

The Right To Be Lazy

Paul Lafargue

1883

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Preface | 3 |
| Chapter I. A Disastrous Dogma | 5 |
| Chapter II. Blessings of Work | 8 |
| Chapter III. The Consequences of Over-Production | 16 |
| Chapter IV. New Songs to New Music | 24 |
| Appendix | 28 |

Preface

M. Thiers, at a private session of the commission on primary education of 1849, said: "I wish to make the influence of the clergy all powerful because I count upon it to propagate that good philosophy which teaches man that he is here below to suffer, and not that other philosophy which on the contrary bids man to enjoy." M. Thiers was stating the ethics of the capitalist class, whose fierce egoism and narrow intelligence he incarnated.

The Bourgeoisie, when it was struggling against the nobility sustained by the clergy, hoisted the flag of free thought and atheism; but once triumphant, it changed its tone and manner and today it uses religion to support its economic and political supremacy. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it had joyfully taken up the pagan tradition and glorified the flesh and its passions, reproved by Christianity; in our days, gorged with goods and with pleasures, it denies the teachings of its thinkers like Rabelais and Diderot, and preaches abstinence to the wageworkers. Capitalist ethics, a pitiful parody on Christian ethics, strikes with its anathema the flesh of the laborer; its ideal is to reduce the producer to the smallest number of needs, to suppress his joys and his passions and to condemn him to play the part of a machine turning out work without respite and without thanks.

The revolutionary socialists must take up again the battle fought by the philosophers and pamphleteers of the bourgeoisie; they must march up to the assault of the ethics and the social theories of capitalism; they must demolish in the heads of the class which they call to action the prejudices sown in them by the ruling class; they must proclaim in the faces of the hypocrites of all ethical systems that the earth shall cease to be the vale of tears for the laborer; that in the communist society of the future, which we shall establish "peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must," the impulses of men will be given a free rein, for "all these impulses are by nature good, we have nothing to avoid but their misuse and their excesses," and they will not be avoided except by their mutual counter-balancing, by the harmonious development of the human organism, for as Dr. Beddoe says, "It is only when a race reaches its maximum of physical development, that it arrives at its highest point of energy and moral vigor." Such was also the opinion of the great naturalist Charles Darwin.

This refutation of the "Right to Work" which I am republishing with some additional notes appeared in the weekly *Egalité*, 1880, second series.

P.L.

Sainte-Pélagie Prison, 1883.

Chapter I. A Disastrous Dogma

Let us be lazy in everything, except in loving and drinking, except in being lazy. — *Lessing*

A strange delusion possesses the working classes of the nations where capitalist civilization holds its sway. This delusion drags in its train the individual and social woes which for two centuries have tortured sad humanity. This delusion is the love of work, the furious passion for work, pushed even to the exhaustion of the vital force of the individual and his progeny. Instead of opposing this mental aberration, the priests, the economists and the moralists have cast a sacred halo

¹ European explorers pause in wonder before the physical beauty and the proud bearing of the men of primitive races, not soiled by what Paepig calls “the poisonous breath of civilization.” Speaking of the aborigines of the oceanic Islands, Lord George Campbell writes: “There is not a people in the world which strikes one more favorably at first sight. Their smooth skin of a light copper tint, their hair golden and curly, their beautiful and happy faces, in a word. their whole person formed a new and splendid specimen of the ‘genus homo’; their physical appearance gave the impression of a race superior to ours.” The civilized men of ancient Rome, witness Caesar and Tacitus, regarded with the same admiration the Germans of the communist tribes which invaded the Roman empire. Following Tacitus, Salvien, the priest of the fifth century who received the surname of master of the Bishops, held up the barbarians as an example to civilized Christians: “We are immodest before the barbarians, who are more chaste than we. Even more, the barbarians are wounded at our lack of modesty; the Goths do not permit debauchees of their own nation to remain among them; alone in the midst of them, by the sad privilege of their nationality and their name, the Romans have the right to be impure. (Pederasty was then the height of the fashion among both pagans and Christians.) The oppressed fly to the barbarians to seek for mercy and a shelter.” (*De Gubernatione Dei*) The old civilization and the rising Christianity corrupted the barbarians of the ancient world, as the old Christianity and the modern capitalist civilization are corrupting the savages of the new world.

M.F. LePlay, whose talent for observation must be recognized, even if we reject his sociological conclusions, tainted with philanthropic and Christian pharisaism, says in his hook *Les Ouvriers Europeans* (1885): “The Propensity of the Bachkirs for laziness (the Bachkirs are semi-nomadic shepherds of the Asiatic slope of the Ural mountains); the leisure of nomadic life, the habit of meditation which this engenders in the best endowed individuals — all this often gives them a distinction of manner, a fineness of intelligence and judgement which is rarely to be observed on the same social level in a more developed civilization ... The thing most repugnant to them is agricultural labor: they will do anything rather than accept the trade of a farmer.” Agriculture is in fact the first example of servile labor in the history of man. According to biblical tradition, the first criminal, Cain, is a farmer.

over work. Blind and finite men, they have wished to be wiser than their God; weak and contemptible men, they have presumed to rehabilitate what their God had cursed. I, who do not profess to be a Christian, an economist or a moralist, I appeal from their judgement to that of their God; from the preachings of their religious, economics or free thought ethics, to the frightful consequences of work in capitalist society.

In capitalist society work is the cause of all intellectual degeneracy, of all organic deformity. Compare the thorough-bred in Rothschild's stables, served by a retinue of bipeds, with the heavy brute of the Norman farms which plows the earth, carts the manure, hauls the crops. Look at the noble savage whom the missionaries of trade and the traders of religion have not yet corrupted with Christianity, syphilis and the dogma of work, and then look at our miserable slaves of machines.¹

When, in our civilized Europe, we would find a trace of the native beauty of man, we must go seek it in the nations where economic prejudices have not yet uprooted the hatred of work. Spain, which, alas, is degenerating, may still boast of possessing fewer factories than we have of prisons and barracks; but the artist rejoices in his admiration of the hardy Andalusian, brown as his native chestnuts, straight and flexible as a steel rod; and the heart leaps at hearing the beggar, superbly draped in his ragged *capa*, parleying on terms of equality with the duke of Ossuna. For the Spaniard, in whom the primitive animal has not been atrophied, work is the worst sort of slavery.² The Greeks in their era of greatness had only contempt for work: their slaves alone were permitted to labor: the free man knew only exercises for the body and mind. And so it was in this era that men like Aristotle, Phidias, Aristophanes moved and breathed among the people; it was the time when a handful of heroes at Marathon crushed the hordes of Asia, soon to be subdued by Alexander. The philosophers of antiquity taught contempt for work, that degradation of the free man, the poets sang of idleness, that gift from the Gods:

O Melibae Deus nobis haec otia fecit.

Jesus, in his sermon on the Mount, preached idleness: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Jehovah the bearded and angry god, gave his worshipers the supreme example of ideal laziness; after six days of work, he rests for all eternity.

On the other hand, what are the races for which work is an organic necessity? The Auvergnians; the Scotch, those Auvergnians of the British Isles; the Galicians, those Auvergnians of Spain; the Pomeranians, those Auvergnians of Germany; the Chinese, those Auvergnians of Asia. In our society which are the classes that love

² The Spanish proverb says: Descanzar es salud. (Rest is healthful.)

work for work's sake. The peasant proprietors, the little shopkeepers; the former bent double over their fields, the latter crouched in their shops, burrow like the mole in his subterranean passage and never stand up to look at nature leisurely.

