

Capital

CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY
VOLUME 1

Karl Marx

TRANSLATED BY **PAUL REITTER**

EDITED BY **PAUL NORTH & PAUL REITTER**

FOREWORD BY **WENDY BROWN**

AFTERWORD BY **WILLIAM CLARE ROBERTS**

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON & OXFORD

The So-Called Original Accumulation

I. The Secret of Original Accumulation

We have seen how money is transformed into capital, how capital makes surplus-value, and how surplus-value makes more capital. The accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value, and surplus-value presupposes capitalist production, while capitalist production presupposes that individual commodity producers have large amounts of capital in their hands. The whole process thus seems to imply that capitalist accumulation must be preceded by an “original” accumulation, or what Adam Smith calls “previous accumulation”—an accumulation that doesn’t stem from capitalist production, but instead serves as its starting point.ⁱ

This original accumulation plays more or less the same role in political economy as original sin in theology. Adam bit into the apple, and the whole human race fell into a state of sin. Similarly, the origin of original accumulation is presented as an anecdote about the past that supposedly explains everything. Long, long ago, there were two kinds of people: elites who showed great industry and ragamuffins who lazed about. The first type of person accumulated wealth, while the second type ultimately came to have nothing to sell but his own skin. Both the poverty of the masses—who still have only themselves to sell, in spite of all their labor—and the wealth of the few, which keeps growing even though these few haven’t worked in ages, date to this original sin. As a way of defending *propriété*, Mr. Thiers, for example, feeds this vapid children’s fable to the French, who used to have such active and nimble minds, and he does so with the solemnity of a statesman.ⁱⁱ The moment the question of property is raised, it becomes a sacred duty to insist that the standpoint of nursery tales is the only one appropriate for all ages and levels. It is well known that conquest, subjugation, pillaging,

murder—in short, acts of violence—have dominated the history of the real world. But the gentle world of political economy has always been an idyll. There, law and “labor” have been the only means of acquiring wealth, although, of course, an exception is made every year for “this year.” The methods of original accumulation may be many things; what they are not is idyllic.

Money and commodities no more start out as capital than do the means of production or the means of subsistence. They have to be transformed into capital. But this can happen only under certain conditions—namely, two very different commodity owners must come into contact with each other. On the one side is a person who owns money and the means of production and subsistence, and he wants to valorize a sum of value he owns by purchasing someone else’s labor-power. He encounters the free worker, who sells his own labor-power and thus sells labor. This worker is free in two senses. He isn’t considered a means of production, as slaves and serfs are. Nor do the means of production belong to him, as is the case with independent farmers. He is, rather, free of such things—legally free and property-free. Once the commodity market has been polarized in this way, the basic conditions of capitalist production are in place. The capital relation presupposes that workers are separated from the things they need to realize their labor, in the sense that they no longer own those things. As soon as capitalist production has begun to stand on its own two feet, it not only maintains this separation, it continuously reproduces it on an ever-larger scale. So the process that creates the capital relation must also be the process whereby the worker is split away from owning the prerequisites of his labor, a process that transforms the social means of subsistence and production into capital, while also transforming the actual producers into wage laborers. So-called original accumulation is thus nothing other than the historical process of separating the producers from the means of production. It appears as “original” because it constitutes the prehistory of both capital and the mode of production that goes with capital.

We can see right away that this process of separation implies a whole series of historical processes, which is, in fact, a double-sided series in which two different relations of ownership dissolve. On the one hand, there is the dissolution of the relations that make workers into another person’s property—into the means of production that another person appropriates. But what also dissolves is the actual producers’ ownership of their means of production. This process of separation encompasses the entire history of the development of modern bourgeois society, and it would be

quite easy to understand if bourgeois historians had shown that as the feudal mode of production dissolved, its mode of exploitation was transformed into the capitalist one, instead of representing feudalism's dissolution exclusively under the *clair obscur* of the worker's emancipation.ⁱⁱⁱ The worker's enslavement was the starting point of this historical development, which moved forward as the form of his enslavement changed. Yet for our purposes, it isn't necessary to analyze that medieval movement. Although capitalist production sporadically took shape in Mediterranean countries as early as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the capitalist era dates only to the sixteenth century. Wherever it blossomed, serfdom had long since been abolished, and, moreover, the sun had already begun to set on the medieval city-state.

The epoch-making moments in the history of this separation process occurred when large numbers of people were violently torn from their means of production and subsistence, and thrust, now free as birds and just as rightless, into the labor market as proletarians. The whole process was based on land being expropriated from the workers, which is thus where our analysis will begin. The coloration of this history has varied from country to country, and it has passed through its different stages in various sequences. Only in England has it assumed its classic form. Hence England will serve as our example here.¹

2. The Expropriation of the Rural Population's Land

Serfdom had in effect disappeared in England by the end of the fourteenth century: at the time, and even more so in the fifteenth century, the vast majority of the population² was made up of free peasant proprietors, however much the trappings of feudalism may have obscured their status as owners. On the larger feudal estates, free farmers displaced the old bailiffs (themselves former serfs). Some agricultural wage laborers were peasants who wanted to valorize their leisure time by working on those

1. In Italy, where capitalist production developed first, it also happened that serfdom dissolved earlier than elsewhere. The Italian serf was emancipated before he had secured any prescriptive right to the land. When he was emancipated, which instantly turned him into an uprooted proletarian without any legal rights, he found a new master ready and waiting for him in Italy's towns, many of which had existed since Roman times.

2. Even at the end of the seventeenth century, more than $\frac{4}{5}$ of England's total population was still agricultural (Macaulay, "The History of England." Lond. 1854, Vol. I, p. 413). I mention Macaulay because as a systematic falsifier of history, he generally "circumcises" such facts as much as possible.

estates, while others belonged to a small independent class of actual wage laborers—small in both relative and absolute terms. The members of this class were also free peasant proprietors, practically speaking, since they got wages and were given four or more acres of arable land with their cottages. Along with actual peasants, moreover, they enjoyed the use of the common land, where their cattle grazed and they could gather their firewood, timber, turf, and so on.³ Throughout Europe, feudal production was characterized by the fact that the land was divided among as many subfeudatories as possible. The feudal lord's power, like that of every sovereign, rested on not the length of his rent roll but the number of subjects he had, which in turn depended on the number of free peasant proprietors.⁴ While England's land was thus divided into giant baronages after the Norman Conquest, with a single baronage often including 900 old Anglo-Saxon lordships, it was also strewn with peasant properties among which only a few large feudal domains were scattered. These conditions, coupled with the urban efflorescence so characteristic of the fifteenth century, made for the popular wealth that Chancellor Fortescue depicted with such eloquence in his *Laubidus Legum Angliae*. At the same time, however, they precluded wealth as capital.

The final three decades of the fifteenth century, along with the first decades of the sixteenth century, witnessed the prelude to the momentous change that brought about the foundation for the capitalist mode of production. A large number of uprooted proletarians with no rights were thrown into the labor market when the bands of feudal retainers dissolved—as Sir James Steuart correctly said, these retainers had “everywhere uselessly filled house and castle.” Although royal power, itself the product of an emerging bourgeois society, violently accelerated the dissolution of the bands as it strove for absolute sovereignty, it was far from the only important factor here. In their stubborn resistance to the king and Parliament, the feudal lords created incomparably more proletarians

3. One must never forget that even the serf not only owned the piece of land attached to his house, although he was of course a tribute-paying owner, but he was also a coproprietor of the common land. “The peasant [in Silesia] is a serf.” Nevertheless, such serfs owned common lands. “It has not yet been possible to commit the Silesians to the division of communes, while in the *Neumark* there is hardly a village where this division is not being carried out with the greatest success” (Mirabeau, “De la Monarchie Prussienne. Londres 1788,” Vol. 2, pp. 125, 126).

