

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ASSERTION OF ECONOMIC SCIENCE THAT ALL RURAL LABOURERS MUST ENTER THE FACTORY SYSTEM

THE theory that it is God's will that some people should own others, satisfied people for a very long time. But that theory, by justifying cruelty, caused such cruelty as evoked resistance, and produced doubts as to the truth of the theory.

So now with the theory that an economic evolution, guided by inevitable laws, is progressing, in consequence of which some people must collect capital, and others must labour all their lives to increase those capitals, preparing themselves meanwhile for the promised communalisation of the means of production; this theory, causing some people to be yet more cruel to others, also begins (especially among common people not stupefied by science) to evoke certain doubts.

For instance, you see goods-porters destroying their lives by thirty-seven-hour labour, or women

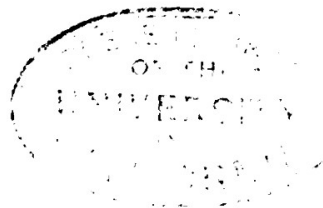
in factories, or laundresses, or type-setters, or all those millions of people who live in hard, unnatural conditions of monotonous, stupefying, slavish toil, and you naturally ask: what has brought these people to such a state? and how are they to be delivered from it? And science replies, that these people are in this condition because the railway belongs to this Company, the silk factory to that gentleman, and all the foundries, factories, printing shops, and laundries, to capitalists; and that this state of things will come right by workpeople forming unions, co-operative societies, strikes, and taking part in government, and more and more swaying the masters and the government, till the workers obtain first, shorter hours and increased wages, and finally, all the means of production into their hands; and then—all will be well. Meanwhile all is going on as it should go, and there is no need to alter anything.

This answer must seem to an unlearned man, and particularly to our Russian folk, very surprising. In the first place, neither in relation to the goods-porters nor the factory women, nor all the millions of other labourers suffering from heavy, unhealthy, stupefying labour, does the possession of the means of production by capitalists explain anything. The agricultural means of production of those men who are now working at the railway have not been seized by capitalists:

they have land, and horses, and ploughs, and harrows, and all that is necessary to till the ground ; also these women working at the factory are not only not forced to it by being deprived of their implements of production, but, on the contrary, they have (for the most part against the wish of the elder members of their families) left the homes where their work was much wanted, and where they had implements of production.

Millions of workpeople in Russia, and in other countries, are in like case. So that the cause of the miserable position of the workers cannot be found in the seizure of the means of production by capitalists. The cause must lie in that which drives them from the villages. That in the first place. Secondly, the emancipation of the workers from this state of things (even in that distant future in which science promises them liberty) can be accomplished neither by shortening the hours of labour, nor by increasing wages, nor by the promised communalisation of the means of production.

All that, cannot improve their position. For the labourers' misery—alike on the railway, in the silk-factory, and in every other factory or workshop—consists not in the longer or shorter hours of work (agriculturists sometimes work eighteen hours a day, and as much as thirty-six hours on end, and consider their lives happy



ones); nor does it consist in the low rate of wages, nor in the fact that the railway or the factory is not theirs; but it consists in the fact that they are obliged to work in harmful, unnatural conditions, often dangerous and destructive to life, and to live a barrack life in towns—a life full of temptations and immorality—and to do compulsory labour at another's bidding.

Latterly the hours of labour have diminished, and the rate of wages has increased; but this diminution of the hours of labour and this increase in wages has not improved the position of the worker, if one takes into account not their more luxurious habits—watches with chains, silk kerchiefs, tobacco, *vodka*, beef, beer, etc.—but their true welfare, *i.e.* their health and morality, and chiefly their freedom.

At the silk-factory with which I am acquainted, twenty years ago the work was chiefly done by men, who worked fourteen hours a day, earned on an average fifteen roubles a month, and sent the money, for the most part, to their families in the villages. Now, nearly all the work is done by women, working eleven hours, some of whom earn as much as twenty-five roubles a month (over fifteen roubles on the average), and, for the most part, do not send it home, but spend all they earn here, chiefly on dress, drunkenness, and vice. The diminution of the hours of work merely increases the time they spend in the taverns.

