MARX AND ENGELS
ON
MALTHUS

Selections from the writings of Marx
and Engels dealing with the theories
of Thomas Robert Malthus

Edited with an Introductory
Essay and Notes by

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Part One

MALTHUS—YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY: AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

MALTHUS—YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

An Introductory Essay

(i) MALTHUS YESTERDAY

(*a*) *The Theory of Population*

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, the rulers of Britain were greatly alarmed by the enthusiasm for the French Revolution which was sweeping through the country. The Revolution was breeding dangerous thoughts, not only in the minds of intellectuals like Godwin and poets like Wordsworth, but also in the minds of the working people—the labourers, artisans and small shopkeepers of cities like London and Glasgow. The French Revolution left no one unaffected. "Everything", wrote a contemporary, "not this or that thing, but literally everything, was soaked in this one event."[1]

Those who feared radical social reform fought back against those who hoped and worked for it. A regime of thought-control, terror and physical repression was instituted. The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended; there were many trials for high treason, often with savage sentences; and there was pitiless persecution of those who were suspected of harbouring "democratic" thoughts. But physical repression was not enough. Those who feared reform had also to take sides in the great battle of ideas which was raging at the time, in order to overcome the new notions of "the perfectibility of man and of society" which were beginning to grip wide sections of the people.

To their aid, in 1798, came the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, with his famous *Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society.*

The *Essay*, at least in its first origins, was quite frankly intended as a political tract, aimed (as Marx noted) "against the French Revolution and the contemporary ideas of reform in England (Godwin, etc.)".[2] Malthus himself tells us as much in his Preface. "The following Essay", he writes, "owes its

[1] Cockburn, *Memorials of His Time* (1856), p. 80.

[2] Below, p. 168.

origin to a conversation with a friend, on the subject of Mr. Godwin's Essay, on avarice and profusion, in his Enquirer. The discussion, started the general question of the future improvement of society; and the Author at first sat down with an intention of merely stating his thoughts to his friend, upon paper. . . ."[1] The first edition of the *Essay*, then, took the form of an open attack against those who believed in "the perfectibility of man and of society"—that is, against those who believed in what Malthus called "the possible existence of a society, all the members of which, should live in ease, happiness, and comparative leisure; and feel no anxiety about providing the means of subsistence for themselves and families".[2] Malthus maintained that the "principle of population" was "conclusive against the perfectibility of the mass of mankind".[3]

The main argument of the first edition of the *Essay* was as simple as it was sensational. Here is a short summary, in Malthus's own words:

> "The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.
>
> "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will shew the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second.
>
> "By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal.
>
> "This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. This difficulty must fall some where; and must necessarily be severely felt by a large portion of mankind. . . .
>
> "This natural inequality of the two powers of population, and of production in the earth, and that great law of our nature which must constantly keep their effects equal, form the great difficulty that to me appears insurmountable in the way to the perfectibility of society."[4]

[1] *Essay*, 1st edn. (1926 reprint), p. 1. The "friend", as we now know, was actually Malthus's father, Daniel Malthus, who was a strong believer in the possibilities of social improvement.

[2] *Ibid*, pp. 16–17. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 17. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 13–16.

It will be seen that this argument is chiefly founded upon two propositions—that population when unchecked "increases in a geometrical ratio", whereas "subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio". Upon the validity of these "ratios" the argument as a whole stands or falls. It is true that the emphasis on the "ratios" was toned down a little in later editions of the *Essay*, but it is not true—as is often suggested by Malthus's modern admirers—that Malthus eventually came to set little store by them.[1] "Malthus", wrote Engels, "puts forward a calculation upon which his whole system is based. Population increases in geometrical progression—1+2+4+8+16+32, etc. The productive power of the land increases in arithmetical progression—1+2+3+4+5+6. The difference is obvious and horrifying, but is it correct?"[2] Malthus's attempts to demonstrate its correctness are extremely unsatisfactory, to say the least of it. The "geometrical ratio" he takes to be proved by the contemporary growth of population in the United States of America, where he asserts (on very doubtful authority) that "the population has been found to double itself in twenty-five years". Therefore, he says, we will take this result as our rule, and assume "that population, when unchecked, goes on doubling itself every twenty-five years, or increases in a geometrical ratio".[3]

