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# The Wage System

By PETER KROPOTKIN

(Followed by a Postscript.)

## I. REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT AND WAGES

IN THEIR PLANS for the reconstruction of society, the Collectivists commit, in our opinion, a double error. While speaking of the abolition of the rule of capital, they wish, nevertheless, to maintain two institutions which form the very basis of that rule, namely, representative government and the wage system.

As for the representative government, it remains incomprehensible to us how intelligent men (and they are not wanting amongst the Collectivists) can continue to be the partisans of national and municipal parliaments, after all the lessons on this subject bestowed on us by history, whether in England or in France, in Germany, Switzerland or the United States. While parliamentary rule is seen everywhere to be falling to pieces; while its principles in themselves—and no longer merely their applications—are being criticised in every direction, how can intelligent men, calling themselves Revolutionary Socialists, seek to maintain a system already condemned to death?

Representative government is a system which was elaborated by the middle class to make head against royalty and, at the same time, to maintain and augment their domination of the workers. It is the characteristic form of middle-class rule. But even its most ardent admirers have never seriously contended that a parliament or municipal body does actually represent a nation or a city; the more intelligent are aware that this is impossible. By upholding parliamentary rule the middle class have been simply seeking to oppose a dam betwixt themselves and royalty, or betwixt themselves and the territorial aristocracy, without giving liberty to the people. It is moreover plain that, as the people become conscious of their interests, and as the variety of those interests increases, the system becomes unworkable. And this is why the democrats of all countries are seeking for different palliatives or correctives and cannot find them. They are trying.

the *Referendum*, and discovering that it is worthless; they prate of proportional representation, of the representation of minorities, and other parliamentary utopias. In a word, they are striving to discover the undiscoverable; that is to say, a method of delegation which shall represent the myriad varied interests of the nation; but they are being forced to recognise that they are upon a false track, and confidence in government by delegation is passing away.

It is only the Social Democrats and Collectivists who are not losing this confidence, who are attempting to maintain so-called national representation; and this is what we cannot understand.

If our Anarchist principles do not suit them, if they think them inapplicable, they ought, at least, as it seems to us, to try to discover what other system of organisation could well correspond to a society without capitalists or landlords. But to take the middle-class system—a system already in its decadence, a vicious system if ever there was one—and to proclaim this system (with a few innocent corrections, such as the imperative mandate, or the *Referendum*, the uselessness of which has been demonstrated already) good for a society that has passed through the Social Revolution, is what seems to us absolutely incomprehensible, unless under the name of Social Revolution they understand something very different from Revolution, some petty botching of existing middle-class rule.

The same with regard to the wage system. After having proclaimed the abolition of private property and the possession in common of the instruments of production, how can they sanction the maintenance of the wage system under any form? And yet this is what the Collectivists are doing when they praise the efficiency of labour notes.

That the English Socialists of the early part of this century should invent labour notes is comprehensible. They were simply trying to reconcile Capital and Labour. They repudiated all idea of laying violent hands upon the property of the capitalists. They were so little of revolutionaries that they declared themselves ready to submit even to imperial rule, if that rule would favour their co-operative societies. They remained middle-class men at bottom, if charitable ones; and this is why (as Engels said in his preface to the Communist Manifesto of 1848) the Socialists of that period were to be found among the middle class, whilst the advanced workmen were Communists.

If later Proudhon took up this same idea, that again is easy to understand. What was he seeking in his Mutualist system, if not to render capital less offensive, despite the maintenance of private property, which he detested, but which he believed necessary to guarantee the individual against the state? Further, if economists, belonging more or less to the middle class, also admit labour notes, it is not surprising. It matters little to them whether the worker be paid in labour notes or in coin stamped with the effigy of king or

republic. They want to save, in the coming overthrow, private property in inhabited houses, the soil, the mills; or, at least, in inhabited houses and the capital necessary for the production of manufactures. And to maintain this property, labour notes will answer very well.

If the labour note can be exchanged for jewels and carriages, the owner of house property will willingly accept it as rent. And as long as the inhabited house, the field and the mill belong to individual owners, so long will it be requisite to pay them in some way before they will allow you to work in their fields or their mills, or to lodge in their houses. And it will also be requisite to pay wages to the worker, either in gold or in paper money or in labour notes exchangeable for all sorts of commodities.