4. With its purely feudal organization of landed property, and its advanced small-scale agriculture, Japan offers us a much truer picture of the European Middle Ages than all our history books, which bourgeois prejudices have shaped so decisively. It is far too easy to be “liberal” at the expense of the Middle Ages.

by driving the peasantry from the land, which the peasants had just as much right to as the lords themselves, according to feudal law, and also by usurping the common lands. The immediate impetus for this expropriation (in England) was that Holland's wool industry had begun to flourish, causing the price of wool to rise. The old feudal nobility had been decimated in the great feudal wars, and the new nobility, a child of its time, regarded money as the highest power of all. Its watchword was therefore that arable land should be turned into sheep pastures.^{iv}

In his *Description of England*, prefixed to *Holingshed's Chronicles*, Harrison describes how the country was being ruined by the expropriation of small farmers. "What care our great incroachers!" The peasants' homes and the workers' cottages were demolished or left to rot. "If," says Harrison, "the old records of everie manour be sought, it will soone appear that in some one manour seventeene, or eighteene, or twentie houses are shrunke, that the number of people supported by the land is much reduced. . . . Of cities and townes either utterlie decaied, or more than a quarter or halfe diminished, though some one be a little increased here or there, of townes pulled downe for sheepe-walks, and no more but the lordships now standing in them, I could say somewhat." These old chroniclers always exaggerate when they complain, but they still give us a true sense of what contemporaries made of the revolution in the relations of production. Comparing the works of Chancellor Fortescue with Thomas More's allows us to see the gap separating the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Without going through any transitional stages at all, members of the English working class tumbled from their golden age, as Thornton observed, into an iron age.

Legislation recoiled in this face of this upheaval, having not yet reached that advanced stage of culture where the *ultima thule* of all statecraft is the "wealth of nations," i.e., the formation of capital and the ruthless exploitation and immiseration of most people. In his history of Henry VII, Bacon says, "At that time [1489], complaints about the conversion of arable land into pasture [sheep walks, etc.], maintained by a few herdsmen, began to be more frequent; and tenancies for years, lives, and at will (whereupon much of the yeomanry lived) were turned into demesnes. This bred a decay of people, and, by consequence, a decay of towns, churches, tithes, and the like. . . . In remedying of this inconvenience, the king's wisdom was admirable, and the parliament's at that time. . . . They took a course to take away depopulating inclosures, and depopulating pasturage."

An Act of Henry VII (1488, c. 19) made it illegal to destroy all peasant homes to which more than 20 acres of land were attached. This law was renewed by an Act (25) of Henry VIII, which says, among other things, "Many farms, and great plenty of cattle, particularly sheep, had been gathered into few hands, whereby the rents of the lands had been increased, and tillage very much decayed; churches and houses pulled down, and a marvelous numbers of people rendered incapable of maintaining themselves and their families." Hence the Act prescribed that dilapidated farmhouses be rebuilt, and also established limits for the ratio of land devoted to sheep pastures and land devoted to wheatfields. An Act promulgated in 1533 lamented that some men owned as many as 24,000 sheep and set the maximum limit at 2,000.⁵ But the people's expressions of discontent and the long legislative campaign against the expropriation of small farmers and peasants—begun in the day of Henry VII and waged continuously for 150 years—proved equally ineffectual. Without realizing it, Bacon divulged the secret of this failure. "The device of King Henry VII," he says in section 20 of his *Essays, Civil and Moral*, "was profound and admirable, in making farms and houses of husbandry of a standard; that is, maintained with such a proportion of land to them, as may breed a subject in convenient plenty and no servile condition, and to keep the plough in the hands of the owners and not hirelings."⁶ What capitalist production required was just the opposite: that the majority of the people exist in a servile state, that these people be transformed into mercenaries, and that

5. Note added to the second edition: In his "Utopia," Thomas More writes of the strange land where "sheep devour men."

6. Note added to the second edition: Bacon discusses the connection between a free, prosperous peasantry and a good infantry. "This did wonderfully concern the might and mannerhood of the kingdom, to have the farms, as it were of a standard sufficient to maintain an able body out of penury, and did in effect amortize a great part of the lands of the kingdom unto the hold and occupation of the yeomanry or middle people, of a condition between gentlemen, and cottagers and peasants. For it hath been held by the general opinion of men of best judgment in the wars . . . that the principal strength of an army consisteth in the infantry or foot. And to make good infantry, it requireth men bred, not in a servile or indigent fashion, but in some free and plentiful manner. Therefore if a state run most to noblemen and gentlemen, and that the husbandmen and ploughmen be but as their workfolks and labourers, or else mere cottagers (which are but hous'd beggars) you may have a good cavalry, but never good stable bands of foot. . . . And this is to be seen in France, and Italy, and some other parts abroad, where in effect all is noblesse, or peasantry . . . insomuch, as they are inforced to employ mercenary bands of Switzers and the like, for their battalions of foot; whereby also it comes to pass, that those nations have much people, and few soldiers" ("The Reign of Henry VII" etc. Verbatim Reprint from Kenet's England, ed. 1710, Lond. 1870, p. 308).

their means of labor be transformed into capital. The older legislation also tried to keep four acres of land attached to the rural wage laborer's cottage, and it forbade him from taking in lodgers. As late as 1627 (under Charles I), Roger Crocker of Frontmill was punished because he built a cottage on Frontmill Manor but didn't include four acres of land as a permanent annex. And as late as 1638 (again under Charles I), a royal commission was appointed to enforce the old laws, especially the one about the four acres. This effort persisted into Cromwell's day: he made it illegal to build a house inside a 10-mile radius of London without attaching four acres of land to it. Even during the first half of the eighteenth century, people protested when a rural worker's cottage didn't come with 1–2 acres. Nowadays, such a worker wouldn't dare to dream of having that much. If his cottage has a little garden, or he can rent a few roods of land some distance from it, he considers himself lucky. "Landlords and farmers," says Dr. Hunter, "work hand in hand here. A few acres to the cottage would make the labourers too independent."⁷

In the sixteenth century, a frightful new impetus to violently expropriate the people arose as a result of the Reformation and the colossal theft of church property it set in motion. When the Reformation began, the Catholic Church was the feudal owner of much of England's land. The shuttering of monasteries sent their former inhabitants hurtling into the ranks of the proletariat. Church estates were for the most part either given away to rapacious royal favorites or sold—at laughable prices—to speculating farmers and townspeople, who drove off large numbers of hereditary subtenants, then consolidated their holdings. By law, the rural poor had been guaranteed ownership of a part of the church's tithes; this was now taken from them without another word.⁸ "*Pauper ubique jacet*," exclaimed Queen Elizabeth after traveling around England.⁹ In the forty-third year of her reign, the government was finally forced to acknowledge pauperism, which it did when it introduced the poor rate. "The authors of this law seem to be ashamed to state the grounds of it, for, contrary to all tradition, it has no preamble whatever."⁹ Charles I (16 c. 4) later made the poor rate permanent, and in fact it didn't change—or become even harsher—until

7. Dr. Hunter op. cit. p. 134. "The quantity of land assigned [under the old laws] would now be judged too great for labourers, and rather as likely to convert them into small farmers" (George Roberts, "The Social History of the People of the Southern Counties of England in past centuries. Lond. 1856," p. 184).

8. "The right of the poor to share in the tithe, is established by the tenure of ancient statutes" (Tuckett op. cit. Vol. II, pp. 804, 805).

9. William Cobbett, "A History of the Protestant Reformation," §471.

1834.¹⁰ But these immediate effects of the Reformation weren't the most lasting ones. Church property had functioned as the religious bulwark of the old relations of landed property. Its demise rendered them untenable.¹¹

During the last decades of the seventeenth century, the yeomen, a class of independent peasants, still outnumbered farmers. The yeomen had been Cromwell's greatest strength, and as Macaulay allowed, it spoke well of them that they were nothing like the dissolute drunken squires and their lackeys, the county clergy, who had to marry their masters' discarded mistresses. Even the rural wage laborers were still part owners of the com-

