1

Origins of the Working-class Movement

Capitalism is a way of life. It is a way of life that we in the United States take for granted. In a capitalist system, private entrepreneurs advance a certain amount of capital. With this capital they build, buy, or rent production facilities, purchase raw materials, and hire laborers to work for them. The finished product is sold on the open market, and the income from the sale of the product returns to the entrepreneur who started it all. The entrepreneur consumes a part of this income and the rest is used to repeat the productive process anew, to expand the process of production, or to begin a new productive venture.

This way of life presupposes a number of institutions. It presupposes the existence of entrepreneurs in possession of sufficient capital to begin the production process. It presupposes the availability of production facilities and raw materials that can be purchased or rented. It presupposes the availability of workers willing to sell their labor power for a fixed duration of time. It presupposes the existence of markets in which the means of production, labor time, and finished products can be purchased or sold. And it presupposes a stable political structure strong enough to protect and maintain the property rights of buyers and sellers in these markets.

In a capitalist system individuals depend on other people to produce the goods and services each needs to survive. Survival depends on the ability of these individuals to exchange the goods each has to sell for the goods each needs to survive. Production is production for sale. Each producer specializes in some particular product: food, blankets, shoes, or bicycles, for example. And within the production process itself, each worker specializes in some particular task: tanning the leather, cutting the leather, sewing the seams, or attaching the soles or heels of shoes, for example. Adam Smith, the great champion of capitalism as a way of life, saw in this division of labor the potential for an enormous increase in

human wealth. He wrote, "The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is any where directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour."[1] This division of labor is impossible without the existence of some system for exchanging products. Within a capitalist system of production, competitive markets provide the institutional structure that makes such exchange possible. Within such markets the exchange ratios between various products, their relative prices, are regulated by the forces of demand and supply. Neither individual buyers nor individual sellers can set the prices for commodities bought or sold. Each must accept the market price. "The market price of every particular commodity is regulated by the proportion between the quantity which is actually brought to market, and the demand of those who are willing to pay."[2]

Adam Smith thought that production for sale within such competitive markets worked to reduce the price of every commodity to the lowest possible level. He contrasted the price of a commodity monopolized by one seller with the prices of commodities sold under conditions of competition between sellers:

> The price of monopoly is upon every occasion the highest which can be got. The natural price, or the price of free competition, on the contrary, is the lowest which can be taken, not upon every occasion indeed, but for any considerable time together. The one is upon every occasion the highest which can be squeezed out of the buyers, or which, it is supposed, they will consent to give: The other is the lowest which the sellers can commonly afford to take, and at the same time continue their business.[3]

A seller may upon some occasion secure a price higher than that necessary to sustain his or her business. If, for example, an entrepreneur discovers a more efficient way to produce shoes, then that entrepreneur's unit costs of production will be lower than average, and hence the entrepreneur could afford to sell beneath the market price. This lower unit cost gives the entrepreneur leeway as to how to price the product. Either the price can be set at the market price, in which case the entrepreneur secures greater-than-average profits, or the price can be set

---

1. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1937), p. 3.
2. Ibid., p. 56.
3. Ibid., p. 61.

at below-market prices, in which case competing producers will be forced to lower their prices or face extinction. In either case, competitive pressures will force an adjustment in supply and in the market price of the commodity produced. If the product is sold at below-market prices, producers who cannot meet the competition of lower prices will drop out of the industry, and the market price will fall to a level that is the lowest that sellers can commonly afford to take. If the product is sold at the market price with resulting higher-than-average profits, entrepreneurs will be attracted into the industry, the supply of the commodity will increase, and consequently, the price will fall to the lowest level sellers can afford. It is in this sense then that prices in competitive markets are, as Smith says, "for any considerable time together," the lowest possible prices for the commodities produced.