And meanwhile the proletariat, the great class embracing all the producers of civilized nations, the class which in freeing itself will free humanity from servile toil and will make of the human animal a free being, — the proletariat, betraying its instincts, despising its historic mission, has let itself be perverted by the dogma of work. Rude and terrible has been its punishment. All its individual and social woes are born of its passion for work.

Chapter II. Blessings of Work

In 1770 at London, an anonymous pamphlet appeared under the title, **An Essay on Trade and Commerce**. It made some stir in its time. The author, a great philanthropist, was indignant that “the factory population of England had taken into its head the fixed idea that in their quality of Englishmen all the individuals composing it have by right of birth the privilege of being freer and more independent than the laborers of any country in Europe. This idea may have its usefulness for soldiers, since it stimulates their valor, but the less the factory workers are imbued with it the better for themselves and the state. Laborers ought never to look on themselves as independent of their superiors. It is extremely dangerous to encourage such infatuations in a commercial state like ours, where perhaps seven-eighths of the population have little or no property. The cure will not be complete until our industrial laborers are contented to work six days for the same sum which they now earn in four.” Thus, nearly a century before Guizot, work was openly preached in London as a curb to the noble passions of man. “The more my people work, the less vices they will have”, wrote Napoleon on May 5th, 1807, from Osterod. “I am the authority ... and I should be disposed to order that on Sunday after the hour of service be past, the shops be opened and the laborers return to their work.” To root out laziness and curb the sentiments of pride and independence which arise from it, the author of the **Essay on Trade** proposed to imprison the poor in ideal “work-houses”, which should become “houses of terror, where they should work fourteen hours a day in such fashion that when meal time was deducted there should remain twelve hours of work full and complete”

Twelve hours of work a day, that is the ideal of the philanthropists and moralists of the eighteenth century. How have we outdone this *nec plus ultra!* Modern factories have become ideal houses of correction in which the toiling masses are

¹ At the first Congress of Charities held at Brussels in 1817 one of the richest manufacturers of Marquette, near Lille, M. Scrive, to the plaudits of the members of the congress declared with the noble satisfaction of a duty performed: “We have introduced certain methods of diversion for the children. We teach them to sing during their work, also to count while working.” That distracts them and makes them accept bravely “those twelve hours of labor which are necessary to procure their means of existence.” Twelve hours of labor, and such labor, imposed on children less than twelve years old! The materialists will always regret that there is no hell in which to confine these Christian philanthropic murderers of childhood.

imprisoned, in which they are condemned to compulsory work for twelve or fourteen hours, not the men only but also women and children.¹ And to think that the sons of the heroes of the Terror have allowed themselves to be degraded by the religion of work, to the point of accepting, since 1848, as a revolutionary conquest, the law limiting factory labor to twelve hours. They proclaim as a revolutionary principle the Right to Work. Shame to the French proletariat! Only slaves would have been capable of such baseness. A Greek of the heroic times would have required twenty years of capitalist civilization before he could have conceived such vileness.

And if the miseries of compulsory work and the tortures of hunger have descended upon the proletariat more in number than the locusts of the Bible, it is because the proletariat itself invited them. This work, which in June 1848 the laborers demanded with arms in their hands, this they have imposed on their families; they have delivered up to the barons of industry their wives and children. With their own hands they have demolished their domestic hearths. With their own hands they have dried up the milk of their wives. The unhappy women carrying and nursing their babes have been obliged to go into the mines and factories to bend their backs and exhaust their nerves. With their own hands they have broken the life and the vigor of their children. Shame on the proletarians! Where are those neighborly housewives told of in our fables and in our old tales, bold and frank of speech, lovers of Bacchus. Where are those buxom girls, always on the move, always cooking, always singing, always spreading life, engendering life's joy, giving painless birth to healthy and vigorous children? ... Today we have factory girls and women, pale drooping flowers, with impoverished blood, with disordered stomachs, with languid limbs ... They have never known the pleasure of a healthful passion, nor would they be capable of telling of it merrily! And the children? Twelve hours of work for children! O, misery. But not all the Jules Simon of the Academy of Moral and Political Science, not all the Germanys of jesuitism, could have invented a vice more degrading to the intelligence of the children, more corrupting of their instincts, more destructive of their organism than work in the vitiated atmosphere of the capitalist factory.

Our epoch has been called the century of work. It is in fact the century of pain, misery and corruption.

And all the while the philosophers, the bourgeois economists — from the painfully confused August Comte to the ludicrously clear Leroy Beaulieu; the people of bourgeois literature — from the quackishly romantic Victor Hugo to the artlessly grotesque Paul de Kock, — all have intoned nauseating songs in honor of the god Progress, the eldest son of Work. Listen to them and you would think that happiness was soon to reign over the earth, that its coming was already perceived. They rummaged in the dust of past centuries to bring back feudal miseries to serve

as a somber contrast to the delights of the present times. Have they wearied us, these satisfied people, yesterday pensioners at the table of the nobility, today pen-valets of the capitalist class and fatly paid? Have they reckoned us weary of the peasant, such as La Bruyere described him? Well, here is the brilliant picture of proletarian delights in the year of capitalist progress 1840, Penned by one of their own men, Dr. Villermé, member of the Institute, the same who in 1848 was a member of that scientific society (Thiers, Cousin, Passy, Blanqui, the academician, were in it), which disseminated among the masses the nonsense of bourgeois economics and ethics.

It is of manufacturing Alsace that Dr. Villermé speaks, — the Alsace of Kestner and Dollfus, those flowers of industrial philanthropy and republicanism. But before the doctor raises up before us his picture of proletarian miseries, let us listen to an Alsatian manufacturer, Mr. Th. Mieg, of the house of Dollfus, Mieg & Co., depicting the condition of the old-time artisan: “At Mulhouse fifty years ago (in 1813, when modern mechanical industry was just arising) the laborers were all children of the soil, inhabiting the town and the surrounding villages, and almost all owning a house and often a little field.”² It was the golden age of the laborer. But at that time Alsatian industry did not deluge the world with its cottons, nor make millionaires out of its Dollfus and Koechlin. But twenty-five years after, when Villermé visited Alsace, the modern Minotaur, the capitalist workshop, had conquered the country; in its insatiable appetite for human labor it had dragged the workmen from their hearths, the better to wring them and press out the labor which they contained. It was by thousands that the workers flocked together at the signal of the steam whistle.

A great number, — says Villermé — five thousand out of seventeen thousand, were obliged by high rents to lodge in neighboring villages. Some of them lived three or four miles from the factory where they worked.

At Mulhouse in Dornach, work began at five o'clock in the morning and ended at eight o'clock in the evening, summer and winter. It was a sight to watch them arrive each morning into the city and depart each evening. Among them were a multitude of women, pale, often walking bare-footed through the mud, and who for lack of umbrellas when the rain or snow fell, wore their aprons or skirts turned up over their heads. There was a still larger number of young children, equally dirty, equally pale, covered with rags, greasy from the machine oil

² Speech delivered before the International Society of Practical Studies in Social Economics, at Paris in May 1863, and published in the French *Economist* of the same epoch.

which drops on them while they work. They were better protected from the rain because their clothes shed water; but unlike the women just mentioned, they did not carry their day's provisions in a basket, but they carried in their hands or hid under their clothing as best they might, the morsel of bread which must serve them as food until time for them to return home.