The same thing is happening, to a greater or lesser extent, at all the factories and works. Everywhere, notwithstanding the diminution of the hours of labour and the increase of wages, the health of the operatives is worse than that of country workers, the average duration of life is shorter, and morality is sacrificed, as cannot but occur when people are torn from those conditions which most conduce to morality: family life, and free, healthy, varied, and intelligible agricultural work.

It is very possibly true, as some economists assert, that with shorter hours of labour, more pay, and improved sanitary conditions in mills and factories, the health and morality of the workers improve, in comparison with the former condition of factory workers. It is possible also that latterly, and in some places, the position of the factory hands is better in external conditions than the position of the country population. But this is so (and only in some places) because the Government and society, influenced by the affirmations of science, do all that is possible to improve the position of the factory population at the expense of the country population.

If the condition of the factory workers, in some places, is (though only in externals) better than that of country people, it only shows that one can, by all kinds of restrictions, render life

miserable, in what should be the best external conditions; and that there is no position so unnatural and bad that men may not adapt themselves to it, if they remain in it for some generations.

The misery of the position of a factory hand, and in general of a town worker, does not consist in his long hours and small pay, but in the fact that he is deprived of the natural conditions of life in touch with nature, is deprived of freedom, and is compelled to compulsory and monotonous toil at another man's will.

And therefore the reply to the questions, why factory and town workers are in miserable conditions, and how those may be improved, cannot be, that this arises because capitalists have possessed themselves of the means of production, and that the workers' condition will be improved: by diminishing their hours of work, increasing their wages, and communalising the means of production.

The reply to these questions must consist in indicating the causes which have deprived the workers of natural conditions of life in touch with nature, and have driven them into factory bondage; and in indicating means to free the workers from the necessity of foregoing a free country life, and from going into slavery at the factories.

And therefore the question why town workers

are in a miserable condition, includes, first of all, the question: what reasons have driven them from the villages, where they and their ancestors have lived and might live; where, in Russia, people such as they do still live? and what it is that drove, and continues to drive them, against their will, to the factories and works?

If there are workmen, as in England, Belgium, or Germany, who for some generations have lived by factory work, even they live so, not at their own free will but because their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers were, in some way, compelled to exchange the agricultural life which they loved, for life which seemed to them hard in towns and at factories. First the country people were deprived of land by violence, says Karl Marx, were evicted and brought to vagabondage; and then, by cruel laws, they were tortured with pincers, with red-hot irons, and were whipped, to make them submit to the condition of being hired labourers. Therefore the question, how to free the workers from their miserable position, should, one would think, naturally lead to the question, how to remove those causes which have already driven some, and are now driving, and threatening to drive, the rest of the peasants from the position which they considered and consider good, and have driven and are driving them to a position which they consider bad.

Economic science, although it indicates in passing the causes that drove the peasants from the villages, does not concern itself with the question how to remove these causes, but directs all its attention to the improvement of the worker's position in the existing factories and works, assuming as it were that the workers' position in these factories and workshops is something unalterable, something which must at all costs be maintained for those who are already in the factories, and must be reached by those who have not yet left the villages or abandoned agricultural work.

Moreover, economic science is so sure that all the peasants have inevitably to become factory operatives in towns, that though all the sages and the poets of the world have always placed the ideal of human happiness amid conditions of agricultural work,—though all the workers whose habits are unperverted have always preferred, and still prefer, agricultural labour to any other,—though factory work is always unhealthy and monotonous, while agriculture is most healthy and varied,—though agricultural work is free,<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* the peasant alternates toil and rest at his own will, while factory work, even if the factory belongs to the workmen, is always

<sup>1</sup> In Russia, as in many other countries, the greater part of the agricultural work still is done by peasants working their own land on their own account.—(Trans.).



enforced, in dependence on the machines,—though factory work is derivative, while agricultural work is fundamental, and without it no factory could exist,—yet economic science affirms that all the country people, not only are not injured by the transition from the country to the town, but themselves desire it, and strive towards it.