10. We can see the "spirit" of Protestantism in the following situation, among other ones. In the south of England certain landed proprietors and well-to-do farmers put their heads together and composed ten questions having to do with the correct interpretation of the Elizabethan Poor Law. They proceeded to present these questions to a famous jurist of the time, Sergeant Snigge (later a judge under James I), and asked for his expert opinion. "Question 9—Some of the more wealthy farmers in the parish have devised a skillful mode by which all the trouble of executing this act (the 43rd of Elizabeth) might be avoided. They have proposed that we shall erect a prison in the parish, and then give notice to the neighbourhood, that if any persons are disposed to farm the poor of this parish, they do give in sealed proposals, on a certain day, of the lowest price at which they will take them off our hands; and that they will be authorised to refuse to any one unless he be shut up in the aforesaid prison. The proposers of this plan conceive that there will be found in the adjoining counties, persons, who, being unwilling to labour and not possessing substance or credit to take a farm or ship, so as to live without labour, may be induced to make a very advantageous offer to the parish. If any of the poor perish under the contractor's care, the sin will lie at his door, as the parish will have done its duty by them. We are, however, apprehensive that the present act (43rd of Elizabeth), will not warrant a prudential measure of this kind; but you are to learn that the rest of the freeholders of the county, and of the adjoining county of B., will very readily join in instructing their members to propose an act to enable the parish to contract with a person to lock up and work the poor; and to declare that if any person shall refuse to be so locked up and worked, he shall be entitled to no relief. This, it is hoped, will prevent persons in distress from wanting relief, and be the means of keeping down the parishes" (R. Blakey, "The History of Political Literature from the earliest times. Lond. 1855," Vol. 2, pp. 84–5). Serfdom was abolished in Scotland centuries later than in England. As late as 1698, Fletcher of Saltoun declared in the Scottish Parliament, "The number of beggars in Scotland is estimated at no fewer than 200,000. The only remedy that I, a Republican on principle, can suggest, is to restore the ancient state of villanage, and to make slaves of all those who are unable to provide for their own subsistence." Eden (op. cit. Bk I, Ch. 1, pp. 60–61) says, "The decrease of villenage seems necessarily to have been the era of the origin of the poor. . . . Manufacturers and commerce are the true parents of our national poor." Like our Scot, that republican out of principle, Eden errs only on this point: it wasn't the abolition of serfdom, but rather the abolition of the agricultural worker's ownership of the land that turned him into a proletarian and, eventually, a pauper. This expropriation was carried out differently in France, whose Ordinance of Moulina (1571) and Edict of 1656 correspond to the English Poor Laws.

11. When Mr. Rogers wrote his "History of Agriculture," he was a professor of political economy at the University of Oxford, the very center of Protestant orthodoxy. Yet in the book's preface, he stresses that the Reformation pauperized the majority of the people.

munal property. But by about 1750, the yeomen had disappeared,¹² and in the final decades of the eighteenth century, the last traces of communal agricultural property vanished, too. Here we will set aside the purely economic factors that helped bring about the agricultural revolution and focus on the violent measures involved.

During the time of the Stuarts' restoration, English landed proprietors used the law to push through a usurpation campaign that was carried out all over the Continent, too, but without the same legal formality. They abolished the feudal tenure of land, that is, did away with all its obligations to the state. They "indemnified" the state by imposing taxes on the peasants and the rest of the people. They also established the rights of modern private ownership for estates to which they had only a feudal title. And, finally, they enacted those laws of settlement that affected the English agricultural worker in the same way, *mutatis mutandis*, as the edict of the Tartar Boris Godunov affected the Russian peasants.^{vi}

The "Glorious Revolution" resulted in the reign of not only William III¹³ but also landed and capitalist profiteers, who inaugurated the new era by stealing state lands on a massive scale: such theft had been carried out with a certain restraint up to then. These lands were sold at ridiculous prices, simply given away, or directly usurped and annexed by private estates.¹⁴ As all this occurred, legal etiquette was completely ignored. The state lands fraudulently appropriated in this way, along with those plundered church estates that weren't lost during the republican revolution,

12. "A Letter to Sir T. C. Bunbury, Bt.: On the High Price of Provisions. By a Suffolk Gentleman." Ipswich 1795, p. 4. Even that fanatical advocate of the system of large farms, the author of the "Inquiry into the Connection of large farms etc. Lond. 1773," says on page 139, "I most lament the loss of our yeomanry, that set of men, who really kept up the independence of this nation; and sorry I am to see their lands now in the hands of monopolizing lords, tenanted out to small farmers, who hold their leases on such conditions as to be little better than vassals ready to attend a summons on every mischievous occasion."

13. On, among other things, the private morality of this bourgeois hero: "The large grant of lands in Ireland to Lady Orkney, in 1695, is a public instance of the king's affection, and the lady's influence. . . . Lady Orkney's endearing offices, are supposed to have been—*foeda labiorum ministeria*. (In the Sloane Manuscript Collection of the British Museum. Number 4224. The manuscript is titled, "The character and behaviour of King William, Sunderland, etc., as represented in Original Letters to the Duke of Shrewsbury from Somers, Halifax, Oxford, Secretary Vernon etc." It abounds with *curiosa*.) [Editor's note: The *foeda laborium ministra* is the Edict of 1597 whereby peasants who deserted their lords could be returned by force if they were caught within five years.]

14. "The illegal alienation of the Crown Estates, partly by sale and partly by gift, is a scandalous chapter in English history . . . a gigantic fraud on the nation" (F. W. Newman, "Lectures on Political Econ. Lond. 1851," pp. 129, 130).

eventually became the princely domains of today's English oligarchy.^{15,vii} Bourgeois capitalists tried to facilitate this operation, their aims being to transform the land into a purely commercial article, to increase their supply of uprooted proletarians from the countryside who had no rights, and so on. They furthered their own interests just as sensibly as the Swedish urban burghers did when they teamed up with the peasantry, their economic bulwark, to help the king forcibly take back royal lands from the oligarchy (after 1604, and also later, or under Charles X and Charles XI).

Communal property was an old Germanic institution that had lived on under the cover of feudalism. We have seen that this land began to be violently usurped at the end of the fifteenth century, continuing into the sixteenth century, most of the time involving the transformation of cultivated lands into cattle pastures. But back then expropriation meant individual acts of violence, which a legislative campaign that went on for 150 years tried in vain to stop. The fact that the law itself now functioned as the way to steal the people's land showed the advances made in the eighteenth century, although big farmers also employed their own little private methods on the side.¹⁶ The Parliamentary form of theft was the "Bill of Inclosures of Commons," or, in other words, decrees the landlords used to turn the people's property into their own private property—to expropriate the people. When Sir Frederic Morton Eden demanded a "general Act of Parliament for the enclosure of Commons," thereby conceding that a parliamentary *coup d'état* would be required to transform them into private property, and, at the same time, called for the legislature to "indemnify" the expropriated poor, he was in effect refuting his own clever lawyerly claim that communal property was the private property of the large landlords who supplanted the feudal lords.¹⁷

As tenants at will—small farmers on yearly leases, or a servile rabble dependent on the arbitrary will of the landlords—took the place of the independent yeomen, not only the theft of the state domains but also (and especially) the systematic theft of communal property did a great deal to

15. Read, for instance, Edmund Burke's pamphlet on the ducal house of Bedford, whose offshoot, Lord John Russell, was "the tomtit of liberalism."

16. "The farmers forbid the cottagers to keep any living creatures besides themselves and children, under the pretence, that if they keep any beasts or poultry, they will steal from the farmers' barns for their support; they also say, keep the cottagers poor and you will keep them industrious, etc.—but the real fact, I believe, is that the farmers may have the whole right of common to themselves" ("A Political Enquiry into the Consequences of enclosing Waste Lands. Lond. 1785," p. 75).

17. Eden op. cit. Preface.

help enlarge the big farms that were called capital farms¹⁸ or merchant farms¹⁹ in the eighteenth century and, moreover, set the agricultural population “free” for industry, i.e., turn it into a proletariat.

However, people didn’t understand the identity of a nation’s wealth and its citizens’ poverty in the eighteenth century as well as they would in the nineteenth century. Hence the heated polemics in the economic literature of the time having to do with the “inclosure of the commons.” I will quote just a few passages from the mass of material in front of me, since they will give readers a keen sense of the circumstances in question.^{viii}

“In many parishes of Hertfordshire,” wrote one outraged person, “twenty-four farms, with an average area of 50 to 150 acres, have been combined into three farms.”²⁰ “In Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, inclosing has greatly prevailed; and most of the new inclosed lordships are turned into pasturage, in consequence of which, many lordships have not now 50 acres ploughed yearly, in which 1,500 were ploughed formerly. . . . The ruin of former dwelling-houses, barns, stables, and so on shew every one who passes through that there were once better inhabitants. A hundred houses and families have in some places, been reduced to eight or ten. The landholders, in most parishes that have been enclosed only 15 or 20 years, are very few in comparison of the numbers who occupied them in their open field state. It is no uncommon thing to see four of five wealthy graziers engrossing a large enclosed lordship, which was before in the hands of 20 or 30 farmers, and as many smaller tenants and proprietors. All these are hereby thrown out of their livings with their families, and many other families which were employed and supported by them.”²¹ But it wasn’t only uncultivated land that was annexed by neighboring landowners under the pretext of “enclosure.” The same thing happened with land that was still being cultivated, either communally or by someone who paid the community rent. “I have here in view of inclosures of open fields and lands already improved. It is acknowledged by even the writers in defence of inclosures, that these diminish tillage, increase the monopolies of farms, raise the prices of provisions, and produce depopulation . . .