If the evidence for the "geometrical ratio" is unsatisfactory, that for the "arithmetical ratio" is even more so. In fact, Malthus adduces no evidence whatsoever for it—all that he does is to assert that it is "the very utmost that we can conceive". Let us allow, he says, "that by great exertion, the whole produce of the Island might be increased every twenty-five years, by a quantity of subsistence equal to what it at present produces. The most enthusiastic speculator cannot suppose a greater increase than this."[4] But this is merely an assertion, and by no means a proof. As Engels pointed out, it ignores (among other things) the fact that "science advances in proportion to the body of knowledge passed down to it by the previous generation, that is, in the most normal conditions it

[1] Cf. Kenneth Smith, *The Malthusian Controversy* (1951), p. 223.

[2] Below, pp. 62–3. [3] *Essay* (1st edn.), pp. 20–1. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

also grows in geometrical progression".[1] The "arithmetical ratio" was in fact purely chimerical.[2] Later on Malthus's followers began to substitute the so-called "law of diminishing returns" for the discredited "arithmetical ratio", and Malthus himself relied increasingly upon this "law" in successive editions of his *Essay*. But this does not save the "principle of population" from collapse. The "law of diminishing returns", as will be shown below,[3] is just as chimerical as the "arithmetical ratio".

Notwithstanding these fairly obvious defects, the success of the *Essay* among the ruling classes was immediate and considerable. Not only did it appear to prove that society was not "perfectible", but it also seemed to reveal that it was useless to attempt any major reform even within the present framework of society. In particular, it was impossible "to remove the wants of the lower classes of society". "The truth is", said Malthus, "that the pressure of distress on this part of a community is an evil so deeply seated, that no human ingenuity can reach it."[4] All that can possibly be proposed, he argued, are "palliatives", such as the abolition of the Poor Laws.

It was on this application of the principle of population to the question of reform within the present framework of society, and in particular to the question of the Poor Laws, that Malthus concentrated in the second and subsequent editions of the *Essay*. In his preface to the second edition of 1803, he remarks that in the course of the discussion he "was naturally led into some examination of the effects of this principle on the existing state of society. It appeared to account for much of that poverty and misery observable among the lower classes of people in every nation, and for those reiterated failures in the efforts of the higher classes to relieve them."[5] As the broader perspectives opened up by the French Revolution faded, and the problems of poverty and pauperism were brought into greater prominence by the developing Industrial Revolution and the dislocation caused by the Napoleonic Wars, this application of the principle received more and more emphasis.

When the first edition of Malthus's *Essay* appeared, the

[1] Below, p. 63. [2] Cf. below, p. 124. [3] Pp. 28–31.
[4] *Essay* (1st edn.), p. 95. [5] *Essay* (2nd edn.), p. iii.

English Poor Law legislation was still based on the old principle that an individual could obtain relief only in his own parish. In 1795, in the face of a great increase in pauperism, the so-called "Speenhamland system" had been widely introduced, whereby wages were subsidised from the rates according to a sliding scale varying with the price of bread. This system was beneficial at that time to certain of the larger employers of labour—particularly the agricultural employers—since it meant that part of their wage bill would be paid by their smaller competitors, upon whom the burden of the poor rate fell very heavily. The Speenhamland system encouraged employers to cut wages, and resulted in an even greater spread of pauperism among the working people.

Malthus was opposed to the Poor Laws from the beginning. "The poor-laws of England", he said in the first edition of the *Essay*, "tend to depress the general condition of the poor" because their tendency is "to increase population without increasing the food for its support".[1] This theme received much greater stress in the second and subsequent editions. Malthus's work was more influential than that of any other single individual in helping to secure the passing of the new Poor Law of 1834, a measure which was based above all on the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie. The principle of population provided a "scientific" basis for the "reform" of the Poor Law—and also a *moral* basis. In a notorious passage in the second edition, Malthus disposed of the idea that the poor had any "natural right" to support:

> "A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he do not work upon the compassion of some of her guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. . . . The guests learn

