



CHAPTER X

LAWS CONCERNING TAXES, LAND, AND PROPERTY

THE German Socialists have termed the combination of conditions which put the workers in subjection to the capitalists, the iron law of wages, implying by the word "iron" that this law is immutable. But in these conditions there is nothing immutable; these conditions merely result from human laws concerning taxes, land, and, above all, concerning things which satisfy our requirements, *i.e.* concerning property. Laws are framed, and repealed, by human beings. So that it is not some sociological "iron" law, but ordinary man-made law, that produces slavery. In the case in hand, the slavery of our times is very clearly and definitely produced, not by some "iron" elemental law, but by human enactments: about land, about taxes, and about property. There is one set of laws by which any quantity of land may belong to private people, and may pass from one to another by inheritance, or by will, or may be sold; there is another set of laws by which everyone must pay the taxes demanded

of him unquestioningly ; and there is a third set of laws to the effect that any quantity of articles, by whatever means acquired, may become the absolute property of the people who hold them. And in consequence of these laws slavery exists.

We are so accustomed to all these laws, that they seem to us just as necessary and natural to human life, as the laws maintaining serfdom and slavery seemed in former times ; no doubt about their necessity and justice seems possible, and we notice nothing wrong in them. But just as a time came when people, having seen the ruinous consequences of serfdom, questioned the justice and necessity of the laws which maintained it, so now, when the pernicious consequences of the present economic order have become evident, one involuntarily questions the justice and inevitability of the legislation about land, taxes, and property, which produces these results.

As people formerly asked, Is it right that some people should belong to others, and that the former should have nothing of their own, but should give all the produce of their labour to their owners ? so now we must ask ourselves, Is it right that people must not use land accounted the property of other people ? is it right that people should hand over to others, in the form of taxes, whatever part of their labour is demanded of them ? Is it right that people may

not make use of articles considered to be the property of other people?

Is it right that people should not have the use of land when it is considered to belong to others who are not cultivating it?

It is said that this legislation is instituted because landed property is an essential condition if agriculture is to flourish, and if there were no private property passing by inheritance, people would drive one another from the land they occupy, and no one would work or improve the land on which he is settled. Is this true? The answer is to be found in history, and in the facts of to-day. History shows that property in land did not arise from any wish to make the cultivator's tenure more secure, but resulted from the seizure of communal lands by conquerors, and its distribution to those who served the conquerors. So that property in land was not established with the object of stimulating the agriculturists. Present-day facts show the fallacy of the assertion that landed property enables those who work the land to be sure that they will not be deprived of the land they cultivate. In reality just the contrary has everywhere happened, and is happening. The right of landed property, by which the great proprietors have profited most, and are profiting, has produced the result that all, or most, *i.e.* the immense majority of the

agriculturists, are now in the position of people who cultivate other people's land, from which they may be driven at the whim of men who do not cultivate it. So that the existing right of landed property certainly does not defend the rights of the agriculturist to enjoy the fruits of the labour he puts into the land, but, on the contrary, it is a way of depriving the agriculturists of the land on which they work, and handing it over to those who have not worked it; and therefore it is certainly not a means for the improvement of agriculture, but, on the contrary, a means of deteriorating it.

About taxes it is said that people ought to pay them because they are instituted with the general, even though silent, consent of all; and are used for public needs, to the advantage of all. Is this true?

The answer to this question is given in history and in present-day facts. History shows that taxes never were instituted by common consent, but, on the contrary, always only in consequence of the fact that some people having obtained power (by conquest or by other means) over other people, imposed tribute, not for public needs, but for themselves. And the same thing is still going on. Taxes are taken by those who have the power to take them. If nowadays some portion of these tributes, called taxes and duties, are used for public purposes, it is, for the

most part, for public purposes that are harmful rather than useful to most people.

For instance, in Russia one-third of the peasants' whole income is taken in taxes, but only one-fiftieth of the State revenue is spent on their greatest need, the education of the people; and even that amount is spent on a kind of education which, by stupefying the people, harms them more than it benefits them. The other forty-nine-fiftieths are spent on unnecessary things, harmful for the people, such as equipping the army, building strategical railways, forts, and prisons, or supporting the priesthood and the court, and on salaries for military and civil officials, *i.e.* on salaries for those people who make it possible to take this money from the people.

The same thing goes on not only in Persia, Turkey, and India, but also in all the Christian and constitutional States and democratic Republics: money is taken from the majority of the people, quite independently of the consent or non-consent of the payers, and the amount collected is not what is really needful, but as much as can be got (we know how Parliaments are made up, and how little they represent the will of the people), and it is used not for the common advantage, but for things the governing classes consider necessary for themselves: on wars in Cuba or the Philippines, on taking and keeping

the riches of the Transvaal, and so forth. So that the explanation that people must pay taxes because they are instituted with general consent and are used for the common good, is as unjust as the other explanation, that private property in land is established to encourage agriculture.

Is it true that people should not use articles needful to satisfy their requirements, if those articles are the property of other people?

It is asserted that the right of property in acquired articles is established in order to make the worker sure that no one will take from him the produce of his labour.

Is this true?

It is only necessary to glance at what is done in our world, where property rights are defended with especial strictness, in order to be convinced how completely the facts of life run counter to this explanation.

In our society, in consequence of the right of property in acquired articles, the very thing happens which that right is intended to prevent: namely, all articles which have been, and continually are being, produced by working people, are possessed by (and as they are produced are continually taken by) those who have not produced them.

So that the assertion that the right of property secures to the workers the possibility of enjoying the products of their labour is

evidently yet more unjust than the assertion concerning property in land, and it is based on the same sophistry: first, the fruit of their toil is unjustly and violently taken from the workers, and then the law steps in, and these very articles which have been taken from the workmen,—unjustly and by violence,—are declared to be the absolute property of those who have stolen them.

Property: for instance a factory, acquired by a series of frauds and by taking advantage of the workmen, is considered a result of labour, and is held sacred; but the lives of those workmen who perish at work in that factory, and their labour, are not considered their property, but are rather considered to be the property of the factory owner, if he—taking advantage of the necessities of the workers—has bound them down in a manner considered legal. Hundreds of thousands of bushels of corn, collected from the peasants by usury and by a series of extortions, are considered to be the property of the merchant, while the growing corn raised by the peasants is considered to be the property of someone else, if he has inherited the land from a grandfather or great-grandfather who took it from the people. It is said that the law defends equally the property of the millowner, of the capitalist, of the landowner, and of the factory or country labourer. The equality of the

capitalist and of the worker is like the equality of two fighters, of whom one has his arms tied and the other has weapons, but to both of whom certain rules are applied with strict impartiality while they fight. So that all the explanations of the justice and necessity of the three sets of laws which produce slavery are as untrue as were the explanations formerly given of the justice and necessity of serfdom. All those three sets of laws are nothing but the establishment of that new form of slavery which has replaced the old form. As people formerly established laws enabling some people to buy and sell other people, and to own them, and to make them work—and slavery existed; so now people have established laws that men may not use land that is considered to belong to someone else, must pay the taxes demanded of them, and must not use articles considered to be the property of others—and we have the slavery of our times.