

CHAPTER V

WHY LEARNED ECONOMISTS AFFIRM WHAT IS FALSE

HOWEVER obviously unjust may be the assertion of the men of science that the welfare of humanity must consist in the very thing that is profoundly repulsive to human feelings—in monotonous, enforced factory labour—the men of science were inevitably led to make this obviously unjust assertion, just as the theologians of old were inevitably led to make the equally evidently unjust assertion that slaves and their masters were creatures differing in kind, and that the inequality of their position in this world would be compensated in the next.

The cause of this evidently unjust assertion is that those who have formulated, and who are formulating, the laws of science, belong to the well-to-do classes, and are so accustomed to the conditions, advantageous for themselves, in which they live, that they do not admit the thought that society could exist under other conditions.

The condition of life to which people of the

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well-to-do classes are accustomed, is that of an abundant production of various articles, necessary for their comfort and pleasure ; and these things are only obtained thanks to the existence of factories and works organised as at present. And therefore, when discussing the improvement of the workers' position, men of science, belonging to the well-to-do classes, always have in view only such improvements as will not do away with this system of factory production, and those conveniences of which they avail themselves.

Even the most advanced economists — the socialists, who demand the complete control of the means of production, for the workers— expect production of the same, or almost of the same, articles, as are produced now, to continue in the present, or similar, factories, with the present division of labour.

The difference, as they imagine it, will only be that, in the future, not they alone, but all men, will make use of such conveniences as only they now enjoy. They dimly picture to themselves that, with the communalisation of the means of production, they too—men of science, and the ruling classes in general—will do some work, but chiefly as managers, designers, scientists, or artists. To the questions, who will have to wear a muzzle and make white-lead? who will be stokers? miners? and cesspool cleaners? they

are either silent, or foretell that all these things will be so improved that even work at cess-pools, and underground, will afford pleasant occupation. That is how they represent to themselves future economic conditions, both in Utopias such as that of Bellamy and in scientific works.

According to their theories, the workers will all join unions and associations, and cultivate solidarity among themselves by unions, strikes, and participation in Parliament, till they obtain possession of all the means of production, as well as the land; and then they will be so well fed, so well dressed, and enjoy such amusements on holidays, that they will prefer life in town, amid brick buildings and smoking chimneys, to free village life amid plants and domestic animals; and monotonous, bell-regulated machine work to varied, healthy, and free agricultural labour.

Though this anticipation is as improbable as the anticipation of the theologians about a heaven to be enjoyed hereafter by workmen in compensation for their hard labour here, yet learned and educated people of our society believe this strange teaching, just as formerly wise and learned people believed in a heaven for workmen in the next world.

And learned men and their disciples—people of the well-to-do classes—believe this because they must believe it. This dilemma stands

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before them: either they must see that all that they make use of in their lives, from railways to lucifer matches and cigarettes, represents labour which costs the lives of many of their brethren, and that they, not sharing in that toil but making use of it, are very dishonourable men; or they must believe that all that takes place, takes place for the general advantage, in accord with unalterable laws of economic science. Therein lies the inner psychological cause compelling men of science—men wise and educated, but not enlightened—to affirm positively and tenaciously such an obvious untruth, as that the labourers, for their own well-being, should leave a happy and healthy life in touch with nature, and go to ruin their bodies and souls in factories and workshops.