[1] *Essay* (1st edn.), p. 83.

too late their error, in counteracting those strict orders to all intruders, issued by the great mistress of the feast, who, wishing that all guests should have plenty, and knowing that she could not provide for unlimited numbers, humanely refused to admit fresh comers when her table was already full."[1]

This revealing passage was expunged from subsequent editions, but the basic idea behind it—that the poor are not entitled to claim relief as a right—was upheld by Malthus to the end. And not only had the poor no right to relief, but they must also be punished for their poverty.[2] "Dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful",[3] said Malthus, and it ought to be made as disagreeable as possible. These ideas were eventually incorporated in the new Poor Law of 1834, which abolished all "outdoor relief" for the able-bodied, compelling the indigent to receive relief inside a workhouse, and thus forcing the weavers, petty craftsmen and casual farm labourers into the factories. The "workhouse system" of industrial England, against which the Chartists—and the Webbs—struggled, was one of the first-fruits of the Malthusian theory of population.[4]

In his preface to the second edition, Malthus stated that he had "endeavoured to soften some of the harshest conclusions of the first essay".[5] But in actual fact the amount of "softening" was negligible. It is true that he now suggested that there might be some hope of improvement if the poor voluntarily delayed marriage, and therefore procreation, until they were in a position to support a family. But he himself does not seem to have placed much reliance on this remedy, and all the fundamental doctrines of the original *Essay* survived to the last edition with only superficial changes. The *Essay* was swollen by the addition of a great deal of historical and statistical material (much of it of very dubious validity), but there were no really radical alterations in the theory itself. Whatever the intentions of its author may have been, the Malthusian theory of population remained to the end what it had been at the beginning—an apology for the condition of the working people,

[1] *Essay* (2nd edn.), pp. 531–2.
[2] Cf. below, p. 67.
[3] *Essay* (1st edn.), p. 85.
[4] Cf. below, Part Two, items (ii) and (iii).
[5] *Essay* (2nd edn.), p. vii.

and a warning against all attempts to ameliorate the condition of society. As such it did yeoman service during Malthus's lifetime. And it is still doing yeoman service to-day, over a century after Malthus's death.

(b) Economic Theory in General

In so far as it prepared the way for the new Poor Law of 1834, and thus for the removal of the last obstacle which hindered the flow of cheap labour from the country to the towns, Malthus's theory of population was a welcome gift to the industrial bourgeoisie. But it was also by no means unwelcome to the "agricultural interests", who feared radical social reform even more than the industrial bourgeoisie did, and upon whom the burden of the poor rate (at least in certain districts) was beginning to fall with crippling force. Indeed, if the theory of population had been opposed to the general interests of the landed proprietors, Malthus would probably have found excellent reasons for opposing it. For whenever the interests of the landed proprietors and the industrial bourgeoisie came into serious conflict—as they did more and more in the first three decades of the nineteenth century over such issues as the Corn Laws and parliamentary reform—Malthus invariably came down on the side of the landed proprietors. And this is the key to the understanding of his economic theory in general. "Malthus wants bourgeois production", said Marx, "in so far as it is not revolutionary, in so far as it is not a historical force, but merely creates a broader and more convenient material basis for the 'old' society."[1] This attitude coloured all his economic writings. "His writings of 1815 on protective tariffs and ground rent", wrote Marx,

> "were intended to corroborate his earlier apology for the poverty of the producers; but in particular they were intended to defend reactionary landed property against 'enlightened', 'liberal' and 'progressive' capital, and above all to justify a retrograde piece of legislation put forward in England in the interests of the aristocracy as against the industrial bourgeoisie. Finally his *Principles of Political Economy*, directed against Ricardo, had essentially the aim of confining the

[1] Below, p. 157.

absolute demands of industrial capital, and the laws according to which its productivity develops, within limits which would be 'advantageous' and 'desirable' from the point of view of the landed aristocracy, the State Church to which Malthus belonged, government officials, and tax-consumers."[1]

