CHAPTER VI

BANKRUPTCY OF THE SOCIALIST IDEAL

BUT even allowing the assertion (evidently unfounded as it is, and contrary to the facts of human nature), that it is better for people to live in towns and to do compulsory machine work in factories, rather than to live in villages and work freely at handicrafts—there remains in the very ideal itself, to which the men of science tell us the economic evolution is leading, an insoluble contradiction. The ideal is that the workers, having become masters of all the means of production, are to obtain all the comforts and pleasures now possessed by well-to-do people. They will all be well clothed and housed, and well nourished, and will all walk on electrically-lighted asphalt streets, and frequent concerts and theatres, and read papers and books, and ride on auto-cars, etc. But that everybody may have certain things, the production of those things must be apportioned, and consequently it must be decided how long each workman is to work.

How is that to be decided?

Statistics may show (though very imperfectly) what people require in a society fettered by capital, by competition, and by want. But no statistics can show how much is wanted, and what articles are needed to satisfy the demand in a society where the means of production will belong to the society itself, *i.e.* where the people will be free.

The demands in such a society cannot be defined, and they will always infinitely exceed the possibility of satisfying them. Everybody will wish to have all that the richest now possesses, and therefore it is quite impossible to define the quantity of goods that such a society will require.

Furthermore, how are people to be induced to work at articles which some consider necessary and others consider unnecessary or even harmful?

If it be found necessary for everybody to work, say, six hours a day, in order to satisfy the requirements of the society, who, in a free society, can compel a man to work those six hours, if he knows that part of the time is spent on producing things he considers unnecessary or even harmful?

It is undeniable that under the present state of things most varied articles are produced with great economy of exertion, thanks to machinery, and thanks especially to the division of labour which has been brought to an extreme nicety

and carried to the highest perfection; and that these articles are profitable to the manufacturers, and that we find them convenient and pleasant to use. But the fact that these articles are well made, and are produced with little expenditure of strength, that they are profitable to the capitalists and convenient for us, does not prove that free men would, without compulsion, continue to produce them. There is no doubt that Krupp, with the present division of labour, makes admirable cannons very quickly and artfully; N. M. very quickly and artfully produces silk materials; X. Y. and Z. produce toilet scents, powder to preserve the complexion, or glazed packs of cards; and K. produces whisky of choice flavour, etc.; and, no doubt, both for those who want these articles and for the owners of the factories in which they are made, all this is very advantageous. But cannons, and scents, and whisky, are wanted by those who wish to obtain control of the Chinese market, or who like to get drunk, or are concerned about their complexions; but there will be some who consider the production of these articles harmful. And there will always be people who consider that, besides these articles—exhibitions, academies, beer and beef are unnecessary and even harmful. How are these people to be made to participate in the production of such articles?

But even if a means could be found to get

all to agree to produce certain articles (though there is no such means, and can be none, except coercion), who, in a free society, without capitalistic production, competition and its law of supply and demand, will decide which articles are to have the preference? Which are to be made first, and which after? Are we first to build the Siberian railway and fortify Port-Arthur, and then macadamise the roads in our country districts, or *vice versâ*? Which is to come first: electric lighting or irrigation of the fields? And then comes another question, insoluble with free workmen: which men are to do which work? Evidently all will prefer hay-making or drawing to stoking or cesspool cleaning. How, in apportioning the work, are people to be induced to agree?

No statistics can answer these questions. The solution can only be theoretical: it may be said that there will be people to whom power will be given to regulate all these matters. Some people will decide these questions, and others will obey them.

But besides the questions of apportioning and directing production and of selecting work, when the means of production are communalised there will be another and most important question—as to the degree of division of labour that can be established in a socialistically organised society. The now existing division of labour

is conditioned by the necessities of the workers. A worker only agrees to live all his life underground, or to make the one-hundredth part of one article all his life, or move his hands up and down amid the roar of machinery all his life, because he will otherwise not have means to live. But it will only be by compulsion that a workman, owning the means of production and not suffering want, can be induced to accept such stupefying and soul-destroying conditions of labour as those in which people now work. Division of labour is undoubtedly very profitable and natural to people; but, if people are free, division of labour is only possible up to a certain, very limited, extent, which has been far overstepped in our society.

If one peasant occupies himself chiefly with boot-making, and his wife weaves, and another peasant ploughs, and a third is a blacksmith, and they all, having acquired special dexterity in their own work, afterwards exchange what they have produced—such division of labour is advantageous to all, and free people will naturally divide their work in this way. But a division of labour by which a man makes one one-hundredth of an article, or a stoker works in 140 degrees (Fahrenheit) of heat, or is choked with harmful gases—such division of labour is disadvantageous, because though it furthers the production of insignificant articles, it destroys

that which is most precious—the life of man. And therefore such division of labour as now exists, can only exist where there is compulsion. Rodbertus [1] says that communal division of labour unites mankind. That is true; but it is only free division—such as people voluntarily adopt —that unites.

If people decide to make a road, and one digs, another brings stones, a third breaks them, etc.—that sort of division of work unites people.

But if, independently of the wishes, and sometimes against the wishes, of the workers, a strategical railway is built, or an Eiffel tower, or stupidities such as fill the Paris exhibition; and one workman is compelled to obtain iron, another to dig coal, a third to make castings, a fourth to cut down trees, and a fifth to saw them up, without even having the least idea what the things they are making are wanted for, then such division of labour not only does not unite men, but, on the contrary, it divides them.

And, therefore, with communalised implements of production, if people are free, they will only adopt division of labour in as far as the good resulting will outweigh the evil it occasions to the workers. And as each man naturally sees good in extending and diversifying his activities, such

[1] A leader of German scientific Socialism (1805–75).—(Trans.).

division of labour as now exists will, evidently, be impossible in a free society.

To suppose that with communalised means of production there will be such an abundance of things as is now produced by compulsory division of labour, is like supposing that after the emancipation of the serfs the domestic orchestras [1] and theatres, the home-made carpets and laces, and the elaborate gardens which depended on serf-labour would continue to exist as before. So that the supposition that when the Socialist ideal is realised, everyone will be free, and will at the same time have at his disposal everything, or almost everything, that is now made use of by the well-to-do classes, involves an obvious self-contradiction.

[1] Before the emancipation of the serfs in Russia some proprietors had private theatres of their own and troupes of musicians and actors composed of their own serfs. On many estates the serfs produced a variety of hand-made luxuries, as well as necessaries, for the proprietors.—(Trans.).