le besoin; on appelle valeurs les choses auxquelles nous attribuons de la valeur. La plupart des choses ont seulement de la valeur parce qu'elles satisfont aux besoins engendrés par l'opinion. L'opinion sur nos besoins peut changer, donc l'utilité des choses, qui n'exprime qu'un rapport de ces choses à nos besoins, peut changer aussi. Les besoins naturels eux-mêmes changent continuellement. Quelle variété n'y a-t-il pas, en effet, dans les objets qui servent de nourriture principale chez les différents peuples !

La lutte ne s'établit pas entre l'utilité et l'opinion : elle s'établit entre la valeur vénale que demande l'offreur, et la valeur vénale qu'offre le demandeur. La valeur échangeable du produit est chaque fois la résultante de ces appréciations contradictoires.

En dernière analyse, l'offre et la demande mettent en présence la production et la consommation, mais la production et la consommation dépendent des échanges individuels.

Le produit qu'on offre n'est pas l'utilité en lui-même. C'est le consommateur qui en constate l'utilité. Le marché n'est pas le lieu où le consommateur rapporte sa quantité d'utilité. Il est prouvé que c'est le libre arbitre de l'homme qui donne lieu à l'opposition entre la valeur utile et la valeur en échange.

Quant à la demande, elle ne sera effective qu'à la condition d'avoir à sa disposition des moyens d'échange. Ces moyens eux-mêmes sont des produits, des valeurs vénales.

Dans l'offre et la demande nous trouvons donc d'un côté un produit qui a coûté des valeurs vénales, et le besoin de vendre; de l'autre, des moyens qui ont coûté des valeurs vénales, et le désir d'acheter.

M. Proudhon oppose l'acheteur libre au producteur libre. Il donne à l'un et à l'autre des qualités purement métaphysiques. C'est ce qui lui fait dire :

Il est prouvé que c'est le libre arbitre de l'homme qui donne lieu à l'opposition entre la valeur utile et la valeur en échange.

Le producteur, du moment qu'il a produit dans une société fondée sur la division du travail et sur les échanges, c'est la théorie de M. Proudhon, est forcé de vendre. M. Proudhon fait le producteur maître des moyens de production; mais il conviendra avec nous que ce n'est pas du libre arbitre que dépendent ses moyens de production. Il y a plus; ces moyens de production sont en grande partie des produits qui lui viennent du dehors, et dans la production moderne il n'est pas même libre de produire la quantité qu'il veut. Le degré actuel du développement des forces productives l'oblige à produire sur telle ou telle échelle.

Le consommateur n'est pas plus libre que le producteur. Son opinion repose sur ses moyens et ses besoins. Les uns et les autres sont déterminés par sa situation sociale, laquelle dépend elle-même de l'organisation sociale tout entière. Oui, l'ouvrier qui achète des pommes de terre, et la femme enceinte qui achète des dentelles, suivent l'un et l'autre leur opinion respective. Mais la diversité de leurs opinions s'explique par la différence de la position qu'ils occupent dans le monde, laquelle est le produit de l'organisation sociale.

Le système des besoins tout entier est-il fondé sur l'opinion ou sur toute l'organisation de la production ? Le plus souvent les besoins naissent directement de la production, ou d'un état de choses basé sur la production. Le commerce de l'univers roule presque entier sur des besoins, non de la consommation individuelle, mais de la production. Ainsi, pour

14 Idem, p. 41.
15 Cours d'économie politique, Paris, 1823, pp. 88 et 99.
choisir un autre exemple, le besoin que l'on a des notaires ne suppose-t-il pas un droit civil donné, qui n'est qu'une expression d'un certain développement de la propriété, c'est-à-dire de la production ?

Il ne suffit pas à M. Proudhon d'avoir éliminé du rapport de l'offre et de la demande les éléments dont nous venons de parler. Il pousse l'abstraction aux dernières limites, en fondant tous les producteurs en un seul producteur, tous les consommateurs en un seul consommateur, et en établissant la lutte entre ces deux personnages chimériques. Mais dans le monde réel les choses se passent autrement. La concurrence entre ceux qui offrent et la concurrence entre ceux qui demandent, forment un élément nécessaire de la lutte entre les acheteurs et les vendeurs, d'où résulte la valeur vénale.

Après avoir éliminé les frais de production et la concurrence, M. Proudhon peut tout à son aise, réduire à l'absurde la formule de l'offre et de la demande.

L'offre et la demande, dit-il, ne sont autre chose que deux formes cérémonielles servant à mettre en présence la valeur d'utilité et la valeur d'échange, et à provoquer leur conciliation. Ce sont les pôles électriques dont la mise en rapport doit produire le phénomène d'affinité appelé échange 16

Autant vaut dire que l'échange n'est qu'une "forme cérémonielle", pour mettre en présence le consommateur et l'objet de la consommation. Autant vaut dire que tous les rapports économiques sont des "formes cérémonielles", pour servir d'intermédiaire à la consommation immédiate. L'offre et la demande sont des rapports d'une production donnée, ni plus ni moins que les échanges individuels.

Ainsi, toute la dialectique de M. Proudhon en quoi consiste-t-elle ? A substituer à la valeur utile et à la valeur échangeable, à l'offre et à la demande, des notions abstraites et contradictoires, telles que la rareté et l'abondance, l'utilité et l'opinion, un producteur et un consommateur, tous les deux chevaliers du libre-arbitre.

Et à quoi voulait-il en venir ?

A se ménager le moyen d'introduire plus tard un des éléments qu'il avait écartés, les frais de production, comme la synthèse entre la valeur utile et la valeur échangeable. C'est ainsi qu'à ses yeux les frais de production constituent la valeur synthétique ou la valeur constituée.

2. La valeur constituée ou la valeur synthétique

"La valeur (vénale) est la pierre angulaire de l'édifice économique." (T. 1, p. 90). La valeur "constituée" est la pierre angulaire du système des contradictions économiques.

Qu'est-ce donc que cette "valeur constituée" qui constitue toute la découverte de M. Proudhon en économie politique ?

L'utilité est une fois admise, le travail est la source de la valeur. La mesure du travail, c'est le temps. La valeur relative des produits est déterminée par le temps du travail qu'il a fallu employer pour les produire. Le prix est l'expression monétaire de la valeur relative d'un produit. Enfin, la valeur constituée d'un produit est tout simplement la valeur qui se constitue par le temps du travail y fixé.

De même qu'Adam Smith a découvert la division du travail, de même lui, M. Proudhon, prétend avoir découvert la "valeur constituée". Ce n'est pas précisément "quelque chose d'inouï", mais aussi faut-il convenir qu'il n'y a rien d'inouï dans aucune découverte de la science économique. M. Proudhon, qui sent toute l'importance de son invention, cherche cependant à en atténuer le mérite afin de rassurer le lecteur sur ses prétentions à l'originalité, et de se réconcilier les esprits que leur timidité rend peu favorables aux idées nouvelles.

Mais à mesure qu'il fait la part de ce que chacun de ses prédécesseurs a fait pour l'évaluation de la valeur, il est forcément amené à avouer tout haut que c'est à lui qu'en revient la plus large part, la part du lion.

L'idée synthétique de la valeur avait été vaguement aperçue par Adam Smith... Mais cette idée de la valeur était tout intuitive chez A. Smith : or, la société ne change pas ses habitudes sur la foi d'intuitions : elle ne se décide que sur l'autorité des faits. Il fallait que l'antinomie s'exprimât d'une manière plus sensible et plus nette : J.-B. Say fut son principal interprète.

Voilà l'histoire toute faite de la découverte de la valeur synthétique : à Adam Smith l'intuition vague, à J.-B. Say l'antinomie, à M. Proudhon la vérité constituante et "constituée". Et que l'on ne s'y méprene pas : tous les autres économistes, de Say à Proudhon, n'ont fait que se traîner dans l'ornière de l'antinomie.

Il est incroyable que tant d'hommes de sens se démènent depuis quarante ans contre une idée si simple. Mais non, la comparaison des valeurs s'effectue sans qu'il y ait entre elles aucun point de comparaison et sans unité de mesure : voilà, plutôt que d'embrasser la théorie révolutionnaire de l'égalité, ce que les économistes du XIXe siècle ont résolu de soutenir envers et contre tous. Qu'en dira la postérité ?

La postérité, si brusquement apostrophée, commencera par être brouillée et que M. Proudhon, craignant de choquer l'anglophobie de ses lecteurs, a mieux aimé se faire l'éditeur remonté à 1817. Ricardo est le chef de toute une école, qui règne en Angleterre depuis la Restauration. La doctrine ricardienne résume rigoureusement, impitoyablement toute la bourgeoisie anglaise, qui est elle-même le type de la bourgeoisie moderne. "Qu'en dira la postérité ?" Elle ne dira pas que M. Proudhon n'a point connu Ricardo, car il en parle, il en parle longuement, il y revient toujours et finit par dire que c'est du "fatras". Si jamais la postérité s'en mêle, elle dira peut-être que M. Proudhon, craignant de choquer l'anglophobie de ses lecteurs, a mieux aimé se faire l'éditeur responsable des idées de Ricardo. Quoi qu'il en soit, elle trouvera fort naïf que M. Proudhon donne comme "théorie révolutionnaire de l'avénir", ce que Ricardo a scientifiquement exposé comme la théorie de la société actuelle, de la société bourgeoise, et qu'il prêne ainsi pour la solution de l'antinomie entre l'utilité et la valeur en échange ce que Ricardo et son école ont longtemps avant lui présenté comme la formule scientifique d'un seul côté de l'antinomie, de la valeur en échange. Mais mettons pour toujours la postérité de côté, et confrontons M. Proudhon avec son prédécesseur Ricardo. Voici quelques passages de cet auteur, qui résument sa doctrine sur la valeur : Ce n'est pas l'utilité qui est la mesure de la valeur échangeable, mais l'utilité qui est la mesure de la valeur échangeable. La valeur est du moins aussi naturelle que les Gotha et c'est pour l'utilité que les Gotha sont du moins selon la valeur des objets que l'utilité est la mesure de la valeur échangeable.

Proudhon : Ouvrage cité, tome I. p. 68.
Ricardo : Principes de l'économie politique, etc. Traduits de l'anglais par J.-S. Constancio, Paris 1839, tome I, p. 3.
Idem, pp. 4 et 5.
Ils ne forment cependant qu'une très petite quantité des marchandises qu'on échange journellement. Le plus grand nombre des objets que l'on désire posséder étant le fruit de l'industrie, on peut les multiplier, non seulement dans un pays, mais dans plusieurs, à un degré auquel il est presque impossible d'assigner des bornes, toutes les fois qu'on voudra y employer l'industrie nécessaire pour les créer.

Quand donc nous parlons de marchandises, de leur valeur échangeable et des principes qui règlent leur prix relatif, nous n'avons en vue que celles de ces marchandises dont la quantité peut s'accroître par l'industrie de l'homme, dont la production est encouragée par la concurrence et n'est contrariée par aucune entrave.

Ricardo cite A. Smith, qui, selon lui, “a défini avec beaucoup de précision la source primitive de toute valeur échangeable” (SMITH : tome I, ch. V.) et il ajoute :

Que telle soit en réalité la base de la valeur échangeable de toutes les choses [savoir, le temps du travail], excepté de celles que l'industrie des hommes ne peut multiplier à volonté, c'est un point de doctrine de la plus haute importance en économie politique : car il n'est point de source d'où se soient écoulées autant d'erreurs, et d'où soient nées tant d'opinions diverses dans cette science, que le sens vague et peu précis que l'on attache, au mot valeur.

Si c'est la quantité de travail fixée dans une chose qui règle sa valeur échangeable, il s'ensuit que toute augmentation dans la quantité de travail doit nécessairement augmenter la valeur de l'objet auquel il a été employé, et de même toute diminution de travail doit en diminuer le prix.

Ricardo reproche ensuite à Smith :

1° De donner à la valeur une mesure autre que le travail, tantôt la valeur du blé, tantôt la quantité de travail qu'une chose peut acheter, etc.

2° D'avoir admis sans réserve le principe et d'en restreindre cependant l'application à l'état primitif et grossier de la société, qui précède l'accumulation des capitaux et la propriété des terres.

Ricardo s'attache à démontrer que la propriété des terres, c'est-à-dire la rente, ne saurait changer la valeur relative des denrées, et que l'accumulation des capitaux n'exerce qu'une action passagère et oscillatoire sur les valeurs relatives déterminées par la quantité comparative de travail employée à leur production. A l'appui de cette thèse, il donne sa fameuse théorie de la rente foncière, décompose le capital, et en vient, en dernière analyse, à n'y trouver que du travail accumulé. Il développe ensuite toute une théorie du salaire et du profit, et démontre que le salaire et le profit ont leurs mouvements de hausse et de baisse, en raison inverse l'un de l'autre, sans influer sur la valeur relative du produit. Il ne néglige pas l'influence que l'accumulation des capitaux et la différence de leur nature (capitaux fixes et capitaux circulants), ainsi que le taux des salaires, peuvent exercer sur la valeur proportionnelle des produits. Ce sont même les principaux problèmes qui occupent Ricardo.

Toute économie dans le travail, dit-il, ne marque jamais de faire baisser la valeur relative, d'une marchandise, soit que cette économie porte sur le travail nécessaire à la fabrication de l'objet même, ou bien sur le travail nécessaire à la formation du capital employé dans cette production.

Par conséquent, tant qu'une journée de travail continuera à donner à l'un la même quantité de poisson et à l'autre autant de gibier, le taux naturel des prix respectifs d'échange restera toujours le même, quelle que soit, d'ailleurs, la variation dans les salaires et dans le profit, et malgré tous les effets de l'accumulation du capital.

20 Idem. p. 5.
21 Idem. p. 5...
23 Idem.
24 Idem, tome I, pp. 9 et 10.
26 En marge, Engels écrit : "Chez Ricardo la valeur relative est la valeur exprimée en numéraire."
27 Ricardo : Ouvrage cité, tome I, p. 28.
28 On sait que Ricardo détermine la valeur d'une, marchandise par "la quantité de travail qui est nécessaire pour l'obtenir". Or la forme d'échange en vigueur dans tout système de production fondé sur la production de marchandise - donc également dans le système capitaliste - implique que cette valeur ne soit pas exprimée directement en quantités de travail main en quantités d'autre marchandise. La valeur d'une marchandise, exprimée par une certaine quantité d'une autre marchandise (argent ou non), c'est ce que Ricardo appelle sa valeur relative. (Note d'Engels pour l'édition de 1868.)
29 Idem, tome I, p. 32.
Nous avons regardé le travail comme le fondement de la valeur des choses, et la quantité de travail nécessaire à leur production comme la règle qui détermine les quantités respectives des marchandises que l'on doit donner en échange pour d'autres : mais nous n'avons pas prétendu nier qu'il n'y eût dans le prix courant des marchandises quelque déviation accidentelle et passagère de ce prix primitif et naturel 30.

Ce sont les frais de production qui règlent, en dernière analyse, les prix des choses, et non, comme on l'a souvent avancé, la proportion entre l'offre et la demande 31.

Lord Lauderdale avait développé les variations de la valeur échangeable selon la loi de l'offre et de la demande, ou de la rareté et de l'abondance relativement à la demande. Selon lui, la valeur d'une chose peut augmenter lorsque sa quantité en diminue ou que la demande en augmente; elle peut diminuer en raison de l'augmentation de sa quantité ou en raison de la diminution de la demande. Ainsi, la valeur d'une chose peut changer par l'opération de huit causes différentes, savoir des quatre causes appliquées à cette chose même et des quatre causes appliquées à l'argent ou à toute autre marchandise qui sert de mesure à sa valeur. Voici la réfutation de Ricardo :

Des produits dont un particulier ou une compagnie ont le monopole varient de valeur d'après la loi que lord Lauderdale a posée : ils baissent à proportion qu'on les offre en plus grande quantité, et ils haussent avec le désir que montrent les acheteurs de les acquérir; leur prix n'a point de rapport nécessaire avec leur valeur naturelle. Mais quant aux choses qui sont sujettes à la concurrence parmi les vendeurs et dont la quantité peut s'augmenter dans des bornes modérées, leur prix dépend en définitive, non de l'état de la demande et de l'approvisionnement, mais bien de l'augmentation ou de la diminution des frais de production 32.

Nous laisserons au lecteur le soin de faire la comparaison entre le langage si précis, si clair, si simple de Ricardo, et les efforts de rhétorique que fait M. Proudhon, pour arriver à la détermination de la valeur relative par le temps du travail.

Ricardo nous montre le mouvement réel de la production bourgeoise qui constitue la valeur. M. Proudhon, faisant abstraction de ce mouvement réel, " se démène " pour inventer de nouveaux procédés, afin de régler le monde d'après une formule prétendue nouvelle qui n'est que l'expression théorique du mouvement réel existant et si bien exposé par Ricardo. Ricardo prend son point de départ dans la société actuelle, pour nous démontrer comment elle constitue la valeur : M. Proudhon prend pour point de départ la valeur constituée, pour constituer un nouveau monde social au moyen de cette valeur. Pour lui, M. Proudhon, la valeur constituée doit faire le tour et redevienne constitutante pour un monde déjà tout constitué d'après ce mode d'évaluation. La détermination de la valeur par le temps de travail est, pour Ricardo, la loi de la valeur échangeable; pour M. Proudhon, elle est la synthèse de la valeur utile et de la valeur échangeable. La théorie des valeurs de Ricardo est l'interprétation scientifique de la vie économique actuelle : la théorie des valeurs de M. Proudhon est l'interprétation utopique de la théorie de Ricardo. Ricardo constate la vérité de sa formule en la faisant dériver de tous les rapports économiques, et en expliquant par ce moyen tous les phénomènes, même ceux qui, au premier abord, semblent la contredire, comme la rente, l'accumulation des capitaux et le rapport des salaires aux profits; c'est là précisément ce qui fait de sa doctrine un système scientifique; M. Proudhon, qui a retrouvé cette formule de Ricardo au moyen d'hypothèses tout à fait arbitraires, est forcé ensuite de chercher des faits économiques isolés qu'il torture et falsifie, afin de les faire passer pour des exemples, des applications déjà existantes, des commencements de réalisation de son idée régénératrice. (Voir notre § 3.)

Passons maintenant aux conclusions que M. Proudhon tire de la valeur constituée (par le temps du travail).

- Une certaine quantité de travail équivaut au produit créé par cette même quantité de travail.
- Toute journée de travail vaut une autre journée de travail; c'est-à-dire, à quantité égale, le travail de l'un vaut le travail de l'autre : il n'y a pas de différence qualificative. A quantité égale de travail, le produit de l'un se donne en échange pour le produit de l'autre. Tous les hommes sont des travailleurs salariés, et des salariés également payés pour un temps égal de travail. L'égalité parfaite préside aux échanges.

Ces conclusions sont-elles les conséquences naturelles, rigoureuses de la valeur " constituée " ou déterminée par le temps du travail ?

Si la valeur relative d'une marchandise est déterminée par la quantité de travail requise pour la produire, il s'ensuit naturellement que la valeur relative du travail, ou le salaire, est également déterminée par la quantité de travail qu'il faut pour produire le salaire. Le salaire, c'est-à-dire la valeur relative -ou le prix du travail, est donc déterminé par le temps du travail qu'il faut pour produire tout ce qui est nécessaire à l'entretien de l'ouvrier.

Diminuez les frais de fabrication des chapeaux et leur prix finira par tomber à leur nouveau prix naturel, quoique la demande puisse doubler, tripler ou quadrupler. Diminuez les frais de l'entretien des hommes, en diminuant le prix naturel de la nourriture et des vêtements qui soutiennent la vie, et

32 Ricardo : Ouvrage cité, tome III. p. 259.
Certes, le langage de Ricardo est on ne peut plus cynique. Mettre sur la même ligne les frais de la fabrication des chapeaux et les frais de l'entretien de l'homme, c'est transformer l'homme en chapeau. Mais ne crions pas tant au cymisme. Le cynisme est dans les choses et non dans les mots qui expriment les choses. Des écrivains français, tels que MM. Droz, Blanqui, Rossi et autres, se donnent l'innocente satisfaction de prouver leur supériorité sur les économistes anglais, en cherchant à observer l'étiquette d'un langage " humanitaire "; s'ils reprochent à Ricardo et à son école leur langage cynique, c'est qu'ils sont vexés de voir exposer les rapports économiques dans toute leur crudité, de voir trahis les mystères de la bourgeoisie.

Résumons : le travail, étant lui-même marchandise, se mesure comme tel par le temps du travail qu'il faut pour produire le travail -marchandise. Et que faut-il pour produire le travail-marchandise ? Tout juste ce qu'il faut de temps de travail pour produire les objets indispensables à l'entretien incessant du travail, c'est-à-dire à faire vivre le travailleur et à le mettre en état de propager sa race. Le prix naturel du travail n'est autre chose que le minimum du salaire. Si le prix courant du salaire 14 s'élève au-dessus du prix naturel, c'est précisément parce que la loi de la, valeur, posée en principe par M. Proudhon se trouve contre-balancée par les conséquences des variations du rapport de l'offre et de la demande. Mais le minimum du salaire n'en reste pas moins le centre vers lequel gravitent les prix courants du salaire.

Ainsi, la valeur relative, mesurée par le temps du travail est fatalement la formule de l'esclavage moderne de l'ouvrier, au lieu d'être, comme M. Proudhon le veut, la " théorie révolutionnaire " de l'émanicipation du prolétariat.

Voyons maintenant en combien de cas l'application du temps du travail comme mesure de la valeur est incompatible avec l'antagonisme existant des classes et l'inégale rétribution du produit entre le travailleurre immédiat et le possesseur du travail accumulé.

Supposons un produit quelconque; par exemple, la toile. Ce produit, comme tel, renferme une quantité de travail déterminée. Cette quantité de travail sera toujours la même, quelle que soit la situation réciproque de ceux qui ont concouru à créer ce produit.

Prenons un autre produit : du drap, qui aurait exigé le même quantité de travail que la toile.

S'il y a échange de ces deux produits, il y a échange de quantités égales de travail. En échangeant ces quantités égales de temps de travail, on ne change pas la situation réciproque des producteurs, pas plus qu'on ne change quelque chose à la situation des ouvriers et des fabricants entre eux. Dire que cet échange des produits mesurés par le temps du travail a pour conséquence la rétribution égaleitaire de tous les producteurs, c'est supposer que l'égalité de participation au produit a subsisté antérieurement à l'échange. Que l'échange du drap contre la toile soit accompli, les producteurs du drap participeront à la toile dans une proportion égale à celle dans laquelle ils avaient auparavant participé au drap.

L'illusion de M. Proudhon provient de ce qu'il prend comme conséquence ce qui ne pourrait être, tout au plus, qu'une supposition gratuite.

Allons plus loin.

Le temps de travail, comme mesure de la valeur, suppose-t-il du moins que les journées sont équivalentes, et que la journée de l'un vaut la journée de l'autre ? Non.

Mettons un instant que la journée d'un bijoutier équivale à trois journées d'un tisserand : toujours est-il que tout changement de la valeur des bijoux relativement aux tissus, à moins d'être le résultat passager des oscillations de la valeur, n'en reste pas moins le centre vers lequel gravitent les prix courants du salaire. Mais le minimum du salaire n'en reste pas moins le centre vers lequel gravitent les prix courants du salaire.

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Votre heure de travail vaut-elle la mienne ? C'est une question qui se débat par la concurrence.

La concurrence, d'après un économiste américain, détermine combien de journées de travail simple sont contenues dans une journée de travail compliqué. Cette réduction de journées de travail compliqué à des journées de travail simple ne suppose-t-elle pas qu'on prend le travail simple lui-même pour mesure de la valeur ? La seule quantité de travail

34 La formule selon laquelle le prix " naturel ", c'est-à-dire normal de la force de travail coïncide avec le salaire minimum, c'est-à-dire avec l'équivalent en valeur des subsistances absolument nécessaires pour l'existence et la reproduction de l'ouvrier, cette formule a été d'abord établie par moi dans L'esquisse d'une critique de l'économie politique (annales franco-allemandes, 1844) et dans La situation de la classe laborieuse en Angleterre. Comme le dit Jet. Marx avait alors accepté cette formule. C'est à nous que Lassalle l'a empruntée. Mais s'il est vrai que dans la réalité le salaire a constamment tendance à se rapprocher de son minimum, la formule ci-dessous n'en est pas moins fausse. Le fait que la force de travail soit, en règle générale et en moyenne payée au-dessous de sa valeur ne saurait modifier celle-ci. Dans Le Capital, Marx a à la fois rectifié cette formule (section " Achat et vente de la force de travail ") et développé les circonstances qui permettent à la production capitaliste de faire baisser de plus en plus au-dessous de sa valeur le prix de la force de travail (chapitre XXIII. La foi générale de l'accumulation capitaliste). (Note d'Engels pour l'édition de 1885.)
servant de mesure à la valeur sans égard à la qualité suppose à son tour que le travail simple est devenu le pivot de l'industrie. Elle suppose que les travaux se sont égalisés par la subordination de l'homme à la machine ou par la division extrême du travail; que les hommes s'effacent devant le travail; que le balancier de la pendule est devenu la mesure exacte de l'activité relative de deux ouvriers, comme il l'est de la célérité de deux locomotives. Alors, il ne faut pas dire qu'une heure d'un homme vaut une heure d'un autre homme, mais plutôt qu'un homme d'une heure vaut un autre homme d'une heure. Le temps est tout, l'homme n'est plus rien; il est tout au plus la carcasse du temps. Il n'y est plus question de la qualité. La quantité seule décide de tout : heure pour heure, journée pour journée; mais cette égalisation du travail n'est point l'œuvre de l'éternelle justice de M. Proudhon; elle est tout bonnement le fait de l'industrie moderne.

Dans l'atelier automatique, le travail d'un ouvrier ne se distingue presque plus en rien du travail d'un autre ouvrier : les ouvriers ne peuvent plus se distinguer entre eux que par la quantité de temps qu'ils mettent à travailler. Néanmoins, cette différence quantitative devient, sous un certain point de vue, qualitative, en tant que le temps à donner au travail dépend, en partie, de causes purement matérielles, telles que la constitution physique, l'âge, le sexe; en partie, de causes morales purement négatives, telles que la patience, l'impossibilité, l'assiduité. Enfin, s'il y a une différence de qualité dans le travail des ouvriers, c'est tout au plus une qualité de la dernière qualité, qui est loin d'être une spécialité distincte. Voilà quel est, en dernière analyse, l'état des choses dans l'industrie moderne. C'est sur cette égalité déjà réalisée du travail automatique que M. Proudhon prend son rabot d'"égalisation", qu'il se propose de réaliser universellement dans le "temps à venir".

Toutes les conséquences "équitables" que M. Proudhon tire de la doctrine de Ricardo reposent sur une erreur fondamentale. C'est qu'il confond la valeur des marchandises mesurée par la quantité de travail y fixée avec la valeur des marchandises mesurée par la "valeur du travail". Si ces deux manières de mesurer la valeur des marchandises se confondaient en une seule, on pourrait dire indifféremment : la valeur relative d'une marchandise quelconque est mesurée par la quantité de travail y fixée; ou bien : elle est mesurée par la quantité de travail qu'elle est à même d'acheter; ou bien encore : elle est mesurée par la quantité de travail qui est à même d'en acquérir. Mais il n'en faut bien qu'il en soit ainsi. La valeur du travail ne saurait pas plus servir de mesure à la valeur que la valeur de toute autre marchandise. Quelques exemples suffiront pour expliquer mieux encore ce que nous venons de dire.

Si le muid de blé coûtait deux journées de travail au lien d'une seule, il aurait le double de sa valeur primitive; mais il ne mettrait pas en mouvement la double quantité de travail, car il ne contiendrait pas plus de matière nutritive qu'auparavant. Ainsi, la valeur du blé mesurée par la quantité de travail employée à le produire aurait double; mais mesurée, ou par la quantité de travail qu'il peut acheter, ou par la quantité de travail par laquelle il peut être acheté, elle serait loin d'avoir double. D'un autre côté, si le même travail produisait le double de vêtements qu'auparavant, la valeur relative en tomberait de moitié; mais, néanmoins, cette double quantité de vêtements ne serait pas pour cela réduite à ne commander que la moitié de la quantité de travail, ou le même travail ne pourrait pas commander la double quantité de vêtements; car la moitié des vêtements continuerait toujours à rendre à l'ouvrier le même service qu'auparavant.

Ainsi, déterminer la valeur relative des denrées par la valeur du travail est contre les faits économiques. C'est se mouvoir dans un cercle vicieux, c'est déterminer la valeur relative par une valeur relative qui, à son tour, a besoin d'être déterminée.

Il est hors de doute que M. Proudhon confond les deux mesures, la mesure par le temps du travail nécessaire pour la production d'une marchandise, et la mesure par la valeur du travail. "Le travail de tout homme, dit-il, peut acheter la valeur qu'il enferme." Ainsi, selon lui, une certaine quantité de travail fixée dans un produit équivaut à la rétribution du travailleur, c'est-à-dire à la valeur du travail. C'est encore la même raison qui l'autorise à confondre les frais de production avec les salaires.

Qu'est-ce que le salaire ? C'est le prix de revient du blé, etc., c'est le prix intégrant de toute chose. "Allons plus loin encore:" Le salaire est la proportionnalité des éléments qui composent la richesse. "Qu'est-ce que le salaire ? C'est la valeur du travail."

Adam Smith prend pour mesure de la valeur tout le temps du travail nécessaire à la production d'une marchandise, tantôt la valeur du travail. Ricardo a dévoilé cette erreur en faisant clairement voir la disparité de ces deux manières de mesurer. M. Proudhon renchérit sur l'erreur d'Adam Smith en identifiant les deux choses, dont l'autre n'avait fait qu'une juxtaposition.

C'est pour trouver la juste proportion dans laquelle les ouvriers doivent participer aux produits, ou, en d'autres termes, pour déterminer la valeur relative du travail, que M. Proudhon cherche une mesure de la valeur relative des marchandises. Pour déterminer la mesure de la valeur relative des marchandises, il n'imagine rien de mieux que de donner pour équivalent d'une certaine quantité de travail la somme des produits qu'elle a créés, ce qui revient à supposer que toute la société ne consiste qu'en travailleurs immédiat, recevant pour salaire leur propre produit. En second lieu, il pose en fait l'équivalence des journées des divers travailleurs. En résumé, il cherche la mesure de la valeur relative des marchandises, pour trouver la rétribution égale des travailleurs et il prend une donnée déjà toute trouvée, l'égalité des salaires, pour s'en aller chercher la valeur relative des marchandises. Quelle admirable dialectique !

Say et les économistes qui l'ont suivi ont observé que le travail étant lui-même sujet à l'évaluation, une marchandise comme une autre enfin, il y avait cercle vicieux à le prendre pour principe et cause efficiente de la valeur. Ces économistes, qu'ils me permettent de le dire, ont fait preuve en cela d'une prodigieuse inattention. Le travail est dit valoir non pas en tant que marchandise lui-même, mais en vue des valeurs qu'on suppose renfermées puissamment en lui. La valeur du travail est une expression figurée, une anticipation de la cause sur l'effet. C'est une fiction au même titre que la
productivité du capital. Le travail produit, le capital vaut ... Par une sorte d'ellipse on dit la valeur du travail ... Le travail comme la liberté... est chose vague et indéterminée de sa nature, mais qui se définit qualitativement par son objet, c'est-à-dire qu'il devient une réalité par le produit.

Mais qu'est-il besoin d'insister ? Dès lors que l'économiste [lisez M. Proudhon] change le nom des choses, vera rerum vocabula, il avoue implicitement son impuisance et se met hors de cause 35.

Nous avons vu que M. Proudhon fait de la valeur du travail la “ cause efficiente ” de la valeur des produits, au point que pour lui, le salaire, nom officiel de la “ valeur du travail ”, forme le prix intégrant de toute chose. Voilà pourquoi l'objection de Say le trouble. Dans le travail-marchandise, qui est d'une réalité effrayante, il ne voit qu'une ellipse grammaticale. Donc, toute la société actuelle fondée sur le travail-marchandise, est désormais fondée sur une licence poétique, sur une expression figurée. La société veut-elle “ éliminer tous les inconvénients ” qui la travaillent, eh bien ! qu'elle élimine les termes maïsnonnants, qu'elle change de langage, et pour cela elle n'a qu'à s'adresser à l'Académie pour lui demander une nouvelle édition de son dictionnaire. D'après tout ce que nous venons de voir, il nous est facile de comprendre pourquoi M. Proudhon, dans un ouvrage d'économie politique a dû rentrer dans de longues dissertations sur l'étymologie et d'autres parties de la grammaire. Ainsi, il en est encore à discuter savamment la dérivation surannée de servus à servare. Ces dissertations philologiques ont un sens profond, un sens ésotérique, elles font une partie essentielle de l'argumentation de M. Proudhon.

Le travail, la force du travail, en tant qu'il se vend et s'achète, est une marchandise comme toute autre marchandise, et a, par conséquent, une valeur d'échange. Mais la valeur du travail, ou le travail en tant que marchandise, produit tout aussi peu que la valeur du blé, ou le blé, en tant que marchandise, sert de nourriture.

Le travail " vaut " plus ou moins, selon que les denrées alimentaires sont plus ou moins chères, selon que l'offre et la demande des bras existent à tel ou tel degré, etc., etc.

Le travail n'est point une " chose vague "; c'est toujours un travail déterminé, ce n'est jamais le travail en général que l'on vend et que l'on achète. Ce n'est pas seulement le travail qui se définit qualitativement par l'objet, mais c'est encore l'objet qui est déterminé par la qualité spécifique du travail.

Le travail, en tant qu'il se vend et s'achète, est marchandise lui-même. Pourquoi l'achète-t-on ? " En vue des valeurs qu'on suppose renfermées puissamment en lui. " Mais si l'on dit que telle chose est une marchandise, il ne s'agit plus du but dans lequel on l'achète, c'est-à-dire de l'utilité que l'on veut en tirer, de l'application que l'on veut en faire. Elle est marchandise comme objet de trafic. Tous les raisonnements de M. Proudhon se bomenent à ceci : on n'achète pas le travail comme objet immédiat de consommation. Non, on l'achète comme instrument de production, comme on l'achèterait une machine. En tant que marchandise, le travail vaut et ne produit pas. M. Proudhon aurait pu dire tout aussi bien qu'il n'existe pas de marchandise du tout, puisque toute marchandise n'est acquise que dans un but d'utilité quelconque et jamais comme marchandise elle-même.

En mesurant la valeur des marchandises par le travail, M. Proudhon entretient vaguement l'impossibilité de dérober à cette même mesure le travail en tant qu'il a une valeur, le travail-marchandise. Il pressent que c'est faire du minimum du salaire le prix naturel et normal du travail immédiat, que c'est accepter l'état actuel de la société. Aussi, pour se soustraire à cette conséquence fatale, il fait volte-face et prétend que le travail n'est pas une marchandise, qu'il ne saurait pas avoir une valeur. Il oublie qu'il a pris lui-même pour mesurer la valeur du travail, il oublie que tout son système repose sur le travail-marchandise, sur le travail qui se troque, se vend et s'achète, s'échange contre des produits, etc.; sur le travail enfin qui est une source immédiate de revenu pour le travailleur. Il oublie tout.

Pour sauver son système, il consent à en sacrifier la base.

Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas 36 !

Nous arrivons maintenant à une nouvelle détermination de la “ valeur constituée ”.

" La valeur est le rapport de la proportionnalité des produits qui composent la richesse. "

Remarquons d'abord que le simple mot de " valeur relative ou échangeable " implique l'idée d'un rapport quelconque, dans lequel les produits s'échangent réciproquement. Qu'on donne à ce rapport le nom de " rapport de proportionnalité "; on n'a rien changé à la valeur relative, si ce n'est l'expression. Ni la dépréciation, ni le surhaussement de la valeur d'un produit ne détruisent la qualité qu'il a de se trouver dans un " rapport de proportionnalité " quelconque avec les autres produits qui forment la richesse.

Pourquoi donc ce nouveau terme, qui n'apporte pas une nouvelle idée ?

Le " rapport de proportionnalité " fait penser à beaucoup d'autres rapports économiques, tels que la proportionnalité de la production, la juste proportion entre l'offre et la demande, etc.; et M. Proudhon a pensé à tout cela en formulant cette paraphrase didactique de la valeur vénale.

En premier lieu, la valeur relative des produits étant déterminée par la quantité comparative du travail employé à la production de chacun d'eux, le rapport de la proportionnalité, appliqué à ce cas spécial, signifie la quantité respective des produits qui peuvent être fabriqués dans un temps donné et qui, par conséquent, se donnent en échange.

35 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité, tome I, p. 61 et p. 188.
36 Et pour vivre, perdre ce qui est la raison de vivre. (N.R.)
Voyons quel parti M. Proudhon tire de ce rapport de proportionnalité.

Tout le monde sait que, lorsque l'offre et la demande s'équilibrent, la valeur relative d'un produit quelconque est exactement déterminée par la quantité de travail qui y est fixée, c'est-à-dire que cette valeur relative exprime le rapport de la proportionnalité précisément dans le sens que nous venons d'y attacher. M. Proudhon intervertit l'ordre des choses. Commencez, dit-il, par mesurer la valeur relative d'un produit par la quantité de travail qui y est fixée, et alors l'offre et la demande s'équilibreront infailliblement. La production correspondra à la consommation, le produit sera toujours échangeable. Son prix courant exprimera exactement sa juste valeur. Au lieu de dire avec tout le monde : quand le temps est beau, on voit beaucoup de monde se promener, M. Proudhon fait promener son monde pour pouvoir lui assurer du beau temps.