The English landed proprietors at this time were certainly in sore need of an advocate. The industrial bourgeoisie, who were obsessed—and for their time rightly obsessed—with the great importance of the accumulation of capital, were attacking them in the economic field on two separate fronts. First, they argued, the legislation restricting the import of corn from abroad, while it certainly meant high rents for the landlords, also meant dear bread, and therefore high wages, low profits for the capitalists, and less accumulation of capital. Second, they maintained that the greater part of the rent which the landlords received was generally spent by them on consumer goods and personal services, so that comparatively little of it was saved and accumulated as capital. Other things being equal, then, it was better that the "net revenue" of society should flow into the hands of the industrial bourgeoisie rather than into those of the landlords, since more of it would then be accumulated as capital. The industrial bourgeoisie habitually displayed that habit of "parsimony" which Adam Smith had so highly praised, while the landlords were notable for that "prodigality" which Adam Smith had correspondingly condemned.

What the landlords needed at this time was an apologist who would prove on their behalf that there was something sacrosanct about the rent which they received, that there were serious dangers inherent in an over-rapid accumulation of capital, and that even though they spent most of their income instead of saving it they were still performing a useful social function in the modern capitalist world.

To their aid came the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, with his pamphlet *An Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent* (1815), and, later, with his book *Principles of Political Economy* (1820).

[1] Below, p. 122.

The first of these two works, in which Malthus put forward the new theory of differential rent (based on the "law of diminishing returns") which was subsequently to become associated with Ricardo's name,[1] did not, on the whole, have the political effect which Malthus intended. Malthus's aim was two-fold. First, he wanted to disprove the assertion, then frequently being made, that the landlord was no better than a common monopolist, whose monopoly was injurious to the consumers. The payment of rent to the landlord, Malthus argued, was not evidence of the existence of a common monopoly at all: on the contrary, it was "a clear indication of a most inestimable quality in the soil, which God has bestowed on man—the quality of being able to maintain more persons than are necessary to work it".[2] Second, he wanted to provide a theoretical basis for the defence of the Corn Laws—a defence which he himself put forward, shortly after the publication of his pamphlet on rent, in a new pamphlet entitled *The Grounds of an Opinion on the Policy of Restricting the Importation of Foreign Corn* (1815). But Ricardo, Malthus's main opponent in the field of economic theory, had little difficulty in turning the tables completely on him. Ricardo took over Malthus's theory of rent, combined it with a theory of profit which he had already developed independently, and on this theoretical basis demonstrated convincingly that "the interest of the landlord is always opposed to the interest of every other class in the community. His situation is never so prosperous, as when food is scarce and dear: whereas, all other persons are greatly benefited by procuring food cheap".[3] And he appended to this demonstration a set of arguments, erected on the same theoretical basis, designed to show the advantages of a free trade in corn. Ricardo, in short, suggested very persuasively that Malthus's theory of rent, when properly expounded and interpreted, proved virtually the opposite of what Malthus had tried to make it prove.

The argument of Book II of Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy*, however, was a harder nut to crack. In this part of the *Principles*, which dealt with "The Progress of Wealth", Malthus maintained that the "present distresses" were in large

[1] See below, p. 113.

[2] *Inquiry*, p. 16.

[3] Ricardo, *Works and Correspondence* (Sraffa's edn.), Vol. IV, p. 21.

measure due to the over-rapid accumulation of capital in recent years. If accumulation were too rapid, he argued, the production of commodities might well increase at a greater rate than the distribution of the purchasing power necessary to buy them, so that a "general glut" of commodities would result from this relative deficiency of "effective demand". Since there was an ever-present tendency for this sort of thing to happen under capitalism, the permanent existence of a class of "unproductive consumers"—who would consume without at the same time producing anything—was vitally necessary, in order to keep the economic system functioning at a full employment level. As Marx put it:

> "In order to charm out of his bosom the awful conflict between the desire for enjoyment and the chase after riches, Malthus, about the year 1820, advocated a division of labour, which assigns to the capitalist actually engaged in production, the business of accumulating, and to the other sharers in surplus-value, to the landlords, the place-men, the beneficed clergy, etc., the business of spending. It is of the highest importance, he says, 'to keep separate the passion for expenditure and the passion for accumulation.' "[1]

In this theory there were ingeniously combined both a warning against the over-rapid development of capitalism, and an apology for the continued existence under capitalism of people like the landlords and their "unproductive" associates who did nothing except consume.