But how can this new form of wages, the labour note, be sanctioned by those who admit that houses, fields, mills are no longer private property, that they belong to the commune or the nation?

## II. THE COLLECTIVIST WAGE SYSTEM

LET US EXAMINE more closely this system for the remuneration of labour, as set forth by the English, French, German and Italian collectivists.\*

It comes very much to this: Every one works, in fields, in factories, in schools, in hospitals. The working day is regulated by the state, to which belong the soil, factories, means of communication and all the rest. Each worker, having done a day's work, receives a labour note, stamped, let us say, with these words: *eight hours of labour*. With this note he can procure any sort of goods in the shops of the state or the various corporations. The note is divisible in such a way that one hour's worth of meat, ten minutes' worth of matches, or half-an-hour's worth of tobacco can be purchased. Instead of saying: "two pennyworth of soap," after the Collectivist Revolution they will say: "five minutes' worth of soap."

Most Collectivists, faithful to the distinction established by the middle-class economists (and Marx also) between *qualified* (skilled) and *simple* (unskilled) labour, tell us that qualified or professional toil should be paid a certain number of times more than simple toil. Thus, one hour of the doctor's work should be considered as equivalent to two or three hours of the work of the nurse, or three hours of that of the navy. "Professional or qualified labour will be a multiple of simple labour," says the Collectivist Grönlund, because this sort

\*The Spanish Anarchists, who continue to call themselves Collectivists, understand by this term common possession of the instruments of labour and "liberty for each group to share the produce of labour as they think fit"; on Communist principles or in any other way.

of labour demands a longer or shorter apprenticeship.

Other Collectivists do not make this distinction. They proclaim "equality of wages." The doctor, the schoolmaster and the professor will be paid (in labour notes) at the same rate as the navvy. Eight hours spent in walking the hospitals will be worth the same as eight hours spent in navvies' work or in the mine or the factory.

Some make a further concession; they admit that disagreeable or unhealthy labour, such as that in the sewers, should be paid at a higher rate than work which is agreeable. One hour of service in the sewers may count, they say, for two hours of the labour of the professor.

Let us add that certain Collectivists advocate the wholesale remuneration of trade societies. Thus, one society may say: "Here are a hundred tons of steel. To produce them one hundred workers of our society have taken ten days; as our day consisted of eight hours, that makes eight thousand hours of labour for one hundred tons of steel; eighty hours a ton." Upon which the State will pay them eight thousand labour notes of one hour each, and these eight thousand notes will be distributed amongst the fellow-workers in the foundry as seems best to themselves.

Or again, if one hundred miners have spent twenty days in hewing eight thousand tons of coal, the coal will be worth two hours a ton, and the sixteen thousand labour notes for one hour each received by the miners' union will be divided amongst them as they think fair.

If there be disputes, if the miners protest and say that a ton of steel ought to cost six hours of labour instead of eight, or if the professor rate his day twice as high as the nurse, then the State must step in and regulate their differences.

Such, in a few words, is the organisation which the Collectivists desire to see arising from the Social Revolution. As we have seen, their principles are: collective property in the instruments of labour, and remuneration of each worker according to the time spent in productive toil, taking into account the productiveness of his work. As for their political system, it would be parliamentary rule, ameliorated by the change of men in power, the imperative mandate, and the *referendum*—i.e., the general vote of Yes or No upon questions submitted to the popular decision.

This system seems to us absolutely incapable of realisation.

The Collectivists begin by proclaiming a revolutionary principle—the abolition of private property—and, as soon as proclaimed, they deny it, by maintaining an organisation of production and consumption springing from private property.

They proclaim a revolutionary principle and ignore the consequences it must necessarily bring about. They forget that the very fact of abolishing individual property in the instruments of production (land, factories, means of communication) must cause society to set

out in a new direction; that it must change production from top to bottom, change not only its methods but its ends; that all the everyday relations between individuals must be modified as soon as land, machinery and the rest are considered as common possessions.