Thus to the strain of an insufferably long day – at least fifteen hours – is added for these wretches the fatigue of the painful daily journeys. Consequently they reach home overwhelmed by the need of sleep, and next day they rise before they are completely rested in order to reach the factory by the opening time.

Now, look at the holes in which were packed those who lodge in the town: “I saw at Mulhouse in Dornach, and the neighboring houses, some of those miserable lodgings where two families slept each in its corner on straw thrown on the floor and kept in its place by two planks ... This wretchedness among the laborers of the cotton industry in the department of the upper Rhine is so extreme that it produces this sad result, that while in the families of the manufacturers, merchants, shopkeepers or factory superintendents, half of the children reach their twenty-first year, this same half ceases to exist before the lapse of two years in the families of weavers and cotton spinners.”

Speaking of the labor of the workshop, Villermé adds: “It is not a work, a task, it is a torture and it is inflicted on children of six to eight years. It is this long torture day after day which wastes away the laborers in the cotton spinning factories”. And as to the duration of the work Villermé observes, that the convicts in prisons work but ten hours, the slaves in the west Indies work but nine hours, while there existed in France after its Revolution of 1789, which had proclaimed the pompous Rights of Man “factories where the day was sixteen hours, out of which the laborers were allowed only an hour and a half for meals.”³

What a miserable abortion of the revolutionary principles of the bourgeoisie! What woeful gifts from its god Progress! The philanthropists hail as benefactors of humanity those who having done nothing to become rich, give work to the poor. Far better were it to scatter pestilence and to poison the springs than to erect a

³ L.R. Villermé. *Tableau de L'état physique et moral des ouvriers dans les fabriques de coton, de laine et de soie* (1840). It is not because Dollfus, Koechlin and other Alsatian manufacturers were republicans, patriots and protestant philanthropists that they treated their laborers in this way, for Blanqui, the academician, Reybaud, the prototype of Jerome Paturot, and Jules Simon have observed the same amenities for the working class among the very catholic and monarchical manufacturers of Lille and Lyons. These are capitalist virtues which harmonize delightfully with all political and religious convictions.

capitalist factory in the midst of a rural population. Introduce factory work, and farewell joy, health and liberty; farewell to all that makes life beautiful and worth living.⁴

And the economists go on repeating to the laborers, "Work, to increase social wealth", and nevertheless an economist, Destutt de Tracy, answers: "It is in poor nations that people are comfortable, in rich nations they are ordinarily poor"; and his disciple Cherbuliez continues: "The laborers themselves in co-operating toward the accumulation of productive capital contribute to the event which sooner or later must deprive them of a part of their wages". But deafened and stupefied by their own howlings, the economists answer: "Work, always work, to create your prosperity", and in the name of Christian meekness a priest of the Anglican Church, the Rev. Mr. Townshend, intones: Work, work, night and day. By working you make your poverty increase and your poverty releases us from imposing work upon you by force of law. The legal imposition of work "gives too much trouble, requires too much violence and makes too much noise. Hunger, on the contrary, is not only a pressure which is peaceful, silent and incessant, but as it is the most natural motive for work and industry, it also provokes to the most powerful efforts." Work, work, proletarians, to increase social wealth and your individual poverty; work, work, in order that becoming poorer, you may have more reason to work and become miserable. Such is the inexorable law of capitalist production.

Because, lending ear to the fallacious words of the economists, the proletarians have given themselves up body and soul to the vice of work; they precipitate the whole of society into these industrial crises of over-production which convulse the social organism. Then because there is a plethora of merchandise and a dearth of purchasers, the shops are closed and hunger scourges the working people with its whip of a thousand lashes. The proletarians, brutalized by the dogma of work, not understanding that the over-work which they have inflicted upon themselves during the time of pretended prosperity is the cause of their present misery, do not run to the granaries of wheat and cry: "We are hungry, we wish to eat. True we have not a red cent, but beggars as we are, it is we, nevertheless, who harvested the wheat and gathered the grapes." They do not besiege the warehouse of Bonnet, or Jujurieux, the inventor of industrial convents, and cry out: "M. Bonnet, here are your working women, silk workers, spinners, weavers; they are shivering pitifully

⁴ The Indians of the warlike tribes of Brazil kill their invalids and old people; they show their affection for them by putting an end to a life which is no longer enlivened by combats, feasts and dances. All primitive peoples have given these proofs of affection to their relatives: the Massagetae of the Caspian Sea (Herodotus), as well as the Wens of Germany and the Celts of Gaul. In the churches of Sweden even lately they preserved clubs called family clubs which served to deliver parents from the sorrows of old age. How degenerate are the modern proletarians to accept with patience the terrible miseries of factory labor!

under their patched cotton dresses, yet it is they who have spun and woven the silk robes of the fashionable women of all Christendom. The poor creatures working thirteen hours a day had no time to think of their toilet. Now, they are out of work and have time to rustle in the silks they have made. Ever since they lost their milk teeth they have devoted themselves to your fortune and have lived in abstinence. Now they are at leisure and wish to enjoy a little of the fruits of their labor. Come, M. Bonnet, give them your silks, M. Harmel shall furnish his muslins, M. Pouyer-Quertier his calicos, M. Pinet his boots for their dear little feet, cold and damp. Clad from top to toe and gleeful, they will be delightful to look at. Come, no evasions, you are a friend of humanity, are you not, and a Christian into the bargain? Put at the disposal of your working girls the fortune they have built up for you out of their flesh; you want to help business, get your goods into circulation, — here are consumers ready at hand. Give them unlimited credit. You are simply compelled to give credit to merchants whom you do not know from Adam or Eve, who have given you nothing, not even a glass of water. Your working women will pay the debt the best they can. If at maturity they let their notes go to protest, and if they have nothing to attach, you can demand that they pay you in prayers. They will send you to paradise better than your black-gowned priests steeped in tobacco.”

Instead of taking advantage of periods of crisis, for a general distribution of their products and a universal holiday, the laborers, perishing with hunger, go and beat their heads against the doors of the workshops. With pale faces, emaciated bodies, pitiful speeches they assail the manufacturers: “Good M. Chagot, sweet M. Schneider, give us work, it is not hunger, but the passion for work which torments us”. And these wretches, who have scarcely the strength to stand upright, sell twelve and fourteen hours of work twice as cheap as when they had bread on the table. And the philanthropists of industry profit by their lockouts to manufacture at lower cost.