Ricardo, who saw the cause of the "present distresses" rather in a deficiency of capital than in an excess of it, attacked this theory with all the force he could muster. He recognised clearly enough that Malthus's argument was fundamentally apologetic, and he also recognised the superficiality of the reasoning by which it was supported. In his *Notes on Malthus*, Ricardo's brief and exasperated comments on Malthus's defence of "unproductive consumers" reveal his attitude plainly. For example:

> "A body of unproductive labourers are just as necessary and as useful with a view to future production, as a fire,

[1] *Capital*, Vol. I (Allen and Unwin edn.), p. 607.

> which should consume in the manufacturers warehouse the goods which those unproductive labourers would otherwise consume. . . . In what way can a man's consuming my produce, without making me any return whatever, enable me to make a fortune? . . . I cannot express in language so strong as I feel it my astonishment at the various propositions advanced in this section. . . . Mr. Malthus is a most powerful ally of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. . . ."[1]

And although Ricardo went much too far in the opposite direction, even denying the very possibility of a "general glut" of commodities under capitalism, his reply to Malthus convinced most of his contemporaries. Malthus's explanation of unemployment in terms of "effective demand", unlike his theory of population, did not become popular in his lifetime. Oddly enough, it had to await our own times before becoming fashionable. To-day, as an important constituent part of Keynesian economic doctrine, a modified variant of the Malthusian theory of effective demand has been made to play a role just as reactionary as that which Malthus intended the original theory to play.

[1] *Works and Correspondence*, Vol. II, pp. 421–33.

(ii) MARX AND ENGELS ON MALTHUS

(*a*) *General Criticisms*

"THE hatred of the English working class against Malthus", wrote Marx, ". . . is therefore entirely justified. The people were right here in sensing instinctively that they were confronted not with a *man of science* but with a *bought advocate*, a pleader on behalf of their enemies, a shameless sycophant of the ruling classes."[1] It was for this reason that Marx and Engels spent so much time and energy in attacking Malthus's doctrines.

They recognised, of course, that Malthus had his merits. Marx, for example, praised Malthus for protesting against the extension of the working day.[2] Again, we can infer from the number of times that elementary statements by Malthus are quoted approvingly in *Capital* that Marx admired his facility for expressing familiar classical propositions; and Marx was always prepared to admit that Malthus at least had "a certain interest in theoretical sophistication".[3] Marx also appreciated the superiority of Malthus *when compared with certain other "vulgar" economists*, such as Say and Bastiat.[4] In particular, Malthus was obviously superior to those economists who put forward "the pitiable doctrines of harmony in bourgeois political economy"[5] —i.e. the doctrines which suggested that there was no real conflict of interests between social classes under capitalism. Malthus at least had the merit of laying emphasis on the disharmonies —in fact, as Marx says, "he clings to them with parsonic satisfaction, amplifies them and blazons them forth".[6] Malthus, he says in another place, "is not interested in disguising the contradictions of bourgeois production; on the contrary, he is interested in emphasising them".[7] But Marx did not consider this particular merit to be a very outstanding one. For one

[1] Below, p. 123.

[2] Cf. *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 539, footnote: "All honour to Malthus that he lays stress on the lengthening of the hours of labour, a fact to which he elsewhere in his pamphlet [*Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent*] draws attention." Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 568.

[3] Below, p. 126.

[4] Cf. *Critique of Political Economy* (Kerr edn.), p. 34, footnote.

[5] Below, p. 124. [6] Below, p. 124. [7] Below, p. 164.

thing, Malthus had not discovered the contradictions himself, and the reasons why he was interested in emphasising them were hardly admirable. And for another, the accounts which he gave of these contradictions were superficial and false, and the "remedies" which he proposed were purely apologetic. Such merits as he possessed were greatly outweighed by his deficiencies.