They say: "No private property"; and immediately they hasten to maintain private property in its everyday forms. "For productive purposes you are a commune," they say; "the fields, the tools, the machinery, all that has been made up to this day—manufactures, railways, wharves, mines—belong to all of you in common. Not the slightest distinction will be made concerning the share of each one in this collective property.

"But from to-morrow you are minutely to discuss the part that each one of you is to take in making the new machines, digging the new mines. From to-morrow you are to endeavour to weigh exactly the portion which will accrue to each one from the new produce. You are to count your minutes of work, you are to be on the watch lest one moment of your neighbour's toil may purchase more than yours.

"You are to calculate your hours and your minutes of labour, and since the hour measures nothing,—since in one factory a workman can watch four looms at once, whilst in another he only watches two, you are to weigh the muscular force, the energy of brain, the energy of nerve expended. You are scrupulously to count up the years of apprenticeship, that you may value precisely the share of each one amongst you in the production of the future. And all this, after you have declared that you leave entirely out of your reckoning the share he has taken in the past."

It is evident to us that a society cannot organise itself upon two opposing principles, two principles which contradict one another at every step. The nation or the commune which should give to itself such an organisation would be forced either to return property or else to transform itself immediately into a communist society.

### III. UNEQUAL REMUNERATION

WE HAVE SAID that most Collectivist writers demand that in a Socialist society remuneration should be based upon a distinction between qualified or professional labour and simple labour. They assert that an hour of the engineer's, the architect's or the doctor's work should be counted as two or three hours' work from the blacksmith, the mason or the nurse. And the same distinction, say they, should be established between workers whose trades require a longer or shorter apprenticeship and those who are mere day labourers.

This is the case in the present middle-class society; it must be the case in the future society of Collectivism.

But to establish this distinction is to maintain all the inequalities of our existing society. It is to trace out beforehand a demarcation between the worker and those who claim to rule him. It is still to divide society into two clearly defined classes: an aristocracy of knowledge above, a horny-handed democracy below; one class devoted to the service of the other, whilst that other profits by its leisure to learn how to dominate those who toil for it.

This is to take the distinctive features of middle-class society and sanction them by a social revolution. It is to erect into a principle an abuse which to-day is condemned in the society that is breaking up.

We know very well what will be said in answer. We shall be told about "Scientific Socialism." The middle-class economist, and Marx too, will be cited to prove that there is a good reason for a scale of wages, for the "labour force" of the engineer costs society more than the "labour force" of the navvy. And, indeed, have not the economists striven to prove that, if the engineer is paid twenty times more than the navvy, it is because the cost necessary to produce an engineer is more considerable than that necessary to produce a navvy? And has not Marx maintained that the like distinction between various sorts of manual labour is of equal logical necessity? He could come to no other conclusion, since he took up Ricardo's theory of value and insisted that products exchange in proportion to the quantity of the work socially necessary to produce them.

But we know also how much of all this to believe. We know that if the engineer, the scientist and the doctor are paid to-day ten or a hundred times more than the labourer, and the weaver earns three times as much as the toiler in the fields and ten times as much as a match girl, it is not because what they receive is in proportion to their various costs of production. Rather it is in proportion to the extent of monopoly in education and in industry. The engineer, the scientist and the doctor simply draw their profits from their own sort of capital—their degrees, their certificates—just as the manufacturer draws a profit from a mill, or as a nobleman used to do from his birth and title.

When the employer pays the engineer twenty times more than the workman, he makes this very simple calculation: if an engineer can save him £4,000 a year in cost of production, he will pay him £800 a year to do it. And if he sees a foreman is a clever sweater and can save him £400 in handicraft, he at once offers him £80 or £90 a year. He expends £100 where he counts upon gaining £1,000; that is the essence of the capitalist system. And the like holds good of the differences in various trades.

Where then is the sense of talking of the cost of production of labour force, and saying that a student who passes a merry youth at the University, has a *right* to ten times higher wages than the son of a miner who has pined in a pit since he was eleven? Or that a

weaver has a *right* to wages three or four times higher than those of an agricultural labourer? The expenditure needed to produce a weaver is not four times as great as the necessary cost of producing a field worker. The weaver simply benefits by the advantageous position which industry enjoys in Europe as compared with parts of the world where at present there is no industrial development.