If industrial crises follow periods of overwork as inevitably as night follows day, bringing after them lockouts and poverty without end, they also lead to inevitable bankruptcy. So long as the manufacturer has credit he gives free rein to the rage for work. He borrows, and borrows again, to furnish raw material to his laborers, and goes on producing without considering that the market is becoming satiated and that if his goods don't happen to be sold, his notes will still come due. At his wits' end, he implores the banker; he throws himself at his feet, offering his blood, his honor. “A little gold will do my business better”, answers the Rothschild. “You have 20,000 pairs of hose in your warehouse; they are worth 20c. I will take them at 4c.” The banker gets possession of the goods and sells them at 6c or 8c, and pockets certain frisky dollars which owe nothing to anybody: but the manufacturer has stepped back for a better leap. At last the crash comes and the warehouses disgorge. Then so much merchandise is thrown out of the window that you cannot imagine

how it came in by the door. Hundreds of millions are required to figure the value of the goods that are destroyed. In the last century they were burned or thrown into the water.⁵

But before reaching this decision, the manufacturers travel the world over in search of markets for the goods which are heaping up. They force their government to annex Congo, to seize on Tonquin, to batter down the Chinese Wall with cannon shots to make an outlet for their cotton goods. In previous centuries it was a duel to the death between France and England as to which should have the exclusive privilege of selling to America and the Indies. Thousands of young and vigorous men reddened the seas with their blood during the colonial wars of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

There is a surplus of capital as well as of goods. The financiers no longer know where to place it. Then they go among the happy nations who are leafing in the sun smoking cigarettes and they lay down railroads, erect factories and import the curse of work. And this exportation of French capital ends one fine morning in diplomatic complications. In Egypt, for example, France, England and Germany were on the point of hair-pulling to decide which usurers shall be paid first. Or it ends with wars like that in Mexico where French soldiers are sent to play the part of constables to collect bad debts.⁶

These individual and social miseries, however great and innumerable they may be, however eternal they appear, will vanish like hyenas and jackals at the approach of the lion, when the proletariat shall say "I will". But to arrive at the realization of its strength the proletariat must trample under foot the prejudices of Christian ethics, economic ethics and free-thought ethics. It must return to its natural instincts, it must proclaim the Rights of Laziness, a thousand times more noble and more sacred than the anaemic Rights of Man concocted by the metaphysical lawyers of the bourgeois revolution. It must accustom itself to working but three hours a day, reserving the rest of the day and night for leisure and feasting.

Thus far my task has been easy; I have had but to describe real evils well known, alas, by all of us; but to convince the proletariat that the ethics inoculated into it is wicked, that the unbridled work to which it has given itself up for the last hun-

⁵ At the Industrial Congress held in Berlin in Jan. 21st, 1879 the losses in the iron industry of Germany during the last crisis were estimated at \$109,056,000.

⁶ M. Clemenceau's **Justice** said on April 6. 1880 in its financial department: "We have heard this opinion maintained, that even without pressure the billions of the war of 1870 would have been equally lost for France, that is under the form of loans periodically put out to balance the budgets of foreign countries; this is also our opinion." The loss of English capital on loans of South American Republics is estimated at a billion dollars. The French laborers not only produced the billion dollars paid Bismarck, but they continued to pay interest on the war indemnity to Ollivier, Girardin, Bazaine and other income drawers, who brought on the war and the rout. Nevertheless they still have one shred of consolation: these billions will not bring on a war of reprisal.

dred years is the most terrible scourge that has ever struck humanity, that work will become a mere condiment to the pleasures of idleness, a beneficial exercise to the human organism, a passion useful to the social organism only when wisely regulated and limited to a maximum of three hours a day; this is an arduous task beyond my strength. Only communist physiologists, hygienists and economists could undertake it. In the following pages I shall merely try to show that given the modern means of production and their unlimited reproductive power it is necessary to curb the extravagant passion of the laborers for work and to oblige them to consume the goods which they produce.

Chapter III. The Consequences of Over-Production

A Greek poet of Cicero's time, Antiparos, thus sang of the invention of the water-mill (for grinding grain), which was to free the slave women and bring back the Golden Age: "Spare the arm which turns the mill, O, millers, and sleep peacefully. Let the cock warn you in vain that day is breaking. Demeter has imposed upon the nymphs the labor of the slaves, and behold them leaping merrily over the wheel, and behold the axle tree, shaken, turning with its spokes and making the heavy rolling stone revolve. Let us live the life of our fathers, and let us rejoice in idleness over the gifts that the goddess grants us." Alas! The leisure, which the pagan poet announced, has not come. The blind, perverse and murderous passion for work transforms the liberating machine into an instrument for the enslavement of free men. Its productiveness impoverishes them.

A good working woman makes with her needles only five meshes a minute, while certain circular knitting machines make 30,000 in the same time. Every minute of the machine is thus equivalent to a hundred hours of the working-women's labor, or again, every minute of the machine's labor, gives the working women ten days of rest. What is true for the knitting industry is more or less true for all industries reconstructed by modern machinery. But what do we see? In proportion as the machine is improved and performs man's work with an ever increasing rapidity and exactness, the laborer, instead of prolonging his former rest times, redoubles his ardor, as if he wished to rival the machine. O, absurd and murderous competition!

¹ Under the old regime, the laws of the church guaranteed the laborer ninety rest days, fifty-two Sundays and thirty-eight holidays, during which he was strictly forbidden to work. This was the great crime of catholicism, the principal cause of the irreligion of the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie: under the revolution, when once it was in the saddle, it abolished the holidays and replaced the week of seven days by that of ten, in order that the people might no longer have more than one rest day out of the ten. It emancipated the laborers from the yoke of the church in order the better to subjugate them under the yoke of work.

The hatred against the holidays does not appear until the modern industrial and commercial bourgeoisie takes definite form, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Henry IV asked of the Pope that they be reduced. He refused because "one of the current heresies of the day is regarding feasts" (*Letters of Cardinal d'Ossat*). But in 1666 Perefisus, archbishop of Paris, suppressed

That the competition of man and the machine might have free course, the proletarians have abolished wise laws which limited the labor of the artisans of the ancient guilds; they have suppressed the holidays.¹ Because the producers of that time worked but five days out of seven, are we to believe the stories told by lying economists that they lived on nothing but air and fresh water? Not so, they had leisure to taste the joys of earth, to make love and to frolic, to banquet joyously in honor of the jovial god of idleness. Gloomy England, immersed in protestantism, was then called "Merrie England." Rabelais, Quevedo, Cervantes, and the unknown authors of the romances make our mouths water with their pictures of those monumental feasts² with which the men of that time regaled themselves between two battles and two devastations, in which everything "went by the barrel" Jordaens and the Flemish School have told the story of these feasts in their delightful pictures. Where, O, where, are the sublime gargantuan stomachs of those days; where are the sublime brains encircling all human thought? We have indeed grown puny and degenerate. Embalmed beef, potatoes, doctored wine and Prussian schnaps, judiciously combined with compulsory labor have weakened our bodies and narrowed our minds. And the times when man cramps his stomach and the machine enlarges its out-put are the very times when the economists preach to us the Malthusian theory, the religion of abstinence and the dogma of work. Really it would be better to pluck out such tongues and throw them to the dogs.

Because the working class, with its simple good faith, has allowed itself to be thus indoctrinated, because with its native impetuosity it has blindly hurled itself into work and abstinence, the capitalist class has found itself condemned to laziness and forced enjoyment, to unproductiveness and over consumption. But if the over-work of the laborer bruises his flesh and tortures his nerves, it is also fertile in griefs for the capitalist.

seventeen of them in his diocese. Protestantism, which was the Christian religion adapted to the new industrial and commercial needs of the bourgeoisie, was less solicitous for the people's rest. It dethroned the saints in heaven in order to abolish their feast days on earth.

Religious reform and philosophical free thought were but pretexts which permitted the jesuitical and rapacious bourgeoisie to pilfer the feast days of the people.