Ce que M. Proudhon donne comme la conséquence de la valeur vénale déterminée a priori par le temps du travail, ne pourrait se justifier que par une loi, rédigée à peu près en ces termes :

Les produits seront désormais échangés en raison exacte du temps de travail qu'ils ont coûté. Quelle que soit la proportion de l'offre à la demande, l'échange des marchandises se fera toujours comme si elles avaient été produites proportionnellement à la demande. Que M. Proudhon prenne sur lui de formuler et de faire une pareille loi, et nous lui passerons les peines. S'il tient au contraire à justifier sa théorie, non en législateur, mais en économiste, il aura à prouver que le temps qu'il faut pour créer une marchandise indique exactement son degré d'utilité et marque son rapport de proportionnalité à la demande, par conséquent à l'ensemble des richesses. En ce cas, si un produit se vend à un prix égal à ses frais de production, l'offre et la demande s'équilibreront toujours; car les frais de production sont censés exprimer le vrai rapport de l'offre à la demande.

Effectivement, M. Proudhon s'attache à prouver que le temps du travail qu'il faut pour créer un produit marque sa juste proportion aux besoins, de telle sorte que les choses dont la production coûte le moins de temps, sont le plus immédiatement utiles, et ainsi de suite graduellement. Déjà la seule production d'un objet de luxe prouve, selon cette doctrine, que la société a du temps de reste qui lui permet de satisfaire à un besoin de luxe.

La preuve même de sa thèse, M. Proudhon la trouve dans l'observation que les choses les plus utiles coûtent le moins de temps de production, que la société commence toujours par les industries les plus faciles, et que successivement elle s'attaque à la production des objets qui coûtent le plus de temps de travail et qui correspondent à des besoins d'un ordre plus élevé.

M. Proudhon emprunte à M. Dunoyer l'exemple de l'industrie extractive, - cueillette, pâture, chasse, pêche, etc., - qui est l'industrie la plus simple, la moins coûteuse et par laquelle l'homme a commencé " le premier jour de sa deuxième création ". Le premier jour de sa première création est consigné dans la Genèse qui nous fait voir en Dieu le premier industriel du monde.

Les choses se passent tout autrement que le pense M. Proudhon. Au moment même où la civilisation commence, la production commence à se fonder sur l'antagonisme des ordres, des états, des classes, enfin sur l'antagonisme du travail accumulé et du travail immédiat. Pas d'antagonisme, pas de progrès. C'est la loi que la civilisation a suivie jusqu'à nos jours. Jusqu'à présent les forces productives se sont développées grâce à ce régime de l'antagonisme des classes. Dire maintenant que, parce que tous les besoins de tous les travailleurs étaient satisfaits, les hommes pouvaient se livrer à la création des produits d'un ordre supérieur, à des industries plus compliquées, ce serait faire abstraction de l'antagonisme des classes et bouleverser tout le développement historique. C'est comme si l'on voulait dire que, parce qu'on nourrissait des murènes dans des piscines artificielles, sous les empereurs romains, on avait de quoi nourrir abondamment toute la population romaine; tandis que, bien au contraire, le peuple romain manquait du nécessaire pour acheter du pain, et les aristocrates romains ne manquaient pas d'esclaves pour les donner en pâture aux murènes.

Le prix des vivres a presque continuellement haussé, tandis que le prix des objets manufacturés et de luxe a presque continuellement baissé. Prenez l'industrie agricole elle-même : les objets les plus indispensables, tels que le blé, le lait, les viandes, etc., haussent de prix, tandis que le coton, le sucre, le café, etc., baissent continuellement dans une proportion surprenante. Et même parmi les comestibles proprement dits, les objets de luxe, tels que les artichauts, les asperges, etc., sont aujourd'hui relativement à meilleur marché que les comestibles de première nécessité. A notre époque, le superflu est plus facile à produire que le nécessaire. Enfin, à diverses époques historiques, les rapports réciproques des prix sont non seulement différents, mais opposés. Dans tout le moyen âge, les produits agricoles étaient relativement à meilleur marché que les produits manufacturés; dans le temps modéré, ils sont en raison inverse. L'utilité des produits agricoles a-t-elle pour cela diminué depuis le moyen âge ?

L'usage des produits est déterminé par les conditions sociales dans lesquelles se trouvent placés les consommateurs, et ces conditions mêmes reposent sur l'antagonisme des classes.

Le coton, les pommes de terre et l'eau-de-vie sont des objets du plus commun usage. Les pommes de terre ont engendré, les écrouelles; le coton a chassé en grande partie le lin et la laine, bien que la laine et le lin soient, en beaucoup de cas, d'une plus grande utilité, ne fût-ce que sous le rapport de l'hygiène; l'eau-de-vie, enfin, l'a emporté sur la bière et le vin, bien que l'eau-de-vie employée comme substance alimentaire soit généralement reconnue comme un poison. Pendant tout un siècle, les gouvernements luttèrent vainement contre l'opium européen; l'économie prévalut, elle dicta des ordres à la consommation.

Pourquoi donc le coton, la pomme de terre et l'eau-de-vie sont-ils les pivots de la société bourgeoise ? Parce qu'il faut, pour les produire, le moins de travail et qu'ils sont par conséquent au plus bas prix. Pourquoi le minimum du prix décide-t-il
du maximum de la consommation ? Serait-ce par hasard à cause de l'utilité absolue de ces objets, de leur utilité intrinsèque, de leur utilité en tant qu'ils correspondent de la manière la plus utile aux besoins de l'ouvrier comme homme, et non de l'homme comme ouvrier ? Non c'est parce que, dans une société fondée sur la misère, les produits les plus misérables ont la prérrogative fatale de servir à l'usage du plus grand nombre.

Dire maintenant que, parce que les choses les moins coûteuses sont d'un plus grand usage, elles doivent être de la plus grande utilité, c'est dire que l'usage si répandu de l'eau-de-vie, à cause du peu de frais de sa production, est la preuve la plus concluante de son utilité; c'est dire au prolétaire que la pomme de terre lui est plus salutaire que la viande; c'est accepter l'état de choses existant; c'est faire enfin, avec M. Proudhon, l'apologie d'une société sans la comprendre.

Dans une société à venir, où l'antagonisme des classes aurait cessé, où il n'y aurait plus de classes, l'usage ne serait plus déterminé par le minimum du temps de production; mais le temps de production sociale qu'on consacrerait aux différents objets serait déterminé par leur degré d'utilité sociale.

Pour revenir à la thèse de M. Proudhon, du moment que le temps du travail nécessaire à la production d'un objet n'est point l'expression de son degré d'utilité, la valeur d'échange de ce même objet, déterminée d'avance par le temps du travail y fixé, ne saura jamais régler le juste rapport de l'offre à la demande, c'est-à-dire le rapport de proportionnalité dans le sens que M. Proudhon y attache pour le moment.

Ce n'est point la vente d'un produit quelconque au prix de ses frais de production qui constitue le " rapport de proportionnalité " de l'offre à la demande, ou la qualité proportionnelle de ce produit relativement à l'ensemble de la production; ce sont les variations de la demande et de l'offre qui désignent au producteur la quantité dans laquelle il faut produire une marchandise donnée, pour recevoir en échange au moins les frais de production. Et comme ces variations sont continues, il y a aussi mouvement continu de retraite et d'application des capitaux, quant aux différentes branches de l'industrie.

Ce n'est qu'en raison de pareilles variations que les capitaux sont consacrés précisément dans la proportion requise, et non au-delà, à la production des différentes marchandises pour lesquelles il y a demande. Par la hausse ou la baisse des prix, les profits s'élèvent au-dessus ou tombent au-dessous de leur niveau général, et par là les capitaux sont attirés ou détournez de l'emploi particulier qui vient d'éprouver l'une ou l'autre de ces variations.

Si nous portons les yeux sur les marchés des grandes villes, nous verrons avec quelle régularité ils sont pourvus de toutes sortes de denrées, nationales et étrangères, dans la quantité requise, et quelque différente qu'en soit la demande par l'effet du caprice, du goût ou par les variations dans la population; sans qu'il y ait souvent engorgement par un approvisionnement surabondant, ni cherté excessive par la faiblesse de l'approvisionnement comparée à la demande : l'on doit convenir que le principe qui distribue le capital dans chaque branche d'industrie, dans les proportions exactement convenables, est plus puissant qu'on le suppose en général 37.

Si M. Proudhon accepte la valeur des produits comme déterminée par le temps du travail, il doit accepter également le mouvement oscillatoire qui, seul, fait du travail la mesure de la valeur. Il n'y a pas de " rapport de proportionnalité " tout constitué, il n'y a qu'un mouvement constituant.

Nous venons de voir dans quel sens il est juste de parler de la " proportionnalité ", comme d'une conséquence de la valeur déterminée par le temps du travail. Nous allons voir maintenant comment cette mesure par le temps, appelée par M. Proudhon " loi de proportionnalité ", se transforme en loi de disproportionnalité.

Toute nouvelle invention qui permet de produire en une heure ce qui a été produit jusqu'ici en deux heures déprécie tous les produits homogènes qui se trouvent sur le marché. La concurrence force le producteur à vendre le produit de deux heures à aussi bon marché que le produit d'une heure. La concurrence réalise la loi selon laquelle la valeur relative d'un produit est déterminée par le temps du travail nécessaire pour le produire. Le temps du travail servant de mesure à la valeur vénale devient ainsi la loi d'une dépréciation continue du travail. Nous dirons plus. Il y aura dépréciation non seulement pour les marchandises apportées sur le marché, mais aussi pour les instruments de production, et pour tout un atelier. Ce fait, Ricardo le signale déjà en disant : " En augmentant constamment la facilité de production, nous diminuons constamment la valeur de quelques-unes des choses produites auparavant 38."

Sismondi va plus loin. Il voit, dans cette " valeur constituée " par le temps du travail, la source de toutes les contradictions de l'industrie et du commerce modernes.

La valeur mercantile, dit-il, est toujours fixée, en dernière analyse, sur la quantité de travail nécessaire pour se procurer la chose évaluée : ce n'est pas celle qu'elle a actuellement coûté, mais celle qu'elle coûtait désormais avec des moyens peut-être perfectionnés; et cette quantité, quoi qu'elle soit difficile à apprécier, est toujours établie avec fidélité par la concurrence... C'est sur cette base qu'est calculée la demande du vendeur aussi bien que l'offre de l'acheteur. Le premier affirmera peut-être que la chose lui a coûté dix journées de travail, mais si l'autre reconnaît qu'elle...
Sismondi : Études, etc. Édition de Bruxelles. tome II. p. 267,
41  " Troie n’est plus. " (N.R.)

Karl Marx : Misère de la philosophie
Qu'est-ce qui maintenait la production dans des proportions justes ou à peu près ? C'était la demande qui commandait à l'offre, qui la précédait. La production suivait pas à pas la consommation. La grande industrie, forcée par les instruments mêmes dont elle dispose à produire 43 sur une échelle toujours plus large, ne peut plus attendre la demande. La production précède la consommation, l'offre force la demande.

Dans la société actuelle, dans l'industrie basée sur les échanges individuels, l'anarchie de la production, qui est la source de tant de misère, est en même temps la source de tout progrès.

Ainsi de deux choses, l'une :

- Ou vous voulez les justes proportions des siècles passés avec les moyens de production de notre époque, alors vous êtes à la fois réactionnaire et utopiste.

- Ou vous voulez le progrès sans l'anarchie : alors, pour conserver les forces productives, abandonnez les échanges individuels.

Les échanges individuels ne s'accordent qu'avec la petite industrie des siècles passés, et son corollaire de "juste proportion ", ou bien encore avec la grande industrie et tout son cortège de misère et d'anarchie.

D'après tout ce que nous venons de dire, la détermination de la valeur par le temps du travail, c'est-à-dire la formule que M. Proudhon nous donne comme la formule régénératrice de l'avenir, n'est que l'expression scientifique des rapports économiques de la société actuelle, ainsi que Ricardo l'a clairement et nettement démontré bien avant M. Proudhon.

Mais au moins l'application "égalitaire" de cette formule appartient-elle à M. Proudhon ? Est-ce lui qui, le premier, a imaginé de réformer la société en transformant tous les hommes en travailleurs immédiats, échangeant des quantités de travail égales ? Est-ce bien à lui de faire aux communistes - ces gens dépourvus de toute connaissance en économie politique, ces "hommes obstinément bêtes ", ces "réveurs paradisiaques" - le reproche de n'avoir pas trouvé, avant lui, cette "solution du problème du prolétariat"?

Quiconque est tant soit peu familiarisé avec le mouvement de l'économie politique en Angleterre, n'est pas sans savoir que presque tous les socialistes de ce pays ont, à différentes époques, proposé l'application égalitaire de la théorie ricardienne. Nous pourrions citer à M. Proudhon : l'Économie politique de Hodgskins 44, 1822; William Thomson : An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth, most conducive to Human Happiness, 1824 45; T.R. Edmonds : Practical Moral and Political Economy, 1828, etc., etc., et quatre pages d'etc. Nous nous contenterons de laisser parler un communiste anglais, M. Bray. Nous rapporterons les passages décisifs de son ouvrage remarquable : Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy, Leeds, 1839, et nous nous y arrêterons assez longtemps, d'abord parce que M. Bray cet encore peu connu en France, ensuite parce que nous croyons y avoir trouvé la clé des ouvrages passée, présents et futurs de M. Proudhon.

Le seul moyen pour arriver à la vérité, c'est d'aborder de front les premiers principes. Remontons tout d'un coup à la source d'où les gouvernements mêmes dérivent. En allant ainsi à l'origine de la chose, nous trouverons que toute force de gouvernement, que toute injustice sociale et gouvernementale provient du système social actuellement en vigueur - de l'institution de la propriété telle qu'elle existe maintenant (the institution of property as it at present exists), et qu'ainsi, pour mettre, à tout jamais, fin aux injustices et aux misères d'aujourd'hui, il faut renverser de fond en comble l'état actuel de la société... En attaquant les économistes sur leur propre terrain et avec leurs propres armes, nous éviterons l'absurde bavardage sur les visionnaires et les théoriciens, qu'ils sont toujours prêts à éta
ter. A moins de nier ou de désapprouver les vérités et principes reconnus, sur lesquels ils fondent leurs propres arguments, les économistes ne pourront guère repousser les conclusions auxquelles nous arrivons Par cette même méthode.

C'est le travail seul qui donne de la valeur. (It is labour alone which bestows value)... Chaque homme a un droit indubitable à tout ce que son travail honnête peut lui procurer. En s'appropriant ainsi les fruits de son travail, il ne commet aucune injustice à l'égard des autres hommes; car il n'empête point sur le droit de tout autre à agir de même... Toutes les idées de supériorité et d'infériorité, de maître et de salarié, naissent de ce qu'on a négligé les premiers principes, et qu'en conséquence l'inégalité s'est introduite dans la possession (and to the consequent rise of inequality of possessions). Aussi longtemps que cette inégalité sera maintenue, il sera impossible de déraciner des idées de l'idées ou de renverser les institutions qui se fondaient sur elles. Jusqu'à présent, on a toujours le vain espoir de remédier à un état de choses qui est contre la nature, tel qu'il nous régit maintenant, en détruisant l'inégalité existante et en laissant subsister la cause de l'inégalité, mais nous démontrerons bientôt que le gouvernement n'est pas une cause, mais un effet, qu'il ne crée pas, mais qu'il est créé, - qu'en un mot, il est le résultat de l'inégalité dans la possession (the

43 Pour " de produire ", N.R.)
44 Voir ci-dessus, p. 40, la " Préface à la 2e édition allemande ". (N.R.)
45 Idem.
Le système de l'égalité a pour lui non seulement les plus grands avantages, mais aussi la stricte justice... Chaque homme est un anneau, et un anneau indispensable dans la chaîne des effets, qui prend son point de départ dans une idée, pour aboutir peut-être à la production d'une pièce de drap. Ainsi, de ce que nos goûts ne sont pas les mêmes pour les différentes professions, il ne faut pas conclure que le travail de l'un doit être mieux rétribué que celui de l'autre. L'inventeur recevra toujours, outre sa juste récompense en argent, le tribut de notre admiration, que le génie seul peut obtenir de nous... 

Par la nature même du travail et de l'échange, la stricte justice demande que tous les échangeurs aient des bénéfices, non seulement mutuels, mais égaux (all exchangeers should be not only mutually but they should likewise be equally benefited). Il n'y a que deux choses que les hommes puissent échanger entre eux, savoir : le travail et le produit du travail. Si les échanges s'opéraient d'après un système équitable, la valeur de tous les articles serait déterminée par leurs frais de production complets; et des valeurs égales s'échangeraient toujours contre des valeurs égales (If a just system of exchanges were acted upon, the value of all articles would be determined by the entire cost of production, and equal values should always ex. change for equal values.) Si, par exemple, un chausselier met une journée pour faire un chapeau, et un bottier le même temps à faire une paire de souliers (en supposant que la matière première qu'ils emploient ait la même valeur) et qu'ils échangent ces articles entre eux, le bénéfice qu'ils en retirent est en même temps mutuel et égal. L'avantage qui en découle pour chacune des parties ne peut être un désavantage pour l'autre, puisque chacun a fourni la même quantité de travail; et les matériaux dont elles se servaient servaient étaient de valeur égale. Mais si le chausselier avait obtenu deux paires de souliers contre un chapeau, toujours dans notre supposition première, il est évident que l'échange serait injuste. Le chausselier frustrerait le bottier d'une journée de travail; et s'il en agissait ainsi dans tous ses échanges, il recevrait contre le travail d'une demi-année le produit de toute une année d'une autre personne. Jusqu'ici, nous avons toujours suivi ce système d'échange souverainement injuste : les ouvriers ont donné aucapitaliste le travail de toute une année en échange de la valeur d'une demi-année (the workmen have given the capitalist the labour of a whole year, in exchange for the value of only half a year), - et c'est de là, et non pas d'une iniquité supposée dans les forces physiques et intellectuelles des individus, qu'est provenue l'inégalité de richesse et de pouvoir. L'inégalité des échanges, la différence des prix dans les achats et les ventes ne peut exister qu'à la condition qu'à tout jamais les capitalistes restent capitalistes et les ouvriers, ouvriers - les uns une classe de tyrans, les autres une classe d'esclaves... Cette transaction prouve donc clairement que les capitalistes et les propriétaires ne font que donner à l'ouvrier, pour son travail d'une semaine, une partie de la richesse qu'ils ont obtenue de lui la semaine d'avant, c'est-à-dire que pour quelque chose, ils ne lui donnent rien (nothing for something)... La transaction entre le travailleur et le capitaliste est une vraie comédie : dans le fait, elle n'est, en mainte circonstance, qu'un vol impudent quoique légal. (The whole transaction between the producer and the capitalist is a mere farce : it is, in fact, in thousands of instances no other than a barefaced though legal robbery.)

Le bénéfice de l'entrepreneur ne cessera jamais d'être une perte pour l'ouvrier - jusqu'à ce que les échanges entre les parties soient égaux ; et les échanges ne peuvent être égaux aussi longtemps que la société est divisée entre capitalistes et producteurs, et que les derniers vivent de leur travail, tandis que les premiers s'enflent du profit de ce travail...

Il est clair, continue M. Bray, que vous aurez beau établir telle ou telle forme de gouvernement... que vous aurez beau prêcher, au nom de la morale et de l'amour fraternel... la réciprocité est incompatible avec l'inégalité des échanges. L'inégalité des échanges, comme étant la source de l'inégalité des possessions, est l'ennemi secret qui nous dévore. (No reciprocity can exist where there are unequal exchanges. Inequality of exchanges, as being the cause of inequality of possessions, is the secret enemy that devours us.)

... La considération du but et de la fin de la société m'autorise à conclure, que non seulement tous les hommes doivent travailler et ainsi parvenir à pouvoir échanger, mais que des valeurs égales doivent s'échanger contre des valeurs égales. De plus, comme le bénéfice de l'un ne doit pas être une perte pour un autre, la valeur doit se déterminer par les faits de production. Pourtant nous avons vu que, sous le régime social actuel, le profit du capitaliste et de l'homme riche est toujours la perte de l'ouvrier - que ce résultat doit inévitablement s'ensuivre et que le pauvre reste abandonné entièrement à la merci du riche, sous chaque forme de gouvernement, aussi longtemps que

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47 Idem, pp. 33, 36 et 37.
48 Bray : Ouvrage cité, pp. 45, 48, 49 et 50.
l'inégalité des échanges subsiste - et que l'égalité des échanges ne peut être assurée que par un régime social qui reconnaisse l'universalité du travail… L'égalité des échanges ferait graduellement passer la richesse des mains des capitalistes actuels dans celles des classes ouvrières.

Aussi longtemps que ce système de l'inégalité des échanges sera en vigueur, les producteurs seront toujours aussi pauvres, aussi ignorants, aussi surchargés de travail, qu'ils le sont actuellement, quand même on abolirait toutes les taxes, tous les impôts gouvernementaux… Il n'y a qu'un changement total de système, l'introduction de l'égalité du travail et des échanges, qui puisse améliorer cet état de choses et assurer aux hommes la vraie égalité des droits… Les producteurs n'ont qu'à faire un effort - et c'est par eux que tout effort pour leur propre salut doit être fait - et leurs chaînes seront brisées à jamais… Comme but, l'égalité politique est une erreur : elle est même une erreur comme moyen. (As an end, the political equality is there a failure, (…) as a means, also, it is there a failure.)

Avec l'égalité des échanges, le profit de l'un ne peut pas être la perte de l'autre : car tout échange n'est plus qu'un simple transfert de travail et de richesse, il n'exige aucun sacrifice. Ainsi, tous un système social basé sur l'égalité des échanges, le producteur pourra encore arriver à la richesse, au moyen de ses épargnes ; mais sa richesse ne sera plus que le produit accumulé de son propre travail. Il pourra échanger sa richesse ou la donner à d'autres; mais il lui sera impossible de rester riche, pour un temps un peu prolongé, après qu'il aura cessé de travailler. Par l'égalité des échanges, la richesse perd le pouvoir actuel de se renouveler et de se reproduire pour ainsi dire par elle-même : elle ne pourra plus combler le vide que la consommation aura créé; car, à moins d'être reproduite par le travail, la richesse une fois consommée est perdue à jamais. Ce que nous appelons maintenant profits et intérêts ne pourra plus exister sous le régime des échanges égaux. Le producteur et le distributeur y seraient également rétribués et c'est la somme totale de leur travail qui servirait à déterminer la valeur de tout article créé et mis à la portée du consommateur…

Le principe de l'égalité dans les échanges doit donc, par sa nature même, amener le travail universel de la production déterminera tout l'ensemble, universellement, du travail et de la richesse produite. Ce qui sert et, en aucun cas, le profit réalisé par un homme ou dans une industrie ne constituerait la perte d'un autre homme ou d'une autre branche d'industrie. Le travail de chaque individu serait là seule mesure de ses profits et de sa perte…

Après avoir réfuté les objections des économistes contre le communisme, M. Bray continue ainsi :

Si un changement de caractère est indispensable pour faire réussir un système social de communauté dans sa forme parfaite : si, d'un autre côté, le système actuel ne présente ni les circonstances, ni les facilités voulues pour arriver à ce changement de caractère et préparer les hommes à un état meilleur que nous désirons tous, il est évident que les choses doivent, de toute nécessité, rester telles qu'elles sont, à moins qu'on découvre et applique un terme social préparatoire, - un mouvement qui participe du système actuel comme du système à venir (du système de la communauté), - une, espèce de halte intermédiaire, à laquelle la société puisse arri

Le mouvement tout entier n'exigerait que la coopération dans sa forme la plus simple… Les frais de production détermineraient, en toute circonstance, la valeur du produit, et des valeurs égales s'échangeraient toujours contre des valeurs égales. De deux personnes, dont l'une aurait travaillé une semaine entière et l'autre une demi-semaine, la première recevrait le double de la rémunération de l'autre; mais ce surplus de paie ne serait pas donné à l'un aux dépens de l'autre : la perte encourue par le dernier ne tomberait en aucune manière sur le premier. Chaque personne échangeait le salaire qu'elle aurait individuellement reçu contre des objets de même valeur que son salaire, et, en aucun cas, le profit réalisé par un homme ou dans une industrie ne constituerait la perte d'un autre homme ou d'une autre branche d'industrie. Le travail de chaque individu serait là seule mesure de ses profits et de sa perte…

… Au moyen de comptoirs (boards of trade) généraux et locaux, on déterminerait la quantité de différents objets exigée par la consommation, et la valeur relative de chaque objet en comparaison avec les autres (le nombre d'ouvriers à employer dans les différentes branches de travail), en un mot, tout ce qui tient à la production et à la distribution sociale. Ces opérations se ferait, pour une nation, en aussi peu de temps et avec autant de facilité qu'elles se font, sous le régime actuel, pour une société particulière… Les individus se grouperaient en familles, les familles en communtes, comme sous le régime actuel… en n'abolirait pas même directement la distribution de la population dans la ville et la campagne, toute mauvaise qu'elle est. Dans cette association, chaque individu continuera de jouir de la liberté qu'il possède maintenant d'accumuler autant que bon lui semble, et

Idem, pp. 51, 52, 53 et 55.


Bray : Ouvrage cité, p. 134.
Nous n'avons plus que quelques mots à répondre à M. Bray, qui, bien malgré nous et en dépit de nous, se trouve avoir supplanté M. Proudhon, à cela près que M. Bray, loin de vouloir posséder le dernier mot de l'humanité, propose seulement les mesures qu'il croit bonnes pour une époque de transition entre la société actuelle et le régime de la communauté.

Une heure de travail de Pierre s'échange contre une heure de travail de Paul. Voilà l'axiome fondamental de M. Bray.

Supposons que Pierre a douze heures de travail devant lui et que Paul n'en a que six : alors Pierre ne pourra faire avec Paul qu'un échange de six contre six. Pierre aura par conséquent six heures de travail de reste. Que fera-t-il de ces six heures de travail ?

Ou il n'en fera rien, c'est-à-dire qu'il aura travaillé six heures pour rien; ou bien il chômera six autres heures pour se mettre en équilibre; ou bien encore, et c'est là sa dernière ressource, il donnera à Paul ces six heures, dont il n'a que faire, par-dessus le marché.

Ainsi, au bout du compte, qu'est-ce que Pierre aura gagné sur Paul ? Des heures de travail, non. Il n'a gagné que des heures de loisir : il sera forcé de faire le fainéant six heures durant. Et pour que ce nouveau droit de fainéantise soit non seulement goûter, mais encore prisé dans la nouvelle société, il faut que celle-ci trouve son plus haute félicité dans la paresse, et que le travail lui pèse comme une chaîne dont elle devra se débarrasser coûte que coûte. Et encore, pour revenir à notre exemple, si ces heures de loisir que Pierre a gagnées sur Paul étaient un gain réel ! Mais non. Paul, en commençant par ne travailler que six heures, arrive par un travail régulier et réglé au résultat que Pierre n'obtient qu'en commençant par un excès de travail. Chacun voudra être Paul, il y aura concurrence pour conquérir la place de Paul, concurrence de paresse.

Et bien ! l'échange de quantités égales de travail, que nous a-t-il donné ? Surproduction, dépréciation, excès de travail suivi de chômage, enfin les rapports économiques tels que nous les voyons constitués dans la société actuelle, moins la concurrence de travail.

Mais non, nous nous trompons. Il y aura encore un expédient qui pourra sauver la société nouvelle, la société des Pierre et des Paul. Pierre mangera tout seul le produit des six heures de travail qui lui restent. Mais du moment qu'il n'a plus à échanger pour avoir produit, il n'a pas non plus à produire pour échanger, et toute la supposition d'une société fondée sur l'échange et la division du travail tomberait. On aura sauvé l'égalité des échanges par cela même que les échanges auront cessé d'exister.

Paul et Pierre en viendraient à l'état de Robinson.

Donc, si l'on suppose tous les membres de la société travailleurs immédiats, l'échange des quantités égales d'heures de travail n'est possible qu'à la condition qu'on soit convenu d'avance du nombre d'heures qu'il faudra employer à la production matérielle. Mais une telle convention n'échange individuel.

Nous arriverons encore à la même conséquence, si nous prenons pour point de départ, non plus la distribution des produits créés, mais l'action de la production. Dans la grande industrie, Pierre n'est pas libre de fixer lui-même le temps de son travail, car le travail de Pierre n'est rien sans le concours de tous les Pierre et de tous les Paul qui forment l'atelier. C'est ce qui explique fort bien la résistance opiniâtre que les commerçants anglais opposèrent au bill de dix heures. C'est qu'ils ne savaient que trop qu'une diminution de travail de deux heures accordée aux femmes et aux enfants devait également entraîner une diminution de temps de travail pour les adultes. Il est dans la nature de la grande industrie que le temps du travail soit égal pour tous. Ce qui est aujourd'hui le résultat du capital et de la concurrence des ouvriers entre eux, sera demain, si vous reprenez le rapport du travail au capital, le fait d'une convention basée sur le rapport de la somme des forces productives à la somme des besoins existants.

Mais une telle convention est la condamnation de l'échange individuel, et nous voilà encore arrivés à notre premier résultat.

Dans le principe, il n'y a pas échange des produits, mais échange des travaux qui concourent à la production. C'est du mode d'échange des forces productives que dépend le mode d'échange des produits. En général, la forme de l'échange des produits correspond à la forme de la production. Changez la dernière, et la première se trouvera changée en conséquence. Aussi voyons-nous dans l'histoire de la société le mode d'échange les produits se régler sur le mode de les produire. L'échange individuel correspond aussi à un mode de production déterminé, qui, lui-même, répond à l'antagonisme des classes. Ainsi pas d'échange individuel sans l'antagonisme des classes.

Mais les consciences honnêtes se refusent à cette évidence. Tant qu'on est bourgeois, on ne peut faire autrement que de voir dans ce rapport d'antagonisme un rapport d'harmonie et de justice éternelle, qui ne permet à personne de se faire

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valoir aux dépens d'autrui. Pour le bourgeois, l'échange individuel peut subsister sans l'antagonisme des classes ; pour lui ce sont deux choses tout à fait disparates. L'échange individuel, comme se le figure le bourgeois, est loin de ressembler à l'échange individuel tel qu'il se pratique.

M. Bray fait de l'illusion de l'honnête bourgeois l'idéal qu'il voudrait réaliser. En épurant l'échange individuel, en le débarrassant de tout ce qu'il y trouve d'éléments antagonistes, il croit trouver un rapport "égalitaire", qu'il voudrait faire passer dans la société.

M. Bray ne voit pas que ce rapport égalitaire, cet idéal correctif, qu'il voudrait appliquer au monde, n'est lui-même que le reflet du monde actuel, et qu'il est par conséquent totalement impossible de reconstituer la société sur une base qui n'en est qu'une ombre embelli. À mesure que l'ombre redevient corps, on s'aperçoit que ce corps, loin d'en être la transfiguration rêvée, est le corps actuel de la société 53.

53 Comme toute autre théorie, celle de M. Bray a trouvé ses partisans qui se sont laissé tromper aux apparences. On a fondé à Londres, à Sheffield, à Leeds et dans beaucoup d'autres villes en Angleterre, des equitable-labour-exchange-bazars. Ces bazars, après avoir absorbé des capitaux considérables, ont tous fait des faillites scandaleuses. On en a perdu le goût pour toujours : avis à M. Proudhon ! (Note de Marx.)
3. **Application de la loi des proportionnalités de valeur**

a. La monnaie

"L'or et l'argent sont les premières marchandises dont la valeur so... sa constitution."

Donc, l'or et l'argent sont les premières applications de la "valeur constituée"... par M. Proudhon. Et comme M. Proudhon constitue les valeurs des produits en les déterminant par la quantité comparative de travail y fixé, la seule chose qu'il avait à faire, c'était de prouver que les variations survenues dans la valeur de l'or et de l'argent s'expliquent toujours par les variations du temps de travail qu'il faut pour les produire. M. Proudhon n'y songe pas. Il ne parle pas de l'or et de l'argent comme marchandise, il en parle comme monnaie.

Toute sa logique, si logique il y a, consiste à escamoter la qualité qu'ont l'or et l'argent de servir de monnaie, au... n'a ni vue ni compris, M. Proudhon l'a vue, comprise et léguée à la... La monnaie, ce n'est pas une chose, c'est un rapport de... tion secondaire qui ne s'explique plus par l'enchaînement des rapports de production, mais tout autre marchandise, n'est plus du domaine de la science, s'ils ont fait de la physique, de la mécanique, de l'histoire, etc.

Il aurait reconnu, au contraire, que ce rapport est un anneau, et, comme tel, intimement lié à tout l'enchaînement des autres rapports économiques, et que ce rapport correspond à un mode de production déterminé, ni plus ni moins que l'échange individuel.

Une fois qu'on a reconnu la nécessité d'un agent particulier d'échange, c'est-à-dire la nécessité de la monnaie, alors il ne s'agit plus que d'expliquer pourquoi cette fonction particulière est dévolue à l'or et à l'argent plutôt qu'à toute autre marchandise. C'est là une question secondaire qui ne s'explique plus par l'enchaînement des rapports de production, mais par les qualités spécifiques inhérentes à l'or et à l'argent comme matière. Si, d'après tout cela, les économistes dans cette occasion... comme le leur reproche M. Proudhon, ils n'ont fait que ce qu'ils devaient faire. La question n'est plus du domaine de l'économie politique.

Ce qu'aucun des économistes, dit M. Proudhon, n'a ni vu ni compris, c'est la raison économique qui a déterminé, en faveur des métaux précieux, la faveur dont ils jouissent.

La raison économique que nul, et pour cause, n'a ni vue ni comprise, M. Proudhon l'a vue, comprise et léguée à la postérité.

Or ce que nul n'a remarqué, c'est que de toutes les marchandises, l'or et l'argent sont les premières dont la valeur soit arrivée à la constitution. Dans la période patriarcale, l'or et l'argent se marchandent encore et s'échangent en lingots, mais déjà avec une tendance visible à la domination.

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54 On sait que Proudhon n'a pas tenu compte de cet avertissement. En 1849 il essaya lui-même d'ouvrir une nouvelle banque d'échange à Paris. Mais elle fit faillite avant même d'être entrée vraiment en fonctions. Des poursuites judiciaires furent engagées envers Proudhon à la suite de ce krach. (Note d'Engels pour l'édition de 1886)
et avec une préférence marquée. Peu à peu les souverains s'en emparent et y apposent leur sceau : et de cette consécration souveraine naît la monnaie, c'est-à-dire la marchandise par excellence, celle qui, nonobstant toutes les secousses du commerce, conserve une valeur proportionnelle déterminée et se fait accepter en tout paiement... Le trait distinctif de l'or et de l'argent vient, il le répète, de ce que, grâce à leurs propriétés métalliques, aux difficultés de leur production, et surtout à l'intervention de l'autorité publique, ils ont de bonne heure conquis, comme marchandise, la fixité et l'authenticité.

Dire que, de toutes les marchandises, l'or et l'argent sont les premières dont la valeur soit arrivée à la constitution, c'est-à-dire après tout ce qui précède, que l'or et l'argent sont les premières arrivées à l'état de monnaie, voilà la grande révélation de M. Proudhon, voilà la vérité que nul n'avait découverte avant lui. Si, par ces mots, M. Proudhon a voulu dire que l'or et l'argent sont des marchandises pour la production desquelles le temps a été consacré plus tôt que pour toutes les autres, ce serait encore une des suppositions dont il est si prompt à gratifier ses lecteurs. Si nous voulons nous en tenir à cette érudition patriarcale, nous dirions à M. Proudhon que le temps nécessaire pour produire les objets de première nécessité, tels que le fer, etc., a été consacré en premier lieu. Nous lui ferons grâce de l'arc classique d'Adam Smith.

Mais, après tout cela, comment M. Proudhon peut-il encore parler de la constitution d'une valeur, puisqu'une valeur n'est jamais constituée toute seule ? Elle est constituée, non par le temps qu'il faut pour la produire toute seule, mais par rapport à la quotité de tous les autres produits qui peuvent être créés dans le même temps. Ainsi la constitution de la valeur de l'or et de l'argent suppose la constitution déjà toute donnée d'une foule d'autres produits. Ce n'est donc pas la marchandise qui est arrivée, dans l'or et l'argent, à l'état de " valeur constituée ", c'est la " valeur constituée " de M. Proudhon qui est arrivée, dans l'or et l'argent à l'état de monnaie.

Examinons maintenant de plus près ces raisons économiques, qui d'après M. Proudhon ont valu à l'or et à l'argent l'avantage d'être érigés en monnaie plus tôt que tous les autres produits, en passant par l'état constitutif de la valeur. Ces raisons économiques sont : la " tendance visible à la domination ", la " préférence marquée " déjà dans la " période patriarcale ", et autres circonlocutions du fait même, qui augmentent la difficulté, puisqu'elles multiplient le fait, en multipliant les incidents que M. Proudhon fait survenir pour expliquer le fait. M. Proudhon n'a pas encore épousé toutes les raisons prétendues économiques. En voici une d'une force souveraine, irrésistible :

C'est de la consécration souveraine que naît la monnaie : les souverains s'emparent de l'or et y apposent leur sceau.

Ainsi le bon plaisir des souverains est, pour M. Proudhon, la raison suprême en économie politique ! Vraiment, il faut être dépourvu de toute connaissance historique pour ignorer que ce sont les souverains qui, de tout temps, ont subi les conditions économiques, mais que ce ne sont jamais eux qui leur ont fait la loi. La législation tant politique que civile ne fait que prononcer, verbaliser le pouvoir des rapports économiques.

Le souverain s'est-il emparé de l'or et de l'argent, pour en faire les agents universels d'échange, en y imprimant son sceau, ou ces agents universels d'échange ne se sont-ils pas plutôt emparés du souverain en le forçant à leur imprimer son sceau et à leur donner une consécration politique ?