No one has ever estimated the real cost of production of labour force. And if an idler costs society much more than an honest workman, it still remains to be known if, when all is told (infant mortality amongst the workers, the ravages of anæmia, the premature deaths) a sturdy day labourer does not cost society more than an artisan.

Are we to be told that, for example, the 1s. a day of a London workwoman and the 3d. a day of the Auvergne peasant who blinds herself over lace-making, represent the cost of production of these women? We are perfectly aware that they often work for even less, but we know also that they do it entirely because, thanks to our splendid social organisation, they would die of hunger without these ridiculous wages.

The existing scale of wages seems to us a highly complex product of taxation, government interference, monopoly and capitalist greed—in a word, of the State and the capitalist system. In our opinion all the theories made by economists about the scale of wages have been invented after the event to justify existing injustices. It is needless to regard them.

We are, however, certain to be informed that the Collectivist wage scale will, at all events, be an improvement. "You must admit," we shall be told, "that it will, at least, be better to have a class of workers paid at twice or three times the ordinary rate than to have Rothschilds, who put into their pockets in one day more than a workman can in a year. It will be a step towards equality."

To us it seems a step away from it. To introduce into a Socialist society the distinction between ordinary and professional labour would be to sanction by the Revolution and erect into a principle a brutal fact, to which we merely submit to-day, considering it all the while as unjust. It would be acting after the manner of those gentlemen of the Fourth of August, 1789, who proclaimed, in high sounding phraseology, the abolition of feudal rights, and on the Eighth of August sanctioned those very rights by imposing upon the peasants the dues by which they were to be redeemed from the nobles. Or again, like the Russian government at the time of the emancipation of the serfs, when it proclaimed that the land henceforth belonged to the nobility, whereas previously it was considered an abuse that the land which belonged to the peasants should be bought and sold by private persons.

Or, to take a better known example, when the Commune of 1871

decided to pay the members of the Communal Council 12s. 6d. a day, whilst the National Guards on the ramparts had only 1s. 3d., certain persons applauded this decision as an act of grand democratic equality.\* But, in reality, the Commune did nothing thereby but sanction the ancient inequality between officials and soldiers, governors and governed. For an Opportunist parliament such a decision might have seemed splendid, but for the Commune it was a negation of its own principles. The Commune was false to its own revolutionary principle, and by that very fact condemned it.

In the present state of society, when we see Cabinet Ministers paying themselves thousands a year, whilst the workman has to content himself with less than a hundred; when we see the foreman paid twice or three times as much as the ordinary hand, and when amongst workers themselves there are all sorts of gradations, from 7s. or 8s. a day down to the 3d. for the sempstress, we disapprove the large salary of the minister, and also the difference between the artisan's eight-shillings and the sempstress' three-pence. And we say, "Let us have done with privileges of education as well as of birth." We are Anarchists just because such privileges disgust us.

How can we then raise these privileges into a principle? How can we proclaim that privileges of education are to be the basis of an equal Society, without striking a blow at that very Society. What is submitted to to-day, will be submitted to no longer in a society based on equality. The general above the soldier, the rich engineer above the workman, the doctor above the nurse, already disgust us. Can we suffer them in a society which starts by proclaiming equality?

Obviously not. The popular conscience, inspired by the idea of equality, will revolt against such an injustice, it will not tolerate it.

That is why certain Collectivists, understanding the impossibility of maintaining a scale of wages in a society inspired by the influence of the Revolution, zealously advocate equality in wages. But they only stumble against fresh difficulties, and their equality of wages becomes a Utopia, as incapable of realisation as the wage scale of the others.

A society that has seized upon all social wealth, and has plainly announced that all have a right to this wealth, whatever may be the part they have taken in creating it in the past, will be obliged to give up all idea of wages, either in money or in labour notes.

#### IV. EQUAL WAGES versus FREE COMMUNISM

"TO EACH ACCORDING to his deeds," say the Collectivists, or rather according to his share of service rendered to society. And this is the principle they recommend as the basis of economic organisation,

\*Among these "certain persons" were Marx, in *The Civil War in France*, Engels in his introduction to later editions of this work, and Lenin in *The State and Revolution* (ED.)

after the Revolution shall have made common property all the instruments of labour and all that is necessary for production.