² These gigantic feasts lasted for weeks. Don Rodrigo de Lara wins his bride by expelling the Moors from old Calatrava, and the Romancero relates the story:

les bodas fueron en Burgos

Las tornabodas en Salas:

En bodas y tornabodas

Pasaron siete semanas

Tantas vienen de las gentes

Que no caben por las plazas

(The wedding was at Bourges, the infaring at Salas. In the wedding and the infaring seven weeks were spent. So many people came that the town could not hold them ...)

The men of these seven-weeks weddings were the heroic soldiers of the wars of independence.

The abstinence to which the productive class condemns itself obliges the capitalists to devote themselves to the over-consumption of the products turned out so riotously by the laborers. At the beginning of capitalist production a century or two ago, the capitalist was a steady man of reasonable and peaceable habits. He contented himself with one wife or thereabouts. He drank only when he was thirsty and ate only when he was hungry. He left to the lords and ladies of the court the noble virtues of debauchery. Today every son of the newly rich makes it incumbent upon himself to cultivate the disease for which quicksilver is a specific in order to justify the labors imposed upon the workmen in quicksilver mines; every capitalist crams himself with capons stuffed with truffles and with the choicest brands of wine in order to encourage the breeders of blooded poultry and the growers of Bordelais. In this occupation the organism rapidly becomes shattered, the hair falls out, the gums shrink away from the teeth, the body becomes deformed, the stomach obtrudes abnormally, respiration becomes difficult, the motions become labored, the joints become stiff, the fingers knotted. Others, too feeble in body to endure the fatigues of debauchery, but endowed with the bump of philanthropic discrimination, dry up their brains over political economy, or juridical philosophy in elaborating thick soporific books to employ the leisure hours of composers and pressmen. The women of fashion live a life of martyrdom, in trying on and showing off the fairy-like toilets which the seamstresses die in making. They shift like shuttles from morning until night from one gown into another. For hours together they give up their hollow heads to the artists in hair, who at any cost insist on assuaging their passion for the construction of false chignons. Bound in their corsets, pinched in their boots, décolleté to make a coal-miner blush, they whirl around the whole night through at their charity balls in order to pick up a few cents for poor people, – sanctified souls!

To fulfill his double social function of non-producer and over-consumer, the capitalist was not only obliged to violate his modest taste, to lose his laborious habits of two centuries ago and to give himself up to unbounded luxury, spicy indigestibles and syphilitic debauches, but also to withdraw from productive labor an enormous mass of men in order to enlist them as his assistants.

Here are a few figures to prove how colossal is this waste of productive forces. According to the census of 1861, the population of England and Wales comprised 20,066,244 persons, 9,776,259 male and 10,289,965 female. If we deduct those too old of too young to work, the unproductive women, boys and girls, then the “ideological professions”, such as governors, policemen, clergy, magistrates, soldiers, prostitutes, artists, scientists, etc., next the people exclusively occupied with eating the labor of others under the form of land-rent, interest, dividends, etc. ... there remains a total of eight million individuals of both sexes and of every age, including

the capitalists who function in production, commerce, finance, etc. Out of these eight millions the figures run:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Agricultural laborers, including herdsmen, servants and farmers' daughters living at home | 1,098,261 |
| Factory Workers in cotton, wool, hemp, linen silk, knitting | 642,607 |
| Mine Workers | 565,835 |
| Metal Workers (blast furnaces, rolling mills, etc.) | 396,998 |
| Domestics | 1,208,648 |

“If we add together the textile workers and the miners, we obtain the figures of 2,208,442; if to the former we add the metal workers, we have a total of 1,039,605 persons; that is to say, in each case a number below that of the modern domestic slaves. Behold the magnificent result of the capitalist exploitation of machines.”³ To this class of domestics, the size of which indicates the stage attained by capitalist civilization, must still be added the enormous class of unfortunates devoted exclusively to satisfying the vain and expensive tastes of the rich classes: diamond cutters, lace-makers, embroiderers, binders of luxurious books, seamstresses employed on expensive gowns decorators of villas, etc.⁴

Once settled down into absolute laziness and demoralized by enforced enjoyment, the capitalist class in spite of the injury involved in its new kind of life, adapted itself to it. Soon it began to look upon any change with horror. The sight of the miserable conditions of life resignedly accepted by the working class and the sight of the organic degradation engendered by the depraved passion for work increased its aversion for all compulsory labor and all restrictions of its pleasures. It is precisely at that time that, without taking into account the demoralization which the capitalist class had imposed upon itself as a social duty, the proletarians took it into their heads to inflict work on the capitalists. Artless as they were, they took seriously the theories of work proclaimed by the economists and moralists, and girded up their loins to inflict the practice of these theories upon the capitalists. The proletariat hoisted the banner, “He who will not work Neither shall he Eat”.

³ Karl Marx's *Capital*.

⁴ “The Proportion in which the population of the country is employed as domestics in the service of the wealthy class indicates its progress in national wealth and civilization.” (R.M. Martin, *Ireland Before and After the Union*, 1818). Gambetta, who has denied that there was a social question ever since he ceased to be the poverty-stricken lawyer or the Cafe Procope, undoubtedly alluded to this ever-increasing domestic class when he announced the advent of new social strata.

Lyons in 1831 rose up for bullets or work. The federated laborers of March 1871 called their uprising “The Revolution of Work”. To these outbreaks of barbarous fury destructive of all capitalist joy and laziness, the capitalists had no other answer than ferocious repression, but they know that if they have been able to repress these revolutionary explosions, they have not drowned in the blood of these gigantic massacres the absurd idea of the proletariat wishing to inflict work upon the idle and reputable classes, and it is to avert this misfortune that they surround themselves with guards, policemen, magistrates and jailors, supported in laborious unproductiveness. There is no more room for illusion as to the function of modern armies. They are permanently maintained only to suppress the “enemy within”. Thus the forts of Paris and Lyons have not been built to defend the city against the foreigner, but to crush it in case of revolt. And if an unanswerable example be called for, we mention the army of Belgium, that paradise of capitalism. Its neutrality is guaranteed by the European powers, and nevertheless its army is one of the strongest in proportion to its population. The glorious battlefields of the brave Belgian army are the plains of the Borinage and of Charleroi. It is in the blood of the unarmed miners and laborers that the Belgian officers temper their swords and win their epaulets. The nations of Europe have not national armies but mercenary armies. They protect the capitalists against the popular fury which would condemn them to ten hours of mining or spinning. Again, while compressing its own stomach the working class has developed abnormally the stomach of the capitalist class, condemned to over-consumption.

For alleviation of its painful labor the capitalist class has withdrawn from the working class a mass of men far superior to those still devoted to useful production and has condemned them in their turn to unproductiveness and over-consumption. But this troop of useless mouths in spite of its insatiable voracity, does not suffice to consume all the goods which the laborers, brutalized by the dogma of work, produce like madmen, without wishing to consume them and without even thinking whether people will be found to consume them.