This example of the effects of the discovery of a more efficient technique of production illustrates three interesting features of competitive markets. The first feature is the tendency of prices in such markets to gravitate toward the lowest possible price sellers can afford. A second feature is the self-regulative capacity of such competitive markets. Changes in production techniques, in the supply of raw materials, or in the demand for consumer goods automatically induce corrections in the quantities of particular commodities produced, and in the prices of these commodities, thus achieving a new equilibrium around the lowest price sellers can afford. Third, the example illustrates an incentive to innovation inherent in the pressures of competitive markets. Each producer has an incentive to come up with more efficient techniques of production--for the discovery of such techniques lowers the unit costs of production for that producer and makes possible a higher-than-average rate of profit for that producer. To be sure, this advantage is temporary. Eventually competitors will adopt the new and more efficient techniques, and the price of the commodity will fall. But even temporary advantages result in a greater accumulation of wealth, and incentives remain to seek out other production efficiencies as well. Since these incentives work on every producer, the result is a systematic tendency of competitive markets to encourage innovation and greater efficiency in the process of production.

Capitalism is a way of life that has not always been with us. It has a relatively late appearance in the history of humankind. Before capitalism, for a period of roughly one thousand years between the fall of the Roman Empire and the emergence of capitalism, life in Europe was organized according to the system of feudalism. Under feudalism, the land was divided into large estates, which belonged to the church, the crown, or members of the feudal aristocracy. These estates were, for the

most part, preserved and passed intact with the death of one feudal lord to an eldest son or nearest male relative. The ruling lord was surrounded by a system of subordinate nobles, some of whom were granted control over parts of the higher lord's estate or held control over smaller estates of their own. The feudal aristocracy was organized into a pyramidal structure of relations of service and subordination. At the bottom of the feudal class structure, beneath the aristocracy, was the peasantry, a class that included the vast majority of the people of feudal Europe. The peasants lived in villages on the feudal estates. They farmed the land, both in plots allotted to their own use and in the fields of the feudal lord. From time to time they were also called upon to help in the building of roads and fortifications and in the performance of whatever other work might be required to maintain the estate.

Life in feudalism differed in many ways from life in capitalism. In the feudal system almost all production was done for local consumption. Trade, exchange, and markets were not central to the provision of the bulk of the goods necessary for consumption and renewed production. As late as the early part of the twentieth century, remnants of the feudal nobility in Russia continued to pride themselves on the self-sufficiency of their estates. Unlike the wage laborers of capitalism who sell their labor power on the open market and are free to travel wherever they like in search of better pay or a better job, feudal peasants were legally bound to the estate of their birth. They performed work for the feudal lord, not in exchange for wage payment, but in response to the direct coercive threat of the ruling aristocracy. For the most part, peasants lived and died on the estates of their birth. The tasks they performed were predominantly agricultural or directly related to the requirements of agriculture. Production and the way of life organized around the tasks of production remained largely the same for generation after generation. In contrast to the dynamic, innovative character of capitalism, feudalism was characterized by a repetitive and static way of life.

There was no single cause responsible for the transformation from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe. No attempt will be made here to explain that transformation.[4] But whatever the ultimate causes,

---

4. For attempts to understand this change, see Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, part 8, "The So Called Primitive Accumulation" (1867) (New York: International, 1973), pp. 713-760; Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957); Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (New York: International, 1947); and Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). The recent work of Robert Brenner has provoked a stimulating debate. On this see T. H. Aston and C.H.E.

the transformation involved at least the following factors. First, there appeared a class of what might be called protocapitalists. For the most part, these protocapitalists did not come from the landed nobility. Instead, they emerged from the ranks of medieval merchants and artisans who had established themselves in various European cities where they had some independence from the domination of the landed aristocracy. Second, there appeared also a class of wage laborers available to be employed by the protocapitalists. These wage laborers came from two distinct groups. Some were artisans and apprentices who, because of the breakdown of the feudal guilds, were in need of gainful employment. Others were peasants forced off the estates of the landed nobility.

Capitalism began with the development of a system of manufacturing in which protocapitalists paid wages in exchange for the use of the labor power of these dispossessed peasants and artisans and then sold the commodities produced in open markets that had developed in the cities as a result of increasing trade. In its earliest forms this system of manufacturing involved simply this change in the organization of production. The technology employed remained the same as the technology employed in earlier times. In many cases workers were not even united under one roof. The key change turned on the introduction of wage labor as the relation of production connecting workers and capitalists. Subsequent to the introduction of this system of manufactures, several factors--increasing division of labor, technological innovation, and the bringing together of workers into large and interconnected facilities for production--vastly increased the productive powers of labor and started the capitalist system on the road to a revolutionary transformation of life in Western Europe.