If the Social Revolution should be so unfortunate as to proclaim this principle, it would be stemming the tide of human progress; it would be leaving unsolved the huge social problem cast by past centuries upon our shoulders.

It is true that in such a society as ours, where the more a man works the less he is paid, this principle may seem, at first sight, an aspiration towards justice. But at bottom it is but the consecration of past injustice. It is with this principle that the wage-system started, to end where it is to-day, in crying inequalities and all the abominations of the present state of things. And it has ended thus because, from the day on which society began to value services in the money or any other sort of wages, from the day on which it was said that each should have only what he could succeed in getting paid for his work, the whole history of Capitalism (the State aiding therein) was written beforehand; its germ was enclosed in this principle.

Must we then return to our point of departure and pass once more through the same process of capitalist evolution? These theorists seem to desire it; but happily it is impossible; the Revolution will be Communistic; or it will be drowned in blood, and must be begun all over again.

Service rendered to society, be it labour in factory or field, or moral service, *cannot* be valued in monetary units. There cannot be an exact measure of its value, either of what has been improperly called its "value in exchange" or of its value in use. If we see two individuals, both working for years, for five hours daily, for the community, at two different occupations equally pleasing to them, we can say that, taken all in all, their labours are roughly equivalent. But their work could not be broken up into fractions, so that the product of each day, each hour or each minute of the labour of one should be worth the produce of each minute and each hour of that of the other.

Broadly speaking, we can say that a man who during his whole life deprives himself of leisure for ten hours daily has given much more to society than he who has deprived himself of but five hours a day, or has not deprived himself of any leisure at all. But we cannot take what one man has done during any two hours and say that this produce is worth exactly twice as much as the produce of one hour's work from another individual, and reward each proportionately. To do this would be to ignore all that is complex in the industry, the agriculture, the entire life of society as it is; it would be to ignore the extent to which all individual work is the outcome of the former and present labours of society as a whole. It would be to fancy oneself in the Stone Age, when we are living in the Age of Steel.

Go into a coal mine and see the man stationed at the huge machine that hoists and lowers the cage. In his hands he holds a lever whereby to check or reverse the action of the machinery. He lowers the handle, and in a second the cage changes the direction of its giddy rush up or down the shaft. His eyes are attentively fixed upon an indicator in front of him which shows exactly the point the cage has reached; no sooner does it touch the given level than at his gentlest pressure it stops dead short, not a foot above or below the required place. And scarcely are the full trucks discharged or the empties loaded before, at a touch to the handle, the cage is again swinging up or down the shaft.

For eight or ten hours at a time he thus concentrates his attention. Let his brain relax but for an instant, and the cage would fly up and shatter the wheels, break the rope, crush the men, bring all the work of the mine to a stand-still. Let him lose three seconds upon each reverse of the lever and, in a mine with all the modern improvements, the output will be reduced by from twenty to fifty tons a day.

Is it he who renders the greatest service in the mine? Or is it, perhaps, the boy who rings from below the signal for the mounting of the cage? Or is it the miner who risks his life every moment in the depths of the mine and will end one day by being killed by fire-damp? Or, again, the engineer who would lose the coal seam and set men hewing bare rock? Or, finally, is it the owner who has put all his patrimony into the concern, and who perhaps has said, in opposition to all previous anticipations: "Dig there, you will find excellent coal."?

All the workers engaged in the mine contribute to the raising of coal in proportion to their strength, their energy, their knowledge, their intelligence and their skill. And we can say that all have the right to *live*, to satisfy their needs, and even gratify their whims, after the more imperious needs of every one are satisfied. But how can we value exactly what they have each done?

Further, is the coal that they have extracted entirely the result of *their* work? Is it not also the outcome of the work of the men who constructed the railway leading to the mine, and the roads branching off on all sides from the stations? And what of the work of those who have tilled and sown the fields which supply the miners with food, smelted the iron, cut the wood in the forest, made the machines which will consume the coal, and so on?