Confronted with this double madness of the laborers killing themselves with over-production and vegetating in abstinence, the great problem of capitalist production is no longer to find producers and to multiply their powers but to discover consumers, to excite their appetites and create in them fictitious needs. Since the European laborers, shivering with cold and hunger, refuse to near the stuffs they

⁵ Two examples: The English government to satisfy the peasants of India, who in spite of the periodical famines desolating their country insist on cultivating poppies instead of rice or wheat, has been obliged to undertake bloody wars in order to impose upon the Chinese Government the free entry of Indian opium. The savages of Polynesia, in spite of the mortality resulting from it are obliged to clothe themselves in the English fashion in order to consume the products of the Scotch distilleries and the Manchester cotton mills.

weave, to drink the wines from the vineyards they tend, the poor manufacturers in their goodness of heart must run to the ends of the earth to find people to wear the clothes and drink the wines: Europe exports every year goods amounting to billions of dollars to the four corners of the earth, to nations that have no need of them.⁵ But the explored continents are no longer vast enough. Virgin countries are needed. European manufacturers dream night and day of Africa, of a lake in the Saharan desert, of a railroad to the Soudan. They anxiously follow the progress of Livingston, Stanley, Du Chaillu; they listen open-mouthed to the marvelous tales of these brave travelers. What unknown wonders are contained in the “dark continent”! Fields are sown with elephants’ teeth, rivers of coconut oil are dotted with gold, millions of backsides, as bare as the faces of Dufaure and Girardin, are awaiting cotton goods to teach them decency, and bottles of schnaps and bibles from which they may learn the virtues of civilization.

But all to no purpose: the over-fed capitalist, the servant class greater in numbers than the productive class, the foreign and barbarous nations, gorged with European goods; nothing, nothing can melt away the mountains of products heaped up higher and more enormous than the pyramids of Egypt. The productiveness of European laborers defies all consumption, all waste.

The manufacturers have lost their bearings and know not which way to turn. They can no longer find the raw material to satisfy the lawless depraved passion of their laborers for work. In our woolen districts dirty and half rotten rags are raveled out to use in making certain cloths sold under the name of renaissance, which have about the same durability as the promises made to voters. At Lyons, instead of leaving the silk fiber in its natural simplicity and suppleness, it is loaded down with mineral salts, which while increasing its weight, make it friable and far from durable. All our products are adulterated to aid in their sale and shorten their life. Our epoch will be called the “Age of adulteration” just as the first epochs of humanity received the names of “The Age of Stone”, “The Age of Bronze”, from the character of their production. Certain ignorant people accuse our pious manufacturers of fraud, while in reality the thought which animates them is to furnish work to their laborers, who cannot resign themselves to living with their arms folded. These adulterations, whose sole motive is a humanitarian sentiment, but which bring splendid profits to the manufacturers who practice them, if they are disastrous for the quality of the goods, if they are an inexhaustible source of waste in human labor, nevertheless prove the ingenuous philanthropy of the capitalists, and the horrible perversion of the laborers, who to gratify their vice for work oblige the manufacturers to stifle the cries of their conscience and to violate even the laws of commercial honesty.

And nevertheless, in spite of the over-production of goods, in spite of the adulterations in manufacturing, the laborers encumber the market in countless numbers

imploing: Work! Work! Their super abundance ought to compel them to bridle their passion; on the contrary it carries it to the point of paroxysm. Let a chance for work present itself, thither they rush; then they demand twelve, fourteen hours to glut their appetite for work, and the next day they are again thrown out on the pavement with no more food for their vice. Every year in all industries lockouts occur with the regularity of the seasons. Over-work, destructive of the organism, is succeeded by absolute rest during two or four months, and when work ceases the pittance ceases. Since the vice of work is diabolically attached to the heart of the laborers, since its requirements stifle all the other instincts of nature, since the quantity of work required by society is necessarily limited by consumption and by the supply of raw materials, why devour in six months the work of a whole year; why not distribute it uniformly over the twelve months and force every working-man to content himself with six or five hours a day throughout the year instead of getting indigestion from twelve hours during six months. Once assured of their daily portion of work, the laborers will no longer be jealous of each other, no longer fight to snatch away work from each other's hands and bread from each other's mouths, and then, not exhausted in body and mind, they will begin to practice the virtues of laziness.

Brutalized by their vice, the laborers have been unable to rise to the conception of this fact, that to have work for all it is necessary to apportion it like water on a ship in distress. Meanwhile certain manufacturers in the name of capitalist exploitation have for a long time demanded a legal limitation of the work day. Before the commission of 1860 on professional education, one of the greatest manufacturers of Alsace, M. Bourcart of Guebwiller, declared: "The day of twelve hours is excessive and ought to be reduced to eleven, while work ought to be stopped at two o'clock on Saturday. I advise the adoption of this measure, although it may appear onerous at first sight. We have tried it in our industrial establishments for four years and find ourselves the better for it, while the average production, far from having diminished, has increased." In his study of machines M.F. Passy quotes the following letter from a great Belgian manufacturer M. Ottevaere: "Our machines, although the same as those of the English spinning mills, do not produce what they ought to produce or what those same machines would produce in England, although the spinners there work two hours a day less. We all work two good hours too much. I am convinced that if we worked only eleven hours instead of thirteen we should have the same product and we should consequently produce more economically." Again, M. Leroy Beaulieu affirms that it is a remark of a great Belgian manufacturer that the weeks in which a holiday falls result in a product not less than ordinary weeks.⁶

⁶ Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *La Question Ouvrière au XIX siècle*, 1872.

An aristocratic government has dared to do what a people, duped in their simplicity by the moralists, never dared. Despising the lofty and moral industrial considerations of the economists, who like the birds of ill omen, croaked that to reduce by one hour the work in factories was to decree the ruin of English industry, the government of England has forbidden by a law strictly enforced to work more than ten hours a day, and as before England remains the first industrial nation of the world.

The experiment tried on so great a scale is on record; the experience of certain intelligent capitalists is on record. They prove beyond a doubt that to strengthen human production it is necessary to reduce the hours of labor and multiply the pay days and feast days, yet the French nation is not convinced. But if the miserable reduction of two hours has increased English production by almost one-third in ten years, what breathless speed would be given to French production by a legal limitation of the working day to three hours. Cannot the laborers understand that by over-working themselves they exhaust their own strength and that of their progeny, that they are used up and long before their time come to be incapable of any work at ail, that absorbed and brutalized by this single vice they are no longer men but pieces of men, that they kill within themselves all beautiful faculties, to leave nothing alive and flourishing except the furious madness for work. Like Arcadian parrots, they repeat the lesson of the economist: "Let us work, let us work to increase the national wealth." O, idiots, it is because you work too much that the industrial equipment develops slowly. Stop braying and listen to an economist, no other than M.L.Reybaud, whom we were fortunate enough to lose a few months ago. "It is in general by the conditions of hand-work that the revolution in methods of labor is regulated. As long as handwork furnishes its services at a low price, it is lavished, while efforts are made to economize it when its services become more costly."⁷

To force the capitalists to improve their machines of wood and iron it is necessary to raise wages and diminish the working hours of the machines of flesh and blood. Do you ask for proofs? They can be furnished by the hundreds. In spinning, the self-acting mule was invented and applied at Manchester because the spinners refused to work such long hours as before. In America the machine is invading all branches of farm production, from the making of butter to the weeding of wheat. Why, because the American, free and lazy, would prefer a thousand deaths to the bovine life of the French peasant. Plowing, so painful and so crippling to the laborer in our glorious France, is in the American West an agreeable open-air pastime, which he practices in a sitting posture, smoking his pipe nonchalantly.

⁷ Louis Reybaud, *Le coton, son regime, ses problèmes* (1863).