With its inherently dynamic character and productive efficiency, capitalism pushed aside the old feudal ways of life. With the spread of capitalism went the growth of the distinctive social classes of capitalism: the owners of capital (the bourgeoisie) and the free sellers of labor power (the proletariat). The bourgeoisie, this growing class of wealthy and enterprising men, included many individuals who were not of the hereditary nobility. They were excluded from positions of political power reserved for members of the nobility. In addition, numerous restrictions imposed by and in the interests of the nobility hampered their business ventures, whereas a patchwork of special privileges and

---

Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

benefits, paid for by taxes imposed on the rising bourgeoisie, showered down on the ruling aristocracy. In a relatively short period of time the rising bourgeoisie demanded an elimination of the privileged status of the nobility and an equal share in political power. The result was a contest for political power between the feudal aristocracy and the newly created bourgeoisie. In England this contest, complicated by a clash between conflicting religious sects, led through civil war and dictatorship to the "glorious revolution" of 1688 in which the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie was established. One hundred years later this same conflict led to the great French Revolution, to civil war, and to revolutionary war throughout much of Western Europe.

The revolutionary bourgeoisie proclaimed the natural equality of all men and the consequent equality of rights belonging to all men by nature. It demanded that careers be open to talent rather than reserved for the nobility. And it demanded the subordination of kings and the hereditary nobility to parliaments elected by the people. Capitalism, in which each individual is free to trade as he sees fit and in which the will of political superiors is replaced by the market forces of supply and demand, seemed well suited to the needs of free and equal men. And in lowering prices and increasing output capitalism held the potential for making men rich as well as free. Adam Smith had argued that the framework of capitalism served as an "invisible hand" by which the effort of each to secure his own happiness was turned to the benefit of society as a whole.[5] Smith's argument came after capitalism had firmly taken root and after the political struggle for power in England. But in showing how capitalism contained within it the prospect of increasing wealth for all, Smith linked utilitarian considerations for the happiness of all with the revolutionary appeal to natural equality and natural rights that had accompanied the rise of capitalism. The result was the powerful ideology of classical liberalism that saw in capitalism both the realization of human freedom and the prospect of human happiness.

In his tempered and rational optimism Adam Smith personified the spirit of the Enlightenment, which proclaimed both the emancipation of humankind from its past and the bright prospects of its future. But if Adam Smith saw in capitalism the vision of a better world, others found in it a nightmarish degradation of human life. As we have seen, capitalism required the existence of a class of free laborers who offered their labor power for sale. These wage laborers, the proletariat, did not appear out of nowhere. The great bulk of them were farmers who had

5. Smith, *Inquiry*, p. 423.

been forced off the land. In England, which became the leading center of the development of capitalism, most of the population in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries lived as small farmers on land to which they had some right of use deriving from the traditions of feudal law. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries many of these people were driven off their land. The feudal lords, hard pressed for cash, began to convert the land from the production of grain for human consumption to game preserves and sheep farms that produced wool for sale. This enclosure movement, which involved fencing off the land for sheep, brought also the conversion of farmed land into pastures and the destruction of peasant homes, villages, and churches. Repeated attempts were made to stem the tide of enclosures by royal decree.[6] But the nobility's need for cash prevailed, and by 1750 the small farmer had largely disappeared from the English countryside.

However curtailed his rights may have been in feudal times, the common peasant at least had access to the land he needed to grow his food and to a house to shelter his family. With the enclosure movement the peasant farmer was deprived of his house and cut off from the land that had heretofore provided his means of survival. Thus liberated from feudal ways, large numbers of these dispossessed rural folk roamed the English countryside, some begging, some in search of work, and some as bandits. Beginning with the reign of Henry VII (1485-1509), laws were passed designed to curtail this vagabondage. According to an act of Henry VIII (passed in 1530), beggars old and unable to work were to be granted licenses to beg. Those able to work were to be "tied to the cart-tail and whipped until the blood streams from their bodies, then to swear an oath to go back to their birthplace or to where they have lived the last three years and to put themselves to labor."[7] Later, the act was strengthened to include provisions for second and third arrests for vagabondage. "For the second arrest for vagabondage the whipping is to be repeated and half the ear sliced off; but for the third relapse the offender is to be executed as a hardened criminal and enemy of the common weal."[8] During the reign of Henry VIII, 72,000 of these people were hanged.[9] Subsequent legislation provided for condemning these vagabonds as temporary slaves to anyone willing to feed them and put them to work. Various of these laws provided for branding or executing