No hard and fast line can be drawn between the work of one and the work of another. To measure them by results leads to absurdity. To divide them into fractions and measure them by hours of labour leads to absurdity also. One course remains: not to measure them at all, but to recognise the right of all who take part in productive labour first of all to live, and then to enjoy the comforts of life.

Take any other branch of human activity, take our existence as a whole, and say which of us can claim the highest reward for his deeds?

The doctor who has divined the disease or the nurse who has assured its cure by her sanitary cares? The inventor of the first steam engine or the boy who one day, tired of pulling the cord which formerly served to open the valve admitting the steam beneath the piston, tied his cord to the lever of the machine, and went to play with his companions, without imagining that he had invented the mechanism essential to all modern machinery—the automatic valve? The inventor of the locomotive or that Newcastle workman who suggested that wooden sleepers should take the place of the stones which were formerly put under the rails and threw trains off the line by their want of elasticity? The driver of the locomotive or the signalman who stops the train or opens the way for it?

To whom do we owe the trans-Atlantic cable? To the engineer who persisted in declaring that the cable would transmit telegrams, whilst the learned electricians declared that it was impossible? To Maury, the scientist, who advised the disuse of thick cables and the substitution of one no bigger than a walking stick? Or, after all, is it to those volunteers, from no one knows where, who spent day and night on the deck of the *Great Eastern*, minutely examining every yard of cable and taking out the hails that the shareholders of the maritime companies had stupidly caused to be driven through the insulating coat of the cable to render it useless?

And, in a still wider field, the vast tract of human life, with its joys, its sorrows, and its varied incidents, cannot each of us mention some one who during his life has rendered him some service so great, so important, that if it were proposed to value it in money he would be filled with indignation? This service may have been nothing but a word in season, or it may have been months or years of devotion. Are you going to estimate these, the most important of all services, in labour notes?

"The deeds of each"! But human societies could not live for two successive generations if each one did not give infinitely more than will be returned to him in money, in "notes" or in civic rewards. It would be the extinction of the race if the mother did not expend her life to preserve her children, if every man did not give some things without counting the cost, if human beings did not give most where they look for no reward.

If middle-class society is going to ruin; if we are to-day in a blind alley from which there is no escape without applying axe and torch to the institutions of the past, that is just because we have calculated too much. It is just because we have allowed ourselves to be drawn into giving that we may receive; because we have desired to make society into a commercial company based upon debit and credit.

Moreover, the Collectivists know it. They vaguely comprehend that a society cannot exist if it logically carries out the principle, "To each according to his deeds." They suspect that the *needs* (we are not speaking of the whims) of the individual do not always correspond to his deeds. Accordingly, De Paepe tells us:—

"This eminently individualistic principle will be *tempered* by social intervention for the purpose of the education of children and young people (including their maintenance and nurture) and by social organisations for the assistance of the sick and infirm, asylums for aged workers, etc."

Even Collectivists suspect that a man of forty, the father of three children, has greater needs than a youth of twenty. They suspect that a woman who is suckling her child and spends sleepless nights by its cot, cannot get through so much work as a man who has enjoyed tranquil slumber.

They seem to understand that a man or woman worn out by having perhaps, worked over hard for society in general may find themselves incapable of performing so many "deeds" as those who take their hours of labour quietly and pocket their "notes" in the privileged offices of State statisticians.

And they hasten to *temper* their principle. "Oh, certainly," they say, "society will feed and bring up its children. Certainly it will assist the old and infirm. Certainly *needs* not *deeds* will be the measure of the cost which society will impose on itself to temper the principle of deeds."

What, Charity? Yes, our old friend, "Christian Charity," organised by the State.

Improve the foundling hospital, organise insurance against age and sickness, and the principle of deeds will be "tempered". "Wound that they may heal"—they can get no further.

Thus, after having foresworn Communism, after having sneered at their ease at the formula, "To each according to his needs," is it not obvious that they, the great economists, also perceive that they have forgotten something, *i.e.*, the needs of the producers? And thereupon they hasten to recognise these needs. Only it is to be the State by which they are to be estimated; it is to be the State which will undertake to find out if needs are disproportionate to deeds.