Chapter IV. New Songs to New Music

We have seen that by diminishing the hours of labor new mechanical forces will be conquered for social production. Furthermore, by obliging the laborers to consume their products the army of workers will be immensely increased. The capitalist class once relieved from its function of universal consumer will hasten to dismiss its train of soldiers, magistrates, journalists, procurers, which it has withdrawn from useful labor to help it in consuming and wasting. Then the labor market will overflow. Then will be required an iron law to put a limit on work. It will be impossible to find employment for that swarm of former unproductives, more numerous than insect parasites, and after them must be considered all those who provide for their needs and their vain and expensive tastes. When there are no more lackeys and generals to decorate, no more free and married prostitutes to be covered with laces, no more cannons to bore, no more palaces to build, there will be need of severe laws to compel the working women and working men who have been employed on embroidered laces, iron workings, buildings, to take the hygienic and calisthenic exercises requisite to re-establish their health and improve their race. When once we begin to consume European products at home instead of sending them to the devil, it will be necessary that the sailors, dock handlers and the draymen sit down and learn to twirl their thumbs. The happy Polynesians may then love as they like without fearing the civilized Venus and the sermons of European moralists.

And that is not all: In order to find work for all the non-producers of our present society, in order to leave room for the industrial equipment to go on developing indefinitely, the working class will be compelled, like the capitalist class, to do violence to its taste for abstinence and to develop indefinitely its consuming capacities. Instead of eating an ounce or two of gristly meat once a day, when it eats any, it will eat juicy beefsteaks of a pound or two; instead of drinking moderately of bad wine, it will become more orthodox than the pope and will drink broad and deep bumpers of Bordeaux and Burgundy without commercial baptism and will leave water to the beasts.

The proletarians have taken into their heads to inflict upon the capitalists ten hours of forge and factory; that is their great mistake, because of social antagonisms and civil wars. Work ought to be forbidden and not imposed. The Rothschilds and other capitalists should be allowed to bring testimony to the fact that

throughout their whole lives they have been perfect vagabonds, and if they swear they wish to continue to live as perfect vagabonds in spite of the general mania for work, they should be pensioned and should receive every morning at the city hall a five-dollar gold piece for their pocket money. Social discords will vanish. Bond holders and capitalists will be first to rally to the popular party, once convinced that far from wishing them harm, its purpose is rather to relieve them of the labor of over-consumption and waste, with which they have been overwhelmed since their birth. As for the capitalists who are incapable of proving their title to the name of vagabond, they will be allowed to follow their instincts. There are plenty of disgusting occupations in which to place them. Dufaure might be set at cleaning public closets, Gallifet¹ might perform surgical operations on diseased horses and hogs. The members of the amnesty commission might be sent to the stockyards to pick out the oxen and the sheep to be slaughtered. The senators might play the part of undertakers and lackeys in funeral processions. As for the others, occupations could be found for them on a level with their intelligence. Lorgeril and Eroglie could cork champagne bottles, only they would have to be muzzled as a precaution against intoxication. Ferry, Freycinet and Tirard might destroy the bugs and vermin in the departments of state and other public houses. It would, however, be necessary to put the public funds out of the reach of the capitalists out of due regard for their acquired habits.

But vengeance, harsh and prolonged, will be heaped upon the moralists who have perverted nature. The bigots, the canters, the hypocrites, and other such sects of men who disguise themselves like maskers to deceive the world. For whilst they give the common people to understand that they are busied about nothing but contemplation and devotion in fastings and maceration of their sensuality, — and that only to sustain and aliment the small frailty of their humanity, — it is so far otherwise that on the contrary, God knows, what cheer they make; *et Curies simulant, sed Bacchanalia vivunt.*² You may read it in great letters, in the coloring of their red snouts, and gulching bellies as big as a tun, unless it be when they perfume themselves with sulphur.³ On the days of great popular rejoicing, when instead of swallowing dust as on the 15th of August and 14th of July under capitalism, the communists and collectivists will eat, drink and dance to their hearts' content, the members of the Academy, of moral and political sciences, the priests with long robes and short, of the economic, catholic, protestant, jewish, positivist and free-thought church; the propagandists of Malthusianism, and of Christian, altruistic, independent or dependent ethics, clothed in yellow, shall be compelled to hold a

¹ Gallifet was the general who was directly responsible for the massacre of thousands of French workingmen at the closing days of the Paris Commune.

² They simulate Curius but live like Bacchanals. (Juvenal.)

³ Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, Book II, Chapter XXXIV. Translation of Urquhart and Motteux.

candle until it bums their fingers, shall starve in sight of tables loaded with meats, fruits and flowers and shall agonize with thirst in sight of flowing hogsheads. Four times a year with the changing seasons they shall be shut up like the knife grinders' dogs in great wheels and condemned to grind wind for ten hours.

The lawyers and legislators shall suffer the same punishment. Under the regime of idleness, to kill the time, which kills us second by second, there will be shows and theatrical performances always and always. And here we have the very work for our bourgeois legislators. We shall organize them into traveling companies to go to the fairs and villages, giving legislative exhibitions. The generals in riding boots, their breasts brilliantly decorated with medals and crosses, shall go through the streets and courts levying recruits among the good people. Gambetta and his comrade Cassagnac shall tend door. Cassagnac, in full duellist costume, rolling his eyes and twisting his mustache, spitting out burning tow, shall threaten every one with his father's pistol⁴ and sink into a hole as soon as they show him Lullier's portrait. Gambetta will discourse on foreign politics and on little Greece, who makes a doctor of him and would set Europe on fire to pilfer Turkey; on great Russia that stultifies him with the mincemeat she promises to make of Prussia and who would fain see mischief brewing in the west of Europe so as to feather her nest in the east and to strangle nihilism at home; on Mr. Bismark who was good enough to allow him to pronounce himself on the amnesty ... then uncovering his mountainous belly smeared over with red and white and blue, the three national colors, he will beat the tattoo on it, and enumerate the delicate little ortolans, the truffles and the glasses of Margaux and Y'quem that it has gulped down to encourage agriculture, and to keep his electors of Belleville in good spirits.

In the barracks the entertainment will open with the *Electoral Farce*.

In the presence of the voters with wooden heads and asses' ears, the bourgeois candidates, dressed as clowns, will dance the dance of political liberties, wiping themselves fore and aft with their freely promising electoral programs, and talking with tears in their eyes of the miseries of the people and with copper in their voices of the glories of France. Then the heads of the voters will bray solidly in chorus, hi han! hi han!

Then will start the great play, *The Theft of the Nation's Goods*.

Capitalist France, an enormous female, hairy-faced and bald-headed, fat, flabby, puffy and pale, with sunken eyes, sleepy and yawning, is stretching herself out on a velvet couch. At her feet Industrial Capitalism, a gigantic organism of iron, with an ape-like mask, is mechanically devouring men, women and children, whose thrilling and heart-rending cries fill the air; the bank with a marten's muzzle; a

⁴ Paul de Cassagnac, like his father, Orsnier, was prominent as a conservative politician, journalist and duellist.

hyena's body and harpy-hands, is nimbly flipping coins out of his pocket. Hordes of miserable, emaciated proletarians in rags, escorted by gendarmes with drawn sabers, pursued by furies lashing them with whips of hunger, are bringing to the feet of capitalist France heaps of merchandise, casks of wine, sacks of gold and wheat. Langlois, his nether garment in one hand, the testament of Proudhon in the other and the book of the national budget between his teeth, is encamped at the head of the defenders of national property and is mounting guard. When the laborers, beaten with gun stocks and pricked with bayonets, have laid down their burdens, they are driven away and the door is opened to the manufacturers, merchants and bankers. They hurl themselves pell mell upon the heap, devouring cotton goods, sacks of wheat, ingots of gold, emptying casks of wine. When they have devoured all they can, they sink down, filthy and disgusting objects in their ordure and vomitings. Then the thunder bursts forth, the earth shakes and opens, Historic Destiny arises, with her iron foot she crushes the heads of the capitalists, hiccoughing, staggering, falling, unable to flee. With her broad hand she overthrows capitalist France, astounded and sweating with fear.