---

6. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 719-721.
7. Ibid., p. 734.
8. Ibid., pp. 734-735.
9. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: International, 1966), p. 51.

runaways and for putting these "slaves" in irons, chains, or iron rings around the neck, arms, or legs. The laws also provided that the children of vagabonds were to be taken from them and turned over as "apprentices" to those who would put them to work.[10]

In this way, by the combined forces of need and legal terror, the dispossessed rural people were herded into the new manufacturing enterprises that were in growing need of wage laborers. Such a forced transition from an agricultural way of life, governed by the traditions of the village and the rhythms of nature, to life as a wage laborer in a manufacturing enterprise, governed by the disciplined routine imposed by competitive markets, was bound to have a traumatic effect on these people. Their plight was made even worse by the conditions of life they found in these emerging industries.

In the first place, the length of the working day was extended. In agriculture, of course, the length of the working day is variable, depending on the seasons and the tasks at hand. In the new manufacturing enterprises the working day grew to fourteen, sixteen, and even eighteen hours per day. With the development of large manufacturing facilities, thousands of wage laborers crowded into the growing factory towns. There they worked and lived in cramped, dirty, and poorly lighted spaces. Their working places were often badly polluted with dust or noxious fumes. In these places they were forced to work at breakneck speed, standing throughout the long working day surrounded by dangerous machinery. The streets around their homes were unpaved. They flowed with mud and with the sewage of human wastes and the wastes of animals people tried to maintain in these new conditions. They suffered chronic health problems--particularly respiratory problems--and many of them died at an early age from disease or simply from exhaustion caused by poor nutrition and overwork. In the early days of capitalism, the demand for wage laborers exceeded the supply. To prevent competitive pressures from forcing wages up, laws were passed limiting the wages that could be paid. Wage rates were set in such a way that a single paycheck was insufficient to support a family. In order to earn enough for families to survive, it became necessary for women and children to enter the mines and mills alongside the adult men. Children were often beaten for falling asleep, failing to produce according to norms, or for spoiling a piece of work. Under such conditions, family life decayed. Alcoholism and drug use became avenues of escape for men, women, and children. Crime,

10. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 735-736.

prostitution, illegitimacy, and child slavery became common. The emerging industrial working class dwelt in a world of slums and factories new to England that was not served by educational, cultural, and religious institutions.

Some sense of what life was like for these people is provided by this statement by Ann Eggley, an eighteen-year-old worker in a coal mine:

I'm sure I don't know how to spell my name. We go at four in the morning, and sometimes at half-past four. We begin to work as soon as we get down. We get out after four, sometimes at five, in the evening. We work the whole time except an hour for dinner, and sometimes we haven't time to eat. I hurry [pull a load of coal from where it was dug to the main shaft where it would be taken to the surface] by myself and have done so for long. I know the corves [basket or box filled with coal] are very heavy, they are the biggest corves anywhere about. The work is far too hard for me; the sweat runs off me all over sometimes. I am very tired at night. Sometimes when we get home at night we have not power to wash us, and then we go to bed. Sometimes we fall asleep in the chair. Father said last night it was both a shame and a disgrace for girls to work as we do, but there is naught else for us to do. I began to hurry when I was seven and I have been hurrying ever since. I have been 11 years in the pits. The girls are always tired. I was poorly twice this winter; it was with the headache. I hurry for Robert Wiggins [the man who dug the coal]; he is not akin to me. . . . We don't always get enough to eat and drink, but we get a good supper. I have known my father go at two in the morning to work . . . and he didn't come out till four. I am quite sure that we work constantly 12 hours except on Saturdays. We wear trousers and our shifts in the pit and great big shoes clinkered and nailed. The girls never work naked to the waist in our pit. The men don't insult us in the pit. The conduct of the girls in the pit is good enough sometimes and sometimes bad enough. I never went to day-school. I went a little to a Sunday-school, but I soon gave it over. I thought it too bad to be confined both Sundays and week-days. I walk about and get the fresh air on Sundays. I have not learnt to read. I don't know my letters. I never learnt naught. I never go to church or chapel; there is no church or chapel at Gawber, there is none nearer than a mile. . . . I have never heard that a good man came into the world who was God's son to save sinners. I never heard of Christ at all. Nobody has ever told me about him, nor have my father and mother ever taught me to pray. I know no prayer: I never pray.[11]

don't need to read

11. Testimony before the Ashley Mines Commission of the British Parliament (1842), in John Bowditch and Clement Ramsland, eds., *Voices of the Industrial Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1978), pp. 87-88. Other views of the life of the English