L'empreinte qu'on a donnée et qu'on donne à l'argent ce n'est pas celle de sa valeur, c'est celle de son poids. La fixité et l'authenticité dont parle M. Proudhon ne s'appliquent qu'aux titres de la monnaie, et ce titre indique combien il y a de matière métallique dans un morceau d'argent monnayé.

La seule valeur intrinsèque d'un marc d'argent, dit Voltaire avec le bon sens qu'on lui connaît, est un marc d'argent, une demi-livre du poids de 8 onces. Le poids et le titre font seuls cette valeur intrinsèque 55.

Mais la question : combien vaut une once d'or et d'argent ? n'en subsiste pas moins. Si un cachemire du magasin du Grand Colbert portait la marque de fabrique : pure laine, cette marque de fabrique ne vous dirait pas encore la valeur du cachemire. Il resterait toujours à savoir combien vaut la laine.

Philippe l', roi de France, dit M. Proudhon, mèle à la livre tournois de Charlemagne un tiers d'alliage, s'imagine qu'il s'agit de la fabrication de la monnaie, il peut faire ce que fait tout commerçant ayant le monopole de l'alliage. Qu'il fallait en effet que cette altération des monnaies tant reprochée à Philippe et à ses successeurs !

Un raisonnement très juste, au point de vue de la routine commerciale, mais très faux en science économique, savoir que l'offre et la demande étant la règle des valeurs, on peut, soit en produisant une rareté factice, soit en accaparant la fabrication, faire monter l'estimation et partant la valeur des choses, et que cela est vrai de l'or et de l'argent comme du blé, du vin, de l'huile, du tabac. Cependant la fraude de Philippe ne fut pas plutôt soupçonnée que sa monnaie fut réduite à sa juste valeur et qu'il perdit en même temps ce qu'il avait cru gagner sur ses sujets. Même chose arriva à la suite de toutes les tentatives analogues.

55 Voltaire : Système de Law.
D’abord il a été démontré, maintes et maintes fois, que, si le prince s’avise d’altérer la monnaie, c’est lui qui y perd. Ce qu’il a gagné en une seule fois par la première émission, il le perd autant de fois que les monnaies falsifiées lui rentrent sous la forme d’impôts, etc. Mais Proudhon et ses successeurs ont eu su mettre plus ou moins à l’abri de cette perte, car, une fois la monnaie altérée mise en circulation, ils n’avaient rien de plus pressé à faire que d’ordonner une refonte générale des monnaies sur l’ancien pied.

Et puis d’ailleurs, si Philippe l’ avait véritablement raisonnable comme M. Proudhon, Philippe l’ n’aurait pas bien raisonné " au point de vue commercial ". Ni Philippe l’, ni M. Proudhon ne font preuve de génie mercantile, quand ils s’imaginent qu’on peut altérer la valeur de l’or aussi bien que celle de toute autre marchandise par la seule raison que leur valeur est déterminée par le rapport de l’offre à la demande.

Si le roi Philippe avait ordonné qu’un muid de blé s’appelât désormais deux muids de blé, le roi aurait été un escroc. Il aurait trompé tous les rentiers, tous les gens qui avaient à recevoir cent muids de blé, il aurait été la cause que tous ces gens-là, au lieu de recevoir cent muids de blé, n’en auraient reçu que cinquante. Supposez le roi débiteur de cent muids de blé; il n’en aurait eu à payer que cinquante. Mais dans le commerce cent muids n’auraient jamais valu plus de cinquante. En changeant le nom on ne change pas la chose. La quantité du blé, soit offerte, soit demandée, ne sera ni diminuée ni augmentée par ce seul changement de nom. Ainsi le rapport de l’offre à la demande étant également le même malgré cette altération de nom, le prix du blé ne subira aucune altération réelle. En parlant de l’offre et de la demande des choses, on ne parle pas de l’offre et de la demande du nom des choses. Philippe l’ n’était pas faiseur d’or ou d’argent, comme dit Proudhon; il était faiseur du nom des monnaies. Faites passer vos cachemires français pour des cachemires asiatiques, il est possible que vous trompiez un acheteur ou deux; mais la fraude une fois connue, vos prétendus cachemires asiatiques descendront au prix des cachemires français. En donnant une fausse étiquette à l’or et à l’argent, le roi Philippe l’ ne pouvait faire des dupes que tant que la fraude n’était pas connue. Comme tout autre boutiquier, il trompait ses pratiques par une fausse qualification de la marchandise - cela ne pouvait durer qu’un temps. Tôt ou tard il devait subir la rigueur des lois commerciales. Est-ce là ce que M. Proudhon voulait prouver ? Non. D’après lui, c’est du souverain, et non du commerce, que l’argent reçoit sa valeur. Et qu’a-t-il prouvé effectivement ? Que le commerce est plus souverain que le souverain. Que le souverain ordonne qu’un marc soit désormais deux muids, le commerce vous dira toujours que ces deux muids ne valent que le marc d’auparavant.

Mais pour cela la question de la valeur déterminée par la quantité de travail n’a pas fait un pas. Il reste toujours à décider si ces deux-muids, redevenus le marc d’auparavant, sont déterminés par les frais de production ou par la loi de l’offre et de la demande ?

M. Proudhon continue :

Il est même à considérer que si, au lieu d’altérer les monnaies, il avait été au pouvoir du roi d’en doubler la masse, la valeur échangeable de l’or et de l’argent aurait aussi été baissé de moitié, toujours pour cette raison de proportionnalité et d’équilibre.

Si cette opinion, que M. Proudhon partage avec les autres économistes, est juste, elle prouve en faveur de leur doctrine de l’offre et de la demande, et nullement en faveur de la proportionnalité de M. Proudhon. Car, quelle que fût la quantité de travail fixé dans la masse doublée de l’or et de l’argent, sa valeur serait tombée de moitié, la demande étant restée la même et l’offre ayant doublé. Ou bien est-ce que, par hasard, " la loi de proportionnalité " se confondrait cette fois avec la loi si dédaignée de l’offre et de la demande ? Cette juste proportionnalité de M. Proudhon est en effet tellement élastique, elle se prête à tant de variations, de combinaisons et de permutations, qu’elle pourrait bien coïncider une fois avec le rapport de l’offre à la demande.

Faire " toute marchandise acceptable dans l’échange, sinon de fait, au moins de droit ", en se fondant sur le rôle que jouent l’or et l’argent, c’est donc méconnaitre ce rôle. L’or et l’argent ne sont acceptables de droit que parce qu’ils le sont de fait, et les le sont de fait parce que l’organisation actuelle de la production a besoin d’un agent universel d’échange. Le droit n’est que la reconnaissance officielle du fait.

Nous l’avons vu, l’exemple de l’argent comme application de la valeur passée à l’état de constitution, n’avait été choisi par M. Proudhon que pour faire passer en contrebande toute sa doctrine de l’échangeabilité, c’est-à-dire pour démontrer que toute marchandise évaluée par ses frais de production doit arriver à l’état de monnaie. Tout cela serait bel et bon, n’était l’inconvénient que précisément l’or et l’argent, en tant que monnaie, sont de toutes les marchandises les seules qui ne soient pas déterminées par leurs frais de production; et cela est tellement vrai, que dans la circulation elles peuvent être remplacées par le papier.

Tant qu’il y aura une certaine proportion observée entre les besoins de circulation et la quantité de monnaie émise, que ce soit de la monnaie en papier, en or, en platine ou en cuivre, il ne pourra pas être question d’une proportion égale à la quantité de travail nécessaire pour les produire et les faire arriver au marché,
Karl Marx : Misère de la philosophie

il ajoute néanmoins que la valeur de la monnaie n’est pas déterminée par le temps de travail fixé dans sa matière, mais seulement par la loi de l’offre et de la demande.

Quoique le papier n’ait point de valeur intrinsèque, cependant si l’on en borne la quantité, sa valeur échangeable peut égaler la valeur d’une monnaie métallique de la même dénomination ou de lingots estimés en espèces. C’est encore par le même principe, c’est-à-dire en bannant la monnaie de la monnaie, que des pièces d’un bas titre peuvent circuler pour la même valeur qu’elles auraient eue si leur poids et leur titre étaient ceux fixés par la loi, et non d’après la valeur intrinsèque du métal pur qu’elles contendraient. Voilà pourquoi dans l’histoire des monnaies anglaises nous trouvons que notre numéraire n’a jamais été déprécié dans la même proportion qu’il a été altéré. La raison en est qu’il n’a jamais été multiplié en proportion de sa dépréciation 56.

Voici ce qu’observe J.-B. Say au sujet de ce passage de Ricardo.

Cet exemple devrait suffire, il me semble, pour convaincre l’auteur que la base de toute valeur est non pas la quantité de travail nécessaire pour faire une marchandise, mais le besoin qu’en on a, balancé par sa rareté.

Ainsi la monnaie, qui pour Ricardo n’est plus une valeur déterminée par le temps de travail, et que J.-B. Say prend à cause de cela pour exemple afin de convaincre Ricardo que les autres valeurs ne sauraient non plus être déterminées par le temps de travail, cette monnaie, dis-je, prise par J.-B. Say pour exemple d’une valeur déterminée exclusivement par l’offre et la demande, devient pour M. Proudhon l’exemple par excellence de l’application de la valeur constituée... par le temps du travail.

Pour en finir, si la monnaie n’est point une “valeur constituée” par le temps du travail, elle saurait bien moins encore avoir quelque chose de commun avec la juste “proportionnalité” de M. Proudhon. L’or et l’argent sont toujours échangeables, parce qu’ils ont la fonction particulière de servir comme agent universel d’échange, et nullement parce qu’ils existent dans une quantité proportionnelle à l’ensemble des richesses; ou pour mieux dire encore, ils sont toujours proportionnels parce que, seuls de toutes les marchandises, ils servent de monnaie, d’agent universel d’échange, quelle que soit leur quantité par rapport à l’ensemble des richesses.

La monnaie en circulation ne saurait jamais être assez abondante pour regorger : car si vous en baissez la valeur, vous en augmenterez dans la même proportion la quantité, et en augmentant sa valeur, vous en diminuerez la quantité 57.

On voit que les premières illusions de la bourgeoisie sont aussi ses dernières.

b. L’excédent du Travail

On lit dans des ouvrages d’économie politique cette hypothèse absurde : Si le prix de toutes choses était doublé... Comme si le prix de toutes choses n’était pas la proportion des choses, et qu’on pût doubler une proportion, un rapport, une loi ! 59

Les économistes sont tombés dans cette erreur, faute d’avoir su faire l’application de la “loi de proportionnalité” et de la “valeur constituée”.

Malheureusement, on lit dans l’ouvrage même de M. Proudhon, tome 1er, p. 110, cette hypothèse absurde, que “si le salaire haussait généralement, le prix de toutes choses hausserait “. Au surplus, si l’on trouve dans des ouvrages d’économie politique la phrase en question, on y trouve aussi son explication.

56 Ricardo : Ouvrage cité.
57 Ricardo : Ouvrage cité.
59 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité, tome I, p. 81.
Si l'on dit que "le prix de toutes les marchandises hausse ou baisse, on exclut toujours l'une ou l'autre des marchandises, la marchandise exclue est en général l'argent ou le travail."  

Passons maintenant à la seconde application de la "valeur constituée ", et d'autres proportionnalités dont le seul défaut est d'être peu proportionnées; et voyons si M. Proudhon y est plus heureux que dans la monétisation des moutons.

Un axiome généralement admis par les économistes est que tout travail doit laisser un excédent. Cette proposition est pour moi d'une vérité universelle et absolue : c'est le corollaire de la loi de la proportionnalité, que l'on peut regarder comme le sommaire de toute la science économique. Mais, j'en demande pardon aux économistes, le principe que tout travail doit laisser un excédent n'a pas de sens dans leur théorie, et n'est susceptible d'aucune démonstration.

Pour prouver que tout travail doit laisser un excédent, M. Proudhon personnifie la société: il en fait une société personne, société qui n'est pas, tant s'en faut, la société des personnes, puisqu'elle a ses lois à part, n'ayant rien de commun avec les personnes dont se compose la société, et son " intelligence propre ", qui n'est pas l'intelligence du commun des hommes, mais une intelligence qui n'a pas le sens commun. M. Proudhon reproche aux économistes de n'avoir pas compris la personnalité de cet être collectif. Nous allons à lui opposer le passage suivant d'un économiste américain qui reproche aux autres économistes tout le contraire.

M. Proudhon veut-il dire par là tout simplement que la production de l'individu social dépasse celle de l'individu isolé ? Est-ce de cet excédent de la production des individus associés sur celle des individus non associés, que M. Proudhon entend parler ? S'il en est ainsi, nous pourrons lui citer cent économistes qui ont exprimé cette simple vérité sans tout le mysticisme dont s'entoure M. Proudhon. Voici ce que dit, par exemple, M. Sadler:

Le travail combiné donne des résultats que le travail individuel ne saurait jamais produire. A mesure donc que l'humanité augmentera en nombre, les produits de l'industrie réunies excéderont de beaucoup la somme d'une simple addition calculée sur cette augmentation... Dans les arts mécaniques comme dans les travaux de la science, un homme peut actuellement faire plus dans un jour qu'un individu isolé pendant toute sa vie. L'axiome des mathématiciens, que le tout est égal aux parties n'est plus vrai, appliqué à notre sujet. Quant au travail, ce grand pilier de l'existence humaine (the great pillar of human existence), on peut dire que le produit des efforts accumulés excède de beaucoup tout ce que des efforts individuels et séparés peuvent jamais produire.

Revenons à M. Proudhon. L'excédent du travail, dit-il, s'explique par la société personne. La vie de cette personne suit des lois opposées aux lois qui font agir l'homme comme individu, ce qu'il veut prouver par des "faits".

La découverte d'un procédé économique ne peut jamais valoir à l'inventeur un profit égal à celui qu'il procure à la société... On a remarqué que les entreprises des chemins de fer sont beaucoup moins une source de richesses pour les entrepreneurs que pour l'État... Le prix moyen du transport des marchandises par le roulage est de 18 centimes par tonne et par kilomètre, marchandise prise et rendue en magasin. On a calculé qu'à ce prix, une entreprise ordinaire de chargement de marchandises, la marchandise exclue étant en général l'argent ou le travail, ne retire pas 10 % de bénéfice net, résultat à peu près égal à celui d'une entreprise de roulage. Mais admettons que la célébrité du transport par chemin de fer soit à celle du roulage de terre comme 4 est à 1 : comme dans la société le temps est la valeur même, à égalité de prix le chemin de fer présentera sur le roulage un avantage de 400 %. Cependant, cet avantage énorme, très réel pour la société, est bien loin de se réaliser dans la même proportion pour le voiturier, qui tandis qu'il fait jouer la société d'une mieux-value de 400 %, ne retire pas, quant à lui, 10 %. Supposons, en effet, pour rendre la chose encore plus sensible, que le chemin de fer porte son tarif à 25 centimes, celui du roulage restant à 18 : il perdra à l'instant toutes ses consignations. Expéditeurs, destinataires, tout le monde reviendra à la malbrouke, à la patache, s'il le faut. On désertera la locomotive : un avantage social de 400 % sera sacrifié à une perte privée de 35 %. La raison de cela est facile à saisir : l'avantage qui résulte de la célébrité du chemin de fer est tout social, et chaque individu n'y participe


61 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité.


qu'en une proportion minime (n'oublions pas qu'il ne s'agit dans ce moment que du transport des marchandises), tandis que la perte frappe directement et personnellement le consommateur. Un bénéfice social égal à 400 représente pour l'individu, si la société est seulement d'un million d'hommes, quatre dix millièmes; tandis qu'une perte de 33 % pour le consommateur supposerait un déficit social de 33 millions.

Passe encore que M. Proudhon exprime une célérité mise au quadruple par 400 % de la célérité primitive; mais qu'il mette en rapport les pour cent de célérité avec les pour cent de profit et qu'il forme une proportion entre deux rapports qui, pour être mesurés séparément par des pour cent, sont néanmoins incommensurables entre eux : c'est établir une proportion entre les pour cent et en laisser de côté les dénominations.

Des pour cent sont toujours des pour cent, 10 % et 400 % sont commensurables; ils sont l'un à l'autre comme 10 est à 400. Donc, conclut M. Proudhon, un profit de 10 % vaut quarante fois moins qu'une célérité quadruplée. Pour sauver les apparences, il dit que, pour la société, le temps est la valeur (time is money). Cette erreur provient de ce qu'il se rappelle confusément qu'il y a un rapport entre la valeur et le temps du travail, et il n'a rien de plus pressé à faire que d'assimiler le temps du travail au temps du transport, c'est-à-dire qu'il identifie les quelques chauffeurs, gardes de convoi et consorts, dont le temps de travail n'est autre que le temps de transport, avec la société tout entière. Pour le coup, voilà la célérité devenue capital, et, en ce cas, il a pleinement raison de dire : " Un bénéfice de 400 % sera sacrifié à une perte de 35 %. " Après avoir établi en mathématicien cette étrange proposition, il nous en donne l'explication en économiste. Un bénéfice social égal à 400 représente pour l'individu, si la société est seulement d'un million d'hommes, quatre dix millièmes.

D'accord; mais il ne s'agit pas de 400, il s'agit de 400 %, et un bénéfice de 400 % représente pour l'individu 400 %, ni plus ni moins. Quel que soit le capital, les dividendes se feront toujours dans le rapport de 400 %. Que fait M. Proudhon ? Il prend les pour cent pour le capital, et comme s'il eût crait que sa confusion ne fût point assez manifeste, assez " sensible ", il continue :

" Une perte de 33 % pour le consommateur supposerait un déficit total de 33 millions "; 33 % de perte pour le consommateur restent 33 % pour un million de consommateurs. Comment ensuite M. Proudhon peut-il dire pertinemment que le déficit social, dans le cas d'une perte de 33 %, s'éleve à 33 millions, quand il ne connaît ni le capital social ni même le capital d'un seul des intéressés ? Ainsi, il ne suffisait pas à M. Proudhon d'avoir confondu le capital et les pour cent; il se dépasse en identifiant le capital mis dans une entreprise et le nombre des intéressés.

" Supposons, en effet, pour rendre la chose encore plus sensible ", un capital déterminé. Un profit social de 400 %, réparti sur un million de participants, intéressés chacun pour 1 franc, donne 4 francs de bénéfice pour tête et non pas 0,0004, comme le prétend M. Proudhon. De même, une perte de 33 % pour chacun des participants représente un déficit social de 330 000 francs et non pas de 33 millions (100 : 33 = 1 000 000 : 330 000).

M. Proudhon, préoccupé de sa théorie de la société personne, oublie de faire la division par 100 qui, au lieu de donner 330 000 francs de perte, lui donnerait 33 000 000 francs. Ce compte exact démontre tout juste le contraire de ce qu’a voulu démontrer M. Proudhon : c’est que les bénéfices et pertes de la société ne sont point en raison inverse avec les bénéfices et les pertes des individus.

Après avoir rectifié ces simples erreurs de pur calcul, voyons un peu les conséquences auxquelles on arriverait, si on voulait admettre pour les chemins de fer ce rapport de célérité et de capital, tel que M. Proudhon le donne, moins les erreurs de calcul. Supposons qu’un transport quatre fois plus rapide coûte quatre fois plus, ce transport ne donnerait pas moins de profit que le roulage qui est quatre fois plus lent et coûte le quart des frais. Donc, si le roulage prend 18 centimes, le chemin de fer pourrait prendre 72 centimes. Ce serait selon la " rigueur mathématique ", la conséquence des suppositions de M. Proudhon, toujours moins ses erreurs de calcul. Mais voilà tout d’un coup qu’il nous dit que si, au lieu de 72 centimes, le chemin de fer n’en prenait que 25, il perrait à l’instant toutes ses consignations. Décédément, il faut revenir à la malbouque, à la patache même. Seulement, si nous avons un conseil à donner à M. Proudhon, c’est de ne pas oublier dans son " Programme de l’association progressive " de faire la division par 100. Mais, hélas ! Il n’est guère a espérer que notre conseil soit écouté, car M. Proudhon est tellement entiché de son calcul " progressif " correspondant à l’" association progressive "; qu’il s’écrie avec beaucoup d’emphase :

" J’ai déjà fait voir au chapitre II, par la solution de l’antinomie de la valeur, que l’avantage de toute découverte utile est incomparablement moindre pour l’inventeur, quoi qu’il fasse, que pour la société; j’ai porté la démonstration sur ce point jusqu’à la rigueur mathématique ! "

Revenons à la fiction de la société personne, fiction qui n’avait d’autre but que de prouver la simple vérité que voici : une invention nouvelle faisant produire avec la même quantité de travail une plus grande quantité de marchandises, fait baisser la valeur vénale du produit. La société fait donc un profit, non en obtenant plus de valeurs échangeables, mais en obtenant plus de marchandises pour la même valeur. Quant à l’inventeur, la concurrence fait tomber successivement son profit jusqu’au niveau général des profits. M. Proudhon a-t-il prouvé cette proposition ainsi qu’il voulait le faire ? Non. Cela ne l’empêche pas de reprocher aux économistes d’avoir manqué cette démonstration. Pour lui prouver le contraire, nous...
ne citerons que Ricardo et Lauderdale; Ricardo, chef de l'école, qui détermine la valeur par le temps du travail, Lauderdale, un des défenseurs les plus acharnés de la valeur par l'offre et la demande. Tous les deux ont développé la même thèse.

**En augmentant constamment la facilité de production, nous diminuons constamment la valeur de quelques-unes des choses produites auparavant, quoique par ce même moyen non seulement nous ajoutons à la richesse nationale, mais que nous augmentons encore la faculté de produire pour l'avenir... Aussitôt qu'au moyen des machines, ou par nos connaissances en physique, nous forçons les agents naturels à faire l'ouvrage que l'homme faisait auparavant, la valeur échangeable de cet ouvrage tombe en conséquence. S'il fallait dix hommes pour tourner un moulin à blé, et qu'on découvrit que par le moyen du vent ou de l'eau le travail de ces dix hommes pourrait être épargné, la farine qui serait le produit de l'action du moulin tomberait dès ce moment de valeur, en proportion de la somme de travail épargné : et la société se trouverait enrichie de toute la valeur des choses que le travail de ces dix hommes pourrait produire, les fonds destinés à l'entretien des travailleurs n'ayant pas éprouvé par là la moindre diminution.**

**Lauderdale à son tour, dit :**

Le profit des capitaux provient toujours de ce qu'ils suppléent à une portion de travail que l'homme devrait faire de ses mains, ou de ce qu'ils accomplissent une portion de travail au-dessus des efforts personnels de l'homme et qu'il ne saurait exécuter lui-même. Le mince bénéfice que font en général les propriétaires des machines, comparé au prix du travail auquel elles suppléent, feront naître de doutes peut-être sur la justesse de cette opinion. Une pompe à feu, par exemple, tire en un jour plus d'eau d'une mine de charbon que ne pourraient en sortir sur leur dos trois cents hommes, même en s'aidant de baquets; et il n'est pas douteux qu'elle remplace leur travail à bien moins de frais. C'est ici le cas de toutes les machines. Le travail qui se faisait par la main de l'homme à laquelle elles se sont substituées, elles doivent le faire à plus bas prix... Je suppose qu'un brevet soit donné à l'inventeur d'une machine qui fait l'ouvrage de quatre : comme le privilège exclusif empêche toute concurrence, hors celle qui résulte du travail des ouvriers, il est clair que le salaire de ceux-ci, dans toute la durée du privilège, sera la mesure du prix que l'inventeur doit mettre à ses produits : c'est-à-dire que, pour s'assurer de l'emploi, il exigera un peu moins que le salaire du travail auquel sa machine suppléa. Mais à l'expiration du privilège, d'autres machines de même espèce s'établiront et rivaliseront avec la sienne. Alors il réglera son prix sur le principe général, le faisant dépendre de la concurrence entre les propriétaires des fonds; et le degré en est toujours fixé par la proportion de la quantité des capitaux offerts pour cette fonction avec la demande qu'on en fait.

En dernier lieu donc, tant que le profit sera plus grand que dans les autres industries, il y aura des capitaux qui se jetteront sur l'industrie nouvelle, jusqu'à ce que le taux des bénéfices en soit descendu au niveau commun.

Nous venons de voir que l'exemple du chemin de fer n'était guère propre à jeter quelque jour sur la fiction de la société personnelle. Néanmoins, M. Proudhon reprend hardiment son discours:

Ces points éclaircis, rien de plus aisé que d'expliquer comment le travail doit laisser à chaque producteur un excédent.

Ce qui suit maintenant appartient à l'antiquité classique. C'est un conte poétique fait pour délasser le lecteur des fatigues qu'a dû lui causer la rigueur des démonstrations mathématiques qui le précèdent. M. Proudhon donne à sa société personnelle le nom de Prométhée, dont il glorifie les hauts faits en ces termes :

D'abord, Prométhée sortant du sein de la nature s'éveille à la vie dans une inertie pleine de charmes, etc... Prométhée se met à l'œuvre et, dès sa première journée, première journée de la seconde création, le produit de Prométhée, c'est-à-dire sa richesse, son bien-être, est égal à dix. Le second jour, Prométhée divise son travail, et son produit devient égal à cent. Le troisième jour et chacun des jours suivants, Prométhée invente des machines, découvre de nouvelles utilisées dans le corps, de nouvelles forces dans la nature... A chaque pas que fait son industrie, le chiffre de sa production s'élève et lui dénonce un surcroît de félicité. Et puisque enfin, pour lui, consommer c'est produire, il est clair que chaque journée de consommation, n'important que le produit de la veille, laisse un excédent de produit à la journée du lendemain.

Ce Prométhée de M. Proudhon est un drôle de personnage, aussi faible en logique qu'en économie politique. Tant que Prométhée ne fait que nous enseigner la division du travail, l'application des machines, l'exploitation des forces naturelles et du pouvoir scientifique, multipliant les forces productives des hommes et donnant un excédent comparé à ce que produit le travail isolé, ce nouveau Prométhée n'a que le malheur de venir trop tard. Mais dès que Prométhée se mêle de parler production et consommation, il devient réellement grotesque. Consommer, pour lui, c'est produire; il consomme le lendemain ce qu'il a produit la veille, c'est comme cela qu'il a toujours une journée d'avance; cette journée d'avance c'est son " excédent de travail ". Mais, en consommant le lendemain ce qu'il a produit la veille, il faut bien que le premier jour,

65 Ricardo : Ouvrage cité.
qui n'avait pas de veille, il ait travaillé pour deux journées, afin d'avoir dans la suite une journée d'avance. Comment Prométhée a-t-il gagné le premier jour cet excédent, alors qu'il n'y avait ni division de travail, ni machines, ni même d'autres connaissances des forces physiques que celle du feu ? Ainsi la question, pour avoir été reculée "jusqu'au premier jour de la seconde création", n'a pas fait un pas en avant. Cette manière d'expliquer les choses tient à la fois du grec et de l'hébreu, elle est à la fois mystique et allégorique, elle donne parfaitement à M. Proudhon le droit de dire :

_J'ais démontré par la théorie et par les faits le principe que tout travail doit laisser un excédent._

Les faits, c'est le fameux calcul progressif, la théorie, c'est le mythe de Prométhée.

Mais, continue M. Proudhon, ce principe aussi certain qu'une proposition d'arithmétique, est loin encore de se réaliser pour tout le monde. Tandis que, par le progrès de l'industrie collective, chaque journée de travail individuel obtient un produit de plus en plus grand, et, par une conséquence nécessaire, tandis que le travailleur, avec le même salaire, devenait devoir tous les jours plus riche, il existe dans la société des États qui profitent et d'autres qui dépérissent.

En 1770, la population des Royaumes-Unis de la Grande-Bretagne était de 15 millions et la population productive de 3 millions. Le pouvoir scientifique de la production égalait environ une population de 12 millions d'individus de plus; donc, en somme, il y avait 15 millions de forces productives. Ainsi le pouvoir productif était à la population comme 1 est à 1, et le pouvoir scientifique était au pouvoir manuel comme 4 est à 1.

En 1840, la population ne dépassait pas 30 millions : la population productive était de 6 millions, tandis que le pouvoir scientifique montait à 650 millions, c'est-à-dire qu'il était à la population entière comme 21 à 1, et au pouvoir manuel comme 108 à 1.

Dans la société anglaise, la journée de travail a donc acquis en soixante-dix ans, un excédent de 2 700 % de productivité, c'est-à-dire qu'en 1840 elle a produit vingt-sept fois autant qu'en 1770. D'après M. Proudhon, il faudrait poser la question que voici : pourquoi l'ouvrier anglais de 1840 n'a-t-il pas été vingt-sept fois plus riche que celui de 1770 ? En posant une pareille question, on supposeraient naturellement que les Anglais auraient pu produire ces richesses sans que les conditions historiques dans lesquelles elles ont été produites, telles que : accumulation privée des capitaux, division moderne du travail, atelier automatique, concurrence anarchique, salariat, enfin tout ce qui est basé sur l'antagonisme des classes, eussent existé. Or, pour le développement des forces productives et de l'excédent de travail, cela précèdemment là les conditions d'existence. Donc il a fallu pour obtenir ce développement des forces productives et cet excédent de travail, qu'il y eût des classes qui profitent et d'autres qui dépérissent.

Qu'est-ce donc, en dernier lieu, que ce Prométhée ressuscité par M. Proudhon ? C'est la société, ce sont les rapports sociaux basés sur l'antagonisme des classes. Ces rapports sont, non pas des rapports d'individu à individu, mais d'ouvrier à capitaliste, de fermier à propriétaire foncier, etc. Effacez ces rapports, et vous aurez anéanti toute la société et votre Prométhée n'est plus qu'un fantôme sans bras ni jambes, c'est-à-dire sans atelier automatique, sans division de travail, manquant enfin de tout ce que vous lui avez donné primitivement pour lui faire obtenir cet excédent de travail.

Si donc, dans la théorie, il suffisait, comme le fait M. Proudhon, d'interpréter la formule de l'excédent de travail dans le sens de l'égalité, sans prendre garde aux conditions actuelles de la production, il devrait suffire, dans la pratique, de faire parmi les ouvriers une répartition égaleitaire de toutes les richesses actuellement acquises, sans rien changer aux conditions actuelles de la production. Ce partage n'assurerait pas un grand degré de confort à chacun des participants.

Mais M. Proudhon n'est pas aussi pessimiste qu'on pourrait bien le croire. Comme la proportionnalité est tout pour lui, il faut bien qu'il voie dans le Prométhée tout donné, c'est-à-dire dans la société actuelle, un commencement de réalisation de son idée favorite.

_Mais partout aussi le progrès de la richesse, c'est-à-dire la proportionnalité des valeurs, est la loi dominante, et quand les économistes opposent aux plaintes du parti social l'accroissement progressif de la fortune publique, et les adoucissements apportés à la condition des classes même les plus malheureuses, ils proclament, sans s'en douter, une vérité qui est la condamnation de leurs théories._

Qu'est-ce, en effet, que la richesse collective, la fortune publique ? C'est la richesse de la bourgeoisie, et non celle de chaque bourgeois en particulier. En bien ! les économistes n'ont fait autre chose que de démontrer comment dans les rapports de production tels qu'ils existent, la richesse de la bourgeoisie s'est développée et doit s'accroître encore. Quant aux classes ouvrières, c'est encore une question fort contestée que de savoir si leur condition s'est améliorée à la suite de la richesse prétendue publique. Si les économistes nous citent, à l'appui de leur optimisme, l'exemple de l'ouvrier anglais occupé à l'industrie cotonnière, ils ne voient leur situation que dans les rares moments de la prospérité de l'industrie, et quand les moments de la prospérité sont, aux époques de crise et de stagnation, dans la "juste proportionnalité" de 3 à 10. Mais peut-être aussi, en parlant d'amélioration, les économistes ont-ils voulu parler de ces millions d'ouvriers qui durent périr aux Indes orientales, pour procurer au million et demi d'ouvriers occupés en Angleterre à la même industrie, trois années de prospérité sur dix.

Quant à la participation temporaire à l'accroissement de la richesse publique, c'est différent. Le fait de participation temporaire s'explique par la théorie des économistes. Il est en la confirmation et nullement la "condamnation", comme le dit M. Proudhon. S'il y avait quelque chose à condamner, ce serait certes le système de M. Proudhon, qui réduirait, ainsi que nous l'avons démontré, l'ouvrier au minimum de salaire, malgré l'accroissement des richesses. Ce n'est qu'en le réduisant au minimum de salaire, qu'il y aurait fait une application de la juste proportionnalité des valeurs, de la "valeur
constituée " - par le temps du travail. C'est parce que le salaire, par suite de la concurrence, oscille au-dessus ou au-dessous du prix des vivres nécessaires à la sustentation de l'ouvrier, que celui-ci peut participer tant soit peu au développement de la richesse collective, mais qu'il peut aussi périt de misère. C'est là toute la théorie des économistes qui ne se font pas illusion.

Après ses longues divagations au sujet des chemins de fer, de Prométhée et de la nouvelle société à reconstituer sur la " valeur constituée ", M. Proudhon se recueille; l'émotion le gagne et il s'écrie d'un ton paternel :

J'adjoins les économistes de s'interroger un moment, dans le silence de leur cœur, loin des préjugés qui les troublent et sans égard aux emplois qu'ils occupent ou qu'ils attendent, aux intérêts qu'ils desservent, aux suffrages qu'ils ambitionnent, aux distinctions dont leur vanité se berce : qu'ils disent si jusqu'à ce jour le principe que tout travail doit laisser un excédent leur était apparu avec cette chaîne de préliminaires et de conséquences que nous avons soulevée.
II. La métaphysique de l'économie politique

1. La méthode

Nous voici en pleine Allemagne ! Nous allons avoir à parler métaphysique, tout en parlant économie politique. Et en ceci encore, nous ne faisons que suivre les " contradictions " de M. Proudhon. Tout à l'heure, il nous força de parler anglais, de devenir nous-même passablement anglais. Maintenant la scène change, M. Proudhon nous transporte dans notre chère patrie et nous force à reprendre notre qualité d'Allemand malgré nous.

Si l'Anglais transforme les hommes en chapeaux, l'Allemand transforme les chapeaux en idées. L'Anglais, c'est Ricardo, riche banquier et économiste distingué; l'Allemand c'est Hegel, simple professeur de philosophie à l'Université de Berlin.

Louis XV, dernier roi absolu, et qui représentait la décadence de la royauté française, avait attaché à sa personne un médecin qui était, lui, le premier économiste de la France. Ce médecin, cet économiste, représentait le triomphe imminent et sûr de la bourgeoisie française. Le docteur Quesnay a fait de l'économie politique une science; il l'a résumée dans son fameux Tableau économique. Outre les mille et un commentaires qui ont paru sur ce tableau, nous en possédons un du docteur lui-même.

C'est l' " analyse du tableau économique ", suivie de " sept observations importantes ".

M. Proudhon est un autre docteur Quesnay. C'est le Quesnay de la métaphysique de l'économie politique.

Or, la métaphysique, la philosophie tout entière se résume, d'après Hegel, dans la méthode. Il nous, faudra donc chercher à éclaircir la méthode de M. Proudhon, qui est pour le moins aussi ténébreuse que le Tableau économique. C'est pour cela que nous donnerons sept observations plus ou moins importantes. Si le docteur Proudhon n'est pas content de nos observations, eh bien, il se fera abbé Baudeau et donnera lui-même l' " explication de la méthode économico-métaphysique ".

PREMIÈRE OBSERVATION

Nous ne faisons point une histoire selon l'ordre des temps, mais selon la succession des idées. Les phases ou catégories économiques sont dans leur manifestation tantôt contemporaines, tantôt interverties... Les théories économiques n'en ont pas moins leur succession logique et leur série dans l'entendement : c'est cet ordre que nous nous sommes flatté de découvrir.

Décidément, M. Proudhon a voulu faire peur aux Français, en leur jetant à la face des phrases quasi-hégéliennes. Nous avons donc affaire à deux hommes, d'abord à M. Proudhon, puis à Hegel. Comment M. Proudhon se distingue-t-il des autres économistes ? Et Hegel, quel rôle joue-t-il dans l'économie politique de M. Proudhon ?

Les économistes expriment les rapports de la production bourgeoise, la division du travail, le crédit, la monnaie, etc., comme des catégories fixes, immuables, éternelles. M. Proudhon, qui a devant lui ces catégories toutes formées, veut y voir un mouvement historique des rapports de la production, dont les catégories ne sont que les manifestations de ces rapports donnés, mais ce qu'ils ne nous expliquent pas, c'est comment ces rapports se produisent, c'est-à-dire le mouvement historique qui les fait naître. M. Proudhon ayant pris ces rapports comme des principes, des catégories, des pensées abstraites, n'a qu'à mettre ordre dans ces pensées, qui se trouvent alphabétiquement rangées à la fin de tout traité d'économie politique. Les matériaux des économistes, c'est la vie active et agissante des hommes; les matériaux de M. Proudhon, ce sont les dogmes des économistes. Mais du moment qu'on ne peut pas voir ces rapports, il est impossible de les interpréter. Les termes de M. Proudhon sont les termes de l'histoire, du mouvement historique qui les produit. Comment la raison pure, éternelle, impersonnelle fait-elle naître ces pensées ? Comment procède-t-elle pour les produire ?