18. “Capital-Farms.” (“Two Letters on the Flour Trade, and the Dearness of Corn. By a Person in Business. Lond. 1767,” pp. 19, 20.)

19. “Merchant-farms.” “An Inquiry into the Present High Prices of Provisions. Lond. 1767,” p. 111, note. Published anonymously, this fine book was written by the Rev. Nathaniel Forster.

20. Thomas Wright, “A short address to the Public on the Monopoly of small farms. 1795,” pp. 2, 3.

21. Rev. Addington: “Enquiry into the Reasons for or against enclosing open fields. Lond. 1772,” pp. 37–43 *passim*.

and even the inclosures of waste lands as currently practised bear hard on the poor by depriving them of a part of their subsistence, and only go toward increasing farms already too large.”²² “If,” says Dr. Price, “this land gets into the hands of a few great farmers, the consequence must be, that the little farmers [whom he earlier described as “a multitude of little proprietors and tenants, who maintain themselves and their families by the produce of the ground they occupy, by sheep kept on a common, by poultry, hogs, etc., and who, therefore, have little occasion to purchase any of the means of subsistence”] will be converted into a body of men who earn their subsistence by working for others, and who will be under a necessity of going to market for all they want. . . . There will, perhaps, be more labour, because there will be more compulsion to it. . . . Towns and manufactures will increase, because more will be driven to them in quest of places and employment. This is the way in which the engrossing of farms naturally operates. And this is the way in which, for many years, it has actually been operating in this kingdom.”²³ Price sums up the overall impact of the enclosures as follows: “Upon the whole. The circumstances of the lower ranks of men are altered in almost every respect for the worse. From little occupiers of land, they are reduced to the state of day-labourers and hirelings; and at the same time their subsistence in that state is become more difficult.”²⁴ In fact the usurping of common lands, together

22. Dr. R. Price op. cit. Vol. 2, pp. 155, 156. One would do well to read Forster, Addington, Kent, Price, and James Anderson and compare their works with the pathetic sycophant's maundering that MacCulloch offers in his catalogue, “The Literature of Political Economy. Lond. 1845.”

23. Price op. cit. p. 147.

24. Price op. cit. p. 159. One thinks of ancient Rome here: “The rich gained possession of most of the undistributed land and after a while were confident that no one would take it back from them. They used persuasion or force to buy or seize property which adjoined their own, or any other smallholdings belonging to poor men, and came to operate great ranches instead of single farms. They employed slave hands and shepherds on these estates to avoid having free men dragged off the land to serve in the army, and they derived great profit from this form of ownership too, as the slaves had many children and no liability to military service and their numbers increased freely. For these reasons the powerful were becoming extremely rich, and the number of slaves in the country was reaching large proportions, while the Italian people were suffering from depopulation and a shortage of men, worn down as they were by poverty and taxes and military service. And if they had any respite from these tribulations, they had no employment, because the land was owned by the rich who used slave farm workers instead of free men” (Appian, “Römische Bürgerkriege” I, 7). [Editor's note: English translation, Appian, *The Civil Wars*, trans. John Carter (Penguin, 1996), p. 5.] This passage deals with the time before the Licinian Law. Military service, which dramatically accelerated the demise of the Roman plebeians, was also the main means Charlemagne used to transform free German peasants into serfs and bondsmen so rapidly, as if in a hothouse.

with the agricultural revolution that went along with that, affected agricultural workers so drastically that between 1765 and 1780, their wages began to drop below the minimum level even in Eden's account, and they had to be supplemented with official Poor Law relief. Their wages, he says, "no longer sufficed for the absolute necessities of life."^{ix}

Let's take a moment to listen to someone who defended the enclosures and opposed Dr. Price's position. "It would be wrong to conclude that because men are not seen wasting their labour in the open field, depopulation is occurring. If there are fewer people in the countryside, there are all the more people in the towns. . . . If more labor is set in motion when the small farmers are converted into a body of men who must work for others, it is an advantage which the nation [to which, naturally, the people who have been transformed don't belong] should wish for. . . . The product is greater when their combined labor is applied on one farm. In this way, surplus product is formed for manufactures, and, in turn, the manufactures, one of the mines of this nation, will increase, in proportion to the quantity of the corn produced."²⁵

The most brazen transgressions against the "sacred rights of property" and the basest acts of violence against human beings were required to lay the foundation for the capitalist mode of production, and insofar as they were committed in the service of that end, the political economist accepted them with a stoic peace of mind. Witness Sir Eden, who, moreover, was Tory and "philanthropic" in his political leanings. What did he conclude about all the acts of theft, all the atrocities and cruelty that attended the violent expropriation of the people, a process that began around 1470 and lasted until the final decades of the eighteenth century? He merely offered the "comfortable" parting reflection: "The due proportion between arable land and pasture had to be established. During all of the fourteenth and most of the fifteenth century, there was one acre of pasture to two, three, and even four acres of arable land. Around the middle of the sixteenth century, the proportion was changed to two acres of pasture for every two of arable land, then to two acres to one, until, finally, the just correct proportion of three acres of pasture to one of arable land was attained."^x

By the nineteenth century, of course, people no longer even remembered the agricultural workers' ties to communal property, to say nothing

25. "An Inquiry into the Connection between the present Prices of Provision etc.," pp. 124, 125, 128, 129. Here is a similar argument that nevertheless goes in the opposite direction: "Working men are driven from their cottages and forced into the towns to seek for employment; but then a larger surplus is obtained, and thus Capital is augmented" (*The Perils of the Nation*. 2nd ed. Lond. 1843, p. XIV).

of more recent times. Has the agricultural population been compensated with so much as a farthing for the 3,511,770 acres stolen from it between 1801 and 1831 and, thanks to Parliament's maneuvering, gifted to landlords by landlords?

Finally, the last great process whereby the land was expropriated from the agricultural population was the so-called "clearing of estates"—i.e., human beings were swept off them. All the English methods we have examined so far culminated in "clearing." As we saw in the account of modern conditions given in an earlier section, this "clearing" was extended to the cottages once there were no more independent peasants to be pushed out. Thus it happened that on the very soil they cultivated, workers couldn't even find the space they needed for their own housing. But what really distinguished the actual "clearing of estates" was its more systematic character, the massive scale on which single operations took place (in Scotland they were executed in areas as large as some German principalities), and also the peculiar form of property that was so violently made into modern private property. This property belonged to the clan. But the chief or "great man" was, as the clan's representative, only the titular owner, just as the Queen of England is merely the titular owner of her country's land.²⁶ This revolution began in Scotland after the Pretender's followers rose up for the last time,^{xi} and we can trace its first phases in the works of James Steuart²⁷ and James Anderson.²⁸ In the eighteenth century, the Scots were driven off the land but not allowed to emigrate, which forced them to resettle in Glasgow and other factory towns.²⁹ The "clearings" ordered by the Duchess of Sutherland should suffice to evoke the main method for expropriating

26. "A king of England might as well claim to drive his subjects into the sea" (F. W. Newman op. cit. p. 132).

27. Steuart says, "If you compare the rent of these lands [here he mistakenly includes in this economic category the tribute the taksmen pay the chief of the clan] with the extent, it appears very small; if you compare it with the numbers fed upon the farm, you will find that an estate in the Highlands maintains, perhaps, ten times as many people as another of the same value in a good and fertile province" (op. cit. Vol. 1, Ch. 16, p. 104). [Editor's note: In the traditional clan system, the taksmen paid tribute directly to the chief or laird and were actual holders of the land ("taks"). Marx had written about them in his article "Elections—Financial Clouds—the Duchess of Sutherland and Slavery," which appeared in the *New-York Tribune* in February 1853.]