This testimony is not untypical of early English working class experience. No doubt life was hard for these people. But it was even worse for those who could not find a job. By the nineteenth century the growth in demand for wage laborers had slowed relative to the growing supply of people looking for work. Unemployment became a serious problem for large numbers of people. As early as the reign of Elizabeth (1558-1603), taxes had been levied to pay for the upkeep of people unable to work. In 1834 a new poor law was passed that provided for workhouses to which the unemployed poor were to be sent. "Our intention," said one assistant commissioner, "is to make the workhouses as like prisons as possible." Another administrator said, "Our object . . . is to establish therein a discipline so severe and repulsive as to make them a terror to the poor and prevent them from entering."[12] Diet was reduced to a minimum. Personal effects were taken from the inmates. Men and women were separated and same sex members of the same family were separated from one another. A rigid schedule, labor, and total confinement in the workhouse were enforced. By 1843 the population in these workhouses had risen to nearly 200,000. Only desperate people would go to such places. As E. P. Thompson observed, "The most eloquent testimony to the depths of poverty [outside the workhouses] is in the fact that they were tenanted at all."[13]

The spread of slums, beggars, paupers, prostitutes, and criminals did not go entirely unnoticed by the upper and middle classes. Although many blamed the plight of the poor on their own sloth, lust, or base characters, many others spoke out against the new system that had so hideously transformed the English land and the English people. The poets William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, lamented the barren values of the times and called for a radical transformation that would fulfill the vision of the biblical prophets and the hopes of the French revolutionaries. The journalist and Chartist, William Cobbett, contrasted the pleasures and

---

working class can be found in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy and in the novels of Charles Dickens. Flora Tristan, *London Journal* (1840); Frederick Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844); and Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867,) vol. 1, chapter 15, "Machinery and Modern Industry" provide first-hand accounts of working-class life in the nineteenth century. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), provides a rich historical account of English working-class experience.

12. Both quotations are from E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966), p. 267.

13. Ibid., p. 268.

virtues of the vanishing rural England with the misery and moral collapse of the emerging capitalist order. The same themes of loss of traditional Christian virtues and of contemporary moral failure run through essays of John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle.

Both the romantic poets and the essayists looked on the England of their time with a divided consciousness. On the one hand, they deplored the degeneration of their times and in this sense looked back to an older, more virtuous, and more noble time, when human beings were tied to one another by bonds of duty, community, and friendship and not just by self-interested contracts. On the other hand, they looked forward to a future that would elevate humankind beyond anything ever before seen in history. Neither the poets nor the essayists had any clear blueprint for the society of the future. The poets, at least during the early stages of the French Revolution, adopted a democratic stance that looked to the overthrow of all ruling classes. Later, Carlyle and Ruskin called on the upper classes to reform themselves and provide the moral leadership necessary to restore England to virtue and return happiness to its people. Perhaps the most widely read and most vivid picture of the wretched conditions afflicting the English working class was provided in the novels of Charles Dickens. But whereas Dickens routinely saved his heroes by the device of discovering that they had been born into a more elevated station in life and arranging for them to be restored to it, this solution was not universally available to the working class. Consequently, it is no wonder that members of the working class began to search for ways by which they themselves might struggle against their masters and their conditions of life.

The American and French revolutions profoundly affected the working class movement in England and the rest of Europe. In England an awakening of sorts had already spread throughout parts of the working class in the revivalism of the Methodists and Baptists in the eighteenth century. While the religious revivalists such as Wesley preached subservience to political rulers, they also preached about the need for individual redemption. And in reaching out to the unchurched working class, they affirmed the human worth of every Englishman. The revivalist vision of heaven and hell and the need for rebirth, a radical change in being, aroused the slumbering visions of equality and messianic change that had stirred the English during the time of the civil war a century earlier.[14] When the French Revolution destroyed the old

14. These themes are developed by Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class.*

order in 1789 and proclaimed the dawn of liberty, equality, and fraternity, many English working men and women saw in that revolution the confirmation of the messianic hopes of radical Christianity.