If, uprooting from its heart the vice which dominates it and degrades its nature, the working class were to arise in its terrible strength, not to demand the Rights of Man, which are but the rights of capitalist exploitation, not to demand the Right to Work which is but the right to misery, but to forge a brazen law forbidding any man to work more than three hours a day, the earth, the old earth, trembling with joy would feel a new universe leaping within her. But how should we ask a proletariat corrupted by capitalist ethics, to take a manly resolution ...

Like Christ, the doleful personification of ancient slavery, the men, the women and the children of the proletariat have been climbing painfully for a century up the hard Calvary of pain; for a century compulsory toil has broken their bones, bruised their flesh, tortured their nerves; for a century hunger has torn their entrails and their brains. O Laziness, have pity on our long misery! O Laziness, mother of the arts and noble virtues, be thou the balm of human anguish!

Appendix

Our moralists are very modest people. If they invented the dogma of work, they still have doubts of its efficacy in tranquilizing the soul, rejoicing the spirit, and maintaining the proper functioning of the entrails and other organs. They wish to try its workings on the populace, *in anima vili*, before turning it against the capitalists, to excuse and authorize whose vices is their peculiar mission.

But, you, three-for-a-cent philosophers, why thus cudgel your brains to work out an ethics the practice of which you dare not counsel to your masters? Your dogma of work, of which you are so proud, do you wish to see it scoffed at, dishonored? Let us open the history of ancient peoples and the writings of their philosophers and law givers. “I could not affirm,” says the father of history, Herodotus, “whether the Greeks derived from the Egyptians the contempt which they have for work, because I find the same contempt established among the Thracians, the Cythians, the Persians, the Lydians; in a word, because among most barbarians, those who learn mechanical arts and even their children are regarded as the meanest of their citizens. All the Greeks have been nurtured in this principle, particularly the Lacedaemonians.”¹

“At Athens the citizens were veritable nobles who had to concern themselves but with the defense and the administration of the community, like the savage warriors from whom they descended. Since they must thus have all their time free to watch over the interests of the republic, with their mental and bodily strength, they laid all labor upon the slaves. Likewise at Lacedaemon, even the women were not allowed to spin or weave that they might not detract from their nobility.”²

The Romans recognized but two noble and free professions, agriculture and arms. All the citizens by right lived at the expense of the treasury without being constrained to provide for their living by any of the sordid arts (thus, they designated the trades), which rightfully belonged to slaves. The elder Brutus to arouse the

¹ Herodotus. **Book II.**

² Biot. *De l'abolition de l'esclavage ancien en Occident*, 1840.

people, accused Tarquin, the tyrant, of the special outrage of having converted free citizens into artisans and masons.³

The ancient philosophers had their disputes upon the origin of ideas but they agreed when it came to the abhorrence of work. “Nature,” said Plato in his social utopia, his model republic, “Nature has made no shoemaker nor smith. Such occupations degrade the people who exercise them. Vile mercenaries, nameless wretches, who are by their very condition excluded from political rights. As for the merchants accustomed to lying and deceiving, they will be allowed in the city only as a necessary evil. The citizen who shall have degraded himself by the commerce of the shop shall be prosecuted for this offense. If he is convicted, he shall be condemned to a year in prison; the punishment shall be doubled for each repeated offense.”⁴

In his *Economics*, Xenophon writes, “The people who give themselves up to manual labor are never promoted to public offices, and with good reason. The greater part of them, condemned to be seated the whole day long, some even to endure the heat of the fire continually, cannot fail to be changed in body, and it is almost inevitable that the mind be affected.” “What honorable thing can come out of a shop?” asks Cicero. “What can commerce produce in the way of honor? Everything called shop is unworthy an honorable man. Merchants can gain no profit without lying, and what is more shameful than falsehood? Again, we must regard as something base and vile the trade of those who sell their toil and industry, for whoever gives his labor for money sells himself and puts himself in the tank of slaves.”⁵

Proletarians, brutalized by the dogma of work, listen to the voice of these philosophers, which has been concealed from you with jealous care: A citizen who gives his labor for money degrades himself to the rank of slaves, he commits a crime which deserves years of imprisonment.

Christian hypocrisy and capitalist utilitarianism had not perverted these philosophers of the ancient republics. Speaking for free men, they expressed their thought naively. Plato, Aristotle, those intellectual giants, beside whom our latter day philosophers are but pygmies, wish the citizens of their ideal republics to live in the most complete leisure, for as Xenophon observed, “Work takes all the time and with it one has no leisure for the republic and his friends.” According to Plutarch, the great claim of Lycurgus, wisest of men, to the admiration of posterity, was that he had granted leisure to the citizens of Sparta by forbidding to them any trade whatever. But our moralists of Christianity and capitalism will answer, “These

³ Livy, *Book I*.

⁴ Plato’s *Republic*, Book V.

⁵ Cicero’s *De Officiis*, I, 42.

thinkers and philosophers praised the institution of slavery.” Perfectly true, but could it have been otherwise, granted the economic and political conditions of their epoch? War was the normal state of ancient societies. The free man was obliged to devote his time to discussing the affairs of state and watching over its defense. The trades were then too primitive and clumsy for those practicing them to exercise their birth-right of soldier and citizen; thus the philosophers and law-givers, if they wished to have warriors and citizens in their heroic republics, were obliged to tolerate slaves. But do not the moralists and economists of capitalism praise wage labor, the modern slavery; and to what men does the capitalist slavery give leisure? To people like Rothschild, Schneider, and Madame Boucicaut, useless and harmful slaves of their vices and of their domestic servants. “The prejudice of slavery dominated the minds of Pythagoras and Aristotle,” — this has been written disdainfully; and yet Aristotle foresaw: “that if every tool could by itself execute its proper function, as the masterpieces of Daedalus moved themselves or as the tripods of Vulcan set themselves spontaneously at their sacred work; if for example the shuttles of the weavers did their own weaving, the foreman of the workshop would have no more need of helpers, nor the master of slaves.”

Aristotle’s dream is our reality. Our machines, with breath of fire, with limbs of unwearying steel, with fruitfulness, wonderful inexhaustible, accomplish by themselves with docility their sacred labor. And nevertheless the genius of the great philosophers of capitalism remains dominated by the prejudice of the wage system, worst of slaveries. They do not yet understand that the machine is the saviour of humanity, the god who shall redeem man from the sordidae artes and from working for hire, the god who shall give him leisure and liberty.

Library.Anarhija.Net



Paul Lafargue
The Right To Be Lazy
1883

Retrieved on March 23, 2010 from www.marxists.org

Written: Saint Pélagie Prison, 1883

Translated: Charles Kerr

First Published: Charles Kerr and Co., Co-operative, 1883

Online Version: Lafargue Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000

Transcription/Markup: Sally Ryan & Einde O'Callaghan for the Marxists'
Internet Archive

lib.anarhija.net