28. James Anderson, "Observations on the means of exciting a spirit of National Industry etc." Edinburgh, 1777.

29. In 1860, some of the people who had been violently expropriated were sent to Canada under false pretenses. A few fled into the mountains and to neighboring islands. They were pursued by the police, fought with them, and escaped.

people here.³⁰ She was well versed in political economy, and upon assuming power, she resolved to try a radical economic cure. Her plan was to transform the whole county of Sutherland into sheep pastures. Because similar measures had already been employed, its population was down to 15,000 people. Then, from 1811 to 1820, these 15,000 inhabitants, or about 3,000 families, were methodically uprooted and driven out. Their villages were razed and torched, their fields turned into pastures. It fell to British soldiers to carry out the operation, and in doing so they fought with the locals. One old woman burned to death in the hut she had refused to leave. In this way, Madame Sutherland came to appropriate 794,000 acres of land that had belonged to a clan since time immemorial. She allotted the people who had lived there about 6,000 acres on the seashore, or two acres per family, and this was land that hadn't ever been cultivated or produced any income. So high minded was the Duchess that she leased the land to the members of the clan at an average price of 2 shillings and 6d. per acre, these being people who for centuries had shed their blood for her family. She divided the entire mass of the land she had stolen into 29 large sheep farms, each inhabited by a single family, most often the family of an English farm servant. By 1825, all 15,000 Scots had been replaced by 131,000 sheep. The aboriginal Scots who wound up on the seashore turned to fishing to support themselves. They became amphibians and lived, as an English writer has said, half on land and half in the water, and yet they could live only halfway from both livelihoods.³¹

30. "In the Highlands of Scotland," said Buchanan, the Adam Smith commentator, in 1814, "the ancient state of property is daily subverted. . . . The landlord, without regard to the hereditary tenant [this category is also wrongly applied here] now offers his lands to the highest bidder, who, if he is an improver, instantly adopts a new system of cultivation. The land, formerly overspread with small tenants or labourers, was peopled in proportion to its produce, but under the new system of improved cultivation and increased rents, the largest possible produce is obtained at the least possible expence; and the useless hands being, with this view, removed, the population is reduced, not to what the land will maintain, but to what it will employ. The dispossessed tenants seek a subsistence in the manufacturing towns, etc." (David Buchanan, "Observations on etc. A. Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Edinb. 1814"). "The Scotch grandees dispossessed families as they would grub up coppice-wood, and they treated villages and their people, as Indians harassed with wild beasts do, in their vengeance, a jungle with tigers. . . . Man shall be bartered for a fleece or a carcass of mutton, nay, held cheaper. . . . Why, how much worse is it than the intention of the Moguls, who, when they had broken into the northern provinces of China, proposed in council to exterminate the inhabitants, and convert the land into pasture. This proposal many Highland proprietors have effected in their own country against their own countrymen" (George Ensor, "An Inquiry concerning the Population of Nations. Lond. 1818," pp. 215, 216).

31. To express her sympathy for the Negro slaves of the American republic, the current Duchess of Sutherland hosted Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin,"

But the loyal Scots had to pay even more dearly for their highlander's romantic tendency to idolize the "great men" in their clan. For when those men smelled the scent of fish, they detected something profitable. They leased the land on the shore to large fishmongers from London, and the Scots were driven away from this place, too.³²

In the end, part of their former land was transformed again, this time into a hunting preserve. Everyone knows that England has no real forests. In the parks of the rich, the "wild beasts" are tame domesticated cattle and as fat as a London alderman. Scotland is thus the last refuge of the "noble passion." "In the Highland," reported Somers in 1848, "new forests are rising up like mushrooms. Here, on one side of Gaick, you have the new forest of Glenfeshie; and there, on the other side you have the new forest of Ardverikie. In the same line you have the Black Mount—an immense waste also recently erected. From east to west—from the neighborhood of Aberdeen to the crags of Oban—you have now a continuous line of forests; while in other parts of the Highlands there are the new forests of Loch Archaig, Glengarry, Glenmoriston, etc. . . . Sheep were introduced into glens which had been the seats of communities of small farmers; and the latter were driven to seek subsistence on coarser and more sterile tracts of soil. Now, again, deer are supplanting sheep; and these are once more dispossessing the small tenants, who will necessarily be driven down upon still coarser land, and to more grinding penury. . . . Deer-forests³³ and the people cannot co-exist. One or other of the two must yield. Let the forests be increased in number and extent during the next quarter of a century, as they have been in the last, and the Gael will perish from their native soil. This movement among the Highland proprietors is partly driven by ambition: a deer-forest is beginning to be considered as a necessary appendage of an estate. Others, of a more practical

in a grand style—of course, the Duchess and her fellow aristocrats shrewdly forgot this sympathy during the Civil War, when every "noble" English heart beat for the slave owners. As the visit was taking place, I published an article in the New-York Tribune depicting the conditions in which the Sutherland slaves lived and worked. (Some excerpts were reprinted by Carey in "The Slave Trade. Philadelphia 1853," pp. 202, 203.) My article was reprinted in a Scottish newspaper, and it prompted a lively polemic between that newspaper and the Sutherlands' sycophants.

32. Readers will find interesting material on this fish trade in Mr. David Urquhart's "Portfolio, New Series." Addendum to the second edition: In the posthumous work cited above, Nassau W. Senior calls the "the proceedings in Sutherlandshire" one of the "most beneficial clearings on record" (op. cit. p. 282).

33. Note added to the second edition: The "deer forests" in Scotland don't contain even a single tree. The sheep are driven from bare hills, and the deer are driven onto them. And this is called a deer forest. No forest culture here!

cast, follow the deer trade with an eye solely to profit. For it is a fact, that a mountain range laid out in a forest is, in many cases, more profitable to the proprietor than when let as sheep-walk. . . . The huntsman who wants a deer-forest limits his offers by no other calculation than the extent of his purse. . . . Sufferings have been inflicted in the Highlands scarcely less severe than those occasioned by the policy of the Norman kings. Deer have received extended ranges, while men have been hunted within a narrower and still narrower circle. . . . One after one, the liberties of the people have been cloven down. . . . These oppressions are daily on the increase. The clearance and dispersion of the people is pursued by the proprietors as a settled principle, as an agricultural necessity, just as trees and brushwood are cleared from the wastes of America or Australia; and the operation goes on in a quiet, business-like way, etc.”³⁴

34. Robert Somers, “Letters from the Highlands; or the Famine of 1847. Lond. 1848,” pp. 12–28 *passim*. These letters first appeared in the Times. Naturally, English political economists cited overpopulation to explain the Gaels’ famine. In any case, they were “pressing” on their means of nourishment. The “clearing of estates,” or, as it is called in German, “Bauernlegen,” became an important phenomenon in Germany, too, particularly after the Thirty Years’ War, and as late as 1790, it led to peasant revolts in Electoral Saxony. “Bauernlegen” was particularly widespread in the eastern part of Germany. In most of the Prussian provinces, it was Frederick II who first secured property rights for the peasants. After conquering Silesia, he forced the landowners to rebuild huts, barns, and so on, and to supply the peasants with cattle and equipment. He needed soldiers for his army and taxpayers for his treasury. The following lines by Mirabeau, who admired Frederick, convey what a nice life peasants led under Frederick’s financial system and his governmental mishmash of despotism, bureaucracy, and feudalism: “Flax is therefore one of the great sources of wealth for the farmer in northern Germany. Unfortunately for the human race, it is only a resource against misery, and not a means of well-being. Direct taxes, drudgery, servitude of every kind, crush the German farmer, who still pays indirect taxes on everything he buys . . . and to make matters worse, he dares not sell his produce where and how he wants; he dares not buy what he needs from merchants who could sell it to him at a better price. All these causes gradually ruin him, and he would find himself unable to pay direct taxes when due without spinning. It provides him with a resource, while keeping his wife, children, servants, valets and himself busy: but what a hard life it is, even with this support. In the summer, he works like a convict, plowing and harvesting; he goes to bed at 9 o’clock and gets up at two, just to keep up with the work; in winter, he should repair his strength with more rest; but he’ll run out of grain for bread and next year’s sowing, if he gets rid of the goods he needs to sell to pay taxes. Spinning is therefore necessary to make up for this loss . . . it must be done with the utmost assiduity. So in winter, the peasant goes to bed at midnight, at one o’clock, and gets up at five or six; or he goes to bed at nine, and gets up at two, every day of his life except Sunday. This excess of wakefulness and work wears down human nature, and this is why men and women grow old much earlier in the countryside than in the cities” (Mirabeau op. cit. Vol. 3, pp. 212ff.). Addendum to the second edition: In March of 1866, or 18 years after the work (by Somers) cited above was published, Leone Levi lectured before the Society of Arts on the transformation of sheep pastures into deer forests. Here he depicted the

Stealing church estates, fraudulently claiming and snatching up state lands, seizing communal property, using the most ruthless terror tactics to usurp feudal and clan property and transform it into modern private property—these are some of the idyllic methods of original accumulation. This is how fields were conquered for capitalist agriculture, the land was incorporated into capital, and urban industry got its necessary supply of uprooted proletarians without rights.