Si nous avions l'intrépidité de M. Proudhon en fait de hégélianisme, nous dirions : elle se distingue en elle-même d'elle-même. Qu'est-ce à dire ? La raison impersonnelle n'ayant en dehors d'elle ni terrain sur lequel elle puisse se poser, ni objet auquel elle puisse s'opposer, ni sujet avec lequel elle puisse composer, se voit forçée de faire la culbute en se posant, en s'opposant et en composant - position, opposition, composition. Pour parler grec, nous avons la thèse, l'antithèse et la synthèse. Quant à ceux qui ne connaissent pas le langage hégélien, nous leur dirons que le langage hégélien, formé de " affirmation, négation et négation de la négation ", ou, si l'on veut dire, n'est ni certes pas de l'hébreu, n'en déplaise à M. Proudhon; mais c'est le langage de cette raison si pure, séparée de l'individu. Au lieu de l'individu ordinaire, avec sa manière ordinaire de parler et de penser, nous n'avons autre chose que cette manière ordinaire toute pure, moins l'individu.

Faut-il s'étonner que toute chose, en dernière abstraction, car il y a abstraction et non pas analyse, se présente à l'état de catégorie logique ? Faut-il s'étonner qu'en laissant tomber peu à peu tout ce qui constitue l'individualisme d'uneaison ?
maison, qu’en faisant abstraction des matériaux dont elle se compose, de la forme qui la distingue, vous arriviez à n’avoir plus qu’un corps, - qu’en faisant abstraction des limites de ce corps vous n’ayez bientôt plus qu’un espace, - qu’en faisant enfin abstraction des dimensions de cet espace, vous finissiez par ne plus avoir que la quantité toute pure, la catégorie logique. A force d’abstraire ainsi de tout sujet tous les prétendus accidents, animés ou inanimés, hommes ou choses, nous avons raison de dire qu’en dernière abstraction on arrive à avoir comme substance les catégories logiques. Ainsi, les métaphysiciens qui, en faisant ces abstractions, s’imagine faire de l’analyse, et qui, à mesure qu’ils se détachent de plus en plus des objets, s’imagine s’en approcher au point de les percer, ces métaphysiciens ont, à leur tour supposé, dire que les choses d’ici-bas sont des broderies, dont les catégories logiques forment le canevas. Voilà ce qui distingue le philosophe du chrétien. Le chrétien n’a qu’une seule incarnation du Logos, en dépit de la logique; le philosophe n’en finit pas avec les incarnations. Que tout ce qui existe, que tout ce qui vit sur la terre et sous l’eau, puisse, à force d’abstraction, être réduit à une catégorie logique; que de cette façon le monde réel tout entier puisse se noyer dans le monde des abstractions, dans le monde des catégories logiques, qui s’en étonnera ?

Tout ce qui existe, tout ce qui vit sur terre et sous l’eau, n'existe, ne vit que par un mouvement quelconque. Ainsi, le mouvement de l'histoire produit les rapports sociaux, le mouvement industriel nous donne les produits industriels, etc., etc.

De même qu’à force d’abstraction nous avons transformé toute chose en catégorie logique, de même on n’a qu’à faire abstraction de tout caractère distinctif des différents mouvements, pour arriver au mouvement à l’état abstrait, au mouvement purement formel, à la formule purement logique du mouvement. Si l’on trouve dans les catégories logiques la substance de toute chose, on s’imagine trouver dans la formule logique du mouvement la méthode absolue, qui non seulement explique toute chose, mais qui implique encore le mouvement de la chose.

C’est cette méthode absolue dont Hegel parle en ces termes :

La méthode est la force absolue, unique, suprême, infinie, à laquelle aucun objet ne saurait résister; c’est la tendance de la raison à se reconnaître elle-même en toute chose 68.

Toute chose étant réduite à une catégorie logique, et tout mouvement, tout acte de production à la méthode, il s’ensuit naturellement que tout ensemble de produits et de production, d’objets et de mouvement, se réduit à une métaphysique appliquée. Ce que Hegel a fait pour la religion, le droit, etc., M. Proudhon cherche à le faire pour l’économie politique.

Ainsi, qu’est-ce donc que cette méthode absolue ? L’abstraction du mouvement. Qu’est-ce que l’abstraction du mouvement ? Le mouvement à l’état abstrait. Qu’est-ce que le mouvement à l’état abstrait ? La formule purement logique du mouvement ou le mouvement de la raison pure. En quoi consiste le mouvement de la raison pure ? A se poser, à s’opposer, à se composer, à se formuler comme thèse, antithèse, synthèse, ou bien encore à s’affirmer, à se nier, à nier sa négation.

Comment fait-elle, la raison, pour s'affirmer, pour se poser en catégorie déterminée ? C'est l'affaire de la raison elle-même et de ses apologistes.

Mais une fois qu’elle est parvenue à se poser en thèse, cette thèse, cette pensée, opposée à elle-même, se dédouble en deux pensées contradictoires, le positif et le négatif, le oui et le non. La lutte de ces deux éléments antagonistes, renfermés dans l’antithèse, constitue le mouvement dialectique. Le oui devenant non, le non devenant oui, le oui devenant à la fois oui et non, le non devenant à la fois non et oui, les contraires se balancent, se neutralisent, se paralysent. La fusion de ces deux pensées contradictoires constitue une pensée nouvelle, qui en est la synthèse. Cette pensée nouvelle se déroule encore en deux pensées contradictoires qui se fondent à leur tour en une nouvelle synthèse. De ce travail d’enfantement naît un groupe de pensées. Ce groupe de pensées suit le même mouvement dialectique qu’une catégorie simple, et a pour antithèse un groupe contradictoire. De ces deux groupes de pensées naît un nouveau groupe de pensées, qui en est la synthèse.

De même que du mouvement dialectique des catégories simples naît le groupe, de même du mouvement dialectique des groupes naît la série, et du mouvement dialectique des séries naît le système tout entier.

Appliquez cette méthode aux catégories de l’économie politique, et vous aurez la logique et la métaphysique de l’économie politique, ou, en d’autres termes, vous aurez les catégories économiques connues de tout le monde, traduites dans un langage peu connu, qui leur donne l’air d’être fraîchement écloses dans une tête raison pure; tellement ces catégories semblent s’engendrer les unes les autres, s’enchaîner et s’enchevêtrer les unes dans les autres.

Hegel : Logique, tome III. 68

45 / 83
DEUXIÈME OBSERVATION

Les catégories économiques ne sont que les expressions théoriques, les abstractions des rapports sociaux de la production. M. Proudhon, en vrai philosophe, prenant les choses à l'envers, ne voit dans les rapports réels que les incarnations de ces principes, de ces catégories, qui sommeillaient, nous dit encore M. Proudhon le philosophe, au sein de la "raison impersonnelle de l'humanité".

M. Proudhon l'économiste a très bien compris que les hommes font le drap, la toile, les étoffes de soie, dans des rapports déterminés de production. Mais ce qu'il n'a pas compris, c'est que ces rapports sociaux déterminés sont aussi bien produits par les hommes que la toile, le lin, etc. Les rapports sociaux sont intimement liés aux forces productives. En acquérant de nouvelles forces productives, les hommes changent leur mode de production, et en changeant le mode de production, la manière de gagner leur vie, ils changent tous leurs rapports sociaux. Le moulin à bras vous donnera la société avec le suzerain; le moulin à vapeur, la société avec le capitalisme industriel.

Les mêmes hommes qui établissent les rapports sociaux conformément à leur productivité matérielle, produisent aussi les principes, les idées, les catégories, conformément à leurs rapports sociaux.

Ainsi ces idées, ces catégories sont aussi peu éternelles que les relations qu'elles expriment. Elles sont des. *produits historiques et transitoires.*

Il y a un mouvement continu d'accroissement dans les forces productives, de destruction dans les rapports sociaux, de formation dans les idées; il n'y a d'immuable que l'abstraction du mouvement - *mors immortalis.*

TROISIÈME OBSERVATION

Les rapports de production de toute société forment un tout. M. Proudhon considère les rapports économiques comme autant de phases sociales, s'engendrant l'une l'autre, résultant l'une de l'autre comme l'antithèse de la thèse, et réalisant dans leur succession logique la raison impersonnelle de l'humanité.

Le seul inconvenient qu'il ait dans cette méthode, c'est qu'en abordant l'examen d'une seule de ces phases, M. Proudhon ne puisse l'expliquer sans avoir recours à tous les autres rapports de la société, rapports que cependant il n'a pas encore fait engendrer par son mouvement dialectique. Lorsque ensuite M. Proudhon, au moyen de la raison pure, passe à l'enfancement des autres phases, il fait comme si c'étaient des enfants nouveau-nés, il oublie qu'elles sont du même âge que la première.

Ainsi, pour arriver à la constitution de la valeur qui pour lui est la base de toutes les évolutions économiques, il ne pouvait se passer de la division du travail, de la concurrence, etc. Cependant dans la série, dans l'entendement de M. Proudhon, dans la succession logique, ces rapports n'existaient point encore.

En construisant avec les catégories de l'économie politique l'édifice d'un système idéologique, on disloque les membres du système social. On change les différents membres de la société en autant de sociétés à part, qui arrivent les unes après les autres. Comment, en effet, la seule formule logique du mouvement, de la succession, du temps, pourrait-elle expliquer le corps de la société, dans lequel tous les rapports coexistent simultanément et se supportent les uns les autres ?

QUATRIÈME OBSERVATION

Voyons maintenant quelles modifications M. Proudhon fait subir à la dialectique de Hegel en l'appliquant à l'économie politique.

Pour lui, M. Proudhon, toute catégorie économique a deux côtés, l'un bon, l'autre mauvais. Il envisage les catégories comme le petit bourgeois envisage les grands hommes de l'histoire : Napoléon est un grand homme; il a fait beaucoup de bien, il a fait aussi beaucoup de mal.

Le bon côté et le mauvais côté, l'avantage et l'inconvenient, pris ensemble, forment pour M. Proudhon la contradiction dans chaque catégorie économique.

Problème à résoudre : conserver le bon côté en éliminant le mauvais.

L'esclavage est une catégorie économique comme une autre. Donc il a, lui aussi, ses deux côtés. Laissons là le mauvais côté et parlons du beau côté de l'esclavage; bien entendu qu'il n'est question que de l'esclavage direct, de l'esclavage des noirs dans le Surinam, dans le Brésil, dans les contrées méridionales de l'Amérique du Nord.

L'esclavage direct est le pivot de l'industrie bourgeoise aussi bien que les machines, le crédit, etc. Sans esclavage, vous n'avez pas de coton; sans le coton, vous n'avez pas d'industrie moderne. C'est l'esclavage qui a donné leur valeur aux colonies, ce sont les colonies qui ont créé le commerce de l'univers, c'est le commerce de l'univers qui est la condition de la grande industrie. Ainsi l'esclavage est une catégorie économique de la plus haute importance.


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69 Ceci était tout à fait exact en l'an 1847. A cette époque le commerce mondial des États-Unis se limitait, pour l'essentiel, à l'importation d'immigrants et de produits industriels et à l'exportation de coton et de tabac, donc de produits du travail des esclaves du Sud. Les États du Nord produisaient principalement du blé et de la viande pour les États esclavagistes. C'est seulement à partir du moment où le Nord ne mit à produire du blé et de la viande pour l'exportation et devint parallèlement un pays industriel, et à partir du moment où le
Proudhon : 

« Il est nécessaire de faire passer de la catégorie économique, une à une, et en faisant de cette catégorie économique, est dans la nature contradictoire, c'est bon au mauvais, de poser des problèmes tendant à les résoudre. En d'autres termes, c'était le principe qui faisait l'histoire, ce n'était pas à faire avec ce mélange de contradictions, deux volumes de contradictions, qu'il appelle à juste titre : Le Système des contradictions économiques. »

**CINQUIÈME OBSERVATION**

Dans la raison absoluë toutes ces idées... sont également simples et générales... En fait, nous ne parvenons à la science que par une sorte d'échafaudage de nos idées. Mais la vérité en soi est indépendante de ces figures dialectiques et affranchie des combinaisons de notre esprit 70.

Voilà tout d'un coup, par une sorte de revirement dont nous connaissons maintenant le secret, la métaphysique de l'économie politique devienne une illusion ! Jamais M. Proudhon n'a dit plus vrai. Certes, du moment que le procédé du mouvement dialectique se réduit au simple procédé d'opposer le bon au mauvais, de poser des problèmes tendant à éliminer le mauvais et de donner une catégorie comme antidote à l'autre, les catégories n'ont plus de spontanéité; l'idée " ne fonctionne plus "; elle n'a plus de vie en elle. Elle ne se pose ni ne se décompose plus en catégories. La succession des catégories est devenue une sorte d'illusion ! Jamais M. Proudhon n'a dit plus vrai. Certes, du moment que le procédé du mouvement dialectique se réduit au simple procédé d'opposer le bon au mauvais, de poser des problèmes tendant à éliminer le mauvais et de donner une catégorie comme antidote à l'autre, les catégories n'ont plus de spontanéité; l'idée " ne fonctionne plus "; elle n'a plus de vie en elle. Elle ne se pose ni ne se décompose plus en catégories. La succession des catégories est devenue une sorte d'échafaudage. La dialectique n'est plus le mouvement de la raison absolue. Il n'y a plus de dialectique, il y a tout au plus de la morale toute pure.

Quand M. Proudhon parlait de la série dans l'entendement, de la succession logique des catégories, il déclarait positivement qu'il ne voulait pas donner l'historie selon l'ordre des temps, c'est à dire, d'après M. Proudhon, la succession historique dans laquelle les catégories se sont manifestées. Tout se passait alors pour lui dans l'étier pur de la raison. Tout devait découler de cet éther au moyen de la dialectique. Maintenant qu'il s'agit de mettre en pratique cette dialectique, la raison lui fait défaut. La dialectique de M. Proudhon fait faux bond à la dialectique de Hegel, et voici que M. Proudhon est amené à dire que l'ordre dans lequel il donne les catégories économiques n'est plus l'ordre dans lequel elles s'engendrent les unes les autres, les évolutions économiques ne sont plus les évolutions de la raison elle-même.

Qu'est-ce donc que M. Proudhon nous donne ? L'historie réelle, c'est-à-dire, d'après l'entendement de M. Proudhon, la succession suivant laquelle les catégories se sont manifestées dans l'ordre des temps ? Non. L'historie comme elle se passe dans l'idée elle-même ? Bien moins encore. Ainsi ni l'historie profane des catégories, ni leur histoire sacrée ! Quelle histoire nous donne-t-il enfin ? L'historie de ses propres contradictions. Voyons comment elles marchent et comment elles traitent M. Proudhon à leur suite.

Avant d'aborder cet examen, qui donne lieu à la sixième observation importante, nous avons encore une observation moins importante à faire.

Admettons avec M. Proudhon que l'historie réelle, l'historie selon l'ordre des temps, est la succession historique dans laquelle les idées, les catégories, les principes se sont manifestés.

Chaque principe a eu son siècle, pour s'y manifester : le principe d'autorité, par exemple, a eu le XI° siècle, de même que le principe d'individualisme le XVIII° siècle. De conséquence en conséquence, c'était le siècle qui appartenait au principe, et non le principe qui appartenait au siècle. En d'autres termes, c'était le principe qui faisait l'historie, ce n'était
pas l'histoire qui faisait le principe. Lorsque, ensuite, pour sauver les principes autant que l'histoire, on se demande pourquoi tel principe s'est manifesté dans le XIᵉ ou dans le XVIIIᵉ siècle plutôt que dans tel autre, on est nécessairement forcé d'examiner minutieusement quels étaient les hommes du XIᵉ siècle, quels étaient ceux du XVIIIᵉ, quels étaient leurs besoins respectifs, leurs forces productrices, leur mode de production, les matières premières de leur production, enfin quels étaient les rapports d'homme à homme qui résultaient de toutes ces conditions d'existence. Approfondir toutes ces questions, n'est-ce pas faire l'histoire réelle, profane des hommes dans chaque siècle, représenter ces hommes à la fois comme les auteurs et les acteurs de leur propre drame ? Mais du moment que vous représentez les hommes comme les acteurs et les auteurs de leur propre histoire, vous êtes, par un détour, arrivé au véritable point de départ, puisque vous avez abandonné les principes éternels dont vous parliez d'abord.

M. Proudhon ne s'est même pas assez avancé sur le chemin de traverse que prend l'idéologue pour gagner la grande route de l'histoire.

SIXIÈME OBSERVATION

Prenons avec M. Proudhon le chemin de traverse.

Nous voulons bien que les rapports économiques, envisagés comme des lois immuables, des principes éternels, des catégories idéales, fussent antérieurs aux hommes actifs et agissant; nous voulons bien encore que ces lois, ces principes, ces catégories eussent, dès l'origine des temps, sommeillé " dans la raison impersonnelle de l'humanité " . Nous avons déjà vu qu'avec toutes ces éternités immuables et immobiles, il n'y a plus d'histoire; il y a tout au plus l'histoire dans l'idée, c'est-à-dire l'histoire qui se refléchit dans le mouvement dialectique de la raison pure. M. Proudhon, en disant que, dans le mouvement dialectique, les idées ne se " différencient " plus, a annulé l'ombre du mouvement et le mouvement des ombres, au moyen desquels on aurait pu tout au plus encore créer un simulacre de l'histoire. Au lieu de cela, il impute à l'histoire sa propre impuissance, il s'en prend à tout, jusqu'à la langue française.

Il n'est donc pas exact de dire, dit M. Proudhon le philosophe, que quelque chose avient, quelque chose se produit : dans la civilisation comme dans l'univers, tout existe, tout agit depuis toujours. Il en est ainsi de toute l'économie sociale 71.

Telle est la force productrice des contradictions qui fonctionnent et qui font fonctionner M. Proudhon, qu'en voulant expliquer l'histoire il est forcé de la nier, qu'en voulant expliquer la venue successive des rapports sociaux il nie que quelque chose puisse avenir, qu'en voulant expliquer la production avec toutes ses phases, il conteste que quelque chose puisse se produire.

Ainsi pour M. Proudhon plus d'histoire, plus de succession des idées, et cependant son livre subsiste toujours; et ce livre est précisément, d'après sa propre expression, l'histoire selon la succession des idées. Comment trouver une formule, car M. Proudhon est l'homme aux formules, qui l'aide à pouvoir sauter d'un seul bond par delà toutes ses contradictions ?

Pour cela, il a inventé une raison nouvelle, qui n'est ni la raison absolue, pure et vierge, ni la raison commune des hommes actifs et agissant dans les différents siècles, mais qui est une raison tout à part, la raison de la société personne, du sujet humanité, qui sous la plume de M. Proudhon, débute parfois aussi comme génie social, raison générale et en dernier lieu comme raison humaine... Cette raison, affublée de tant de noms, se fait cependant à chaque instant reconnaître comme la raison individuelle de M. Proudhon avec son bon et son mauvais côté, ses antídotes et ses problèmes.

" La raison humaine ne crée pas la vérité ", cachée dans les profondeurs de la raison absolue, éternelle. Elle ne peut que la dévoiler. Mais les vérités qu'elle a dévoilées jusqu'à présent sont incomplètes, insuffisantes et partant contradictoires. Donc, les catégories économiques, étant elles-mêmes des vérités découvertes, révélées par la raison humaine, par le génie social sont également incomplètes et renferment le germe de la contradiction. Avant M. Proudhon, le génie social n'a vu que les éléments antagonistes, et non la formule synthétique, cachés tous deux simultanément dans la raison absolue. Les rapports économiques, ne faisant que réaliser sur la terre ces vérités insuffisantes, ces catégories incomplètes, ces notions contradictoires sont donc contradictoires en eux-mêmes, et présentent les deux côtés, dont l'un bon, l'autre mauvais.

Trouver la vérité complète, la notion dans toute sa plénitude, la formule synthétique qui anéantisse l'économie, voilà le problème du génie social. Voilà encore pourquoi, dans l'illusion de M. Proudhon, le même génie social a été poussé d'une catégorie à l'autre, sans encore être parvenu, avec toute la batterie de ses catégories, à arracher à Dieu, à la raison absolue, une formule synthétique.

D'abord, la société (le génie social), pose un premier fait, émet une hypothèse... véritable antinomie, dont les résultats antagonistes se déroulent dans l'économie sociale de la même manière que les conséquences auraient pu se déduire dans l'esprit; en sorte que le mouvement industriel, suivant en tout la déduction des idées, se divise en un double courant, l'un d'effets utiles, l'autre de résultats subversifs... Pour constituer harmonieusement ce principe à double face et résoudre cette antinomie, la société en fait surgir une seconde, laquelle sera bientôt suivie d'une troisième, et telle sera la marche du génie social, jusqu'à ce qu'ayant épuisé toutes ses contradictions - je suppose, mais cela

71 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité, tome II, p. 102.
n'est pas prouvé, que la contradiction dans l'humanité ait un terme, - il revienne d'un bond sur toutes ses positions antérieures et dans une seule formule résout tous ses problèmes 72.

De même qu’auparavant l'antithèse s'est transformée en antidote, de même la thèse devient maintenant hypothèse. Ce changement de tems n'a plus rien qui puisse nous étonner de la part de M. Proudhon. La raison humaine, qui n'est rien moins que pure, n'ayant que des vues incomplètes, rencontre à chaque pas de nouveaux problèmes à résoudre. Chaque nouvelle thèse qu'elle découvre dans la raison absolue et qui est la négation de la première thèse, devient pour elle une synthèse, qu'elle accepte assez naïvement comme la solution du problème en question. C'est ainsi que cette raison se démêle dans des contradictions toujours nouvelles jusqu'à ce que, se trouvant à bout de contradictions, elle s'aperçoive que toutes ses thèses et synthèses ne sont que des hypothèses contradictoires. Dans sa perplexité, la raison humaine, le génie social, revient d'un bond sur toutes ses positions antérieures et dans une seule formule résout tous ses problèmes.

Cette formule unique, disons-le en passant, constitue la véritable découverte de M. Proudhon. C'est la valeur constituée.

On ne fait des hypothèses qu'en vue d'un but quelconque. Le but que se proposait en premier lieu le génie social qui parle par la bouche de M. Proudhon, c'était d'éliminer ce qu'il y a de mauvais dans chaque catégorie économique, pour n'avoir que du bon. Pour lui le bon, le bien suprême, le véritable but pratique, c'est l'égalité. Et pourquoi le génie social se proposait-il l'égalité plutôt que l'inégalité, la fraternité, le catholicisme, ou tout autre principe ? Parce que l'humanité n'a réalisé successivement tant d'hypothèses particulières qu'en vue d'une hypothèse supérieure,

qui est précisément l'égalité. En d'autres mots : parce que l'égalité est l'idéal de M. Proudhon. Il s'imagine que la division du travail, le crédit, l'atelier, que tous les rapports économiques n'ont été inventés qu'en vue de l'égalité, et cependant ils ont toujours fini par tourner contre elle. De ce que l'histoire et la fiction de M. Proudhon se contredisent à chaque pas, ce dernier conclut qu'il y a contradiction. S'il y a contradiction, elle n'existe qu’entre son idée fixe et le mouvement réel.

Désormais, le bon côté d'un rapport économique, c'est celui qui affirme l'égalité; le mauvais côté, c'est celui qui la nie et affirme l'inégalité. Toute nouvelle catégorie est une hypothèse du génie social, pour éliminer l'inégalité engendrée par l'hypothèse précédente. En résumé, l'égalité est l'intention primitive, la tendance mystique, le but providentiel que le génie social a constamment devant les yeux, en tournant dans le cercle des contradictions économiques. Aussi la Providence est-elle la locomotive qui fait mieux marcher tout le bagage économique de M. Proudhon que sa raison pure et évanouie. Il a consacré à la Providence tout un chapitre, qui suit celui des impôts.

Providence, but providentiel, voilà le grand mot dont on se sert aujourd'hui, pour expliquer la marche de l'histoire. Dans le fait ce mot n'explique rien. C'est tout au plus une forme déclamationaire, une manière comme une autre de paraphraser les faits.

Il est de fait qu'en Écosse les propriétés foncières obtinrent une valeur nouvelle par le développement de l'industrie anglaise. Cette industrie ouvrit de nouveaux débouchés à la laine. Pour produire la laine en grand, il fallait transformer les champs labourables en pâturages. Pour effectuer cette transformation, il fallait concentrer les propriétés. Pour concentrer les propriétés, il fallait abolir les petites tenures, chasser des milliers de tenanciers de leur pays natal, et mettre à leur place quelques pasteurs surveillant des millions de moutons. Ainsi, par des transformations successives, la propriété foncière a eu pour résultat en Écosse de faire chasser les hommes par les moutons. Dites maintenant que le but providentiel de l'institution de la propriété foncière en Écosse avait été de faire chasser les hommes par les moutons, et vous aurez fait de l'histoire providentielle.

Certes, la tendance à l'égalité appartient à notre siècle. Dire maintenant que tous les siècles antérieurs, avec des besoins, des moyens de production, etc., tout à fait différents, travaillaient providentiellement à la réalisation de l'égalité, c'est d'abord substituer les moyens et les hommes de notre siècle aux hommes et aux moyens des siècles antérieurs, et méconnaître le mouvement historique par lequel les générations successives transformaient les résultats acquis des générations qui les précédaient. Les économistes savent très bien que la même chose qui était pour l'un la matière ouvragee n'est pour l'autre que la matière première de nouvelle production.

Supposez, comme le fait M. Proudhon, que le génie social ait produit, ou plutôt imprisve, les seigneurs féodaux dans le but providentiel de transformer les colonis en travailleurs responsables et égaiteaires; et vous aurez fait une substitution de buts et de personnes toute digne de cette Providence qui, en Écosse, instituait la propriété foncière, pour se donner le malin plaisir de faire chasser les hommes par les moutons.

Mais puisque M. Proudhon prend un intérêt si tendre à la Providence, nous le renvoyons à l'Histoire de l'économie politique, de M. de Villeneuve-Bargemont, qui, lui aussi, court après un but providentiel. Ce but ce n'est plus l'égalité, c'est le catholicisme.

SEPTIÈME ET DERNIÈRE OBSERVATION

72 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité, tome I, p. 133.
Les économistes ont une singulière manière de procéder. Il n’y a pour eux que deux sortes d’institutions, celles de l’art et celles de la nature. Les institutions de la féodalité sont des institutions artificielles, celles de la bourgeoisie sont des institutions naturelles. Ils ressemblent en ceci aux théologiens, qui, eux aussi, établissent deux sortes de religions. Toute religion qui n’est pas la leur est une invention des hommes, tandis que leur propre religion est une émanation de Dieu. En disant que les rapports actuels - les rapports de la production bourgeoise - sont naturels, les économistes font entendre que ce sont là des rapports dans lesquels se crée la richesse et se développent les forces productives conformément aux lois de la nature. Donc ces rapports sont eux-mêmes des lois naturelles indépendantes de l’influence du temps. Ce sont des lois éternelles qui doivent toujours régir la société. Ainsi il y a eu de l’histoire, mais il n’y en a plus. Il y a eu de l’histoire, puisqu’il y a eu des institutions de féodalité, et que dans ces institutions de féodalité on trouve des rapports de production tout à fait différents de ceux de la société bourgeoise, que les économistes veulent faire passer pour naturels et partant éternels.

La féodalité aussi avait son prolétariat - le servage, qui renfermait tous les germes de la bourgeoisie. La production féodale aussi avait deux éléments antagonistes, qu’on désigne également sous le nom de beau côté et de mauvais côté de la féodalité, sans considérer que c’est toujours le mauvais côté qui finit par emporter sur le côté beau. C’est le mauvais côté qui produit le mouvement qui fait l’histoire en constituant la lutte. Si, à l’époque du règne de la féodalité, les économistes, enthousiasmés des vertus chevaleresques, de la bonne harmonie entre les droits et les devoirs, de la vie patriarcale des villes, de l’état de prospérité de l’industrie domestique dans les campagnes, du développement de l’industrie organisée par corporations, jurandes, maîtrises, enfin de tout ce qui constitue le beau côté de la féodalité, s’étaient proposé le problème d’éliminer tout ce qui fait ombre à ce tableau - servage, privilèges, anarchie - qu’en serait-il arrivé? On aurait anéanti tous les éléments qui constituaient la lutte, et étouffé dans son germe le développement de la bourgeoisie. On se serait posé l’absurde problème d’éliminer l’histoire.

Lorsque la bourgeoisie l’eût emporté, il ne fut plus question ni du bon, ni du mauvais côté de la féodalité. Les forces productives qui s’étaient développées par elle sous la féodalité, lui furent acquises. Toutes les anciennes formes économiques, les relations civiles qui leur correspondaient, l’état politique qui était l’expression officielle de l’ancienne société civile, étaient brisées. Ainsi, pour bien juger la production féodale, il faut la considérer comme un mode de production fondé sur l’antagonisme. Il faut montrer comment la richesse se produisait au dedans de cet antagonisme, comment les forces productives se développaient en même temps que l’antagonisme des classes, comment l’une des classes, le mauvais côté, l’inconvénient de la société, allait toujours croissant, jusqu’à ce que les conditions matérielles de son émancipation fussent arrivées au point de maturité. N’est-ce pas dire assez que le mode de production, les rapports dans lesquels les forces productives se développent, ne sont rien moins que des lois éternelles, mais qu’ils correspondent à un développement déterminé des hommes et de leurs forces productives, et qu’un changement survenu dans les forces productives des hommes amène nécessairement un changement dans leurs rapports de production ? Comme il importe avant tout de ne pas être privé des fruits de la civilisation, des forces productives acquises, il faut briser les formes traditionnelles dans lesquelles elles ont été produites. Dès ce moment, la classe révolutionnaire devient conservatrice.

La bourgeoisie commence avec un prolétariat qui lui-même est un reste du prolétariat des temps féodaux. Dans le cours de son développement historique, la bourgeoisie développe nécessairement son caractère antagoniste, qui à son début se trouve être plus ou moins déguisé, qui n’existe qu’à l’état latent. A mesure que la bourgeoisie se développe, il se développe dans son sein un nouveau prolétariat, un prolétariat moderne : il se développe une lutte entre la classe prolixaire et la classe bourgeoise, lutte qui, avant d’être sentie des deux côtés, aperçue, appréciée, comprise, avouée et hautement proclamée, ne se manifeste préalablement que par des conflits partiels et momentanés, par des faits subversifs. D’un autre côté, si tous les membres de la bourgeoisie moderne ont le même intérêt en tant qu’ils forment une classe vis-à-vis d’une autre classe, ils ont des intérêts opposés, antagonistes, en tant qu’ils se trouvent les uns vis-à-vis des autres. Cette opposition des intérêts découle des conditions économiques de leur vie bourgeoise. De jour en jour, il devient donc plus clair que les rapports de production dans lesquels se meut la bourgeoisie n’ont pas un caractère un, un caractère simple, mais un caractère de duplicité ; que dans les mêmes rapports dans lesquels se produit la richesse la misère se produit aussi ; que dans les mêmes rapports dans lesquels il y a développement des forces productives, il y a une force productive de répression ; que ces rapports ne produisent pas la richesse bourgeoise, c’est-à-dire la richesse de la classe bourgeoise, qu’en anéantissant continuellement la richesse des membres intégrants de cette classe et en produisant un prolétariat toujours croissant.

Plus le caractère antagoniste se met au jour, plus les économistes, les représentants scientifiques de la production bourgeoise, se brouillent avec leur propre théorie ; et différentes écoles se forment. Nous avons les économistes fatalistes, qui dans leur théorie sont aussi indifférents à ce qu’ils appellent les inconvénients de la production bourgeoise, que les bourgeois eux-mêmes le sont dans la pratique aux souffrances des prolétaires qui les aident à acquérir des richesses. Dans cette école fataliste, il y a des classiques et des romantiques. Les classiques, comme Adam Smith et Ricardo, représentent une bourgeoisie qui, luttant encore avec les restes de la société féodale, ne travaille qu’à épurer les rapports économiques des tâches féodales, à augmenter les forces productives, et à donner à l’industrie et au commerce un nouvel essor. Le prolétariat participant à cette lutte, absorbé dans ce travail fébrile, n’a que des souffrances passagères, accidentelles, et lui-même les regarde comme telles. Les économistes comme Adam Smith et Ricardo, qui sont les historiens de cette époque, n’ont d’autre mission que de démontrer comment la richesse s’acquiert dans les rapports de la production bourgeoise, de formuler ces rapports en catégories, en lois, et de démontrer...
combien ces lois, ces catégories, sont pour la production des richesses supérieures aux lois et aux catégories de la société féodale. La misère n’est à leurs yeux que la douleur qui accompagne tout enfantement, dans la nature aussi bien que dans l’industrie.

Les romantiques appartiennent à notre époque, où la bourgeoisie est en opposition directe avec le prolétariat : où la misère s’engendre en aussi grande abondance que la richesse. Les économistes se posent alors en fatalistes blasés qui, du haut de leur position, jettent un superbe regard de dédain sur les hommes locomotives qui fabriquent les richesses. Ils copient tous les développements donnés par leurs prédécesseurs, et l’indifférence qui chez ceux-là était de la naïveté devient pour eux de la coquetterie.

Vient ensuite l’école humanitaire, qui prend à cœur le mauvais côté des rapports de production actuels. Celle-ci cherche, par acquit de conscience, à pallier tant soit peu les contrastes réels; elle déploie sincèrement la détresse du prolétariat, la concurrence effrénée des bourgeois entre eux-mêmes; elle conseille aux ouvriers d’être sobres, de bien travailler et de faire peu d’enfants; elle recommande aux bourgeois de mettre dans la production une ardeur réfléchie.

Toute la théorie de cette école repose sur des distinctions interminables entre la théorie et la pratique, entre les principes et les résultats, entre l’idée et l’application, entre le contenu et la forme, entre l’essence et la réalité, entre le droit et le fait, entre le bon et le mauvais côté.

L’école philanthrope est l’école humanitaire perfectionnée. Elle nie la nécessité de l’antagonisme; elle veut faire de tous les hommes des bourgeois; elle veut réaliser la théorie en tant qu’elle se distingue de la pratique et qu’elle ne renferme pas d’antagonisme. Il va sans dire que, dans la théorie, il est aisés de faire abstraction des contradictions qu’on rencontre à chaque instant dans la réalité. Cette théorie deviendrait alors la réalité idéalisée. Les philanthropes veulent donc conserver les catégories qui expriment les rapports bourgeois, sans avoir l’antagonisme qui les constitue et qui en est inseparable. Ils s’imaginent combattre sérieusement la pratique bourgeoise, et ils sont plus bourgeois que les autres.

De même que les économistes sont les représentants scientifiques de la classe bourgeoise, de même les socialistes et les communistes sont les théoriciens de la classe prolétaire. Tant que le prolétariat n’est pas encore assez développé pour se constituer en classe, que, par conséquent, la lutte même du prolétariat avec la bourgeoisie n’a pas encore un caractère politique, et que les forces productives ne se sont pas encore assez développées dans le sein de la bourgeoisie elle-même, pour laisser entrevoir les conditions matérielles nécessaires à l’affranchissement du prolétariat et à la formation d’une société nouvelle, ces théoriciens ne sont que des utopistes qui, pour obvier aux besoins des classes opprimées, improvisent des systèmes et courent après une science régénératrice. Mais à mesure que l’histoire marche et qu’avec elle elle la lutte du prolétariat se dessine plus nettement, ils n’ont plus besoin de chercher de la science 73 dans leur esprit, ils n’ont qu’à se rendre compte de ce qui se passe devant leurs yeux et de s’en faire l’organe. Tant qu’ils cherchent la science et ne font que de systèmes, tant qu’ils sont au début de la lutte, ils ne voient dans la misère que la misère, sans y voir le côté révolutionnaire, subversif, qui renverra la société ancienne. Dès ce moment, la science produite par le mouvement historique, et s’y associant en pleine connaissance de cause, a cessé d’être doctrinaire, elle est devenue révolutionnaire.

Revenons à M. Proudhon.

Chaque rapport économique a un bon et un mauvais côté c’est le seul point dans lequel M. Proudhon ne se dément pas. Le bon côté, il en est exposé par les économistes; le mauvais côté, il le voit dénoncé par les socialistes. Il emprunte aux économistes la nécessité des rapports éternels; il emprunte aux socialistes l’illusion de ne voir dans la misère que l’état même; il est d’accord avec les uns et les autres en voulant s’en référer à l’autorité de la science. La science, pour lui, se réduit aux minces proportions d’une formule scientifique; il n’est l’homme à la recherche des formules. C’est ainsi que M. Proudhon se fatigue d’avoir donné la critique et de l’économie politique et du communisme: il est au-dessous de l’une et de l’autre. Au-dessous des économistes, puisque comme philosophe, qui a sous la main une formule magique, il a cru pouvoir se dispenser d’entrer dans des détails purement économiques; au-dessous des socialistes, puisqu’il n’a ni assez de courage, ni assez de lumières pour s’élèver, ne serait-ce que spéculativement, au-dessus de l’horizon bourgeois.

Il veut être la synthèse, il est une erreur composée.

Il veut planer en homme de science au-dessus des bourgeois et des prolétaires; il n’est que le petit bourgeois, ballotté constamment entre le Capital et le Travail, entre l’économie politique et le communisme.

2. **La division du travail et les machines**

La division du travail ouvre, d’après M. Proudhon, la série des *évolutions économiques*.

![Tableau]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bon côté de la division du travail.</th>
<th>Mauvais côté de la division du travail</th>
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| "Considérée dans son essence, la division du travail est le mode selon lequel se réalise l’égalité des conditions et des intelligences." (Tome 1er, p. 93.) | "La division du travail est devenue révolutionnaire, subversif, qui renverra la société ancienne. Dès ce moment, la science produite par le mouvement historique, et s’y associant en pleine connaissance de cause, a cessé d’être doctrinaire, elle est devenue révolutionnaire."