It is to be the State that will give alms to him who is willing to recognise his inferiority. From thence to the Poor Law and the Workhouse is but a stone's throw.

There is but a stone's throw, for even this step-mother of a society, against which we are in revolt, has found it necessary to temper its individualistic principle. It too has had to make concessions in a Communistic sense, and in this same form of charity.

It also distributes halfpenny dinners to prevent the pillage of its shops. It also builds hospitals, often bad enough, but sometimes splendid, to prevent the ravages of contagious disease. It also, after having paid for nothing but the hours of labour, receives the children

of those whom it has itself reduced to the extremity of distress. It also takes account of needs—as a charity.

The existence of the poor was the first cause of riches. This it was which created the earliest capitalist. For, before the surplus value, about which people are so fond of talking, could begin to be accumulated it was necessary that there should be poverty-stricken wretches who would consent to sell their labour force rather than die of hunger. It is poverty that has made the rich. And if poverty had advanced by such rapid strides by the end of the Middle Ages, it was chiefly because the invasions and wars, the creation of States and the development of their authority, the wealth gained by exploitation in the East, and many other causes of a like nature, broke the bonds which once united agrarian and urban communities, and led them, in place of the solidarity which they once practised, to adopt the principle of the wage-system.

Is this principle to be the outcome of the Revolution? Dare we dignify by the name of a Social Revolution—that name so dear to the hungry, the suffering and the oppressed—the triumph of such a principle as this?

It cannot be so. For, on the day when ancient institutions splinter into fragments before the axe of the proletariat, voices will be heard shouting: Bread for all! Lodging for all! Right for all to the comforts of life!

And these voices will be heeded. The people will say to themselves: Let us begin by satisfying our thirst for the life, the joy, the liberty we have never known. And when all have tasted happiness, we will set to work; the work of demolishing the last vestiges of middle-class rule, with its account-book morality, its philosophy of debit and credit, its institutions of mine and thine. "While we throw down we shall be building," as Proudhon said; we shall build in the name of Communism and of Anarchy.

## Postscript

*The Wage System* was first written as a chapter in *The Conquest of Bread*, published in 1888. It was later published in Paris as a pamphlet, in 1889, and in the same year appeared in England as the first in the series of pamphlets published by the newly founded Freedom Press, of which Kropotkin was one of the instigators.

Although *The Wage System* was thus written in the first place as part of a much larger work which set out to describe the whole field of anarchist theory, it is complete in itself and can stand on its own as one of the best expositions of the wages question that have been written and, in its conciseness and clear expression, as one of the best of Kropotkin's own pamphlets.

In certain respects the reader will find that Kropotkin's statements are obsolete, i.e. the rates of pay which he quotes in making his comparisons are very much below those obtaining in similar occupations to-day. We have, however, left the figures as they stand, and leave the reader to substitute the figures which obtain in the industries he knows. He will find that the contemporary figures support Kropotkin's contentions just as forcibly as those of the 1880's.

Now, as ever before, the wage system is used by the governing class as a subtle and effective means of maintaining its power over the workers. In every country to-day we find the same relationship and contrast between, on the one hand, a ruling class which controls the means of production and distribution and enjoys the fruits of that control, and, on the other hand, a class of workers who are made serfs because they cannot live without the money tokens handed to them by the ruling class in return for their labour. In every country—including the "workers' state" of Soviet Russia, the worker is thus dependent on the good will of the master—be he financier or commissar—who controls the plant or farm or office in which he works.

In every country the wage system is also used as a means of dividing the workers. An élite of well-paid workers is formed in each industry, and is encouraged to dissociate itself from the lower-paid workers. Certain specialised trades, like printing, control of which is urgently necessary for the maintenance of any kind of government, are paid much more than equally complicated trades like farm work. The way in which the workers have been gulled by this tactic is shown by the many craft unions which often exist in a single industry and thus make it more difficult for the workers in that industry to act in a united manner. The presence of these highly paid unions in an industry, such as the railways, where the general level of wages is very low, is always detrimental to united workers' action. Indeed,

## THE WAGE SYSTEM

all British unionism, whether based on craft, like the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, or on industry, like the National Union of Railwaymen, is opposed to the interests of the workers precisely because it adheres to the wage system as a basis for action. Organisations which accept the very means of oppressing the workers and merely try to gain ameliorations in the conditions of serfdom cannot be regarded as acting in the interests of the workers. Only a form of organisation which aims at the destruction of capital-labour relationships, and its expression in the wages system, can serve the exploited. It is for this reason that we support the revolutionary form of the syndicate, which aims at destroying the property and class society, as opposed to the wage-bargaining and therefore merely reformist trade union.