3. Bloody Legislation against the Expropriated since the End of the Fifteenth Century. Legislation Enacted to Lower Wages

The proletariat that formed when the bands of feudal retainers were dissolved, and the land was violently expropriated from the people in concentrated bursts, couldn't be absorbed by the early manufacturing system as rapidly as its members were brought into the world. Free as birds and just

continuing desolation of Scotland's Highlands. Among other things, he said, "The landed proprietors found out that land left wild and uncultivated, land dedicated to deer and rabbit pays better than land used as sheep-walks or dedicated to cultivation. And the landowners have acted on this new discovery by at once turning out the sheep as they once turned out the men from their estates and welcoming the new tenants—the wild beasts and the feathered birds. . . . One can walk from the Earl of Dalhousie's estates in Forfarshire to John o'Groats, without ever leaving forest land. . . . In many of these [woods] the fox, the wild cat, the marten, the polecat, the weasel, and the Alpine hare are common; whilst the rabbit, the squirrel and the rat have lately made their way into the country. Immense tracts of lands, much of which is described in the statistical account of Scotland as having a pasturage in richness and extent of very superior description, are thus shut out from all cultivation and improvement, and are solely devoted to the sport of a few persons for a very brief period of the year." The London "Economist" of 2nd June 1866 says, "Amongst the items of news in a Scotch paper of last week: 'One of the finest sheep farms in Sutherlandshire, for which a rent of £1,200 was recently offered, on the expiry of the existing lease this year, is to be converted into a deer forest.' Here we see the modern instincts of feudalism . . . operating pretty much as they did when the Norman Conqueror destroyed thirty-six villages to create the New Forest. . . . Two millions of acres had been laid totally waste, embracing within their area some of the most fertile lands of Scotland. The grass of Glen Tilt were among the most nutritive in the country of Perth. The deer forest of Ben Alder was by far the best grazing ground in the wide district of Badenoch; a part of the Black Mount forest was the best pasture for black-faced sheep in Scotland. Some idea may be formed of the ground laid waste for purely sporting purposes in Scotland from the fact that it embraced an area larger than the whole county of Perth. The resources of the forest of Ben Alder might give some idea of the loss sustained from these forced desolations. The ground would pasture 15,000 sheep, and as it was not more than one-thirtieth part of the whole forest ground in Scotland. . . . All that forest land was totally unproductive. . . . It might thus as well have been submerged under the waters of the German Ocean. Such extemporized wildernesses or deserts ought to be put down by the decided interferences of the Legislature."

as rightless, these proletarians also couldn't suddenly learn the kind of discipline their new situation demanded, having been brutally thrown from the work path to which they were accustomed. Large numbers of them became beggars, thieves, and vagabonds. Personal inclinations sometimes played a role here, but most often it was external conditions that forced them to live this way. Hence bloody legislation against vagabonds was enforced throughout Western Europe at the end of the fifteenth century and during the entire sixteenth century. The fathers of today's working class were punished because others turned them into vagabonds and paupers. In fact, the law treated them as "voluntary" criminals, assuming that whether or not they continued to work under old circumstances that no longer existed was a matter of preference.

In England, this legislation began under Henry VII.

Henry VIII, 1530: Old beggars and those unfit to work will receive a beggar's license. Healthy vagabonds, on the other hand, are to be whipped and locked up. They are to be tied to the cart tail and flogged until they are covered in blood. Then they must promise to return to their birthplace—or wherever they have spent the past three years—and "put themselves to labour." What a gruesome irony! With 27 Henry VIII, this statute is repeated, except that new clauses make it even harsher.^{xii} If someone is again caught living as a vagabond, he is to be whipped a second time, and half an ear will be cut off. If that person relapses once more, he is to be executed as a hardened criminal and enemy of the community.

Edward VI: According to a statute enacted in 1547, the first year of his reign, anyone who refuses to work is condemned to become the slave of the person who denounced him as an idler. The master must give the slave bread and water, weak broth, and whatever amount of meat scraps he deems appropriate. He has the right to use a whip or chains to force the slave to perform any task, no matter how repulsive. If the slave remains absent for a fortnight, he is condemned to lifelong slavery, and the letter "S" is branded on his cheek or forehead. The third time he runs away, he is to be executed as a felon. The master can sell, bequeath, or rent out his slave, just like any piece of portable property or cattle. If the slave tries to undermine his master in any way, here, too, he is to be executed. Justices of the peace are to use informants to track down the culprit. If it happens that a vagabond has been idling about for three days, he is to be brought to his place of birth, the mark "V" is to be branded on his chest with a red-hot iron, and he is to be made to work on the roads or perform some other service wearing chains. If he gives a false birthplace, he becomes the lifelong slave of that place, its inhabitants, or its corporation, and the letter

“S” is to be branded on him. All people have the right to take away vagabonds’ children and keep them as apprentices—boys can be kept until they turn 24, girls until they turn 20. If these children run away, they become the masters’ slaves until they reach those ages, and the masters are free to whip them and put them in chains as they see fit. Every master may clamp an iron ring around a slave’s neck, arm, or leg in order to recognize him better.³⁵ The last part of this statute provides that certain poor persons may be employed by a place or individuals willing to feed them and find them work. This kind of parish slave—he was called a “roundsman”—existed in England well into the nineteenth century.

Elizabeth 1572: Beggars older than 14 without a license are to be flogged hard and branded on their right earlobe, unless someone wants to put them to work for a year. If they are caught again when they are older than 18, they are to be executed unless someone wants to put them to work for two years. If there is another relapse, they are to be shown no mercy and executed as felons. Similar statutes: 18 Elizabeth (c. 3) and 1597.³⁶

35. The author of the “Essay on Trade etc. 1770” remarks, “In the reign of Edward VI indeed the English seem to have set, in good earnest, about encouraging manufactures and employing the poor. This we learn from a remarkable statute which runs thus: ‘That all vagrants shall be branded, etc.’” (p. 5).

36. Note added to the second edition: In his “Utopia,” Thomas More says, “Thus, so that one greedy, insatiable glutton, a frightful plague to his native country, may enclose thousands of acres within a single fence, the tenants are ejected; and some are stripped of their belongings by trickery or brute force, or, wearied by constant harassment, are driven to sell them. One way or another, these wretched people—men, women, husbands, wives, orphans, widows, parents with little children and entire families (poor but numerous, since farming requires many hands)—are forced to move out. They leave the only homes familiar to them, and can find no place to go. Since they must leave at once without waiting for a proper buyer, they sell for a pittance all their household goods, which would not bring much in any case. When that little money is gone (and it’s soon spent in wandering from place to place), what finally remains for them but to steal, and so be hanged—justly, no doubt—or to wander and beg? And yet if they go tramping, they are jailed as idle vagrants. They would be glad to work, but they can find no one who will hire them.” [Editor’s note: Originally published in 1516 in Latin. English translation, Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Robert M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 19.] Of these poor wanderers, about whom More says that they were forced to steal, “72,000 great and petty thieves were put to death during the reign of Henry VIII” (Holinshed, *Description of England*, Vol. 1, p. 186). In Elizabeth’s day, “rogues were trussed up apace, and there was not one year, commonly, wherein three or four hundred of them were not devoured and eaten up by the gallows” (Styrye, *Annals*, Vol. 2). According to this same Styrye, 40 persons were executed over the course of one year in Somersetshire, 35 robbers were branded on the hand, 37 were whipped, and 183 were discharged as “most wicked and desperate persons.” And yet, he believes that not even the “fifth part of the felonies committed in the county were brought to trial, either from the remissness of the magistrates or the foolish lenity of the people.” He

James I: A person who wanders about and begs is declared a rogue and vagabond. Justices of the peace in petty sessions are authorized to have such persons publicly whipped and locked up for six months. If they are caught in the act a second time, they can be sentenced to spend two years in prison. During this time, they are to be whipped at the discretion of the justices of the peace. . . . Dangerous and incorrigible rogues are to be branded with the letter “R” on their left shoulder and given hard labor. If they are caught begging again, they are to be shown no mercy: they are to be executed without clergy present. These statutes remained in effect until the beginning of the eighteenth century and were not abolished until 12 Anne 23 was enacted.

France had similar laws. By the middle of the eighteenth century, a vagabond (*truands*) kingdom had been established in Paris, and at the beginning of Louis XVI’s reign (Ordinance of July 13, 1777), healthy persons between 16 and 60 years of age were still to be sent to the galleys if they practiced no profession or had no means of supporting themselves. Elsewhere, too, we find the same kind of laws—e.g., Charles V’s Statute of October 1531 in the Netherlands; the First Edict of States and Town in Holland, enacted on March 19, 1614; and the *Plakkaat* of the United Provinces (June 25, 1649).