73 Pour "... chercher la science", (N.R.)
La division du travail est, d'après M. Proudhon, une loi éternelle, une catégorie simple et abstraite. Il faut donc aussi que l'abstraction, l'idée, le mot lui suffise pour expliquer la division du travail aux différentes époques de l'histoire. Les castes, les corporations, le régime manufacturier, la grande industrie doivent s'expliquer par le seul mot diviser. Étudiez d'abord bien le sens de diviser, et vous n'aurez pas besoin d'étudier les nombreuses influences qui donnent à la division du travail un caractère déterminé à chaque époque.

Certes, ce serait rendre les choses par trop simples, que de les réduire aux catégories de M. Proudhon. L'histoire ne procède pas aussi catégoriquement. Il a fallu trois siècles entiers, en Allemagne, pour établir la première division du travail en grand, qui est la séparation des villes d'avec les campagnes. À mesure que se modifiait ce seul rapport de la ville à la campagne, la société se modifiait tout entière. À n'envisager que cette seule face de la division du travail, vous avez les Républiques anciennes ou la féodalité chrétienne; l'ancienne Angleterre avec ses barons, ou l'Angleterre moderne avec ses seigneurs du coton (cotton-lords). Au XIV° et au XV° siècles, lorsqu'il n'y avait pas encore de colonies, et que l'Amérique n'existait pas encore pour l'Europe, que l'Asie n'existait que par l'intermédiaire de Constantinople, que la Méditerranée était le centre de l'activité commerciale, la division du travail avait une tout autre forme, un tout autre aspect qu'au XVII° siècle, alors que les Espagnols, les Portugais, les Anglais, les Français avaient des colonies établies dans toutes les parties du monde. L'étendue du marché, sa physionomie donnent à la division du travail aux différentes époques une physionomie, un caractère qu'il serait difficile de déduire du seul mot diviser, de l'idée, de la catégorie.

Tous les économistes, dit M. Proudhon, depuis A. Smith ont signalé les avantages et les inconvénients de la loi de division, mais en insistant beaucoup plus sur les premiers que sur les seconds, parce que cela servait mieux leur optimismisme, et sans qu'aucun d'eux se soit jamais demandé ce que pouvaient être les inconvénients d'une loi... Comment le même principe, poursuivi rigoureusement dans ses conséquences conduit-il à des effets diamétralement opposés ? Pas un économiste, ni avant ni depuis Smith, ne s'est seulement aperçu qu'il y eût là un problème à éclaircir. Say va jusqu'à reconnaître que dans la division du travail, la même cause qui produit le bien engendre le mal.

A. Smith a vu plus loin que ne le pense M. Proudhon. Il a très bien vu que dans la réalité la différence des talents naturels entre les individus est bien mondre que nous ne le croyons. Ces dispositions si différentes, qui semblent distinguer les hommes des diverses professions, quand ils sont parvenus à la maturité de l'âge, ne sont pas tant la cause que l'effet de la division du travail.

Dans le principe, un portefaix diffère moins d'un philosophe qu'un mâtin d'un lévrier. C'est la division du travail qui a mis un abîme entre l'un et l'autre. Tout cela n'empêche pas M. Proudhon de dire, dans un autre endroit, qu'Adam Smith ne se doutait même pas des inconvénients que produit la division du travail. C'est encore ce qui lui fait dire que J.-B. Say a le premier reconnu que dans la division du travail, la même cause qui produit le bien engendre le mal.

Mais écoutons Lemontey : Suum cuique 74.

M. J.B. Say m'a fait l'honneur d'adopter dans son excellent traité d'économie politique, le principe que j'ai mis au jour dans ce fragment sur l'influence morale de la division du travail. Le titre un peu frivole de mon livre ne lui a sans doute pas permis de me citer. Je ne puis attribuer qu'à ce motif le silence d'un écrivain trop riche de son propre fonds pour désavouer un emprunt aussi modique 75.

Rendons-lui cette justice : Lemontey a spirituellement exposé les conséquences fâcheuses de la division du travail telle qu'elle est constituée de nos jours, et M. Proudhon n'en trouvât à y ajouter. Mais puisque, par la faute de M. Proudhon, nous sommes une fois engagé dans cette question de priorité, disons encore en passant que, bien longtemps avant M. Lemontey, et dix-sept ans avant Adam Smith, élève d'A. Ferguson, celui-ci a exposé nettement la chose dans un chapitre qui traite spécialement de la division du travail.

Il y aurait lieu même de douter si la capacité générale d'une nation croît en proportion du progrès des arts. Plusieurs arts mécaniques... réussissent parfaitement lorsqu'ils sont totalement destitués du secours de la raison et du sentiment, et l'ignorance est la mère de l'industrie aussi bien que de la superstition. La réflexion et l'imagination sont sujettes à s'égayer : mais l'habitude de mouvoir le pied ou la main ne dépend ni de l'une ni de l'autre. Ainsi on pourrait dire que la perfection, à l'égard des manufactures, consiste à pouvoir se passer de l'esprit, de manière que sans effort de tête l'atelier

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74 "A chacun son dû ". (N.R.)
75 Lemontey : Oeuvres complètes, Parts, 1840, tome 1er, p. 245.
puisse être considéré comme une machine dont les parties sont des hommes... L'officier général peut être très habile dans l'art de la guerre, tandis que tout le mérite du soldat se borne à exécuter quelques mouvements du pied ou de la main. L'un peut avoir gagné ce que l'autre a perdu... Dans une période où tout est séparé, l'art de penser peut lui-même former un métier à part.

Pour terminer l'aperçu littéraire, nous nions formellement que tous les économistes aient insisté beaucoup plus sur les avantages que sur les inconvénients de la division du travail.

Il suffit de nommer Sismondi.

Ainsi, pour ce qui concerne les avantages de la division du travail, M. Proudhon n'avait rien d'autre à faire que de paraphraser plus ou moins pompeusement les phrases générales que tout le monde connaît.

Voyons maintenant comment il fait dériver de la division du travail prise comme loi générale, comme catégorie, comme pensée, les inconvénients qui y sont attachés. Comment se fait-il que cette catégorie, cette loi, implique une répartition inégale du travail au détriment du système égalitaire de M. Proudhon ?

A cette heure solennelle de la division du travail, le vent des tempêtes commence à souffler sur l'humanité. Le progrès ne s'accomplit pas pour tous d'une manière égale et uniforme; ... il commence par s'emparer d'un petit nombre de privilégiés... C'est cette accession de personnes de la part du progrès qui a fait croire si longtemps à l'inégalité naturelle et providentielle des conditions, enfanté les castes et constitué hiérarchiquement toutes les sociétés.

La division du travail a fait les castes. Or, les castes, ce sont les inconvénients de la division du travail; donc c'est la division du travail qui a engendré les inconvénients. Quod erat demonstrandum. Veu... Vou... Il suffit de nommer Sismondi. Tout le monde sait que... L'homme moderne n'est plus ce qu'il était il y a un siècle et demi. Il est devenu un être qui... Il n'est plus un être où toutes les parties sont en relation avec toutes les parties, où... Il est devenu un être qui... Il n'est plus un être où toutes les parties sont en relation avec toutes les parties, où... Il est devenu un être qui... Il n'est plus un être...
manœuvre d'un goujat 79, il s'en prend de nouveau à l'atelier et aux machines pour dégrader le travailleur "en lui donnant un maître "; et il achève son avilissement en le faisant "déchoir du rang d'artisan à celui de manœuvre ". La belle dialectique ! Et encore s'il s'en tenait là ; mais non, il lui faut une nouvelle histoire de la division du travail, non plus pour en faire dériver les contradictions, mais pour reconstruire l'atelier à sa manière. Pour arriver à ce but, il a besoin d'oublier tout ce qu'il vient de dire sur la division.

Le travail s'organise, se divise autrement selon les instruments dont il dispose. Le moulin à bras suppose une autre division du travail que le moulin à vapeur. C'est donc heurter de front l'histoire que de vouloir commencer par la division du travail en général, pour en venir ensuite à un instrument spécifique de production, les machines.

Les machines ne sont pas plus une catégorie économique, que ne saurait l'être le bœuf qui traîne la charrue. Les machines ne sont qu'une force productive. L'atelier moderne, qui repose sur l'application des machines, est un rapport social de production, une catégorie économique.

Voyons maintenant comment les choses se passent dans la brillante imagination de M. Proudhon.

Dans la société, l'apparition incessante des machines est l'antithèse, la formule inverse du travail : c'est la protestation du génie industriel contre le travail parcellaire et homicide, Qu'est-ce en effet qu'une machine ? Une manière de réunir diverses particules du travail, que la division avait séparées. Toute machine peut être définie un résumé de plusieurs opérations... Donc par la machine, il y aura restauration de travailleur... Les machines, se posant dans l'économie politique contradictoirement à la division du travail, représentent la synthèse, s'opposant à l'esprit humain à l'analyse... La division ne faisait que séparer les diverses parties du travail, laissant chacun se livrer à la spécialité qui lui agréait le plus : l'atelier groupe les travailleurs, selon le rapport de chaque partie au tout... il introduit le principe d'autorité dans le travail... Mais ce n'est pas tout : la machine ou l'atelier, après avoir dégradé le travailleur en lui donnant un maître, achève son avilissement en le faisant déchoir du rang d'artisan à celui de manœuvre... La période que nous parcourrons en ce moment, celle des machines, se distingue par un caractère particulier, c'est le salariat. Le salariat est postérieur à la division du travail et à l'échange.

Une simple observation à M. Proudhon. La séparation des diverses parties du travail, laissant à chacun la faculté de se livrer à la spécialité qui lui agréait le plus, séparation que M. Proudhon fait dater du commencement du monde, n'existe que dans l'industrie moderne sous le régime de la concurrence.

M. Proudhon nous fait ensuite une " généalogie " par trop " intéressante ", pour démontrer comment l'atelier est né de la division du travail, et le salariat de l'atelier.

1° Il suppose un homme qui a remarqué qu'en divisant la production en ses diverses parties, et la faisant exécuter chacune par un ouvrier à part,
on on multiplierait les forces de production.

2° Cet homme,

saisissant le fil de cette idée, se dit qu'en formant un groupe permanent de travailleurs assortis pour l'objet spécial qu'il se propose, il obtiendra une production plus soutenue, etc.

3° Cet homme fait une proposition à d'autres hommes, pour leur faire saisir son idée et le fil de son idée.

4° Cet homme, au début de l'industrie, traite d'égal à égal avec ses compagnons devenus plus tard ses ouvriers.

5° Il est sensible, en effet, que cette égalité primitive a dû rapidement disparaître par la position avantageuse du maître et la dépendance du salarié.

Voilà encore un échantillon de la méthode historique et descriptive de M. Proudhon.

Examinons maintenant, sous le point de vue historique et économique, si véritablement l'atelier ou la machine a introduit le principe d'autorité dans la société postérieurement à la division du travail ; s'il a d'un côté réhabilité l'ouvrier, tout en le soumettant de l'autre à l'autorité ; si la machine est la recomposition du travail divisé, la synthèse du travail opposée à son analyse.

La société tout entière a cela de commun avec l'intérieur d'un atelier, qu'elle aussi a sa division du travail. Si l'on prenait pour modèle la division du travail dans un atelier moderne, pour en faire l'application à une société entière, la société la mieux organisée pour la production des richesses serait incontestablement celle qui n'aurait qu'un seul entrepreneur en chef, distribuant la besogne selon une règle arrêtée d'avance aux divers membres de la communauté. Mais il n'en est point ainsi. Tandis que dans l'intérieur de l'atelier moderne la division du travail est minutieusement réglée par l'autorité de l'entrepreneur, la société moderne n'a d'autre règle, d'autre autorité, pour distribuer le travail, que la libre concurrence.

Sous le régime patriarcal, sous le régime des castes, sous le régime féodal et corporatif, il y avait division du travail dans la société tout entière selon des règles fixes. Ces règles ont-elles été établies par un législateur ? Non. Nées primitivement des conditions de la production matérielle, elle n'ont été érigées en lois que bien plus tard. C'est ainsi que  

79 Apprenti maçon. (N.R.)
ces diverses formes de la division du travail devinrent autant de bases d'organisation sociale. Quant à la division du travail dans l'atelier, elle était très peu développée dans toutes ces formes de la société.

On peut même établir en règle générale, que moins l'autorité présidait à la division du travail dans l'intérieur de la société, plus la division du travail se développait dans l'intérieur de l'atelier, et plus elle y était soumise à l'autorité d'un seul. Ainsi, l'autorité dans l'atelier et celle dans la société, par rapport à la division du travail, sont en raison inverse l'une de l'autre.

Il importe maintenant de voir ce que c'est que l'atelier, dans lequel les occupations sont très séparées, où la tâche de chaque ouvrier est réduite à une opération très simple, et où, l'autorité, le capital, groupe et dirige les travaux. Comment cet atelier a-t-il pris naissance ? Pour répondre à cette question, nous aurions à examiner, comment l'industrie manufacturière proprement dite s'est développée. J'entends parler de cette industrie qui n'est pas encore l'industrie moderne, avec ses machines, mais qui n'est déjà plus ni l'industrie des artisans du moyen âge, ni l'industrie domestique. Nous n'entrons pas en de grands détails : nous ne donnerons que quelques points sommaires, pour faire voir qu'avec des formules on ne peut pas faire de l'histoire.

Une condition des plus indispensables pour la formation de l'industrie manufacturière était l'accumulation des capitaux, facilitée par la découverte de l'Amérique et l'introduction de ses métaux précieux.

Il est suffisamment prouvé que l'augmentation des moyens d'échange eut pour conséquence, d'un côté, la dépréciation des salaires et des rentes foncières, et de l'autre l'accroissement des profits industriels. En d'autres termes : autant la classe des propriétaires et la classe des travailleurs, les seigneurs féodaux et le peuple tombèrent, autant s'éleva la classe des capitalistes, la bourgeoisie.

II y eut d'autres circonstances encore qui concoururent simultanément au développement de l'industrie manufacturière : l'augmentation des marchandises mises en circulation dès que le commerce pénètre aux Indes orientales par la voie du cap de Bonne-Espérance, le régime colonial, le développement du commerce maritime.

Un autre point qu'on n'a pas encore assez apprécié dans l'histoire de l'industrie manufacturière, c'est le licenciement des nombreuses suites des seigneurs féodaux, dont les membres subalternes devinrent des vagabonds avant d'entrer dans l'atelier. La création de l'atelier est précédée d'un vagabondage presque universel au XV° et au XVI° siècles. L'atelier trouva encore un puissant appui dans les nombreux paysans qui, chassés continuellement des campagnes par la transformation des champs en prairies et par les travaux agricoles nécessitant moins de bras pour la culture des terres, vinrent affluer dans les villes pendant des siècles entiers.

L'agrandissement du marché, l'accumulation des capitaux, les modifications survenues dans la position sociale des classes, une foule de personnes se trouvant privées de leurs sources de revenu, voilà autant de conditions historiques pour la formation de la manufacture. Ce ne furent pas, comme dit M. Proudhon, des stipulations à l'amiable entre des égaux qui ont rassemblé les hommes dans l'atelier. Ce n'est pas même dans le sein des anciennes corporations que la manufacture a pris naissance. Ce fut le marchand qui devint chef de l'atelier moderne, et non pas l'ancien maître des corporations. Presque partout il y eut une lutte acharnée entre la manufacture et les métiers.

L'accumulation et la concentration d'instruments et de travailleurs précédèrent le développement de la division du travail dans l'intérieur de l'atelier. Une manufacture consistait beaucoup plus dans la réunion de beaucoup de travailleurs et de beaucoup de métiers dans un seul endroit, dans une salle sous le commandement d'un capital, que dans l'analyse des travaux et dans l'adaptation d'un ouvrier spécial à une tâche très simple.

L'utilité d'un atelier consistait bien moins dans la division du travail proprement dite, que dans cette circonstance qu'on travaillait sur une plus grande échelle, qu'on épargnait beaucoup de frais, etc. A la fin du XVI° et au commencement du XVII° siècle, la manufacture hollandaise connaissait à peine la division.

Le développement de la division du travail suppose la réunion des travailleurs dans un atelier. Il n'y a même pas un seul exemple, ni au XVI°, ni au XVII° siècle, que les diverses branches d'un même métier aient été exploitées séparément au point qu'il aurait eu de les réunir dans un seul endroit pour obtenir l'atelier tout fait. Mais une fois les hommes et les instruments réunis, la division du travail telle qu'elle existait sous la forme des corporations se reproduisit, se reflétait nécessairement dans l'intérieur de l'atelier.

Pour M. Proudhon, qui voit les choses à l'envers, si toutefois il les voit, la division du travail dans le sens d'Adam Smith, précède l'atelier, qui en est une condition d'existence.

Les machines proprement dites datent de la fin du XVII° siècle. Rien de plus absurde que de voir dans les machines l'antithèse de la division du travail, la synthèse rétablissant l'unité dans le travail morcelé.

La machine est une réunion des instruments de travail, et pas du tout une combinaison des travaux pour l'ouvrier lui-même.

Quand, par la division du travail, chaque opération particulière a été réduite à l'emploi d'un instrument simple, la réunion de tous ces instruments, mis en action par un seul moteur, constitue - une machine 80.

80 Babbage : Traité sur l'économie des machines, etc., Paris, 1833.
Outils simples, accumulation des outils, outils composés, mise en mouvement d’un outil composé par un seul moteur manuel, par l’homme, mise en mouvement de ces instruments par les forces naturelles, machine, système des machines ayant un automate pour moteur, - voilà la marche des machines.

La concentration des instruments de production et la division du travail sont aussi inséparables l’une de l’autre que le sont, dans le régime politique, la concentration des pouvoirs publics et la division des intérêts privés. L’Angleterre, avec la concentration des terres, ces instruments du travail agricole, a également la division du travail agricole et la mécanique appliquée à l’exploitation de la terre. La France, qui a la division des instruments, le régime parcellaire, n’a en général ni division du travail agricole ni application des machines à la terre.

Pour M. Proudhon, la concentration des instruments de travail est la négation de la division du travail. Dans la réalité, nous trouvons encore le contraire. À mesure que la concentration des instruments se développe, la division se développe aussi et vice versa. Voilà ce qui fait que toute grande invention dans la mécanique est suivie d’une plus grande division du travail, et chaque accroissement dans la division du travail amène à son tour de nouvelles inventions mécaniques.

Nous n’avons pas besoin de rappeler que les grands progrès de la division du travail ont commencé en Angleterre après l’invention des machines. Ainsi les tisserands et les fileurs étaient pour la plupart des paysans tels qu’on en rencontre encore dans les pays arriérés. L’invention des machines a achevé de séparer l’industrie manufacturière de l’industrie agricole. Le tisserand et le fileur, réunis naguère dans une même famille, furent séparés par la machine. Grâce à la machine, le fileur peut habiter l’Angleterre en même temps que le tisserand séjourne aux Indes orientales. Avant l’invention des machines, l’industrie d’un pays s’exerçait principalement sur les matières premières qui étaient le produit de son propre sol : ainsi en Angleterre la laine, en Allemagne le lin, en France les soies et le lin, aux Indes orientales et dans le Levant le coton, etc. Grâce à l’application des machines et de la vapeur, la division du travail a pu prendre de telles dimensions que la grande industrie, détachée du sol national, dépend uniquement du marché de l’univers, des échanges internationaux, d’une division de travail internationale. Enfin, la machine exerce une telle influence sur la division du travail que, lorsque dans la fabrication d’un ouvrage quelconque, on a trouvé le moyen d’introduire partiellement la mécanique, la fabrication se divise aussitôt en deux exploitations indépendantes l’une de l’autre.

Faut-il parler du but providentiel et philanthropique que M. Proudhon découvre dans l’invention et l’application primitive des machines ?

Lorsque, en Angleterre, le marché eut pris un tel développement que le travail manuel n’y pouvait plus suffire,— on éprouva le besoin des machines. On songeait alors à faire l’application de la science mécanique, déjà tout faite au XVIIIe siècle.

L’atelier automatique marqua son début par des actes qui n’avaient rien moins que philanthropiques. Les enfants furent tenus au travail à coups de fouet; on en faisait un objet de trafic, et on passait un contrat avec les maisons des orphelins. On abolit toutes les lois sur l’apprentissage des ouvriers, parce que, pour nous servir des phrases de M. Proudhon, on n’avait plus besoin des ouvriers synthétiques. Enfin, depuis 1825, presque toutes les nouvelles inventions furent le résultat des collisions entre l’ouvrier et l’entrepreneur qui cherchait à tout prix à déprécier la spécialité de l’ouvrier. Après chaque nouvelle grève tant soit peu importante, surgit une nouvelle machine. L’ouvrier voyait si peu dans l’application des machines une espèce de réhabilitation, de restauration, comme dit M. Proudhon, qu’au XVIIIe siècle, il résista pendant bien longtemps à l’empire naissant de l’automate.

Wyatt, dit le docteur Ure, avait découvert les doigts fileurs [la série des rouleaux cannelés], longtemps avant Arkwright... La principale difficulté ne consistait pas autant dans l’invention d’un mécanisme automatique... La difficulté consistait surtout dans la discipline nécessaire pour faire renoncer les hommes à leurs habitudes irrégulières dans le travail, et pour les identifier avec la régularité invariable d’un grand automate. Mais inventer et mettre en vogue un code de discipline manufacturière, convenable aux besoins et à la célérité du système automatique, voilà une entreprise digne d’Hercule, voilà le noble ouvrage d’Arkwright.

En somme, par l’introduction des machines la division du travail dans l’intérieur de la société s’est accrue, la tâche de l’ouvrier dans l’intérieur de l’atelier s’est simplifiée, le capital a été réuni, l’homme a été dépecé davantage.

M. Proudhon veut-il être économiste et abandonner pour un instant " l’évolution dans la série de l’entendement ", alors il va puiser son érudition dans A. Smith, au temps où l’atelier automatique ne faisait que de naître. En effet, quelle différence entre la division du travail telle qu’elle existait du temps d’Adam Smith et telle que nous la voyons dans l’atelier automatique. Pour bien la faire comprendre, il suffira de citer quelques passages de la Philosophie des manufactures, du docteur Ure.

Lorsque A. Smith écrivit son ouvrage immortel sur les éléments de l’économie politique, le système automatique d’industrie était encore à peine connu. La division du travail lui parut avec raison le grand principe du perfectionnement en manufacture; il démontra, dans la fabrique des épinglees, qu’un ouvrier en se perfectionnant par la pratique sur un seul et même point devient plus expéditif et moins coûteux. Dans chaque branche de manufacture, il vit que d’après ce principe certaines opérations, telles que la coupe des fils de laiton en longueurs égales, deviennent d’une exécution facile; que d’autres, telles que la façon et l’attache des têtes d’épingle, sont à proportion plus difficiles : il en conclut donc que l’on peut naturellement approprier à chacune de ces opérations un ouvrier dont le salaire corresponde à son habilité. C’est cette approvision qui est l’essence de la division des...
travaux. Mais ce qui pouvait servir d’exemple utile du temps du docteur Smith ne serait propre aujourd’hui qu’à induire le public en erreur relativement au principe réel de l’industrie manufacturière. En effet, la distribution, ou plutôt l’adaptation des travaux aux différentes capacités individuelles, n’entre guère dans le plan d’opérations des manufactures automatiques : au contraire, partout où un procédé quelconque exige beaucoup de dextérité et une main sûre, on le retire du bras de l’ouvrier trop adroit et souvent enclin à des irrégularités de plusieurs genres, pour en charger un mécanisme particulier, dont l’opération automatique est si bien réglée qu’un enfant peut la surveiller.

Le principe du système automatique est donc de substituer l’art mécanique à la main-d’œuvre et de remplacer la division du travail entre les artisans par l’analyse d’un procédé dans ses principes constitutifs. Selon le système de l’opération manuelle la main-d’œuvre était ordinairement l’élément le plus dispensable d’un produit quelconque ; mais d’après le système automatique, les talents de l’artisan se trouvent progressivement supplantés par de simples surveillants de mécanique.

La faiblesse de la nature humaine est telle que plus l’ouvrier est habile, plus il devient volontaire et intraitable, et, par conséquent, moins il est propre à un système de mécanique à l’ensemble duquel ses boutades capricieuses peuvent faire un tort considérable. Le grand point du manufacturier actuel est donc, en combinant la science avec ses capitaux, de réduire la tâche de ses ouvriers à exercer leur vigilance et leur dextérité, facultés bien perfectionnées dans leur jeunesse, lorsqu’on les fixe sur un seul objet.

D’après le système des gradations du travail, il faut faire un apprentissage de plusieurs années avant que l’œil et la main deviennent assez habiles pour exercer certains tours de force en mécanique ; mais selon le système qui décompose un procédé en le réduisant à ses principes constitutifs, et qui en soumet toutes les parties à l’opération d’une machine automatique, on peut confier ces mêmes parties élémentaires à une personne douée d’une capacité ordinaire, après l’avoir soumise à une courte épreuve : on peut même, en cas d’urgence, la faire passer d’une machine à l’autre, à la volonté du directeur de l’établissement. De telles mutations sont en opposition ouverte avec l’ancienne routine qui divise le travail et qui assigne à un ouvrier la tâche de façonner la tête d’une épingle, et à un autre celle d’en aiguiser la pointe, travail dont l’uniformité ennuyeuse les énerve... Mais, d’après le principe d’égalisation ou le système automatique, les facultés de l’ouvrier ne sont soumises qu’à un exercice agréable, etc. Son emploi étant de veiller au travail d’un mécanisme bien réglé, il peut l’apprendre en peu de temps ; et lorsqu’il transfère ses services d’une machine à une autre, il varie sa tâche et développe ses idées, en réfléchissant aux combinaisons générales qui résultent de ses travaux et de ceux de ses compagnons. Ainsi cette contrainte des facultés, ce rétrécissement des idées, cet état de gêne du corps qui ont été attribués non sans raison à la division du travail, ne peuvent d’ailleurs que dans des circonstances ordinaires avoir lieu sous le régime d’une égale distribution des travaux.

Le but constant et la tendance de tout perfectionnement dans le mécanisme est en effet de se passer entièrement du travail de l’homme et d’en diminuer le prix, en substituant l’industrie des femmes et des enfants à celle de l’ouvrier adulte, ou le travail d’ouvriers grossiers à celui d’habiles artisans... Cette tendance à n’employer que des enfants au regard vil et aux doigts déliés, au lieu de journaliers possédant une longue expérience, démontre que le dogme scolastique de la division du travail selon les différents degrés d’habileté a enfin été exploité par nos manufacturiers éclairés 81.

Ce qui caractérise la division du travail dans l’intérieur de la société moderne, c’est qu’elle engendre les spécialités, les espèces et avec elles l’idiotisme du métier.

Nous sommes frappés d’admiration, dit Lemontey, en voyant parmi les anciens le même personnage être à la fois dans un degré éminent, philosophe, poète, orateur, historien, prétre, administrateur, général d’armée. Nos âmes s’épouvantent à l’aspect d’un si vaste domaine. Chacun plante sa haie et s’enferme dans son enclos. J’ignore si par cette découpage le champ s’agrandit mais je sais bien que l’homme se repentisse.

Ce qui caractérise la division du travail dans l’atelier automatique, c’est que le travail y a perdu tout caractère de spécialité. Mais du moment que tout développement spécial cesse, le besoin d’universalité, la tendance vers un développement intégral de l’individu commence à se faire sentir. L’atelier automatique efface les spécialités, les espèces et l’idiotisme du métier.

M. Proudhon, n’ayant même pas compris ce seul côté révolutionnaire de l’atelier automatique, fait un pas en arrière, et propose à l’ouvrier de faire non seulement la douzième partie d’une épingle, mais successivement toutes les douze parties. L’ouvrier arriverait ainsi à la science et à la conscience de l’épingle. Voilà ce que c’est que le travail synthétique de M. Proudhon. Personne ne contestera que faire un mouvement en avant et un autre en arrière, c’est également faire un mouvement synthétique.

81 André Ure : Philosophie des manufactures ou Économie industrielle, tome I, chap. 1er.
En résumé, M. Proudhon n'est pas allé au-delà de l'idéal du petit bourgeois. Et pour réaliser cet idéal, il n'imagine rien de mieux que de nous ramener au compagnon, ou tout au plus au maître artisan du moyen âge. Il suffit, dit-il quelque part dans son livre, d'avoir fait une seule fois dans sa vie un chef-d'œuvre, de s'être senti une seule fois homme. N'est-ce pas là, pour la forme autant que pour le fond, le chef-d'œuvre exigé par le corps de métier du moyen âge ?

3. **La concurrence et le monopole**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bon côté de la concurrence</th>
<th><em>La concurrence est aussi essentielle au travail que la division. Elle est nécessaire à l'avènement de l'égalité.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mauvais côté de la concurrence</td>
<td><em>Le principe est la négation de lui-même. Son effet le plus certain est de perdre ceux qu'elle entraîne.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Réflexion générale.</td>
<td><em>Les inconvénients qui marchent à sa suite, de même que le bien qu'elle procure,... découlent logiquement les uns et les autres du principe.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problème à résoudre</td>
<td><em>Demander le principe d'accommodement qui doit dériver d'une loi supérieure à la liberté elle-même.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| VARIANTE | *Il ne saurait donc être ici question de détruire la concurrence, chose aussi impossible que de détruire la liberté; il s'agit d'en trouver l'équilibre, je dirais volontiers la police.* |

M. Proudhon commence par défendre la nécessité éternelle de la concurrence contre ceux qui la veulent remplacer par l'émulation.

Il n'y a pas "d'émulation sans but", et comme l'objet de toute passion est nécessairement analogue à la passion elle-même, d'une femme pour l'aman, du pouvoir pour l'ambitieux, de l'or pour l'avare, une couronne pour le poète, l'objet de l'émulation industrielle est nécessairement le profit. L'émulation n'est pas autre chose que la concurrence même.

La concurrence est l'émulation en vue du profit. L'émulation industrielle est-elle nécessairement l'émulation en vue du profit, c'est-à-dire la concurrence ? M. Proudhon le prouve en l'affirmant. Nous l'avons vu : affirmer, pour lui, c'est prouver, de même que supposer c'est nier.

Si l'objet immédiat de l'aman est la femme, l'objet immédiat de l'émulation industrielle est le produit et non le profit.

La concurrence n'est pas l'émulation industrielle, c'est l'émulation commerciale. De nos jours, l'émulation industrielle n'existe qu'en vue du commerce. Il y a même des phases dans la vie économique des peuples modernes où tout le monde est saisi d'une espèce de vertige pour faire du profit sans produire. Ce vertige de spéculation, qui revient périodiquement, met à nu le véritable caractère de la concurrence qui cherche à échapper à la nécessité de l'émulation industrielle.

Si vous aviez dit à un artisan du XIVe siècle qu'on allait abroger les privilèges et toute l'organisation féodale de l'industrie pour mettre à la place l'émulation, il vous aurait répondu que les privilèges des diverses corporations, maîtrises, jurandes, sont la concurrence organisée. M. Proudhon ne dit pas mieux en affirmant que l'émulation n'est pas autre chose que la concurrence elle-même. *(T1, p.211)*

Ordonnez qu'à partir du 1er janvier 1847, le travail et le salaire soient garantis à tout le monde : aussitôt un immense relâche va succéder à la tension ardente de l'industrie. *(T1, p.212)*

Au lieu d'une supposition, d'une affirmation et d'une négation, nous avons maintenant une ordonnance que M. Proudhon rend tout exprès pour prouver la nécessité de la concurrence, son éternité comme catégorie, etc...

Si l'on s'imagine qu'il ne fait que des ordonnances pour sortir de la concurrence, on n'en sortira jamais. Si l'on pousse les choses jusqu'à proposer d'abolir la concurrence, tout en conservant le salaire, on proposera de faire un non-sens par décret royal. Mais les peuples ne procèdent pas par décret royal. Avant de faire de ces ordonnances-là, ils doivent du moins avoir changé de fond en comble leurs conditions d'existence industrielle et politique, et par conséquent toute leur manière d'être.

M. Proudhon répondra avec son assurance imperturbable que c'est l'hypothèse "d'une transformation de notre nature sans antécédents historiques", et qu'il aurait droit "de nous écarter de la discussion", nous ne savons pas en vertu de quelle ordonnance.

M. Proudhon ignore que l'histoire tout entière n'est qu'une transformation continue de la nature humaine.

*Restons dans les faits. La Révolution française a été faite pour la liberté industrielle autant que pour la liberté politique; et bien que la France, en 1789, n'eût point aperçu toutes les conséquences du principe dont elle demandait la réalisation, disons-le hautement, elle ne s'est trompée ni dans ses vœux, ni dans son attente. Quiconque essaierait de le nier perdrait à mes yeux droit à la critique : je ne disputerai jamais avec un adversaire qui poserait en principe l'erreur spontanée de vingt-cinq millions d'hommes... Pourquoi donc, si la concurrence n'eût été un principe de l'économie sociale, un*
décrit de la destinée, une nécessité de l'âme humaine, pourquoi, au lieu d'abolir corporations, maîtrises et jurandes, ne songeait-on plutôt à réparer le tout ?

Ainsi, puisque les Français du XVIIIe siècle ont aboli corporations, maîtrises et jurandes au lieu de les modifier, les Français du XIXe siècle doivent modifier la concurrence au lieu de l'aboli. Puisque la concurrence a été établie en France, au XVIIIe siècle, comme conséquence de besoins historiques, cette concurrence ne doit pas être détruite au XIXe siècle, à cause d'autres besoins historiques. M. Proudhon, ne prenant pas que l'établissement de la concurrence se liait au développement réel des hommes du XVIIIe siècle, fait de la concurrence une nécessité de l'âme humaine, in partibus fidei 

Qu'aurait-il fait du grand Colbert pour le XVIIe siècle ?

Après la Révolution vient l'état de choses actuel. M. Proudhon y puisse également des faits pour montrer l'éternité de la concurrence, en prouvant que toutes les industries dans lesquelles cette catégorie n'est pas encore assez développé, comme dans l'agriculture, sont dans un état d'inferiorité, de caducité.

D'après ce qu'il y a des industries qui ne sont pas encore à la hauteur de la concurrence, que d'autres encore sont au-dessous du niveau de la production bourgeoise, c'est un radotage qui ne prouve nullement l'éternité de la concurrence.

Toute la logique de M. Proudhon se résume en ceci : la concurrence est un rapport social dans lequel nous développons actuellement nos forces productives. Il donne à cette vérité, non pas des développements logiques, mais des formes souvent très bien développées, en disant que la concurrence est l'émulation industrielle, le mode actuel d'être libre, la responsabilité dans le travail, la constitution de la valeur, une condition pour l'avancement de l'égalité, un principe de l'économie sociale, un décret de la destinée, une nécessité de l'âme humaine, une inspiration de la justice éternelle, la liberté dans la division, la division dans la liberté, une catégorie économique.

Qui dit concurrence dit but commun, et cela prouve, d'un côté, que la concurrence est l'association; de l'autre, que la concurrence n’est pas l'égoïsme. Et qui dit égoïsme ne dit-il pas but commun ? Chaque égoïsme s’exerce dans la société et par le fait de la société. Il suppose donc la société c’est-à-dire des buts communs, des besoins communs, des moyens de production communs, etc., etc... Serait-ce par hasard pour cela que la concurrence et l'association dont parlent les socialistes ne sont pas même divergentes ?

Les socialistes savent très bien que la société actuelle est fondée sur la concurrence. Comment pourraient-ils reprocher à la concurrence de renverser la société actuelle qu'ils veulent renverser eux-mêmes ? Et comment pourraient-ils reprocher à la concurrence de renverser la société à venir, dans laquelle ils voient, au contraire, le renversement de la concurrence ?

M. Proudhon dit, plus loin, que la concurrence est l’opposé du monopole, que, par conséquent, elle ne saurait être l’opposé de l’association.

Le féodalisme était, dès son origine, opposé à la monarchie patriarcale; ainsi, il n'était pas opposé à la concurrence, qui n'existait pas encore. S'en suit que la concurrence n'est pas opposée au féodalisme ?

Dans le fait, société, association sont des dénominations qu'on peut donner à toutes les sociétés, à la société féodale aussi bien qu'à la société bourgeoise, qui est l'association fondée sur la concurrence. Comment donc peut-il y avoir des socialistes qui, par le seul mot d'association, croient pouvoir réfluer la concurrence ? Et comment M. Proudhon lui-même peut-il vouloir défendre la concurrence contre le socialisme, en désignant la concurrence sous le seul mot d'association ?

Tout ce que nous venons de dire fait le beau côté de la concurrence, telle que l'entend M. Proudhon. Passons maintenant au vilain côté, c'est-à-dire au côté négatif de la concurrence, à ce qu'elle a de destructif, de subversif, de qualités malfaisantes.

Le tableau que nous en fait M. Proudhon a quelque chose de lugubre.

La concurrence engendre la misère, elle fomente la guerre civile, elle " change les zones naturelles ", confond les nationalités, trouble les familles, corrompt la conscience publique, " bouleverse les notions de l'équité, de la justice ", de la morale, et, ce qui est pire, elle détruit le commerce probe et libre et ne donne pas même en compensation la valeur synthétique, le prix fixe et honnête. Elle désenchanterait tout le monde, même les économistes. Elle pousse les choses jusqu'à se détruire elle-même.

D'après tout ce que M. Proudhon en dit de mal, peut-il y avoir, pour les rapports de la société bourgeoise, pour ses principes et ses illusions, un élément plus dissolvant, plus destructif que la concurrence ?

Notons bien que la concurrence devient toujours plus destructif pour les rapports bourgeois, à mesure qu'elle excite à une création fétide de nouvelles forces productives, c'est-à-dire des conditions matérielles d'une société nouvelle. Sous ce rapport, du moins, le mauvais côté de la concurrence aurait son bon.

La concurrence comme position ou phase économique considérée dans son origine est le résultat nécessaire... de la théorie de réduction des frais généraux.