In the French Revolution the aristocracy that had ruled France since feudal times was overthrown. Political representation was extended to the Third Estate–the "people" who were not of noble birth. Positions in government, the army, the courts, and the church, which previously had been reserved for the sons of the nobility, were opened up for anyone with the talent to fill them. Peasants seized the land on many of the large estates belonging to the aristocracy and to the church. The prerogatives of the nobles were abolished. The power of the king was limited by an elected assembly. And the freedoms of speech, press, religion, and assembly were affirmed.

In the early stages of the revolution these changes were achieved with minimal bloodshed. Members of the aristocracy, persuaded by the philosophers of the equality and rights of man, joined the people in dismantling the old order. Eventually, of course, elements within the aristocracy did resist the change and, calling on the assistance of the monarchs of Europe, made war upon the French revolution. In time, the guillotine did its awful work on aristocrats and revolutionaries alike. And in time, it became clear that what the revolution had achieved was not the liberation of the "people" as a whole but rather the freedom of the bourgeoisie to crown their mastery of the economic life of the people with laws more suited to their ends. As early as June 1791, the elected assembly, which was dominated by spokesmen of the bourgeoisie, passed legislation outlawing labor unions. With the defeat of the Jacobins and the deliverance of power into more moderate hands, it became clear that the revolution no longer aimed at the emancipation of the people as a whole.

Two years after the overthrow of Maximilien Robespierre, members of the Society of Equals were arrested and charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government. The basic ideas of the group were set forth in the *Manifesto of the Equals*, written by Sylvain Marechal in April 1796. The *Manifesto* proclaimed that "the French Revolution is only the herald of another revolution, far greater, far more solemn, which will be the last of them all." And it made clear that the aim of this revolution was the real equality of all persons. "We are speaking of something more sublime and more equitable, the **Common Good** or the **Community of Goods**. No more individual ownership of the land: *the land belongs to no*

one. We are demanding, we desire, communal enjoyment of the fruits of the earth; *the fruits belong to all.*"[15] The leader of the conspiracy was François-Noël Babeuf, who had taken the name Gracchus of the Roman brothers who were tribunes of the poor. In the *Analysis of the Doctrine of Babeuf by the Babouvists* (1796), the charge of betrayal of the revolutionary hopes of the people is clear. "The Revolution is not finished, because the rich are absorbing all goods and are exclusively in command, while the poor are toiling in a state of virtual slavery; they languish in misery and are nothing in the State."[16] At his trial Babeuf was uncompromising:

> To reach a certain goal, one must vanquish everything that stands in the way. Now, as to the hypothesis of social change in question, whether one chooses to describe it, after the fashion of the plaintiffs, as subversive of the social order or to characterize it, in chorus with the philosophers and the great legislators, as a sublime regeneration, it is indubitable that this change could not be brought about except by the overthrow of the established government and the suppression of everything in the way.[17]

Babeuf was executed later that year. His example would inspire subsequent revolutionaries in France, as we shall see. For now the important point is that the rhetoric of liberty, equality, and fraternity could be seen from two perspectives. From the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie it meant the equal right of all male property holders to vote in elections, the liberty of each to express himself (however he could afford to do so), and the equal right of each to exchange his goods in free markets. For the working class liberty, equality, and fraternity meant the emancipation of every man from the domination of others, equality of material condition, and a community of equals.

In the early days of the revolution these differences were not so apparent. The revolution appeared as an unprecedented break in the continuity of history. It seemed to promise nothing less than the emancipation of humankind both from the rule of tyrants and from its own self-imposed slavery to custom, ignorance, and superstition. This vision of the universal emancipation of humankind had an intoxicating effect on certain elements of the English working class and the English intelligentsia.[18]

15. Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders, eds., *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History* (Garden City: Anchor, 1964), pp. 52, 53.

16. Ibid., p. 56.

17. Ibid., p. 61.