The people in the countryside were thus violently expropriated and driven from the land, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, and tortured in accordance with grotesquely cruel laws until they acquired the discipline that the system of wage labor demands.

It wasn’t enough that the things workers needed in order to work, and the things they worked with, were gathered as capital on one side of the capital relation, while people who had only their own labor-power to sell appeared on the other side. It also wasn’t enough to force those people to voluntarily sell themselves. What developed as capitalist production advanced was a working class whose members saw the demands of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws, having been brought up to do so and also owing to tradition and habituation. Once the capitalist production process had become highly organized, it broke all the resistance it encountered. The continuous generation of a relative surplus population kept the law of labor’s supply and demand, and thus wages, on a track that fit with capital’s valorization requirements. And the silent force of economic relations sealed the capitalist’s domination over his workers. Direct extraeconomic violence is still used, of course, but only in

adds, “the other counties of England were in no better condition than Somersetshire, and many of them were even in a worse one.”

exceptional cases. For the most part, the capitalist can entrust the worker to the “natural laws of production,” i.e., count on the fact that the worker is dependent on capital, something that arises from the conditions of production themselves and is guaranteed and perpetuated by them. Not so during the historical genesis of capitalist production. The ascendant bourgeoisie had to employ state power in order to “regulate” wages, or impose limits on wages consonant with profitmaking, extend the workday, and keep workers at their normal level of dependence. This represents an essential moment in so-called original accumulation.

The class of wage laborers, which emerged in the last half of the fourteenth century, amounted early on to only a very small group within the overall population, remaining so throughout the next century. It enjoyed strong protection with respect to the position it occupied. Independent peasant proprietors gave it that in the countryside, and guild organizations did the same in towns. In both places, masters and workers existed in close proximity, in a social sense. Labor was subordinated to capital, but only formally: the mode of production didn’t yet have a specifically capitalist character. Capital’s variable component far exceeded its constant part, and thus the demand for wage labor grew rapidly every time capital accumulated, while the supply lagged behind. The large part of the national product that would be turned into capital’s accumulation fund still went into the workers’ consumption fund.

From the start, the laws regulating wage labor were written to exploit the worker, and as new ones were created, they never became any less hostile to him.³⁷ The first to be enacted was Edward III’s Statute of Labourers, 1349. It had its French counterpart in the Ordinance of 1350, which was promulgated in the name of King John. English and French legislation developed along parallel paths and featured the same basic content. I won’t address the statutes’ attempts to extend the workday, since I have already examined that point (see chapter 8).

The Statute of Labourers was passed in response to an urgent plea from the House of Commons. “Formerly,” as one Tory naïvely put it, “the poor demanded such high wages, as to threaten industry and wealth. Now their wages are so low as to threaten industry and wealth equally and perhaps more, but in another way.”³⁸ The law established a wage tariff for the city

37. “Whenever the legislature attempts to regulate the differences between masters and their workmen, its counsellors are always the masters,” says Adam Smith. “The spirit of the laws is property,” says Linguet.

38. “Sophisms of Free Trade. By a Barrister. Lond, 1850,” p. 206. He adds maliciously, “We were ready enough to interfere for the employer? Can nothing now be done for the employed?” [Editor’s note: The “Tory” here is John Barnard Byles, (1801–84).]

and the countryside, and for both piecework and day labor. Rural workers were to hire themselves out by the year; in the towns, workers were to hire themselves out on “the open market.” Paying a wage higher than the one set by the statute was punishable by prison. Accepting such a wage carried even stiffer penalties. According to sections 18 and 19 of Elizabeth’s Statute of Apprentices, a person who paid too much was to spend 10 days in prison, while someone who received too much in wages was to spend 21 days there. A statute of 1360 made the penalties more severe, even authorizing masters to employ corporal punishment to compel workers to work for the legal wage. All the contracts, oaths, and organizations used by masons and carpenters to codify their loyalty to one another were declared null and void. To form a workers’ coalition was now a serious crime, and this held from the fourteenth century until 1825, the year when the anticonditions laws were repealed. The true spirit of the Statute of Labourers of 1349 (and later versions) shone forth where the law took care to set a maximum for wages but didn’t bother at all about a minimum.

As readers know, the workers’ situation worsened dramatically in the sixteenth century. Monetary wages rose, but not in proportion to money’s depreciation and the corresponding rise in commodity prices. Thus real wages fell. Yet the laws enacted to lower wages remained in place, as did the practices of branding—and clipping the ears of—those “whom no one was willing to take into service.” The Statute of Apprentices (5 Elizabeth 4) authorized justices of the peace to fix certain wages and modify them according to the seasons and commodity prices. James I extended these labor regulations to weavers, spinners, and every other category of worker.³⁹ George II extended the laws against workers’ coalitions to all manufacturing workshops. In the manufacturing period proper, the capitalist

39. A clause in the statute 2 James I, c. 6 tells us that certain clothiers who also worked as justices of the peace used the authority they had in the latter capacity to dictate the official tariff of wages in their own workshops. In Germany, we find many statutes for keeping wages low, especially after the Thirty Years’ War. “The dearth of servants and workers in the depopulated areas caused the landed proprietors much consternation. Villagers were prohibited from renting rooms to single men and women; all the latter were to be reported to the authorities and put into prison if they wouldn’t become servants, even if they were employed at some other work—say, planting seeds for the peasants for a daily wage, or even buying and selling grain. [Kaiserliche Privilegien und Sanctiones für Schlesien I, 125.] For a century, the decrees of German princes complained bitterly about the evil and impudent rabble, who refused to accept painful conditions and content themselves with the wage established by law. Individual landowners aren’t allowed to pay more than the amount set by the state. And yet after the war, labor conditions were frequently better than they would be a century later. The farm servants of Silesia got to consume meat twice a week in 1652, but in the nineteenth century, there are districts where they eat it only three times a year.

mode of production became so powerful that the laws regulating wages were rendered unenforceable and unnecessary in equal measure. There remained, however, a desire to keep the old legislative arsenal around, just in case. Hence a statute enacted as late as 7 George III prohibited journeymen tailors in and around London from receiving a daily wage higher than 2s. 7½d., except in times of general mourning. Hence, too, a statute enacted as late as 13 George III c. 68 entrusted justices of the peace with regulating silk workers' wages. And as late as 1796, two judgments from the high court were needed to determine whether the orders of justices of the peace regarding wages were also valid for nonagricultural workers. In 1799, Parliament confirmed that miners' wages in Scotland were still regulated by an Elizabethan statute and two seventeenth-century Scottish acts—one dated to 1661 and the other to 1617! An unheard-of event in England's House of Commons showed how dramatically circumstances had changed in the meantime. For more than four hundred years, this institution had produced only wage laws that set strict maximum limits. But in 1796, Whitbread proposed to establish a legal minimum wage for agricultural workers. . . . Although Pitt argued against this, he allowed that the "condition of the poor was cruel." It wasn't until 1813 that the laws regulating wages were finally repealed. They became laughably irrelevant as soon as capitalists began using private legislation to regulate their factories, while letting the poor rate supplement the wages of agricultural workers to the point where workers received the indispensable minimum. Still in effect today are the provisions in the workers' statutes about giving notice and the like, whereby a master who breaks his contract faces only civil penalties, while a worker who does that faces criminal charges. In 1825, however, the horrific laws against workers' coalitions were abolished in the face of the proletariat's menacing attitude. Parliament didn't want to see them go, of course⁴⁰—this being the same Parliament that for

In addition, wages were higher after the war than they would be in the centuries that followed" (G. Freytag).

40. Some remaining bits of the anticoalition legislation were abolished in 1859. Addendum to the second edition: A law enacted on 29th June 1871, abolished all anticoalition laws and officially recognized trade unions. But in a supplementary act promulgated on the same day—"An Act to amend the Criminal Law relating to violence, threats and molestation"—the anticoalition laws were restored in a new form. More specifically, these acts have had the following effects: workers who use certain means of battle against their masters are to be prosecuted according to special criminal legislation, and the masters themselves are to apply this legislation in their capacity as justices of the peace. Two years earlier, the same House of Commons and the same Gladstone who invented new crimes for the working class with the Law of 1871 approved a second reading of a bill that abolished

centuries had displayed the most cynical shamelessness in functioning as a permanent coalition of capitalists allied against workers.