82 " Dans les pays infidèles. " (N.R.)
Pour M. Proudhon, la circulation du sang doit être une conséquence de la théorie de Harvey. Le monopole est le terme fatal de la concurrence, qui l'engendre par une négation incessante d'elle-même. Cette génération du monopole en est déjà la justification ... Le monopole est l'opposé naturel de la concurrence ... mais dès lors que la concurrence est nécessaire, elle implique l'idée du monopole, puisque le monopole est comme le siège de chaque individualité concurrence.

Nous nous réjouissons avec M. Proudhon, qu'il puisse au moins une fois bien appliquer sa formule de thèse et d'antithèse. Tout le monde sait que le monopole moderne est engendré par la concurrence elle-même.

Quant au contenu, M. Proudhon se tient à des images poétiques. La concurrence faisait de chaque subdivision du travail comme une souveraineté où chaque individu se posait dans sa force et dans son indépendance.

Le monopole est le " siège de chaque individualité concurrence ". La souveraineté vaut au moins le siège.

M. Proudhon ne parle que du monopole moderne engendré par la concurrence. Mais nous savons tous que la concurrence a été engendrée par le monopole féodal. Ainsi primitivement la concurrence a été le contraire du monopole, et non le monopole le contraire de la concurrence. Donc, le monopole moderne n'est pas une simple antithèse, c'est au contraire la vrai synthèse.

Thèse : Le monopole féodal antérieur à la concurrence.  
Antithèse : La concurrence.  
Synthèse : Le monopole moderne, qui est la négation du monopole féodal en tant qu'il suppose le régime de la concurrence, et qui est la négation de la concurrence en tant qu'il est mono

Ainsi le monopole moderne, le monopole bourgeois, est le monopole synthétique, la négation de la négation, l'unité des contraires. Il est le monopole à l'état pur, normal, rationnel. M. Proudhon est en contradiction avec sa propre philosophie, quand il fait du monopole bourgeois le monopole à l'état cru, simpliste, contradictoire, spasmodique. M. Rossi, que M. Proudhon cite plusieurs fois au sujet du monopole, paraît avoir mieux saisi le caractère synthétique du monopole bourgeois. Dans son Cours d'économie politique, il distingue entre des monopoles artificiels et des monopoles naturels. Les monopoles féodaux, dit-il, sont artificiels, c'est-à-dire arbitraires; les monopoles bourgeois sont naturels, c'est-à-dire rationnels.

Le monopole est une bonne chose, raisonne M. Proudhon, puisque c'est une catégorie économique, une émanation de la raison impersonnelle de l'humanité. La concurrence est encore une bonne chose, puisqu'elle est, elle aussi, une catégorie économique. Mais ce qui n'est pas bon, c'est la réalité du monopole et la réalité de la concurrence. Ce qui est pire encore, c'est que la concurrence et le monopole se dévoilent mutuellement. Que faire ? Chercher la synthèse de ces deux pensées éternelles, l'arracher au sein de Dieu où elle est déposée de temps immémorial.

Dans la vie pratique, on trouve non seulement la concurrence, le monopole et leur antagonisme, mais aussi leur synthèse, qui n'est pas une formule, mais un mouvement. Le monopole produit la concurrence, la concurrence produit le monopole. Les monopoleurs se font de la concurrence, les concurrents deviennent monopoleurs. Si les monopoleurs restreignent la concurrence entre eux par des associations partielles, la concurrence s'accroît parmi les ouvriers; et plus la masse des prolétaires s'accroît vis-à-vis des monopoleurs d'une nation, plus la concurrence devient effrénée entre les monopoleurs des différentes nations. La synthèse est telle, que le monopole ne peut se maintenir qu'en passant continuellement par la lutte de la concurrence.

Pour engendrer dialectiquement les impôts qui viennent après le monopole, M. Proudhon nous parle du génie social, qui, après avoir suivi irrépétiblement sa route en zigzag, après avoir marché d'un pas assuré, sans repentir et sans arrêt, arrivé à l'angle du monopole, porte en arrière un mélancolique regard, et après une réflexion profonde, frappe d'impôts tous les objets de la production, et crée toute une organisation administrative, afin que tous les emplois soient livrés au prolétariat et payés par les hommes du monopole.

Que dire de ce génie qui, étant à jeun, se promène en zigzag ? Et que dire de cette promenade qui n'aurait d'autre but que de démolir les bourgeois par les impôts, tandis que les impôts servent précisément à donner aux bourgeois les moyens de se conserver comme classe dominante ?

Pour faire entrevoy seulement la manière dans laquelle M. Proudhon traite les détails économiques, il suffira de dire, que d'après lui, l'impôt sur la consommation aurait été établi en vue de l'égalité et pour venir en aide au prolétariat.

L'impôt sur la consommation n'a pris son véritable développement que depuis l'avènement de la bourgeoisie. Entre les mains du capital industriel, c'est-à-dire de la richesse sobre et économie qui se maintient, se reproduit et s'agrandit par l'exploitation directe du travail, l'impôt sur la consommation était un moyen d'exploiter la richesse frivole, joyeuse, prodigue des grands seigneurs qui ne faisaient que consommer. Jacques Steuart a très bien exposé ce but primitif de l'impôt sur la consommation dans ses Recherches des principes de l'économie politique, qu'il a publiées dix ans avant A. Smith.

Dans la monarchie pure, dit-il, les prêtres semblent jaloux en quelque sorte de l'accroissement des richesses et lèvent des impôts en conséquence sur ceux qui deviennent riches, - impôts sur la production. Dans le gouvernement constitutionnel, ils tombent principalement sur ceux qui deviennent pauvres, - impôts sur la consommation. Ainsi, les monarques mettent un impôt sur l'industrie... par exemple la capititation et la taille sont proportionnées à l'opulence supposée de ceux...
qui y sont assujettis. Chacun est imposé à raison du profit qu’il est censé faire. Dans les gouverne-
ments constitutionnels, les impôts se lèvent ordinairement sur la consommation. Chacun est imposé 
à raison de la dépense qu’il fait.

Quant à la succession logique des impôts, de la balance du commerce, du crédit - dans l’entendement de M. Proudhon - nous ferons observer seulement, que la bourgeoisie anglaise, parvenue sous Guillaume d’Orange à sa constitution politique, créa tout d’un coup un nouveau système d’impôts, le crédit public et le système des droits protecteurs, dès qu’elle fut en état de développer librement ses conditions d’existence.

Cet aperçu suffira pour donner au lecteur une juste idée des élucubrations de M. Proudhon sur la police ou l’impôt, la balance du commerce, le crédit, le communisme et la population. Nous défions la critique la plus indulgente d’aider ces chapitres sérieusement.

4. La propriété ou la rente
A chaque époque historique la propriété s’est développée différemment et dans une série de rapports sociaux entièrement différents. Ainsi définir la propriété bourgeoise n’est autre chose que faire l’exposé de tous les rapports sociaux de la production bourgeoise.

Vouloir donner une définition de la propriété, comme d’un rapport indépendant, d’une catégorie à part, d’une idée abstraite et éternelle, ce ne peut être qu’une illusion de métaphysique ou de jurisprudence.

M. Proudhon, tout en ayant l’air de parler de la propriété en général, ne traite que de la propriété foncière, de la renie foncière.

L’origine de la rente, comme de la propriété, est pour ainsi dire extra-économique : elle réside dans des considérations de psychologie et de morale qui ne tiennent que de fort loin à la production des richesses.83

Ainsi, M. Proudhon se reconnaît incapable de comprendre l’origine économique de la rente et de la propriété. Il convient que cette incapacité l’oblige à recourir à des considérations de psychologie et de morale, lesquelles, tenant en effet de fort loin à la production des richesses, tiennent pourtant de fort près à l’exigüité de ses vues historiques. M. Proudhon affirme que l’origine de la propriété a quelque chose de mystique et de mystérieux. Or, voir du mystère dans l’origine de la propriété, c’est-à-dire transformer en mystère le rapport de la production elle-même à la distribution des instruments de production, n’est-ce pas, pour parler le langage de M. Proudhon, renoncer à toute prétention à la science économique ?

M. Proudhon

se borne à rappeler qu’à la septième époque de l’évolution économique - le crédit - la fiction ayant fait évanouir la réalité, l’activité humaine menaçant de se perdre dans le vide, il était devenu nécessaire de rattacher plus fortement l’homme à la nature : or, la rente, a été le prix de ce nouveau contrat 84.

L’homme aux quarante écus a pressenti un Proudhon à venir :

Monsieur le créateur, à vous permis : chacun est maître dans son monde mais vous ne me ferez jamais croire que celui où nous sommes soit de verre.

Dans votre monde, où le crédit était un moyen pour se perdre dans le vide, il est très possible que la propriété soit devenue nécessaire pour rattacher l’homme à la nature. Dans le monde de la production réelle, où la propriété foncière précède toujours le crédit, l’horror vacui 85 de M. Proudhon ne pouvait pas exister.

L’existence de la rente une fois admise, quelle qu’en soit d’ailleurs l’origine, elle se débat contradictoirement entre le fermier et le propriétaire foncier. Quel est le dernier terme de ce débat, en d’autres mots, quelle est la quotité moyenne de la rente ? Voici ce que dit M. Proudhon :

La théorie de Ricardo répond à cette question. Au début de la société, lorsque l’homme, nouveau sur la terre, n’avait devant lui que l’immensité des forêts, que la terre était vaste et que l’industrie commençait à naitre, la rente dut être nulle. La terre, non encore façonnée par le travail, était un objet d’utilité ; ce n’était pas une valeur d’échange ; elle était commune, non sociale. Peu à peu, la multiplication des familles et le progrès de l’agriculture firent sentir le prix de la terre. Le travail vint donner au sol sa valeur : de là naquit la rente. Plus, avec la même quantité de services, un champ put rendre de fruits, plus il fut estimé, aussi la tendance des propriétaires fut-elle toujours de s’attribuer la totalité des fruits du sol, moins le salaire du fermier, c’est-à-dire moins les frais de production. Ainsi la propriété vient à la suite du travail pour lui enlever tout ce qui, dans le produit,

83 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité, tome II, p. 265.
84 Idem, tome II, p. 265.
85 “L’horreur du vide.” (N.R.)
dépasse les frais réels. Le propriétaire remplissant un devoir mystique et représentant vis-à-vis du colon la communauté, le fermier n'est plus, dans les prévisions de la Providence, qu'un travailleur responsable, qui doit rendre compte à la société de tout ce qu'il recueille en sus de son salaire légitime... Par essence et destination, la rente est donc un instrument de justice distributive, l'un des mille moyens que le génie économique met en œuvre pour arriver à l'égalité. C'est un immense cadastre exécuté contradictoirement par les propriétaires et fermiers, sans collision possible, dans un intérêt supérieur, et dont le résultat définitif doit être d'égaliser la possession de la terre entre les exploiteurs du sol et les industriels... Il ne fallait pas moins que cette magie de la propriété pour arracher au colon l'excédent du produit qu'il ne peut s'empêcher de regarder comme sien et dont il se croit exclusivement l'auteur. La rente, ou pour mieux dire la propriété, a brisé l'égotisme agricole et créé une solidarité que nulle puissance, nul partage de la terre n'aurait fait naître... À présent, tout ce fracas de mots se réduit d'abord à ceci : Ricardo dit que l'excédent du prix des produits agricoles sur leurs frais de production, y compris le profit et l'intérêt ordinaires du capital, donne la mesure de la rente. M. Proudhon fait mieux. Il fait intervenir le propriétaire, comme un Deus ex machina, qui arrache au colon tout l'excédent de sa production sur les frais de la production. Il se sert de l'intervention du propriétaire pour expliquer la propriété, de l'intervention du rentier pour expliquer la rente. Il répond au problème en posant le même problème et en l'augmentant encore d'une syllabe.

Observons encore qu'en déterminant la rente par la différence de fécondité de la terre, M. Proudhon lui assigne une nouvelle origine, puisque la terre, avant d'être estimée d'après les différents degrés de fertilité, “ n'était pas ”, suivant lui, “ une valeur d'échange, mais était commune ”. Qu'est-elle donc devenue, cette fiction de la rente qui avait pris naissance dans la nécessité de ramener à la terre l'homme qui allait se perdre dans l'infini du vide ?

Dégageons maintenant la doctrine de Ricardo des phrases providentielles, allégoriques et mystiques dans lesquelles M. Proudhon a eu soin de l'envelopper.

La rente, dans le sens de Ricardo, est la propriété foncière à l'état bourgeois : c'est-à-dire la propriété féodale qui a subi les conditions de la production bourgeoise.

Nous avons vu que, d'après la doctrine de Ricardo, le prix de tous les objets est finalement déterminé par les frais de production, y compris le profit industriel; en d'autres termes, par le temps de travail employé. Dans l'industrie manufacturière, le prix du produit obtenu par le minimum de travail règle le prix de toutes les autres marchandises de la même espèce, attendu qu'on peut multiplier à l'infini les instruments de production les moins coûteux et les plus productifs, et que la libre concurrence amène nécessairement un prix de marché, c'est-à-dire un prix commun pour tous les produits de la même espèce.

Dans l'industrie agricole, au contraire, c'est le prix du produit obtenu par la plus grande quantité de travail qui règle le prix de tous les produits de la même espèce. En premier lieu, on ne peut pas, comme dans l'industrie manufacturière, multiplier à volonté les instruments de production du même degré de productivité, c'est-à-dire les terrains du même degré de fécondité. Puis, à mesure que la population s'accroît, on en vient à exploiter des terrains d'une qualité inférieure, ou à faire sur le même terrain de nouvelles mises de capital, proportionnellement moins productives que les premières. Dans l'un et l'autre cas, on fait usage d'une plus grande quantité de travail pour obtenir un produit proportionnellement moindre. Le besoin de la population ayant rendu nécessaire ce surcroît de travail, le produit du terrain d'une exploitation plus coûteuse a son écoulément forcé tout aussi bien que celui du terrain d'une exploitation à meilleur marché. La concurrence nivelant le prix du marché, le produit du meilleur terrain sera payé tout aussi cher que celui du terrain inférieur. C'est l'excédent du prix des produits du meilleur terrain sur les frais de leur production qui constitue la rente. Si l'on avait toujours à sa disposition les terrains du même degré de fertilité; si l'on pouvait, comme dans l'industrie manufacturière, recourir toujours à des machines moins coûteuses et plus productives, ou si les secondes mises de capital produisaient autant que les premières, alors le prix des produits agricoles serait déterminé par le prix des denrées produites par les meilleurs instruments de production, comme nous l'avons vu pour le prix des produits manufacturés. Mais aussi, dès ce moment, la rente aurait disparu.

Pour que la doctrine de Ricardo soit généralement vraie, il faut que les capitaux puissent être librement appliqués aux différentes branches de l'industrie; qu'une concurrence fortement développée entre les capitalistes ait porté les profits à un taux égal; que le fermier ne soit plus qu'un capitaine industriel qui demande, pour l'emploi de son capital à des terrains inférieurs, un profit égal à celui qu'il tirerait de son capital appliqué, par exemple, à l'industrie cotonnière; que l'exploitation agricole soit soumise au régime de la grande industrie; enfin, que le propriétaire foncier lui-même ne vise plus qu'au revenu monétaire.

En Irlande, la rente n'existe pas encore quoique le fermage y ait pris un développement extrême. La rente étant l'excédent non seulement sur le salaire, mais encore sur le profit industriel, elle ne saurait exister là où le revenu du propriétaire n'est qu'un prélèvement sur le salaire.

Ainsi la rente, bien loin de faire de l'exploitant de la terre, du fermier un simple travailleur, et d'arracher au colon l'excédent du produit qu'il ne peut s'empêcher de regarder comme sien, met en présence du propriétaire foncier le capitaliste industriel, au lieu de l'esclave, du serf, du tributaire, du salarié.
La propriété foncière, une fois constituée en rente, n'a plus en sa possession que l'excédent sur les frais de production, déterminés non seulement par le salaire, mais aussi par le profit industriel. C'est donc au propriétaire foncier que la rente arrachait une partie de son revenu.

Aussi s'est-il écoulé un grand laps de temps avant que le fermier féodal fût remplacé par le capitaliste industriel. En Allemagne, par exemple, cette transformation n'a commencé que dans le dernier tiers du XVIIIᵉ siècle. Il n'y a que l'Angleterre où ce rapport entré le capitaliste industriel et le propriétaire foncier ait pris tout son développement.

Tant qu'il n'y avait que le colon de M. Proudhon, il n'y avait pas de rente. Dès qu'il y a rente, le colon n'est pas le fermier, mais l'ouvrier, le colon du fermier. L'amendissement du travailleur, réduit au rôle de simple ouvrier, journalier, salarié, travaillant pour le capitaliste industriel; l'intervention du capitaliste industriel, exploitant la terre comme toute autre fabrique; la transformation du propriétaire foncier de petit souverain en usurier vulgaire : voilà les différents rapports exprimés par la rente.

La rente, dans le sens de Ricardo, c'est l'agriculture patriarcale transformée en industrie commerciale, le capital industriel appliqué à la terre, la bourgeoisie des villes transplantée dans les campagnes. La rente, au lieu d'attacher l'homme à la nature, n'a fait que rattacher l'exploitation de la terre à la concurrence. Une fois constituée en rente, la propriété foncière elle-même est le résultat de la concurrence, puisque lorsqu'elle dépend de la valeur vénale des produits agricoles. Comme rente, la propriété foncière est mobilisée et devient un effet de commerce. La rente n'est possible que du moment où le développement de l'industrie des villes et l'organisation sociale qui en résulte, forcent le propriétaire foncier à ne viser qu'au profit vénal, au rapport monétaire de ses produits agricoles, à ne voir enfin dans sa propriété foncière qu'une machine à battre monnaie. La rente a si parfaitement détaché le propriétaire foncier du sol, de la nature, qu'il n'a pas seulement besoin de connaître ses terres, ainsi que cela se voit en Angleterre. Quant au fermier, au capitaliste industriel et à l'ouvrier agricole, ils ne sont pas plus attachés à la terre qu'ils explorent, que l'entrepreneur et l'ouvrier des manufactures ne le sont au coton ou à la laine qu'ils fabriquent; ils n'éprouvent de l'attachement que pour le prix de leur exploitation, pour le produit monétaire. De là, les jérimades des partis réactionnaires, qui appellent de tous leurs vœux le retour de la féodalité, de la bonne vie patriarcale, des mœurs simples et des grandes vertus de nos âges.

L'assujettissement du sol aux lois qui régissent toutes les autres industries est et sera toujours le sujet de condoléances intéressées. Ainsi, on peut dire que la rente est devenue la force motrice qui a lancé l'idylle dans le mouvement de l'histoire.

Ricardo, après avoir supposé la production bourgeoise comme nécessaire pour déterminer la rente, l'applique néanmoins à la propriété foncière de toutes les époques et de tous les pays. Ce sont là les errements de tous les économistes, qui représentent les rapports de la production bourgeoise comme des catégories éternelles.

Du but providentiel de la rente, qui est, pour M. Proudhon, la transformation du colon en travailleur responsable, il passe à la rétribution égalitaire de la rente.

La rente, ainsi que nous venons de le voir, est constituée par le prix égal des produits de terrains inégaux en fertilité, de manière qu'un hectolitre de blé qui a coûté 10 francs est vendu 20 francs, si les frais de production s'élèvent, pour un terrain de qualité inférieure, à 20 francs.

Tant que le besoin force d'acheter tous les produits agricoles apportés sur le marché, le prix du marché est déterminé par les frais du produit le plus coûteux. C'est donc cette égalisation du prix résultant de la concurrence et non de la différente fertilité des terrains, qui constitue au propriétaire du meilleur terrain une rente de 10 francs pour chaque hectolitre que vend son fermier.

Supposons un instant que le prix du blé soit déterminé par le temps de travail nécessaire pour le produire, et aussi que l'hectolitre de blé obtenu sur le meilleur terrain se vendra 10 francs, tandis que l'hectolitre de blé obtenu sur le terrain de qualité inférieure sera payé 20 francs. Cela admet, le prix moyen du marché sera de 15 francs tandis que, d'après la loi de la concurrence, il est de 20 francs. Si le prix moyen était de 15 francs, il n'y aurait lieu à aucune distribution, ni égalitaire, ni autre, car il n'y aurait pas de rente. La rente n'existe que par cela même que l'hectolitre de blé, qui coûte au producteur 10 francs, se vend 20 francs. M. Proudhon suppose l'égalité du prix du marché à frais de production inégaux, pour en venir à la répartition égalitaire du produit de l'inégalité.

Nous concevons que des économistes, tels que Mill, Cherbuliez, Hilditch et autres, aient demandé que la rente soit attribuée à l'État pour servir à l'acquittement des impôts. C'est là la franche expression de la haine que le capitaliste industriel voue au propriétaire foncier, qui lui paraît une inutilité, une superflétation dans l'ensemble de la production bourgeoise.

Mais faire d'abord payer l'hectolitre de blé 20 francs, pour faire ensuite une distribution générale des 10 francs qu'on a prélevés en trop sur les consommateurs, cela suffit pour que le génie social poursuive méticuleusement sa route en zigzag, et aille se cognir la tête contre un angle quelconque.

La rente devient, sous la plume de M. Proudhon, un immense cadastre, exécuté contradictoirement par les propriétaires et les fermiers... dans un intérêt supérieur, et dont le résultat définitif doit être d'égaliser la possession de la terre entre les exploitants du sol et les industriels.

Pour qu'un cadastre quelconque, formé par la rente, soit d'une valeur pratique, il faut toujours rester dans les conditions de la société actuelle.
Or, nous avons démontré que le fermage payé par le fermier au propriétaire n'exprime un peu exactement la rente que dans les pays les plus avancés dans l'industrie et dans le commerce. Encore ce fermage renferme-t-il souvent l'intérêt payé au propriétaire pour le capital incorporé à la terre. La situation des terrains, le voisinage des villes, et bien d'autres circonstances encore, influent sur le fermage et modifient la rente. Ces raisons péréptomites suffiraient pour prouver l'inexactitude d'un cadastre basé sur la rente.

D'un autre côté, la rente ne saurait être l'indice constant du degré de fertilité d'un terrain, puisque l'application moderne de la chimie vient à chaque instant changer la nature du terrain, et que les connaissances géologiques commencent précisément de nous jours à renverser toute l'ancienne estimation de la fertilité relative : ce n'est que depuis vingt ans environ qu'on a défriché de vastes terrains dans les comtés orientaux de l'Angleterre, terrains qu'on laissait incultes faute d'avoir bien apprécié les rapports entre l'humeur et la composition de la couche inférieure. Ainsi l'histoire, loin de donner dans la rente un cadastre tout formé, ne fait que changer, renverser totalement les cadastres déjà formés.

Enfin la fertilité n'est pas une qualité aussi naturelle qu'on pourrait bien le croire : elle se rattache intimement aux rapports sociaux actuels. Une terre peut être très fertile cultivée en blé, et cependant le prix du marché pourra déterminer le cultivateur à la transformer en prairie artificielle et à la rendre ainsi infertile.

M. Proudhon n'a improvisé son cadastre, qui ne vaut même pas le cadastre ordinaire, que pour donner un corps au but providentiellement égalitaire de la rente.

La rente, continue M. Proudhon, est l'intérêt payé pour un capital qui ne pérît jamais, savoir la terre. Et comme ce capital n'est susceptible d'aucune augmentation quant à la matière, mais seulement d'une amélioration indéfinie, quant à l'usage, il arrive que, tandis que l'intérêt ou le bénéfice du prêt (mutuum) tend à diminuer sans cesse par l'abondance des capitaux, la rente tend à augmenter grâce au perfectionnement de l'industrie, duquel résulte l'amélioration dans l'usage de la terre... Telle est, dans son essence, la rente.

Cette fois, M. Proudhon voit dans la rente tous les symptômes de l'intérêt, à cela près qu'elle, provient d'un capital d'une nature spécifique. Ce capital, c'est la terre, le capital éternel, qui n'est susceptible d'aucune augmentation quant à la matière, mais seulement d'une amélioration indéfinie quant à l'usage.

Dans la marche progressive de la civilisation, l'intérêt a une tendance continue vers la baisse, tandis que la rente tend continuellement vers la hausse. L'intérêt baisse à cause de l'abondance des capitaux ; la rente hausse avec les perfectionnements apportés dans l'industrie, lesquels ont pour conséquence un usage toujours mieux entendu de la terre.

Telle est, dans son essence, l'opinion de M. Proudhon. Examinons d'abord jusqu'à quel point il est juste de dire que la rente est l'intérêt d'un capital.

Pour le propriétaire foncier lui-même, la rente représente l'intérêt du capital que lui a coûté la terre, ou qu'il en tirerait s'il la vendait. Mais en achetant ou en vendant la terre, il n'achète ou ne vend que la rente. Le prix qu'il a mis pour se faire acquéreur de la rente, se règle sur le taux de l'intérêt en général et n'a rien à faire avec la nature même de la rente. L'intérêt des capitaux placés en terrains est, en général, inférieur à l'intérêt des capitaux placés dans les manufactures ou le commerce. Ainsi pour celui qui ne distingue pas l'intérêt que la terre représente au propriétaire 87 d'avec la rente elle-même, l'intérêt de la terre capital diminue encore plus que l'intérêt des autres capitaux. Mais il ne s'agit pas du prix d'achat ou de vente de la rente, de la valeur vénale de la rente, de la rente capitalisée, il s'agit de la rente elle-même.

Le fermage peut impliquer encore, outre la rente proprement dite, l'intérêt du capital incorporé à la terre. Alors, le propriétaire reçoit cette partie du fermage non comme propriétaire, mais comme capitaliste ; ce n'est cependant pas là la rente proprement dite dont nous avons à parler.

La terre, tant qu'elle n'est pas exploitée comme moyen de production, n'est pas un capital. Les terres capitaux peuvent être augmentées tout aussi bien que tous les autres instruments de production. On n'y ajoute rien à la matière, pour parler le langage de M. Proudhon, mais on multiplie les terres qui servent d'instrument de production. Rien qu'à appliquer à des terres, déjà transformées en moyen de production, de secondes mises de capital, on augmente la terre capital sans rien ajouter à la terre matière, c'est-à-dire à l'étendue de la terre. La terre matière de M. Proudhon, c'est la terre comme bome. Quant à l'éternité qu'il attribue à la terre, nous voulons bien qu'elle ait cette vertu comme matière. La terre capital n'est pas plus éternelle que tout autre capital.

L'or et l'argent, qui donnent l'intérêt, sont aussi durables et éternels que la terre. Si le prix de l'or et de l'argent baisse tandis que celui de la terre va haussant, cela ne vient certes pas de sa nature plus ou moins éternelle.

La terre capital est un capital fixe, mais le capital fixe s'use aussi bien que les capitaux circulants. Les améliorations apportées à la terre ont besoin de reproduction et d'entretien ; elles ne durent qu'un temps et elles ont cela de commun avec toutes les autres améliorations dont on se sert pour transformer la matière en moyen de production. Si la terre capital était éternelle, certains terrains présenteraient un tout autre aspect qu'ils n'ont aujourd'hui, et nous verrions la campagne de Rome, la Sicile, la Palestine, dans tout l'éclat de leur ancienne prospérité.

86 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité. tome II, p 265.
87 Pour... " pour le propriétaire " (N.R)
Il y a même des cas où la terre capital pourrait disparaître, alors même que les améliorations resteraient incorporées à la terre.

D’abord, cela arrive toutes les fois que la rente proprement dite s’anéantit par la concurrence de nouveaux terrains plus fertiles; ensuite, les améliorations qui pouvaient avoir une valeur à une certaine époque, cessent d’en avoir du moment qu’elles sont devenues universelles par le développement de l’agronomie.

Le représentant de la terre capital, ce n’est pas le propriétaire foncier, mais le fermier. Le revenu que la terre donne comme capital, c’est l’intérêt et le profit industriel et non la rente. Il y a des terres qui rapportent cet intérêt et ce profit et qui ne rapportent point de rente.

En résumé, la terre, en tant qu’elle donne un intérêt, est la terre capital, et, comme terre capital, elle ne donne pas une rente, elle ne constitue pas la propriété foncière. La rente résulte des rapports sociaux dans lesquels l’exploitation se fait. Elle ne saurait pas résulter de la nature plus ou moins dure, plus ou moins durable de la terre. La rente provient de la société et non pas du sol.


En quoi consiste, en général, toute amélioration, soit dans l’agriculture, soit dans la manufacture ? C’est à produire plus avec le même travail, c’est à produire autant, ou même plus avec moins de travail. Grâce à ces améliorations, le fermier est dispensé d’employer une plus grande quantité de travail pour un produit proportionnellement moindre. Il n’a pas besoin alors de recourir à des terrains inférieurs, et des portions du capital appliquées successivement au même terrain restent également productives. Donc ces améliorations, loin de faire hausser continuellement la rente, comme le dit M. Proudhon, sont, au contraire, autant d’obstacles temporaires qui s’opposent à sa hausse.

Les propriétaires anglais du XVII° siècle sentaient si bien cette vérité qu’ils s’opposèrent aux progrès de l’agriculture, de crainte de voir diminuer leurs revenus. 88

5. Les grèves et les coalitions des ouvriers

Tout mouvement de hausse dans les salaires ne peut avoir d’autre effet que celui d’une hausse sur le blé, le vin, etc. ; c’est-à-dire l’effet d’une disette. Car qu’est-ce que le salaire ? C’est le prix de revient du blé, etc.; c’est le prix intégral de toute chose. Allons plus loin encore : le salaire est la proportionnalité des éléments qui composent la richesse et qui sont consommés de manière continue chaque jour par la masse des travailleurs. Or, doubler les salaires, c’est attribuer à chacun des producteurs une part plus grande que son produit, ce qui est contradictoire; et si la hausse ne porte que sur un petit nombre d’industries, c’est provoquer une perturbation générale dans les échanges, en un mot, une disette... Il est impossible, je le déclare, que les grèves suivies d’augmentation de salaires n’aboutissent pas à un renchérissement général : cela est aussi certain que deux et deux font quatre. 89

Nous nions toutes ces assertions, excepté que deux et deux font quatre.

D’abord il n’y a pas de renchérissement général. Si le prix de toute chose double en même temps que le salaire, il n’y a pas de changement dans les prix, il n’y a de changement que dans les termes.

Ensuite, une hausse générale des salaires ne peut jamais produire un renchérissement plus ou moins général des marchandises. Effectivement, si toutes les industries emploient le même nombre d’ouvriers en rapport avec le capital fixe ou avec les instruments dont elles se servent, une hausse générale des salaires produirait une baisse générale des profits et le courant des marchandises ne subirait aucune altération.

Même comme le rapport du travail manuel au capital fixe n’est pas le même dans les différentes industries, toutes les industries qui emploient relativement une plus grande masse de capital fixe et moins d’ouvriers, seront forcées tôt ou tard de baisser le prix de leurs marchandises. Dans le cas contraire où le prix de leurs marchandises ne baisse pas, leur profit s’élèvera au-dessus du taux commun des profits. Les machines ne sont pas des salariés. Donc la hausse générale des salaires atteindra moins les industries qui emploient comparativement aux autres plus de machines que d’ouvriers. Mais la concurrence tendant toujours à niveler les profits, ceux qui s’élèvent au-dessus du taux ordinaire, ne sauraient être que passagers. Ainsi, à part quelques oscillations, une hausse générale des salaires ne pourra pas avoir lieu d’un renchérissement général, comme le dit M. Proudhon, une baisse partielle, c’est-à-dire une baisse dans le prix courant des marchandises qui se fabriquent principalement à l’aide des machines.

La hausse et la baisse du profit et des salaires n’expriment que la proportion dans laquelle les capitalistes et les travailleurs participent au produit d’une journée de travail, sans influer dans la plupart des cas sur le prix du produit. Mais que les grèves suivies d’augmentation de salaires aboutissent à un renchérissement général, à une disette même.

88 Voir Petty, économiste anglais du temps de Charles II.
89 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité tome I, pp. 110 et 111.
ce sont là des idées qui ne peuvent échapper que dans le cerveau d'un poète incompris.

En Angleterre, les grèves ont régulièrement donné lieu à l'invention et à l'application de quelques machines nouvelles. Les machines étaient, on peut le dire, l'arme qu'employaient les capitalistes pour abattre le travail spécial en révolte. Le self-acting mule, la plus grande invention de l'industrie moderne, mit hors de combat les fileurs révoltés. Quand les coalitions et les grèves n'auraient d'autre effet que de faire réagir contre elles les efforts du génie mécanique, toujours exercerait-elles une influence immense sur le développement de l'industrie.

Je trouve, continue M. Proudhon, dans un article publié par M. Léon Faucher... septembre 1845, que depuis quelque temps les ouvriers anglais ont perdu l'habitude des coalitions, ce qui est assurément un progrès, dont on ne peut que les féliciter : mais que cette amélioration dans le moral des ouvriers vient surtout de leur instruction économique. Ce n'est point des manufacturiers, s'écriait au meeting de Bolton, un ouvrier fileur, que les salaires dépendent. Dans les époques de dépression les maîtres ne sont pour ainsi dire que le fouet dont s'arme la nécessité, et qu'ils le veulent ou non, il faut qu'ils frappent. Le principe régulateur est le rapport de l'offre avec la demande ; et les maîtres n'ont pas ce pouvoir... A la bonne heure, s'écrie M. Proudhon, voilà des ouvriers bien dressés, des ouvriers modèles, etc., etc. Cette misère manquait à l'Angleterre : elle ne passera pas le détroit. 90

De toutes les villes de l'Angleterre, Bolton est celle où le radicalisme est le plus développé. Les ouvriers de Bolton sont connus pour être on ne peut plus révolutionnaires. Lors de la grande agitation qui eut lieu en Angleterre pour l'abolition des lois céréales, les fabricants anglais ne crurent pouvoir faire face aux propriétaires fonciers qu'en mettant en avant les ouvriers. Mais comme les intérêts des ouvriers n'étaient pas moins opposés à ceux des fabricants, que les intérêts des fabricants ne l'étaient à ceux des propriétaires fonciers, il était naturel que les fabricants fussent avoir le dessous dans les meetings des ouvriers. Que firent les fabricants ? Pour sauver les apparences, ils organiserent des meetings composés, en grande partie des contremaîtres, du petit nombre d'ouvriers qui leur étaient dévoués et des amis du commerce proprement dits. Quand ensuite les véritables ouvriers essayèrent, comme à Bolton et à Manchester, d'y prendre part pour protester contre ces démonstrations factices, on leur défendit l'entrée, en disant que c'était un ticket-meeting. On entend par ce mot des meetings où l'on n'admet que des personnes munies de cartes d'entrée. Cependant les affiches, placardées sur les murs, avaient annoncé des meetings publics. Cependant les affiches, placardées sur les murs, avaient annoncé des meetings publics. Toutes les fois qu'il y avait de ces meetings, les journaux des fabricants rendaient un compte pompeux et détaillé des discours qu'on y avait prononcés. Il va sans dire que c'étaient les contremaîtres qui prononçaient ces discours. Les feuilles de Londres les reprodaient littéralement. M. Proudhon a le malheur de prendre les contremaîtres pour des ouvriers ordinaires et leur enjoint l'ordre de ne pas passer le détroit.

Si en 1844 et en 1845 les grèves frappaient moins les regards qu'auparavant, c'est que 1844 et 1845 étaient les deux premières années de prospérité qu'il y eût pour l'industrie anglaise depuis 1837. Néanmoins, aucune des trades-unions n'avait été dissoute.

Entendons maintenant les contremaîtres de Bolton. Selon eux les fabricants ne sont pas les maîtres du salaire, parce qu'ils ne sont pas les maîtres du prix du produit, et ils ne sont pas les maîtres du produit parce qu'ils ne sont pas les maîtres du marché de l'uni-vers. Par cette raison ils donnaient à entendre qu'ils ne faisaient pas des coalitions pour arracher aux maîtres une augmentation de salaires. M. Proudhon, au contraire, leur interdit les coalitions de crainte qu'une coalition ne soit suivie d'une hausse de salaires, qui entraînerait une disette générale. Nous n'avons pas besoin de dire que sur un seul point il y a entente cordiale entre les contremaîtres et M. Proudhon : c'est qu'une hausse de salaires équivaut à une hausse dans le prix des produits.

Mais la crainte d'une disette, est-ce là la véritable cause de la rancune de M. Proudhon ? Non. Il en veut tout bonnement aux contremaîtres de Bolton, parce qu'ils déterminent la valeur par l'offre et la demande et qu'ils ne se soucien guère de la valeur constituée, de la valeur passée à l'état de constitution, de la constitution de la valeur, y compris l'échangeabilité permanente et toutes les autres proportionnalités de rapports et rapports de proportionnalité, flanqués de la Providence.

La grève des ouvriers est illégale, et ce n'est pas seulement le Code pénal qui dit cela, c'est le système économique, c'est la nécessité de l'ordre établi... Que chaque ouvrier individuellement ait la libre disposition de sa personne et de ses bras, cela peut se tolérer : mais que les ouvriers entreprennent par des coalitions de faire violence au monopole, c'est ce que la société ne peut permettre. 91

M. Proudhon prétend faire passer un article du Code pénal pour un résultat nécessaire et général des rapports de la production bourgeoise.

En Angleterre, les coalitions sont autorisées par un acte de Parlement et c'est le système économique qui a forcé le Parlement à donner cette autorisation de par la loi. En 1825, lorsque sous le ministre Huskisson le Parlement dut modifier la législation, pour la mettre de plus en plus d'accord avec un état de choses résultant de la libre concurrence, il lui fallut nécessairement abolir toutes les lois qui interdisaient les coalitions des ouvriers. Plus l'industrie moderne et la concurrence

90 Proudhon : Ouvrage cité, tome I, pp. 281 et 262.
se développent, plus il y a des éléments 92 qui provoquent et se secondent les coalitions, et aussitôt que les coalitions sont devenues un fait économique, prenant de jour en jour plus de consistance, elles ne peuvent pas tarder à devenir un fait légal.