Some idea of the disparity of wages in this country can be gained from an examination of the averages for various industries in a typical pre-war year (1935). Then male workers in the printing industry and in motor engineering received about £4 a week, while the coal miners and cotton workers averaged between 45s. and 50s. a week, and agricultural workers just over 30s. a week. No reliable figures are available for wages in various trades at present, but the fact that in 1942 the average wages of male workers was £5 2s. od. shows that great discrepancies still exist, when one considers that most agricultural workers even now get only £3 a week and that there are still certain grades of railway workers who get even less than this.

It is of course foolish to suggest that the agricultural worker is less useful than the man who gets three times as much as he for making the means of destruction or for setting a reactionary newspaper. It is equally foolish to pretend that the high-grade locomotive driver is worth more than the signaller who guides his train on its road, whose continual vigilance is necessary to prevent the destruction of life and plant, and who receives little more than half as much pay as his colleague on the footplate. One could continue *ad nauseam* with these comparisons which make nonsense of the whole theory of graded wages. As the anarchists have always contended, it is impossible to assess the comparative value of the work of different people. Nevertheless, this differentiation of wages, which can be justified on no rational or moral grounds, is and has always been used by governing classes to maintain their interests by dividing the workers into varying income groups and so giving substantial sections the illusion of having a vested interest in the present system, as well as provoking jealousies between various crafts, which militate against the unity of the workers within each industry and also the unity of the workers as a whole. This authoritarian tactic of differentiated wages is used in Soviet Russia no less than in Capitalist England, and its survival there in so vigorous a form proves that in Soviet Russia there has in fact been no mitigation of the capital-labour relationship. It merely exists in a different form, but the fact of wage serfdom remains the same in all its characteristics.

Kropotkin's contentions regarding the wages system have thus been confirmed by the progress of the property society, and a few alterations in the figures are all that is needed to bring them up to date.

The pamphlet is in itself quite clearly and ably argued but it may be useful to quote here a short summary of Kropotkin's ideas on the wage system, which formed part of another pamphlet, *Anarchist Communism*.

"The Anarchists cannot consider, like the Collectivists, that a remuneration which would be proportionate to the hours of labour spent by each person in the production of riches may be an ideal, or even an approach to an ideal, society. Without entering here into a discussion as

to how far the exchange value of each merchandise is really measured now by the amount of labour necessary for its production, we must say that the collectivist ideal seems to us merely unrealisable in a society which has been brought to consider the necessaries for production as common property. Such a society would be compelled to abandon the wage-system altogether. It appears impossible that the mitigated individualism of the collectivist school could co-exist with the partial Communism implied by holding land and machinery in common—unless imposed by a powerful government, much more powerful than all those of our own times. The present wage-system has grown up from the appropriation of the necessaries for production by the few; it was a necessary condition for the growth of the present capitalist production; and it cannot outlive it, even if an attempt be made to pay to the worker the full value of his produce, and hours-of-labour cheques be substituted for money. Common possession of the necessaries for production implies the common enjoyment of the fruits of the common production; and we consider that an equitable organisation of society can only arise when every wage system is abandoned, and when everybody, contributing for the common well-being to the full extent of his capacities, shall enjoy also from the common stock of society to the fullest possible extent of his needs."

These are the ideas which Kropotkin has argued more fully in the foregoing pages and which form the basis of the anarchist contention that the wage system is an integral part of the serfdom of labour and that until it is abolished the workers will always be virtually enslaved to the class who control the distribution of money tokens. The wage system is, indeed, one of the strongest chains that keep mankind from freedom.

G. W.