Just after the storm of revolution had broken out, the French bourgeoisie dared to take away the workers' freshly won right of association. A decree of June 14, 1791, pronounced workers' coalitions "an assault on liberty and on the Declaration of the Rights of Man." A person who helped form one was to be fined 500 livres and stripped of the rights of an active citizen for a year.⁴¹ This law leveraged the power of the state to force the struggle between labor and capital within limits that made it much more comfortable for the latter of the two, and the law would survive revolutions and dynastic change. In fact, it was removed from the French Penal Code only quite recently. Even the Reign of Terror let it stand. Nothing said or done here was more characteristic than the pretext for this bourgeois *coup d'état*. "Admitting," wrote Le Chapelier (the recorder), "only that they should be a little higher than they are at present . . . wages must be high enough for the person receiving them to be free from that state of absolute dependence produced by deprivation of the necessities of life, and which is almost that of slavery," workers still must not be allowed to communicate about their interests, act collectively, and thereby reduce their "absolute dependence," "which is almost that of slavery." For if they did so, they would compromise "the liberty of their former masters, who are the present *entrepreneurs*." In other words, the former masters' freedom to keep enslaving their workers would be compromised! And forming a coalition against the despotism of people who had been the masters in corporate society would mean—try to guess!—recreating the old corporations that the French constitution had just abolished.⁴²

embarrassing special legislation against the workers, doing so in a most honest way. The second reading was clever. The matter was dragged out over two years, until the "great liberal party" formed a coalition with its rivals that made it strong enough to act as a front against their common enemy—the working class.

41. Article I of this law reads: "Since the abolition of all kinds of associations of citizens of the same estate and profession is one of the foundations of the French constitution, it is forbidden to re-establish them under any pretext and in any form whatsoever."

Article IV declares that if "citizens belonging to the same professions, arts and crafts hold deliberations and make joint agreements tending to refuse by mutual consent or to grant only at a determined price the assistance of their industry or their labor, the aforementioned deliberations and agreements . . . shall be declared unconstitutional, prejudicial to liberty and to the Declaration of the Rights of Man etc." Thus this is treated as a felony, just as in the old statutes of labourers ("Révolutions de Paris. Paris 1791," Vol. 3, p. 523).

42. Buchez et Roux, "Histoire Parlementaire," Vol. 10, p. 195.

natural blood stains on one cheek,”⁶⁵ capital is born with blood and dirt oozing from every pore.⁶⁶

7. The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation

What does the original accumulation of capital, or its historical genesis, amount to in the end? Original accumulation means that slaves and serfs become wage laborers—in other words, a mere change of form occurs. Beyond that, all it entails is the expropriation of the people directly engaged in production, i.e., the dissolution of private property based on one’s own labor. The foundation of small-scale industry is that the worker owns his means of production, and small-scale industry is a condition that has to be in place for social production and the worker’s own free individuality to develop. We also find this mode of production under the slave system, serfdom, and in other situations of dependence; however, it blooms, operates with maximum energy, and battles its way to

weren’t yet plucked chickens but still owned their means of labor. The expression moved from law into political economy, and was handed down to Adam Smith and Eden by Culpeper, J. Child, and so on. One should use this to assess how much good faith Edmund Burke, an “execrable political cantmonger,” displayed when he called the expression “laboring poor” “execrable political cant.” When this sycophant was on the English oligarchy’s payroll, he played the part of the romantic opponent of the French Revolution, whereas, being on the payroll of the North American colonies when the unrest began there, he played the part of the liberal agent against the English oligarchy. He was a vulgar bourgeois through and through. “The laws of commerce, which are the laws of Nature, and consequently, the laws of God” (Burke op. cit. pp. 31–2). No wonder, then, that in accord with laws of God and Nature, he always sold himself in the very best market. In the writings of the Rev. Mr. Tucker, readers will find an excellent portrait of Mr. Burke during his liberal time: although a parson and a Tory, Mr. Tucker was otherwise an honorable man and a competent political economist. In view of the notoriously weak moral character that predominates today, and believes so devoutly in “the laws of commerce,” one has an obligation to keep denouncing the Burkes of this world, who differ from their successors in only one thing—talent!

65. Marie Augier, “Du Crédit Public.”

66. “Capital is said by the Quarterly Review to fly turbulence and strife, and to be timid, which is very true; but this is very incompletely stating the question. Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum. With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 per cent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 per cent will produce eagerness; 50 per cent positive audacity; 100 per cent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both. Smuggling and the slave trade have amply proved all that is here stated” (T. J. Dunning op. cit. pp. 35, 36).

its adequate classic form only where the worker is the free private proprietor of the things he needs to perform his labor and sets those things in motion himself—only where the peasant owns the land he cultivates, or the artisan owns the instrument he wields with the skill of a virtuoso. This mode of production presupposes that the land and the other means of production are split up, which excludes concentrating them. Thus cooperation can't take place, the division of labor can't occur within a single production process, society can't come to dominate and regulate nature, and it is also impossible for social productive powers to freely develop. In the realms of both production and society, this mode of industry is compatible only with narrow, spontaneously arising limits. Once it reaches a certain level, it brings into being the material means of its own destruction. New powers and passions begin to stir deep within the belly of society, of a society in which they feel themselves to be fettered. It must be destroyed; it is destroyed. The individual and scattered means of production are concentrated, and thus the diminutive holdings of the many are transformed into the giant holdings of the few, while the land and means of subsistence and instruments of labor are thereby expropriated from the great majority of the people. This, the old society's destruction, a frightful and difficult process of expropriation, constitutes the prehistory of capital. Of the array of violent methods it involves, we have discussed only those that play an epochal role in capital's original accumulation. The expropriation of the people directly engaged in production was carried out with the most ruthless barbarism, and driven by the nastiest, pettiest, most hateful and hideous passions. What was once the private property of an independent working individual—someone fused, so to speak, with the things he needs to perform his labor—in other words, private property that someone has worked for, is supplanted by capitalist private property, i.e., private property based on the exploitation of someone else's formally free labor.⁶⁷ The moment this process of transformation has broken down the old society widely and deeply enough; the moment workers are turned into proletarians, and the things required for their labor have been turned into capital; and, finally, the moment the capitalist mode of production stands on its own two feet, the process whereby labor becomes social is altered, as is the transformation of the land and

67. "Our situation is wholly new for society . . . we are striving to separate every type of property from every type of labor" (Sismondi, "Nouveaux Principes de l'Econ Polit." Vol. 2, p. 434).

the other means of production into socially exploited and, thus, shared means of production. Hence a change likewise occurs in the way private owners are expropriated. These processes all have a different form from this point on. No longer is the self-supporting worker the target of expropriation. Its target is now the capitalist who exploits many workers. This expropriation is brought about by none other than the operation of capitalist production's own immanent laws, which entails the concentration of individual masses of capital. One capitalist kills off many others. A number of developments advance along with this concentration, or as the expropriation of many capitalists by a few does: the cooperative form of the labor process on an ever-increasing scale; the conscious technological application of science; the systematic collective exploitation of the earth, the transformation of the means of labor into means of labor that can be used only collectively; and economizing in the use of all the means of production by employing them as the common means of combined social labor. The number of capitalist magnates falls continuously, and the remaining ones monopolize and usurp for themselves all the advantages that this process of transformation holds. Meanwhile, misery increases, as does the amount of pressure, subjugation, degradation, and exploitation inflicted upon the constantly growing working class. But the outrage felt by the members of that class also increases, and they are brought together and are trained and organized by the mechanism of capitalist production itself. Capital's monopoly now shackles the very mode of production that had flourished because of and under it. The concentration of the means of production and the socialization of labor reach the point where neither process is compatible with its capitalist shell. This bursts, and now the bell tolls for capitalist private property. The expropriators are expropriated.

The capitalist mode of production and appropriation, and therefore capitalist private property, is the first negation of individual private property based on one's own labor. In a process that has the necessity of any natural process, capitalist production then produces its own negation—the negation of the negation. This restores individual property, which, however, is now based on the achievement of the capitalist era: namely, the cooperation of free workers and their collective ownership of the land and the means of production that are produced by labor itself.

The process whereby an earlier form of private property, private property that is fragmented and based on an individual's own labor, is transformed into the capitalist kind is of course incomparably longer, harsher,

and more difficult than the one whereby capitalist private property already based on a social system of production is transformed into social property. In the first case, a few usurpers expropriate a great many people; in the second, a great many people expropriate a few usurpers.⁶⁸

68. "The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable. . . . Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product. The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class . . . they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history" (F. Engels and Karl Marx, "Manifest der kommunistischen Partei. London 1848," pp. 11, 9). [Editor's note: English translation, *The Communist Manifesto*, in *MECW*, vol. 6, pp. 496, 494.]