Ainsi l'article du Code pénal prouve tout au plus que l'industrie moderne et la concurrence n'étaient pas encore bien développées sous l'Assemblée constituante et sous l'Empire.

Les économistes et les socialistes 93 sont d'accord sur un seul point : c'est de condamner les coalitions. Seulement ils motivent différemment leur acte de condamnation.

Les économistes disent aux ouvriers : ne vous coalisez pas. En vous coalisant, vous entravez la marche régulière de l'industrie, vous empêchez les fabricants de satisfaire aux commandes, vous troublez le commerce et vous précipitez l'envasissement des machines qui, en rendant votre travail en partie inutile, vous forcent d'accepter un salaire encore abaissé. D'ailleurs, vous avez beau faire, votre salaire sera toujours déterminé par le rapport des bras demandés avec les bras offerts et c'est un effort aussi ridicule que dangereux, que de vous mettre en révolte contre les lois éternelles de l'économie politique.

Les socialistes disent aux ouvriers : ne vous coalisez pas, car, au bout du compte, qu'est-ce que vous y gagneriez ?

Une hausse de salaires ? Les économistes vous prouveront jusqu'à l'évidence, que les quelques sous que vous pourrez y gagner, en cas de réussite, pour quelques moments, seront suivis d'une baisse pour toujours. D'habiles calculateurs vous prouveront qu'il vous faudrait des années pour vous rattraper. seulement sur l'augmentation des salaires, des frais qu'il vous a fallu faire pour organiser et entretenir les coalitions.

Et nous, nous vous dirons, en notre qualité de socialistes, qu'à part cette question d'argent, vous ne serez pas moins les ouvriers, et les maîtres seront toujours les maîtres, après comme avant. Ainsi pas de coalitions, pas de politique, car faire des coalitions, n'est-ce pas faire de la politique ?

Les économistes veulent que les ouvriers restent dans la société telle qu'elle est formée et telle qu'ils l'ont consignée et scellée dans leurs manuels.

Les socialistes veulent que les ouvriers laissent là la société ancienne, pour pouvoir mieux entrer dans la société nouvelle qu'ils leur ont préparée avec tant de prévoyance.

Malgré les uns et les autres, malgré les manuels et les utopies, les coalitions n'ont pas cessé d'apparaître, de grandir et de grandir avec le développement et l'agrandissement de l'industrie moderne. C'est à tel point maintenant, que le degré où est arrivée la coalition dans un pays, marque nettement le degré qu'il occupe dans la hiérarchie du marché de l'univers.

L'Angleterre, où l'industrie a atteint le plus haut degré de développement, a les coalitions les plus vastes et les mieux organisées.

En Angleterre, on ne s'en est pas tenu à des coalitions partielles, qui n'avaient pas d'autre but qu'une grève passagère, et qui disparaparaissaient avec elle. On a formé des coalitions permanentes, des trades-unions qui servent de rempart aux ouvriers dans leurs luttes avec les entrepreneurs. Et à l'heure qu'il est, toutes ces trades-unions locales trouvent un point d'union dans la National Association of United Trades, dont le comité central est à Londres, et qui compte déjà 80 000 membres. La formation de ces grèves, coalitions, trades-unions marcha simultanément avec les luttes politiques des ouvriers qui constituent maintenant un grand parti politique sous le nom de Chartistes.

C'est sous la forme des coalitions qu'ont toujours lieu les premiers essais des travailleurs pour s'associer entre eux.

La grande industrie agglomère dans un endroit une foule de gens inconnus les uns aux autres. La concurrence les divise d'intérêts. Mais le maintien du salaire, cet intérêt commun qu'ils ont contre leur maître, les réunit dans un point-là, l'association prend un caractère politique.

Les conditions économiques avaient d'abord transformé la masse du pays en travailleurs. La domination du capital a créé à cette masse une situation commune, des intérêts communs. Ainsi cette masse est déjà une classe vis-à-vis du capital, mais pas encore pour elle-même. Dans la lutte, dont nous n'avons signalé que quelques phases, cette masse se réunit, elle se constitue en classe pour elle-même. Les intérêts qu'elle défend deviennent des intérêts de classe. Mais la lutte de classe à classe est une lutte politique.

Dans la bourgeoisie, nous avons deux phases à distinguer celle pendant laquelle elle se constituait en classe au régime de la féodalité et de la monarchie absolue, et celle où, déjà constituée en classe, elle renversa la féodalité et la

92 Pour “... plus il y a d'éléments “.

93 C'est-à-dire les socialistes de l'époque, les fouriéristes en France, les partisane d'Owen en Allemagne. (Note d'Engels pour l'édition de 1885.)
monarchie, pour faire de la société une société bourgeoise. La première de ces phases fut la plus longue et nécessita les plus grands efforts. Elle aussi avait commencé par des coalitions partielles contre les seigneurs féodaux.

On a fait bien des recherches pour retracer les différentes phases historiques que la bourgeoisie a parcourues, depuis la commune jusqu’à sa constitution comme classe.

Mais quand il s'agit de se rendre un compte exact des grèves, des coalitions et des autres formes dans lesquelles les prolétaires effectuent devant nos yeux leur organisation comme classe, les uns sont saisis d'une crainte réelle, les autres affichent un dédain transcendantal.

Une classe opprimée est la condition vitale de toute société fondée sur l'antagonisme des classes. L'affranchissement de la classe opprimée implique donc nécessairement la création d'une société nouvelle. Pour que la classe opprimée puisse s'affranchir, il faut que les pouvoirs productifs déjà acquis et les rapports sociaux existants ne puissent plus exister les uns à côté des autres. De tous les instruments de production, le plus grand pouvoir productif, c'est la classe révolutionnaire elle-même. L'organisation des éléments révolutionnaires comme classe suppose l'existence de toutes les forces productives qui pouvaient s'engendrer dans le sein de la société ancienne.

Est-ce à dire qu'après la chute de l'ancienne société il y aura une nouvelle domination de classe, se résumant dans un nouveau pouvoir politique ? Non.

La condition d'affranchissement de la classe laborieuse c'est l'abolition de toute classe, de même que la condition d'affranchissement du tiers état, de l'ordre bourgeois, fut l'abolition de tous les états 94 et de tous les ordres.

La classe laborieuse substituera, dans le cours de son développement, à l'ancienne société civile une association qui exclura les classes et leur antagonisme, et il n'y aura plus de pouvoir politique proprement dit, puisque le pouvoir politique est précisément le résumé officiel de l'antagonisme dans la société civile.

En attendant, l'antagonisme entre le prolétariat et la bourgeoisie est une lutte de classe à classe, lutte qui, portée à sa plus haute expression, est une révolution totale. D'ailleurs, faut-il s'étonner qu'une société, fondée sur l'opposition des classes, aboutisse à la contradiction brutale, à un choc de corps à corps comme dernier dénouement ?

Ne dites pas que le mouvement social exclut le mouvement politique. Il n'y a jamais de mouvement politique qui ne soit social en même temps.

Ce n'est que dans un ordre de choses où il n'y aura plus de classes et d'antagonisme de classes, que les évolutions sociales cesseront d'être des révolutions politiques. Jusque-là, à la veille de chaque remaniement général de la société, le dernier mot de la science sociale sera toujours :

Le combat ou la mort la lutte sanguinaire ou le néant. C'est ainsi que la question est invinciblement posée. (George Sand.)

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94 États, au sens historique tels qu'ils existent à l'époque féodale, c'est-à-dire des états possédant des privilèges précis et limités. La révolution bourgeoise abolit ces états et leurs privilèges. La société bourgeoise ne connaît plus que des classes. C'était donc une contradiction historique que de désigner le prolétariat noua le nom de "quatrième état". (Note d'Engels pour l'édition de 1885.)
ANNEXES

I. Proudhon jugé par K. Marx

Lettre à J.-B. Schweitzer

Londres, le 24 janvier 1865.

Monsieur,

... J'ai reçu hier la lettre dans laquelle vous me demandez un jugement détaillé sur Proudhon. Le temps me manque pour répondre à votre désir. Et puis je n'ai sous la main aucun de ses écrits. Cependant pour vous montrer ma bonne volonté, je vous envoie, à la hâte, ces quelques notes. Vous pourrez les compléter, ajouter ou retrancher, bref en faire ce que bon vous semblera.

Je ne me souviens plus des premiers essais de Proudhon. Son travail d'écologer sur la Langue universelle témoigne du sans-gêne avec lequel il s'attaquait à des problèmes pour la solution desquels les connaissances les plus élémentaires lui faisaient défaut.

Sa première œuvre : Qu'est-ce que la propriété ? est sans conteste la meilleure. Elle fait époque, si ce n'est par la mystique. Il connaissait en traduction; il donne l'impression que pour Le temps me manque à, déjà dans à à Qu'est ce que la propriété ? est... J'ai reçu hier la lettre dans laquelle vous me demandez un jugement détaillé sur Proudhon. Le temps me manque pour répondre à votre désir. Et puis je n'ai sous la main aucun de ses écrits. Cependant pour vous montrer ma bonne volonté, je vous envoie, à la hâte, ces quelques notes.Vous pourrez les compléter, ajouter ou retrancher, bref en faire ce que bon vous semblera.

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Sa première œuvre : Qu'est-ce que la propriété ? est sans conteste la meilleure. Elle fait époque, si ce n'est par la nouveauté du contenu, du moins par la manière neuve et hardie de dire des choses connues. Les socialistes français, dont il connaissait les écrits, avaient naturellement non seulement critiqué de divers points de vue la propriété 96, mais encore l'avaient utopiquement supprimée. Dans son livre, Proudhon est à Saint-Simon et à Fourier à peu près ce que Feuerbach est à Hegel. Comparé à Hegel, Feuerbach est bien pauvre. Pourtant, après Hegel il fit époque, parce qu'il mettait l'accent sur des points désagrégables pour la conscience chrétienne et importants pour le progrès de la critique philosophique, mais laissés par Hegel dans un clair-obscur 97 mystique.

Le style de cet écrit de Proudhon est encore, si je puis dire, fortement musclé, et c'est le style qui, à mon avis, en fait le grand mérite. On voit que, lors même qu'il se borne à reprocher le petit mérite. On voit que, lors même qu'il se borne à reprocher l'insuffisance. La question était trop mal posée pour qu'on pût y répondre correctement. Les " rapports de propriété " antiques avaient été remplacés par la propriété féodale, celle-ci par la propriété bourgeoise. Ainsi l'historie elle-même avait soumis à sa critique les rapports de propriété passés. Ce qu'il s'agissait pour Proudhon de traiter c'était la propriété bourgeoise actuelle. A la question de savoir ce qu'était cette propriété, on ne pouvait

95 Extrait du Social-Demokrat, nos 16, 17 et 18. 1. 3 et 5 février 1865 (N.R.)
96 En français dans le texte.
97 En français dans le texte.
98 Ces deux mots en anglais dans le texte, " sensational pamphlet ".
99 En français dans le texte.
répondre que par une analyse critique de l'économie politique, embrassant l'ensemble de ces rapports de propriété, non pas dans leur expression juridique de rapports de volonté, mais dans la forme réelle, c'est-à-dire de rapports de production. Comme Proudhon intègre l'ensemble de ces rapports économiques à la notion juridique de la propriété, il ne pouvait aller au-delà de la réponse donnée par Brissot, dès avant 1789, dans un écrit du même genre, dans les mêmes termes : " La propriété c'est le vol "

La conclusion que l'on en tire, dans le meilleur des cas, c'est que les notions juridiques du bourgeois sur le vol s'appliquent tout aussi bien à ses profits honnêtes. D'un autre côté, comme le vol, en tant que violation de la propriété, présuppose la propriété, Proudhon s'est embrouillé dans toutes sortes de divagations confuses sur la vraie propriété bourgeoise.

Pendant mon séjour à Paris, en 1844, j'entrai en relations personnelles avec Proudhon. Je rappelle cette circonstance parce que jusqu'à un certain point je suis responsable de sa " sophistication ", mot qu'employoient les anglais pour désigner la falsification d'une marchandise. Dans de longues discussions, souvent prolongées toute la nuit, je l'infectais, à son grand préjudice, d'hégélisanisme qu'il ne pouvait pas étudier à fond, ne sachant pas l'allemand. Ce que j'avais commencé, M. Karl Grün, après mon expulsion de France, le continua. Et encore ce professeur de philosophie allemande avait sur moi cet avantage de ne rien entendre à ce qu'il enseignait.

Peu de temps avant la publication de son second ouvrage important : Philosophie de la misère, etc., Proudhon me l'annonça dans une lettre très détaillée, où entre autres choses se trouvent ces paroles : " J'attends votre férule critique ". Mais bientôt celle-ci tomba sur lui (dans ma Misère de la philosophie, etc., Paris, 1847), d'une façon qui brisa à tout jamais notre amitié.

De ce qui précède, vous pouvez voir que sa Philosophie de la misère ou système des contradictions économiques devait, enfin, donner la réponse à la question : Qu'est-ce que la propriété ? En effet, Proudhon n'avait commencé ses études économiques qu'après la publication de ce premier livre ; il avait découvert que, pour résoudre la question posée par lui, il fallait répondre non par des invectives, mais par une analyse de l'économie politique moderne. En même temps, il essaya d'exposer le système des catégories économiques au moyen de la dialectique. La contradiction hégélienne devait remplacer l'insoluble antinomie de Kant, comme moyen de développement.

Pour la critique de ses deux gros volumes, je dois vous renvoyer à ma réponse. J'ai montré, entre autres, comment le bon côté, il le voit exposé par les économistes ; le mauvais côté, il le voit dénoncé par les socialistes. Il emprunte aux économistes la nécessité des rapports éternels, il emprunte aux socialistes l'illusion de ne voir dans la misère que la propriété, etc., Paris, 1847), d'une façon qui brise à tout jamais notre amitié.

Puis je montre combien déficteuse et rudimentaire est sa connaissance de l'économie politique, dont il entreprenait cependant la critique, et comment avec les utopistes il se met à la recherche d'une préfiguration, mot qu'emploient les anglais pour " speculative "; il est l'homme à la recherche des formules. C'est ainsi que M. Proudhon se flatte d'avoir donné la critique et de l'économie politique et du communisme : il est au-dessus de l'une et de l'autre, au-dessous des économistes, puisque comme philosophe, qui a sous la main une formule magique, il a cru pouvoir se dispenser d'entrer dans des détails purement économiques; au-dessus des socialistes, puisque'il n'a ni assez de courage, ni assez de lumières pour s'élever, ne serait-ce que spéculativement au-dessus de l'horizon bourgeois.

Chaque rapport économique a un bon et un mauvais côté : c'est le seul point dans lequel M. Proudhon ne se dément pas. Le bon côté, il le voit exposé par les économistes, le mauvais côté, il le voit dénoncé par les socialistes. Il emprunte aux économistes la nécessité des rapports éternels, il emprunte aux socialistes l'illusion de ne voir dans la mesure que la mesure (au lieu d'y voir le côté révolutionnaire, subversif, qui renversera la société ancienne). Il est d'accord avec les uns et les autres en voulant s'en référer à l'autorité de la science. La science, pour lui, se réduit aux minces proportions d'une formule scientifique ; il est l'homme à la recherche des formules. C'est ainsi que M. Proudhon se flatte d'avoir donné la critique et de l'économie politique et du communisme : il est au-dessous de l'une et de l'autre, au-dessous des économistes, puisque comme philosophe, qui a sous la main une formule magique, il a cru pouvoir se dispenser d'entrer dans des détails purement économiques; au-dessus des socialistes, puisque'il n'a ni assez de courage, ni assez de lumières pour s'élever, ne serait-ce que spéculativement au-dessus de l'horizon bourgeois.

100 Brissot de Warville : Recherche sur le droit de propriété et sur le vol, etc., Berlin, 1782.

101 En français dans le texte.

102 " En disant que les rapports actuels, - les rapports de la production bourgeoise. - sont naturels, les économistes font entendre que ce sont des rapports dans lesquels se crée la richesse et se développent les forces productives aux lois naturelles indépendantes de l'influence du temps. Ce sont des lois éternelles qui doivent toujours régir la société. Ainsi, il y a eu de l'histoire mais il n'y en a plus. " Misère de la philosophie.
... Il veut planer en homme de science au-dessus des bourgeois, et des prolétaires; il n’est que le petit bourgeois, balloté constamment entre le Capital et le Travail, entre l'économie politique et le communisme.

Quelque dur que paraisse ce jugement, je suis obligé de le maintenir encore aujourd'hui, mot pour mot. Mais il importe de ne pas oublier qu’au moment où je déclarai et prouva théoriquement que le livre de Proudhon n’était que le code du socialisme des petits-bourgeois 103, ce même Proudhon fut anathématisé comme ultra et archi-révolutionnaire à la fois par des économistes et des socialistes. C'est pourquoi plus tard je n'ai jamais mêlé ma voix à ceux qui jetaien la hauts cris sur sa " trahison " de la révolution. Ce n'était pas sa faute si, mal compris à l'origine par d'autres comme par lui-même, il n'a pas répondu à des espérances que rien ne justifiait.

Philosophie de la misère, mise en regard de Qu'est-ce que la propriété ? fait ressortir très défavorablement tous les défaits de la manière d'exposer de Proudhon. Le style est souvent ce que les Français appellent ampoulé 104. Un galimatias prétentieux et spéculatif, qui se donne pour de la philosophie allemande, se rencontre partout où la perspicacité gauloise fait défaut. Ce qu'il vous come aux oreilles, sur un ton de saltimbanc et de fanfaron suffisant, c'est un ennuyeux radotage sur la " science " dont il fait par ailleurs ilégitimement étalage. A la place de la chaleur vraie et naturelle qui éclaire son premier livre, ici en maint endroit Proudhon déclare systématiquement, et s'échauffe à froid. Ajoutez à cela le gauche et désagréable pédantisme de l'autodidacte qui fait l'étudie, de l'ex-ouvrier qui a perdu sa fierté de se savoir penseur indépendant et original, et qui maintenant, en parvenu de la science, croit devoir se paver et se vanter de ce qu'il n'est pas et de ce qu'il n'a pas. Puis il y a ses sentiments de petit-bourgeois qui le poussent à attaquer d'une manière inconvenante et brutale, mais qui n'est ni pénitrante, ni profonde, ni même juste, un homme tel que Cabot, respectable à cause de son attitude pratique envers le prolétariat français, tandis qu'il fait l'aimable avec un Dunoyer (conseiller d'État, il est vrai), qui n'a d'autre importance que d'avoir prêché avec un sérieux comique, tout au long (le trois gros volumes inépuisablesment ennuyeux, un rigorisme ainsi caractérisé par Helvétius : " On veut que les malheureux soient satisfaits."

De fait, la révolution de février survint fort mal à propos pour Proudhon qui, tout juste quelques semaines auparavant, venait de prouver de façon irréfutable que l' " ère des révolutions " était passée à jamais. Cependant son attitude à l'Assemblée nationale ne mérite que des éloges, bien qu'elle prouve son peu d'intelligence de la situation. Après l'insurrection de juin cette attitude était un acte de grand courage. Elle eut de plus cette conséquence heureuse que M. Thiers, dans sa réponse aux propositions de Proudhon, publiée par la suite en brochure, dévoila à toute l'Europe sur quel pilier intellectuel de la bourgeoisie française. Opposé à Thiers, Proudhon prit en effet les proportions d'un colosse antédiluvien. Les derniers " exploits " économiques de Proudhonurent sa découverte du " Crédit gratuit " et de la " Banque du peuple " qui devait le réaliser. Dans mon ouvrage Zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie (Contribution à la critique de l'économie politique) Berlin 1859 (pp. 59-64) 105, on trouve la preuve que la base théorique de ces idées proudhonniennes résulte d'une complète ignorance des premiers éléments de l'économie politique bourgeoise : le rapport entre la Marchandise et l'argent; tandis que leur superstructure pratique n'était que la reproduction de projets bien antérieurs et bien mieux élaborés.

Il n'est pas douteux, il est même tout à fait évident que le système de crédit qui a servi par exemple en Angleterre, au commencement du XVII° et plus récemment du XIX° siècle, à transférer les richesses d'une classe à une autre pourrait servir aussi, dans certaines conditions politiques et économiques, à accélérer l'émancipation de la classe ouvrière. Mais considérer le capital portant intérêts comme la forme principale du capital, mais vouloir faire une application particulière du crédit, de l'abolition prétendue de l'intérêt, la base de la transformation sociale - voilà une fantaisie tout ce qu'il y a de plus philistin. Aussi la trouve-t-on déjà elucubrée con amore chez les porte-parole économiques de la petite bourgeoisie anglaise du XVII° siècle. La polémique de Proudhon contre Bastiat au sujet du capital portant intérêts (1850) est de beaucoup au-dessous de Philosophie de la misère. Il réussit à se faire battre même par Bastiat et pousse de hauts cris, d'une manière burlesque, toutes les fois que son adversaire lui porte un coup.

Il y a quelques années, Proudhon écrivit une dissertation sur les impôts, sur un sujet mis au concours, à ce que je crois, par le gouvernement du canton de Vaud. Ici s'évanouit la dernière lueur de génie : il ne reste que le petit-bourgeois tout pur 107.

Les écrits politiques et philosophiques de Proudhon ont tout le même caractère double et contradictoire que nous avons trouvé dans ses travaux économiques. De plus, ils n'ont qu'une importance locale limitée à la France. Toutefois, ses attaques contre la religion et l'Église avaient un grand mérite en France à une époque où les socialistes français se targaient de leurs sentiments religieux comme d'une supériorité sur le voltairianisme du XVIII° siècle et sur l'athéisme.

103 En français dans le texte.
104 En français dans le texte.
105 En français dans le texte.
107 En français dans le texte.
allemand du XIX° siècle. Si Pierre le Grand abattit la barbarie russe par la barbarie, Proudhon fit de son mieux pour terrasser la phrase française par la phrase.

Ce que l'on ne peut plus considérer comme de mauvais écrits seulement, mais tout bonnement comme des vilénies - correspondant toutefois parfaitement au point de vue petit-bourgeois - c'est le livre sur le coup d'État, où il coquette avec L. Bonaparte, s'efforçant en réalité de le rendre acceptable aux ouvriers français, et son dernier ouvrage contre la Pologne, où, en l'honneur du tsar, il fait montre d'un cynisme de crétin.

On a souvent comparé Proudhon à Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rien ne saurait être plus faux. Il ressemble plutôt à Nicolas Linguet, dont la Théorie des lois civiles est d'ailleurs une œuvre de génie.

La nature de Proudhon le portait à la dialectique. Mais n'ayant jamais compris la dialectique vraiment scientifique, il ne parvint qu'au sophisme. En fait, c'était lié à son point de vue petit-bourgeois. Le petit-bourgeois, tout comme notre historien Raumer, se compose de "d'un côté" et de "de l'autre côté". Même tirailement opposé dans ses intérêts matériels et par conséquent ses vues religieuses, scientifiques et artistiques, sa morale, enfin son être tout entier. Il est la contradiction faite homme.

S'il est, de plus, comme Proudhon, un homme d'esprit, il saura bientôt jongler avec ses propres contradictions et les élaborer selon les circonstances en paradoxes frappants, tapageurs, parfois scandaleux, parfois brillants. Charlatanisme scientifique et accommodements politiques sont inséparables d'un pareil point de vue. Il ne reste plus qu'un seul mobile, la vanité de l'individu, et, comme pour tous les vaniteux, il ne s'agit plus que de l'effet du moment, du succès du jour. De la sorte, s'éteint nécessairement le simple tact moral qui préserva un Rousseau, par exemple, de toute compromission, même apparente, avec les pouvoirs existants.

Peut-être la postérité dira, pour caractériser la toute récente phase de l'histoire française, que Louis Bonaparte en fut le Napoléon et Proudhon le Rousseau-Voltaire.

Vous m'avez confié le rôle de juge... Si peu de temps après la mort de l'homme : à vous maintenant d'en prendre la responsabilité.

Votre tout dévoué,

Karl MARX.
II. John Gray et les bons du travail 108

C’est par John Gray 109 que la théorie du temps de travail pris comme unité de mesure immédiate de la monnaie a été développée pour la première fois de façon systématique. Il fait certifier, par une banque centrale nationale agissant par l’entremise de ses succursales, le temps de travail employé pour produire les différentes marchandises. En échange de la marchandise, le producteur reçoit un certificat officiel de sa valeur, c’est-à-dire un reçu pour autant de temps de travail qu’elle contient et ces billets de banque de 1 semaine de travail, 1 journée de travail, 1 heure de travail, etc., servent en même temps de bons pour l’équivalent de toutes autres marchandises emmagasinées dans les docks de la banque 111. C’est là le principe fondamental, dont tous les détails d’application sont soigneusement étudiés en s’appuyant toujours sur des institutions anglaises existantes. Avec ce système, dit Gray, il serait rendu aussi facile en tout temps de vendre pour de l’argent qu’il l’est maintenant d’acheter avec de l’argent; la production serait la source uniforme et jamais tarie de la demande 112.

Les métaux précieux perdraient leur "privilège " vis-à-vis des autres marchandises et prendraient sur le marché la place qui leur revient à côté du beurre et des œufs, du drap et du calicot, et leur valeur ne nous intéresserait pas plus que celle des diamants 113.

Devons-nous conserver notre mesure fictive des valeurs, l’or, et entraver ainsi les forces productives du pays, ou bien devons-nous recourir à la mesure naturelle des valeurs, le travail, et libérer ainsi les forces productives du pays ? 114 ?

Le temps de travail étant la mesure immanente des valeurs, pourquoi une autre mesure extérieure à côté d’elle ? Pourquoi la valeur d’échange évolue-t-elle en prix ? Pourquoi toutes les marchandises évaluent-elles leurs valeurs dans une marchandise exclusive, qui est ainsi transformée en mode d'existence de la valeur d'échange, en argent ? Tel était le problème qu’avait à résoudre Gray. Au lieu de le résoudre, il s’imagine que les marchandises pourraient se rapporter directement les unes aux autres en tant que produits du travail social. Mais elles ne peuvent se rapporter les unes aux autres que pour ce qu’elles sont. Les marchandises sont de façon immédiate les produits de travaux privés indépendants isolés qui, par leur aliénation dans le processus de l'échange privé, doivent se confirmer comme du travail social général, autrement dit, le travail, sur la base de la production marchande, ne devient travail social que par l'aliénation universelle des travaux individuels. Mais, en posant comme immédiatement social le temps de travail contenu dans les marchandises, Gray le pose comme temps de travail collectif ou comme temps de travail d'individus directement associés. Alors effectivement une marchandise spécifique, comme l’or et l’argent, ne pourrait affronter les autres marchandises comme incarnation du travail général, la valeur d’échange ne deviendrait pas prix, mais la valeur d’usage ne se transformerait pas non plus en valeur d’échange, le produit ne deviendrait pas marchandise et ainsi serait supprimée la base même de la production bourgeoise. Mais telle n’est nullement la pensée de Gray. Les produits doivent être fabriqués comme marchandises, mais non être échangés comme marchandises. Gray confie à une banque nationale la réalisation de ce priez désir. D’une part, la société sous la forme de la banque rend les individus indépendants des conditions de l'échange privé et, d’autre part, elle laisse ces mêmes individus continuer de produire sur la base de l'échange privé. La logique interne cependant pousse Gray à nier les unes après les autres les conditions de la production bourgeoise, bien qu’il veuille seulement "réformer" la monnaie engendrée par l'échange des marchandises. C’est ainsi qu’il transforme le capital en capital national 115, la


110 Gray : The Social System, etc., p. 63. “L’argent ne devrait être, en somme, qu’un reçu, la preuve que le détenteur a contribué pour une certaine valeur à la richesse nationale existante (to the national stock f’wealth), où qu’il a acquis un droit à ladite valeur de quelque personne y ayant elle-même fait apport.”

108 Karl Marx : Misère de la philosophie

111 “Qu’un produit préalablement estimé à une certaine valeur soit dans une banque et qu’on le retire quand on en aura besoin, en stipulant seulement par une convention générale que celui qui dépose un bien quelconque dans la banque nationale proposée pourra en retirer une valeur égale de quelque marchandise que ce soit, contene dans la banque, au lieu d’être obligé de retirer le produit même qu’il y aura déposé.” (Gray : The Social System, etc., pp. 67-68.)

112 Ibid, p. 16.

113 Gray : Lectures on Money, etc., p. 182 [183].


115 “Les affaires de tout pays devraient être conduites sur la base d’un capital national.” (John Gray : The Social System, etc., p. 171.)
propriété foncière en propriété nationale. Et, si l'on y regarde de près, on s'aperçoit que non seulement sa banque reçoit des marchandises d'une main et délivre de l'autre des certificats de livraison de travail, mais qu'elle règle la production elle-même. Dans son dernier ouvrage Lectures on Money, où Gray cherche anxieusement à représenter sa monnaie-travail comme une réforme purement bourgeoise, il s'empêtre dans des absurdités plus criantes encore.

Toute marchandise est immédiatement monnaie. Telle était la théorie de Gray, déduite de son analyse incomplète, partant fausse, de la marchandise. La construction " organique " de " monnaie-travail " et de " banque nationale " et " d'entrepôts de marchandises " n'est qu'une chimère où l'on veut donner l'illusion que le dogme est une loi régissant l'univers. Pour que le dogme suivant lequel la marchandise est immédiatement monnaie ou le travail particulier de l'individu privé qu'elle contient est immédiatement travail social, devienne vérité, il ne suffit naturellement pas qu'une banque y croie et y conforme ses opérations. Au contraire, la banqueroute se chargerait en pareil cas d'en faire la critique pratique. Ce qui reste caché dans l'œuvre de Gray et que notamment lui-même ne voit pas, à savoir que la monnaie-travail est un mot creux à résonance économique qui traduit le pieux désir de se débarrasser de l'argent, avec l'argent, de la valeur d'échange, avec la valeur d'échange, de la marchandise, et avec la marchandise, de la forme bourgeoise de la production, quelques socialistes anglais qui ont écrit soit avant, soit après Gray le proclament sans ambages. Mais il était réservé à M. Proudhon et à son école de prôner très sérieusement la dégradation de l'argent et l'apothéose de la marchandise comme étant l'essence même du socialisme et de réduire ainsi le socialisme à une méconnaissance élémentaire de la nécessaire connexion entre la marchandise et l'argent.

116 " Il faut que le sol soit transformé en propriété nationale " (ibid., p. 298).
117 Voir, par exemple, W. Thompson : An Inquiry into the Distribution of Wealth, etc., Londres, 1827; Bray : Labours Wrongs and Labours Remedy, Leeds, 1839.
118 On peut considérer comme le compendium de cette mélodramatique théorie de la monnaie l'ouvrage d'Alfred Darimon : De la réforme des banques, Paris, 1856.
III. Discours sur la question du libre-échange

Messieurs,

L'abolition des lois céréales en Angleterre est le plus grand triomphe que le libre-échange ait remporté au XIXe siècle. Dans tous les pays où les fabricants parlent de libre-échange, ils ont principalement en vue le libre-échange des grains et des matières premières en général. Frapper de droits protecteurs les grains étrangers, c'est infâme, c'est spéculer sur la famine des peuples.

Du pain à bon marché, des salaires relevés, cheap food, high wages, voilà le seul but pour lequel les free-traders, en Angleterre, ont dépensé des millions, et déjà leur enthousiasme s'est étendu à leurs frères du continent. En général, si l'on veut le libre-échange, c'est pour soulager la condition de la classe laborieuse.

Mais, chose étonnante ! le peuple, auquel on veut à toute force procurer du pain à bon marché, est très ingrat. Le pain à bon marché est aussi mal aimé en Angleterre que le gouvernement à bon marché l'est en France. Le peuple voit dans les hommes de dévouement, dans un Bowring, un Bright et consorts, ses plus grands ennemis et les hypocrites les plus effrontés.

Tout le monde sait que la lutte entre les libéraux et les démocrates s'appelle, en Angleterre, la lutte entre les free-traders et les chartistes.

Voyons maintenant comment les free-traders anglais ont prouvé au peuple les bons sentiments qui les faisaient agir.

Voici ce qu'ils disaient aux ouvriers des fabriques :

Le droit prélevé sur les céréales est un impôt sur le salaire, cet impôt, vous le payez aux seigneurs territoriaux, à ces aristocrates du moyen âge, si votre position est miserable, c'est à cause de la cherté des vivres de première nécessité.

Les ouvriers demandaient à leur tour aux fabricants :

Comment se fait-il que, depuis les trente dernières années ou notre industrie a pris le plus grand développement, notre salaire ait baissé dans une proportion bien plus rapide que le prix des grains n'a haussé ?

L'impôt que nous payons aux propriétaires fonciers, comme vous le prétendez, fait sur l'ouvrier à peu près trois pence (six sous) par semaine. Et cependant le salaire du tisserand à la main est descendu de 28 sh. par semaine à 5 sh. (de 35 fr. à 7 fr. 25) depuis 1815 jusqu'à 1843; et le salaire du tisserand, dans l'atelier automatique, a été réduit de 20 sh. par semaine à 8 sh. (de 25 fr. à 10 fr.) depuis 1823 jusqu'à 1843.

Et pendant tout ce temps la part d'impôt que nous avons payée n'a jamais été au-delà de trois pence. Et puis ! En 1834, quand le pain était à très bon compte et que le commerce allait très bien, qu'est-ce que vous nous disiez ? Si vous êtes malheureux, c'est parce que vous faites trop d'enfants, et que votre mariage est plus fécond que votre industrie !

Voilà les propres paroles que vous nous disiez alors; et vous êtes allé faire les nouvelles lois des pauvres et construire des work-houses, ces bastilles des prolétaires.

C'est à quoi répliquaient les fabricants :

Vous avez raison, messieurs les ouvriers ce n'est pas seulement le prix du blé, mais encore la concurrence entre les bras offerts, qui détermine le salaire.

Mais pensez bien à une chose : c'est que notre sol ne se compose que de rochers et de bancs de sable. Vous figurez-vous, par hasard, qu'on puisse faire venir du blé dans des pots à fleurs ? Ainsi, si, au lieu de prodiguer notre capital et notre travail sur un sol tout à fait stérile, nous abandonnions l'agriculture pour nous livrer exclusivement à l'industrie, toute l'Europe abandonnerait les manufactures, et l'Angleterre formerait une seule grande ville manufacturière, qui aurait pour campagne le reste de l'Europe.

Tout en parlant de la sorte à ses propres ouvriers, le fabricant est interpellé par le petit commerçant qui lui dit :

Mais si nous abolissons les lois céréales, nous ruineron, il est vrai, notre agriculture, mais nous ne forcerons pas pour cela les autres pays de nous fabriquer et d'abandonner les leurs.

Qu'en résultera-t-il ! Je perdrai les pratiques que j'ai maintenant à la campagne, et le commerce intérieur perdra ses marchés.

Le fabricant, tournant le dos à l'ouvrier, répond à l'épicier :

Quant à ça, laissez-nous faire. Une fois que l'impôt sur le blé sera aboli, nous aurons de l'étranger du blé à meilleur marché. Puis nous abaissierons le salaire, qui haussera en même temps dans les autres pays dont nous tirons les grains.

Ainsi, outre les avantages que nous avons déjà, nous aurons encore celui d'un salaire moindre, et avec tous ces avantages, nous forcerons bien le continent à se fournir chez nous.

Mais voilà que le fermier et l'ouvrier de la campagne se mêlent à la discussion.

119 Ce discours, prononcé à la séance publique du 7 Janvier 1848 de l'Association démocratique de Bruxelles est conforme au texte de la brochure originale publiée à Bruxelles en 1848, aux frais de l'Association.

120 Ici, comme dans la suite de ce texte. Marx désigne par " lois céréales " les " lois sur les céréales ". (N.R.)
Et nous, donc, que deviendrons-nous ? disent-ils.

Irions-nous porter un arrêt de mort sur l'agriculture qui nous fait vivre ? Devrions-nous souffrir qu'on nous otât le sol de dessous nos pieds ?

Pour toute réponse l'Anti-com-law league s'est contentée d'assigner des prix aux trois meilleurs écrits traitant l'influence salutaire de l'abolition des lois céréales sur l'agriculture anglaise.

Ces prix ont été remportés par MM. Hope, Morse et Greg, dont les livres furent répandus à la campagne par des milliers d'exemplaires.

L'un des lauréats s'attache à prouver que ce n'est ni le fermier ni le laboureur salarié qui perdra par la libre importation du grain étranger, mais seulement le propriétaire foncier.

Le fermier anglais, s'écrie-t-il, n'a pas à craindre l'abolition des lois céréales, parce qu'aucun pays ne saurait produire du blé d'aussi bonne qualité et à aussi bon marché que l'Angleterre. Ainsi quand même le prix du blé tomberait, ça ne pourrait vous faire du tort, parce que cette baisse porterait seulement sur la rente qui aurait diminué et nullement sur le profit industriel et sur le salaire, qui resteraient les mêmes.

Le second lauréat, M. Morse, soutient, au contraire, que le prix du blé hausera à la suite de l'abolition des lois céréales. Il se donne infiniment de peine, pour démontrer que les droits protecteurs n'ont jamais pu assurer au blé un prix rémunérateur.

A l'appui de son assertion, il cite le fait que toutes les fois qu'on a importé du blé étranger, le prix du blé montait considérablement en Angleterre et quand on en importait peu, il y tombait extrêmement. Le lauréat oublie que l'importation n'était pas la cause du prix élevé, mais que le prix élevé était la cause de l'importation.

Et, tout à l'opposé de son co-lauréat, il affirme que toute hausse dans le prix des grains tourne au profit du fermier et de l'ouvrier, et non pas au profit du propriétaire.

Le troisième lauréat, M. Greg, qui est un grand fabricant et dont le livre s'adresse à la classe des grands fermiers, ne pouvait pas s'en tenir à de semblables niaiseries. Son langage est plus scientifique.

Il convient que les lois céréales ne font hauser la rente qu'en faisant hauser le prix du blé et qu'elles ne font hauser le prix du blé qu'en imposant au capital la nécessité de s'appliquer à des terrains de qualité inférieure, et cela s'explique tout naturellement.

A mesure que la population s'accroît, le grain étranger ne pouvant entrer dans le pays, on est bien forcé de faire valoir des terrains moins fertiles, dont la culture exige plus de frais, et dont le produit est, par conséquent, plus cher.

Le grain étant d'une vente forcée, le prix s'en réglera nécessairement sur le prix des produits des terrains les plus coûteux. La différence qu'il y a entre ce prix et les frais de production des meilleurs terrains constitue la rente.

Ainsi, si à la suite d'une modification des lois céréales, le prix du blé et, par conséquent, la rente tombent, c'est parce que les terrains ingrats cesseront d'être cultivés. Donc la réduction de la rente entraînera infailliblement la ruine d'une partie des fermiers.

Ces observations étaient nécessaires pour faire comprendre le langage de M. Greg.

Les petits fermiers, dit-il, qui ne pourront pas se tenir dans l'agriculture, trouveront une ressource dans l'industrie. Quant aux grands fermiers, ils doivent y gagner. Ou les propriétaires seront forcés de leur vendre à très bon marché leurs terres où les contrats de fermages qu'ils feront avec eux seront à des termes très prolongés. C'est ce qui leur permettra d'engager de grands capitaux à la terre, d'y faire l'application des machines sur une plus grande échelle et d'économiser ainsi sur le travail manuel qui, d'ailleurs, sera à meilleur marché par la baisse générale des salaires, conséquence immédiate des lois céréales.

Le docteur Bowring a donné à tous ces arguments une consécration religieuse, en s'écriant, dans un meeting publié : Jésus-Christ, c'est le free-trade; le free-trade, c'est Jésus-Christ !

On comprend que toute cette hypocrisy n'était pas propre à faire goûter aux ouvriers le pain à bon marché.

Comment d'ailleurs les ouvriers aureraient-ils pu comprendre la philanthropie soudaine des fabricants, de ces gens qui étaient occupés encore à combattre le bill des dix heures, par lequel on voulait réduire la journée de l'ouvrier de fabrique de douze heures à dix heures.

Pour vous faire une idée de la philanthropie de ces fabricants, je vous rappellerai, messieurs, les règlements établis dans toutes les fabriques.

Chaque fabricant a pour son usage particulier un véritable code où il y a des amendes fixées pour toutes les fautes volontaires ou involontaires. Par exemple, l'ouvrier payera tant, s'il a le malheur de s'asseoir sur une chaise, s'il chuchote, cause, rit, s'il arrive quelques minutes trop tard, si une partie de la machine se casse, s'il ne livre pas les objets d'une qualité voulue, etc., etc. Les amendes sont toujours plus fortes que le dommage véritablement occasionné par l'ouvrier. Et pour donner à l'ouvrier toute facilité d'encourir des peines, on fait avancer la pendule de la fabrique, on fournit de mauvaises matières premières pour que l'ouvrier en fasse de bonnes pièces. On destitue le contremaître qui ne serait pas assez habile pour multiplier les cas de contravention.

Vous le voyez, messieurs, cette législation domestique est faite pour enfanter des contraventions, et on fait faire des contraventions pour faire de l'argent. Ainsi, le fabricant emploie tous les moyens pour réduire le salaire nominal et pour exploiter jusqu'aux accidents dont l'ouvrier n'est pas le maître.
Ces fabricants, ce sont les mêmes philanthropes qui ont voulu faire croire aux ouvriers qu’ils étaient capables de faire des dépenses énormes, uniquement pour améliorer leur sort.

Ainsi, d’un côté, ils rognent le salaire de l’ouvrier par les règlements de fabrique de la manière la plus mesquine, et de l’autre, ils s’imposent les plus grands sacrifices pour le faire rehausser par l’Anti-corn-law league.

Ils construisent à grands frais des palais, où la leage établissait, en quelque sorte, sa demeure officielle; ils font marcher une armée de missionnaires vers tous les points de l’Angleterre, pour qu’ils prêchent la religion du libre-échange; ils font imprimer et distribuer gratis des milliers de brochures pour éclairer l’ouvrier sur ses propres intérêts, ils dépensent des sommes énormes pour rendre la presse favorable à leur cause, ils organisent une vaste administration pour diriger les mouvements libre-échangistes, et ils déploient toutes les richesses de leur éloquence dans les meetings publics. C’était dans un de ces meetings qu’un ouvrier s’écria :

Si les propriétaires fonciers vendaient nos os, vous autres, fabricants, vous seriez les premiers à les acheter, pour les jeter dans un moulin à vapeur et en faire de la farine.

Les ouvriers anglais ont très bien compris la signification de la lutte entre les propriétaires fonciers et les capitalistes industriels. Ils savent très bien qu’on voulait rabaisser le prix du pain pour rabaisser le salaire et que le profit industriel augmenterait de ce que la rente aurait diminué.

Ricardo, l’apôtre des free-traders anglais, l’économiste le plus distingué de notre siècle, est sur ce point parfaitement d’accord avec les ouvriers.

Il dit dans son célèbre ouvrage sur l’économie politique :

Si, au lieu de récolter du blé chez nous, nous découvrions un nouveau marché où nous pourrions nous procurer ces objets à meilleur compte, dans ce cas les salaires doivent baisser et les profits d’accroître. La baisse du prix des produits de l’agriculture réduit les salaires non seulement des ouvriers employés à la culture de la terre, mais encore de tous ceux qui travaillent aux manufactures ou qui sont employés au commerce.

Et ne croyez pas, messieurs, que ce soit chose tout à fait indifférente pour l’ouvrier de ne recevoir plus que 4 francs, le blé étant à meilleur marché, quand auparavant il a reçu 5 francs.

Son salaire n’est-il pas toujours tombé par rapport au profit ? Et n’est-il pas clair que sa position sociale a empiré vis-à-vis du capitalisme. Outre cela, il perd encore dans le fait.

Tant que le prix du blé était encore plus élevé, le salaire l’étant également, une petite épargne faite sur la consommation du pain suffisait pour lui procurer d’autres jouissances, mais du moment que le pain et en conséquence le salaire est à très bon marché, il ne pourra presque rien économiser sur le pain pour l’achat des autres objets.

Les ouvriers anglais ont fait sentir aux free-traders qu’ils ne sont pas les dupes de leurs illusions et de leurs mensonges, et si, malgré cela, ils se sont associés à eux contre les propriétaires fonciers, c’était pour détruire les derniers restes de la féodalité et pour n’avoir plus affaire qu’à un seul ennemi. Les ouvriers ne se sont pas trompés dans leurs calculs, car les propriétaires fonciers, pour se venger des fabricants, ont fait cause commune avec les ouvriers pour faire passer le bill des dix heures, que ces derniers avaient vainement demandé depuis trente ans, et qui passa immédiatement après l’abolition des droits sur les céréales.

Si, au congrès des économistes, le docteur Bowring a tiré de sa poche une longue liste pour faire voir toutes les pièces de bœuf, de jambon, de lard, de poulets, etc., etc. qui ont été importées en Angleterre, pour être consommées, comme il dit, par les ouvriers, il a malheureusement oublié de vous dire qu’au même instant les ouvriers de Manchester et des autres villes manufacturières, se trouvaient jetés sur le pavé par la crise qui commençait.

En principe, en économie politique, il ne faut jamais grouper les chiffres d’une seule année pour en tirer des lois générales. Il faut toujours prendre le terme moyen de six à sept ans - laps de temps pendant lequel l'industrie moderne passe par les différentes phases de prospérité, de surproduction, de stagnation, de crise et achève son cycle fatal.

Sans doute, si le prix de toutes les marchandises tombait, et est là la conséquence nécessaire du libre-échange, je pourrai me procurer pour un franc bien plus de choses qu’auparavant. Et le franc de l’ouvrier vaut autant que tout autre. Le travailleur, coûteront également moins cher. Si toutes les marchandises sont à meilleur marché, le travail, qui est aussi une marchandise, baissera également de prix, et, comme nous le verrons plus tard, ce travail marchandise baissera proportionnellement beaucoup plus que les autres marchandises. Le travailleur, comptant toujours sur l’argumentation des économistes, trouvera que le franc s'est fondu dans sa poche, et qu’il ne lui reste plus que cinq sous.
La-dessus les économistes vous diront : eh bien, nous convenons que la concurrence parmi les ouvriers, qui certes n'aura pas diminué sous le régime du libre-échange, ne tardera pas à mettre les salaires en accord avec le bas prix des marchandises. Mais d'autre part le bas prix des marchandises augmentera la consommation; la plus grande consommation exiguera une plus grande production, laquelle sera suivie d'une plus forte demande de bras, et à cette plus forte demande de bras succédera une hausse de salaires.

Toute cette argumentation revient à ceci : le libre-échange augmente les forces productives. Si l'industrie va croissant, si la richesse, si le pouvoir productif, si, en un mot, le capital productif augmente la demande du travail, le prix du travail, et, par conséquent, le salaire, augmente également. La meilleure condition pour l'ouvrier, c'est l'accroissement du capital. Et il faut en convenir. Si le capital reste stationnaire, l'industrie ne restera pas seulement stationnaire, mais elle déclinerà, et, en ce cas, l'ouvrier en sera la première victime. Il périra avant le capitaliste. Et dans le cas où le capital va croissant, dans cet état de choses que nous avons dit le meilleur pour l'ouvrier, quel sera son sort ? Il périra également. L'accroissement du capital productif implique l'accélération et la concentration des capitaux. La centralisation des capitaux amène une plus grande division du travail et une plus grande application des machines. La plus grande division du travail détruit la spécialité du travail, détruit la spécialité du travailleur et, en mettant à la place de cette spécialité un travail que tout le monde peut faire, elle augmente la concurrence entre les ouvriers.

Cette concurrence, devient d'autant plus forte, que la division du travail donne à l'ouvrier le moyen de faire à lui seul le travail de trois.

Les machines produisent le même résultat sur une beaucoup plus grande échelle. L'accroissement du capital productif, en forçant les capitalistes industriels à travailler avec des moyens toujours croissants, ruine les petits industriels et les jette dans le prolétariat. Puis, le taux de l'intérêt diminuant à mesure que les capitaux s'accumulent, les petits rentiers qui ne peuvent plus vivre de leurs rentes seront forcés de se lancer dans l'industrie pour aller augmenter ensuite le nombre des prolétaires.

Enfin, plus le capital productif augmente, plus il est forcé de produire pour un marché dont il ne connaît pas les besoins, plus la production précède la consommation, plus l'offre cherche à forcer la demande, et, en conséquence, les crises augmentent d'intensité et de rapidité. Mais toute crise, à son tour, accélère la centralisation des capitaux et grossit le prolétariat.

Ainsi, à mesure que le capital productif s'accroît, la concurrence entre les ouvriers s'accroît dans une proportion beaucoup plus forte. Le rétribution du travail diminue pour tous, et le fardeau du travail augmente pour quelques.

En 1829, il y avait à Manchester, 1 088 fileurs occupée dans 36 fabriques. En 1841, il n'y en avait plus que 448, et ces ouvriers étaient occupés à 53 353 fuseaux de plus que les 1 088 ouvriers de 1829. Si le rapport du travail manuel avait augmenté proportionnellement au pouvoir productif, le nombre des ouvriers aurait dû atteindre le chiffre de 1848, de sorte que les améliorations apportées dans la mécanique ont enlevé le travail à 1 100 ouvriers.

Nous savons d'avance la réponse des économistes. Ces hommes privés d'ouvrage, disent-ils, trouveront un autre emploi de leurs bras. M. le docteur Bowring n'a pas manqué de reproduire cet argument au congrès des économistes, mais il n'a pas manqué non plus de se réfuter lui-même.

En 1833, M. le docteur Bowring prononçait un discours à la Chambre des communes, au sujet des 50 000 tisserands de Londres qui depuis très longtemps se meurent d'inanition, sans pouvoir trouver cette nouvelle occupation que les free-traders font entrevoir dans le lointain. Mais d'autre part le bas prix des marchandises a tiré le nombre des tisserands à la main. Déjà dans beaucoup d'articles qui se sont faits à la main, le tissu, les flatins; et de toutes les découvertes, le métier à vapeur est celle qui pèse avec le plus de poids sur les tisserands à la main. Déjà dans beaucoup d'articles qui se sont faits à la main, le tisserand a été mis hors de combat, mais il sera battu sur bien des choses qui se font encore à la main.

Nous allons donner les passages les plus saillants de ce discours de M. le docteur Bowring.

La misère des tisserands à la main, dit-il, est le sort inévitable de toute espèce de travail qui s'approche facilement et qui est susceptible d'être à chaque instant remplacé par des moyens moins coûteux. Comme dans ce cas la concurrence entre les ouvriers est extrêmement grande, le moindre relâchement dans la demande amène une crise. Les tisserands à la main se trouvent en quelque sorte placés sur les limites de l'existence humaine. Un pas de plus et leur existence devient impossible. Le moindre choc suffit pour les lancer dans la carrière du dépérissement. Les progrès de la mécanique, en supprimant de plus en plus le travail manuel, amènent infailliblement pendant l'époque de la transition bien des souffrances temporelles. Le bien-être national ne saurait être achevé qu'au prix de quelques maux individuels. On n'avance en industrie qu'aux dépens des travailleurs; et de toutes les découvertes, le métier à vapeur est celle qui pèse avec le plus de poids sur les tisserands à la main. Déjà dans beaucoup d'articles qui se sont faits à la main, le tisserand a été mis hors de combat, mais il sera battu sur bien des choses qui se font encore à la main.

Je tiens, dit-il plus loin, entre mes mains une correspondance du gouverneur général avec la Compagnie des Indes orientales. Cette correspondance concerne les tisserands du district de Dacca. Le gouverneur dit dans ses lettres : il y a quelques années la Compagnie des Indes orientales recevait six à huit millions de pièces de coton, qui étaient fabriquées par les métiers du pays; la demande en tomba graduellement et fut réduite à un million de pièces environ.

Dans ce moment, elle a presque complètement cessé. De plus, en 1800, l'Amérique du Nord a tiré des Indes presque 800 000 pièces de coton. En 1830, elle n'en tirait même pas 4 000. Enfin, en 1800, on a embarqué, pour être transférées en Portugal, un million de pièces de coton. En 1830, le Portugal n'en recevait plus que 20 000.
Les rapports sur la détresse des tisserands indiens sont terribles. Et quelle fut l'origine de cette détresse ?

La présence sur le marché des produits anglais ; la production de l'article au moyen du métier à vapeur. Un très grand nombre de tisserands est mort d'inanition ; le restant a passé à d'autres occupations et surtout aux travaux ruraux. Ne pas savoir changer d'occupation, c'était un arrêt de mort. Et en ce moment, le district de Dacca regorge des fils et des tissus anglais. La mousseline de Dacca, renommée dans tout le monde pour sa beauté et la fermeté de sa texture, est également éclipse par la concurrence des machines anglaises. Dans toute l'histoire du commerce, on aurait peut-être de la peine à trouver des souffrances pareilles à celles qu'ont dû supporter de cette manière des classes entières dans les Indes orientales.

Le discours de M. le docteur Bowring est d'autant plus remarquable que les faits qui y sont cités sont exacts, et que les phrases dont il cherche à les pallier, portent tout à fait le caractère d'hypocrisie commun à tous les serinons libre-échangistes. Il représente les ouvriers comme des moyens de production qu'il faut remplacer par des moyens de production moins coûteux. Il fait semblant de voir dans le travail dont il parle, un travail tout à fait exceptionnel, et dans la machine qui a écrasé les tisserands, une machine également exceptionnelle. Il oublie qu'il n'y a pas de travail manuel qui ne soit susceptible de subir d'un jour à l'autre le sort du tissage.

Le but constant et la tendance de tout perfectionnement dans le mécanisme est, en effet, de se passer entièrement de l'homme ou d'en diminuer le prix en substituant l'industrie des femmes et des enfants à celle de l'ouvrier adulte ou le travail de l'ouvrier grossier à celui de l'habile artisan. Dans la plupart des filatures par métiers continus, en anglais throstlemills, la filature est entièrement exécutée par des filles de seize ans et au-dessous. La substitution de la mule-jenny automatique à la mule-jenny ordinaire a pour effet de congéder la plupart des fileurs et de garder des enfants et des adolescents.

Ces paroles du libre-échangiste le plus passionné, M. le docteur Ure, servent à compléter les confessions de M. Bowring. M. Bowring parle de quelques maux individuels, et dit, en même temps, que ces maux individuels font périr des classes entières ; il parle des souffrances passagères dans le temps de transition, et en même temps qu'il en parle, il ne dissimule pas que ces souffrances passagères ont été pour la plupart le passage de la vie à la mort, et pour le restant le mouvement de transition dans une condition inférieure à celle dans laquelle ils étaient placés auparavant. S'il dit, plus loin, que les malheurs de ces ouvriers sont inséparables du progrès de l'industrie et nécessaires au bien-être national, il dit simplement que le bien-être de la classe bourgeoise a pour condition nécessaire le malheur de la classe laborieuse.

Toute la consolation que M. Bowring prodigue aux ouvriers qui périssent, et, en général, toute la doctrine de compensation que les free-traders établissent, revient à ceci :

Vous autres, milliers d'ouvriers qui périssiez, ne vous désolez pas. Vous pouvez mourir en toute tranquillité. Votre classe ne périra pas. Elle sera toujours assez nombreuse pour que le capital puisse la décimer, sans avoir à craindre de l'anéantir. D'ailleurs, comment voulez-vous que le capital trouve un emploi utile, s'il n'avait pas soin de se ménager toujours la matière exploitable, les ouvriers, pour les exploiter de nouveau ?

Mais aussi, pourquoi poser encore comme problème à résoudre, l'influence que la réalisation du libre-échange exerce sur la situation de la classe ouvrière ? Toutes les lois que les économistes ont exposées, depuis Quesnay jusqu'à Ricardo, sont établies dans la supposition que les entraves qui enchaînent encore la liberté commerciale n'existent plus. Ces lois se confirment au fur et à mesure que le libre-échange se réalise.

La première de ces lois, c'est que la concurrence réduit le prix de toute marchandise au minimum de ses frais de production. Ainsi le minimum de salaire est le prix naturel du travail. Et qu'est ce surplus ne sera que le minimum ; c'est-à-dire que la classe ouvrière se sera conservée comme classe après bien de malheurs, de misères et de cadavres laissés sur le champ de bataille industriel. Mais qu'importe ? La classe subsiste toujours et, mieux que cela, elle se sera accrue.

Ce n'est pas tout. Le progrès de l'industrie produit des moyens d'existence moins coûteux. C'est ainsi que l'eau-détergent a remplacé la bière, que le coton a remplacé la laine et le lin, et que la pomme de terre a remplacé le pain.

Ainsi, comme on trouve toujours moyen d'alimenter le travail avec des choses moins chères et plus matérielles, le minimum du salaire va toujours en diminuant. Si ce salaire a commencé à faire travailler l'homme pour vivre, il finit par faire vivre l'homme d'une vie de machine. Son existence n'a d'autre valeur que celle d'une simple force productive, et le capitaliste le traite en conséquence.
Cette loi du travail marchandise, du minimum du salaire, se vérifiera à mesure que la supposition des économistes, le libre-échange, sera devenue une vérité, une actualité. Ainsi, de deux choses l'une : ou il faut renier toute l'économie politique basée sur la supposition du libre-échange, ou bien il faut convenir que les ouvriers seront frappés de toute la rigueur des lois économiques sous ce libre-échange.

Pour nous résumer : dans l’état actuel de la société, qu’est-ce donc que le libre-échange ? C'est la liberté du capital. Quand vous aurez fait tomber les quelques entraves nationales qui enchaînent encore la marche du capital, vous n'aurez fait qu’en affranchir entièrement l'action. Tant que vous laissez subsister le rapport du travail salarié au capital, l'échange des marchandises entre elles aura beau se faire dans les conditions les plus favorables, il y aura toujours une classe qui exploitera, et une classe qui sera exploitée. On a véritablement de la peine à comprendre la prétention des libéralistes, qui s’imaginent que l’emploi plus avantageux du capital fera disparaître l’antagonisme entre les capitalistes industriels et les travailleurs salariés. Tout au contraire, tout ce qui en résultera, c'est que l’opposition de ces deux classes se dessinera plus nettement encore.

Admettez un instant qu’il n’y ait plus de lois céréales, plus de douane, plus d’octroi, enfin que toutes les circonstances accidentelles, auxquelles l’ouvrier peut encore s’en prendre, comme étant les causes de sa situation misérable, aient entièrement disparu, et vous aurez déchiré autant de voiles qui dérobaient à ses yeux son véritable ennemi.

Il verra que le capital devenu libre ne le rend pas moins esclave que le capital vexé par les douanes.

Messieurs, ne vous en laissez pas imposer par le mot abstrait de liberté. Liberté de qui ? Ce n’est pas la liberté d’un simple individu, en présence d’un autre individu. C’est la liberté qu’a le capital d’écraser le travailleur.

Comment voulez-vous encore sanctionner la libre concurrence par cette idée de liberté quand cette liberté n’est que le produit d’un état de choses basé sur la libre concurrence ?

Nous avons fait voir ce que c’est que la fraternité que le libre-échange fait naître entre les différentes classes d’une seule et même nation. La fraternité que le libre-échange établirait entre les différentes nations de la terre ne serait guère plus fraternelle. Désigner par le nom de fraternité universelle l’exploitation à son état cosmopolite, c’est une idée qui ne pouvait prendre origine que dans le sein de la bourgeoisie. Tous les phénomènes destructeurs que la libre concurrence fait naître dans l’intérieur d’un pays se reproduisent dans des proportions plus gigantesques sur le marché de l’univers. Nous n’avons pas besoin de nous arrêter plus longuement aux sophismes que débitent à ce sujet les libéralistes, et qui valent bien les arguments de nos trois lauréats, MM. Hope, Morse et Greg.

On nous dit, par exemple, que le libre-échange ferait naître une division du travail internationale qui assignerait à chaque pays une production en harmonie avec ses avantages naturels.

Vous pensez peut-être, Messieurs, que la production du café et du sucre, c’est la destinée naturelle des Indes occidentales.

Deux siècles auparavant, la nature, qui ne se mêle guère du commerce, n’y avait mis ni café, ni canne à sucre.

Et il ne se passera peut-être pas un demi-siècle que vous n’y trouverez plus ni café ni sucre, car les Indes orientales, par la production à meilleur marché, ont déjà victorieusement combattu cette prétendue destinée naturelle des Indes occidentales. Et ces Indes occidentales avec leurs dons naturels sont déjà pour les Anglais un fardeau aussi lourd que les tisserands de Dacca, qui, eux aussi, étaient destinés depuis l’origine des temps à tisser à la main.

Une chose encore qu’il ne faut jamais perdre de vue, c’est que, de même que tout est devenu monopole, il y a aussi de nos jours quelques branches industrielles qui dominent toutes les autres et qui assurent aux peuples qui les exploitent le plus, l’empire sur le marché de l’univers. C’est ainsi que dans le commerce international le coton à lui seul a une plus grande valeur commerciale que toutes les autres matières premières employées pour la fabrication des vêtements, prises ensemble. Et il est véritablement risible de voir les libéralistes faire ressortir les quelques spécialités dans chaque branche industrielle pour les mettre en balance avec les produits de commun usage, qui se produisent à meilleur marché dans les pays où l’industrie est le plus développée.

Si les libéralistes ne peuvent pas comprendre comment un pays peut s’enrichir aux dépens de l’autre, nous ne devons pas en être étonnés, puisque ces mêmes messieurs ne veulent pas non plus comprendre comment, dans l’intérieur d’un pays, une classe peut s’enrichir aux dépens d’une autre classe.

Ne croyez pas, messieurs, qu’en faisant la critique de la liberté commerciale nous ayons l’intention de défendre le système protectionniste.

On se dit ennemi du régime constitutionnel, on ne se dit pas pour cela ami de l’ancien régime.

D’ailleurs, le système protectionniste n’est qu’un moyen d’établir chez un peuple la grande industrie, c’est-à-dire de le faire dépendre du marché de l’univers, et du moment qu’on dépend du marché de l’univers on dépend déjà plus ou moins du libre-échange. Outre cela, le système protecteur contribue à développer la libre concurrence dans l’intérieur d’un pays. C’est pourquoi nous voyons que dans les pays où la bourgeoisie commence à se faire valoir comme classe, en Allemagne, par exemple, elle fait de grands efforts pour avoir des droits protecteurs. Ce sont pour elle des armes contre la féodalité et contre le gouvernement absolu, c’est pour elle un moyen de concentrer ses forces, de réaliser le libre-échange dans l’intérieur du même pays.

121 Marx avait écrit : “... ne vous laissez pas en imposer ” (N. R.)
Mais en général, de nos jours, le système protecteur est conservateur, tandis que le système du libre-échange est destructeur. Il dissout les anciennes nationalités et pousse à l'extrême l'antagonisme entre la bourgeoisie et le prolétariat. En un mot, le système de la liberté commerciale hâte la révolution sociale. C'est seulement dans ce sens révolutionnaire, Messieurs, que je vote en faveur du libre-échange.
INDEX DES PRINCIPAUX NOMS CITÉS

ARKWRIGHT RICHARD (1732-1792) : inventeur de la machine à filer connue sous le nom de "Mule Jenny".

BASTIAT FRÉDÉRIC (1801-1850) : économiste français, champion du libéralisme économique; il combattit vigoureusement en 1848 les théories de Proudhon sur l'intérêt et la banque. Auteur des *Harmonies économiques*.

BLANQUI ADOLPHE (1805-1881) : frère d'Auguste Blanqui économiste libre-échangiste, principaux ouvrages : *Résumé de l'histoire du commerce et de l'industrie* (1826); *Histoire de l'économie politique en Europe* (1838); *Les classes ouvrières en France* (1848).

BOISGUILLEBERT PIERRE (1646-1714) : économiste français, précurseur des physiocrates. Avec lui commence l'économie politique classique en France.

FEUERBACH LUDWIG (1804-1872) : philosophe allemand, qui passa de l'hégélialisme de gauche à un matérialisme dont Marx et Engels dénoncèrent par la suite les insuffisances et les tendances à une certaine forme d'idéalisme.

FOURIER FRANÇOIS-MARIE-CHARLES (1772-1835) : socialiste utopique français; il s'est livré dans ses ouvrages à une remarquable critique des effets du capitalisme.

GRAY JOHN (1798-1850) : socialiste utopique anglais, élève d'Owen; il voulait résoudre la question sociale en créant une monnaie-travail qui servirait de base d'échange.

GRUN KARL (1813-1887) : *socialiste* allemand, auteur d'un livre sur *le Mouvement social en France et en Belgique* (1845).

HEGEL GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH (1770-1831) : principal représentant de la philosophie classique allemande et de l'idéalisme objectif, qui découvrit les lois de la dialectique.

KANT EMMANUEL (1724-1804) : célèbre philosophe allemand. Dans son fameux ouvrage, *Critique de la Raison Pure* (1781), Kant développe la thèse agnostique selon laquelle l'essence des choses est inconnaissable, la science ayant simplement pour objet les apparence sensibles.

MALTHUS THOMAS-ROBERT (1766-1834) : *clergyman* et économiste anglais, auteur de la théorie de la surpopulation qui tend à justifier la misère des classes laborieuses.

MILL JAMES (1773-1836) : historien philosophe et économiste anglais.

QUESNAY FRANÇOIS (1694-1774) : *médecin* et économiste français, un des principaux fondateurs de l'économie politique, chef de l'École des physiocrates.

RICARDO DAVID (1772-1823) : *économiste* anglais, qui peut être considéré comme le fondateur de l'École classique d'économie politique.

RODBERTUS JOHANN KARL (1805-1875) : *économiste* allemand, théoricien du socialisme d'État.

SAINT-SIMON CLAUDE-HENRY (1760-1825) : *socialiste* français il imaginait une société basée sur l'organisation industrielle de la production, éliminant les oisifs et soucieuse de l'amélioration du sort de la classe la plus nombreuse et la plus pauvre.

SAY JEAN-BAPTISTE (1767-1832) : *économiste* français qui fit connaître en France les doctrines d'Adam Smith.
SISMONDI JEAN-RICHARD-SIMON de (1773-1842) : économiste et historien suisse.

SMITH ADAM (1723-1790) : économiste et moraliste anglais, fondateur de l'école de l'économie libérale, auteur de La Richesse des nations.

THIERS ADOLPHE (1797-1877) : homme d'État français qui a laissé le triste souvenir d'avoir été le "bourreau de la Commune". Défenseur typique de la bourgeoisie. Auteur d'un livre : De la propriété (1848) auquel Marx fait allusion.

TOLAIN HENRI-LOUIS (1828-1897) : ouvrier ciseleur, membre de l'Internationale dès l'origine. Élu député aux élections du 8 février 1871, prit position à l'Assemblée contre la Commune.

WEITLING WILHELM (1806-1871) : théoricien allemand du communisme utopique ; il sombra dans le mysticisme.
The Poverty of Philosophy
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Poverty of Philosophy (French: Misère de la philosophie) is a book by Karl Marx published in Paris and Brussels in 1847, where he lived in exile from 1843 until 1849. It was originally written in French as an answer to the economic and philosophical arguments of French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon set forth in his 1846 book The System of Economic Contradictions, or The Philosophy of Poverty.

Contents

1 History
   1.1 The ideas of Proudhon
   1.2 Karl Marx in exile
   1.3 Proudhon's The Philosophy of Poverty
   1.4 Marx's The Poverty of Philosophy
2 Content
3 Legacy
4 Footnotes
5 External links

History

The ideas of Proudhon

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) was a French anarchist theoretician who wrote extensively on the relationship between the individual and the state. Proudhon believed in an orderly society but argued that the state represented an illegitimate concentration of official violence which effectively undercut any effort to build a just society. Proudhon rejected all political action as a form of class collaboration but argued instead that the working class could achieve its salvation through economic action alone; abstention from politics was advocated with a view to the ultimate eradication of the existing state and its political apparatus.

Proudhon believed that the stateless future was not preordained by iron laws of history, but was rather to be the conscious creation of a population which had been morally awakened. This necessary morality, based upon honesty, decency, self-respect, and individual responsibility, was believed to be an inherent part of the working class—something to be developed and emphasized.

By way of contrast, industrialists, businessmen, and their servitors were held to be incapable of developing this morality due to the nature of their day-to-day economic and political activity. The act of labor itself was believed to be socially ennobling while the act of economic exploitation backed by political force was held to be inherently corrupting. Therefore, Proudhon emphatically declared for a strict separatism between the working class and all others.
Karl Marx in exile

Karl Marx left Germany following the repression of the newspaper he edited, the Rheinische Zeitung government of Prussia early in 1843. He landed in Paris, where he lived from October 1843 until December 1845.[5] It was there that he first met Proudhon, who was already a well known radical writer, with four books to his credit.[5] Despite an appeal being made as a prospective French collaborator, Proudhon declined to participate in the ill-fated Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher (German-French Yearbook) project with which Marx was intimately associated.[6]

Although the personal contact between the two was limited, Marx read Proudhon's writings at this time, discussions of which may be found in his work of the period, including the book written against Bruno Bauer, The Holy Family (1845), and the unpublished Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.[6] In the published book Marx lent critical support to some of the ideas of Proudhon against competing ideas of Bauer.[6]

Marx was particularly attracted to the comprehensive nature of Proudhon's writings up to 1845 and the latter's willingness to make larger connections from smaller observations.[7] In his book What Is Property? Proudhon emphasized the social relationships emerging from private property, and the tendency of economic development to produce a propertyless proletariat in ever increasing numbers—ideas which Marx found compelling.[7] Marx's praise of Proudhon was not limitless, however, as he felt Proudhon did not fully grasp the way in which wages and money, for example, were themselves forms of private property.[8]

Marx was forced to exit Paris by the French government in 1845, with Brussels, Belgium his next destination.[9] Despite his departure from France, he continued to see Proudhon as a potential political collaborator, asking him in 1846 to participate in a new international correspondence committee patterned after the London-based Workers' Educational Association, designed to propagate socialist ideas among the working class of continental Europe.[9] Proudhon responded cautiously to Marx's appeal.[10] Perhaps partially in consequence, Marx and his friend and political associate turned their organizing efforts to an established political body, the League of the Just.[9]

Proudhon's The Philosophy of Poverty

Marx's The Poverty of Philosophy

Marx read Proudhon's book late in 1846 and responded strongly and negatively, authoring a lengthy letter to his Russian correspondent P.V. Annenkov on December 28, 1846 with a detailed exposition of his views that became the core of his 1847 book.[11] He began working on a book-length formal reply the following January, completing the work in the spring and going to press in April 1847.[11]

The book, formally titled The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon, saw print in Brussels and Belgium early in July 1847.[11] The book was written in the French language to strike its target most closely and for the cutting pun of a title to be rendered most unmistakably. The book was regarded by the political circle around Marx organized as the Communist League as a key part of their
contemporary program, delineating the views of the League from those espoused by Proudhon and his followers.[11]

Somewhat surprisingly, following its initial release in 1847, *The Poverty of Philosophy* was never republished in full prior to Marx's death in 1883.[12] The first German edition of the book was first published in 1885; a Russian language translation by the Emancipation of Labor group (Russian: Освобождение труда) was released in 1886.[12] A corrected Second French Edition materialized in 1896, initiated by Frederick Engels and completed after his death by Marx's daughter, Laura Lafargue.[12]

The first English language edition of *The Poverty of Philosophy* was unveiled in London in 1900 by the pioneer Marxist publisher Twentieth Century Press.[13] The translation for this edition was made by British socialist Harry Quelch.[13] Quelch's version was reprised in the United States for the first time in 1910 by Charles H. Kerr & Co., a socialist publishing house based in Chicago.[13]

**Content**

The tone of Marx's polemic against Proudhon is set from the outset, with a witty cut in lieu of a foreword:

"M. Proudhon has the misfortune of being particularly misunderstood in Europe. In France, he has the right to be a bad economist, because he is reputed to be a good German philosopher. In Germany, he has the right to be a bad philosopher, because he is reputed to be one of the ablest of French economists. Being both a German and an economist at the same time, we desire to protest against this double error.... —*Karl Marx*, Brussels, June 15, 1847."[14]

Although prominently featuring the word "philosophy" in its title, *The Poverty of Philosophy* is essentially a book dealing with the subject of economics—first English-language translator Harry Quelch noted that the work contained "the groundwork of the theories so fully elaborated in *Capital*, apart from its exhaustive analysis of the capitalist system of production and distribution"[15] as well as law of value[16] To argue the method to apply the dialectics to political economy, he cites the Science of Logic of Hegel.[17] And Marx rejects idea of Proudhon on consumption tax[18] and denial of strike action.[19] And the end of the book, he cites the words of George Sand that "Combat or Death: bloody struggle or extinction. It is thus that the question is inexorably put."[20] Further he cites the theory of John Gray.[21] Indeed, the book has been called by one Soviet scholar, "one of the first works of mature Marxism."[22]

**Legacy**

In 1956 economist Joan Robinson proclaimed in a review of a new British edition of *The Poverty of Philosophy* that from the standpoint of modern economics Marx's polemic with Proudhon was "a dead horse" of only "highly specialised interest."[23] She wrote:

"The entertainment value...is not great. There is no wit in *The Poverty of Philosophy* apart from its title; Proudhon's ideas were confused enough to begin with, and Marx's presentation of them makes them totally unseizable, so that there is little sport to be got out of following the argument. All the same for anyone interested in 'What Marx Really Meant' some passages in this book are very valuable. In some ways they bear the same relation to *Capital* that Marshall's *Pure Theory* does to
his Principles. Ideas that are clear in the early and short version were later elaborated into obscurity."[23]

Although a widely-recognized and periodically reissued title, The Poverty of Philosophy is not regarded as one of the fundamental works of Marxist doctrine, exemplified by its omission from the two volume Karl Marx: Selected Works published simultaneously in several countries in the 1930s under the auspices of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute of Moscow.[24]

A new translation of the work appeared in conjunction with the publication of Volume 6 of the joint Soviet-British-American publication of Marx-Engels Collected Works in 1975.[25]

Footnotes

2. Thomas, Marx and the Anarchists, pp. 177–178.
3. Thomas, Marx and the Anarchists, pg. 179.
5. Thomas, Marx and the Anarchists, pg. 191.
6. Thomas, Marx and the Anarchists, pg. 192.
8. Thomas, Marx and the Anarchists, pg. 201.
9. Thomas, Marx and the Anarchists, pg. 205.
10. Thomas, Marx and the Anarchists, pg. 206.
16. The Poverty of Philosophy, Chapter 1, 2
17. The Poverty of Philosophy, Chapter 2, 1
18. The Poverty of Philosophy, Chapter 2, 3
19. The Poverty of Philosophy, Chapter 2, 5
20. From the novel Jean Siska by Sand (In French) Le combat ou la mort, la lutte sanginaire ou le néant. C'est ainsi que la question est invinciblement posée.
21. The Poverty of Philosophy, Annex, 2

External links

- The Poverty of Philosophy (http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/) English text
- Misère de la philosophie (http://www.marxists.org/francais/marx/works/1847/06/km18470615.htm) French text


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1847 in economics