The most important *general* feature of the criticisms of Malthus made by Marx and Engels is their repeated emphasis on his "sin against science". This "sin against science", according to Marx, took two main forms. First, it took the form of his "shameless and mechanical plagiarism".[1] The charge of plagiarism, of course, is notoriously difficult to bring home in cases where the text is not actually *copied*, since the boundaries between the legitimate and illegitimate use of another's work, and between the conscious and unconscious use of it, are often not easy to define. But in the case of Malthus, each of his three major theoretical contributions—the theory of population, the theory of rent, and the theory of effective demand—had been substantially anticipated by earlier writers, and it must be admitted that this series of coincidences is at least highly suspicious. Second, Malthus's "sin against science" took the form of the blatantly *apologetic* character of his conclusions, to which reference has already been made above. As Marx points out on a number of occasions, Malthus's conclusions were generally either in the interests of the ruling classes as a whole as against the workers, or in the interests of the more reactionary sections of the ruling classes as against the more progressive sections. Malthus "had other things in mind than a scientific treatise on population growth", says a modern commentator on the *Essay*,[2] and this is essentially the burden of Marx's complaint against Malthus's work as a whole. Whether Malthus was as *conscious* of his "sin against science" as the very strong language used by Marx and Engels sometimes seems to imply is, I think, open to doubt. But it is certainly true that Malthus's work forms a pattern which suggests, to say the least of it, that he was often influenced by what he *wanted* to prove to a far greater extent than any competent scientist has a right to be.

[1] Below, p. 119. [2] Kenneth Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 244–5.

(b). The Theory of Population

Marx, in a letter to Schweitzer of 24 January, 1865, criticising the work of Proudhon, made the following comment:

> ". . . In a strictly scientific history of political economy the book [Proudhon's *What is Property?*] would hardly be worth mentioning. But sensational works of this kind play their part in the sciences just as much as in the history of the novel. Take, for instance, Malthus' book *On Population*. In its first edition it was nothing but a 'sensational pamphlet' and *plagiarism* from beginning to end into the bargain. And yet what a *stimulus* was produced by this *libel on the human race*!"[1]

The "stimulus" which the principle of population produced was indeed a strong and far-reaching one. There was probably no other idea which exercised so great an influence on economic theory and practice during the first half of the nineteenth century, and certainly no other which aroused such impassioned attacks and defences. And it was destined to exercise considerable influence even outside the strictly economic sphere: for example, it was an important factor in the early development of Darwinism.[2] The "stimulus" was strong from the beginning, and its strength is by no means exhausted to-day.

How did it come about that the Malthusian theory, which had few pretensions to scientific profundity and was shot through and through with fallacies, was able to exercise this enormous influence? One of the main reasons was that the *actual phenomenon* which Malthus described and which he tried to account for—the widespread poverty and pauperism among the working people—was a *real* phenomenon which could not be ignored and which was crying out for an explanation. Malthus was "right, in his way," said Engels, "in asserting that there are always more people on hand than can be maintained from the available means of subsistence"[3]—although the pressure of population was really against the *means of employment* rather than against the means of subsistence. Malthus's

[1] Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, English edn. (Lawrence and Wishart), p. 170.

[2] See Part Four below.

[3] Below, p. 74.

critics might attempt to prove his principle of population to be wrong, but they could not "argue away the facts which led Malthus to his principle".[1] Thus even apart from all questions of what Marx called "party interest",[2] there was a presumption in favour of Malthus's explanation of the facts until a better one had been put forward.

"Party interest", however, played an important role in securing the wide acceptance of the theory in ruling class circles. An explanation of human misery in terms of an "eternal law of nature", such as Malthus's principle of population, has an obvious appeal for political reactionaries, since it diverts attention from the part played in the creation of this misery by class exploitation in general and by particular systems of class exploitation such as capitalism.[3] One cannot do away with an "eternal law of nature". If it is nature and not human society which is responsible for the misery, all one can do, at the very best, is to mitigate some of the effects of this "eternal law" and suffer the remainder with a good grace.

To Marx and Engels, interested as they were in discovering the basic laws of social change, and in particular the "law of motion" of bourgeois society, any explanation of social phenomena such as overpopulation under capitalism in terms of an "eternal law" was bound to appear superficial and inadequate. This was the basis of their main *general* criticism of Malthus's theory of population. As early as 1847, in his first economic work, Marx attacked the tendency of economists to "represent the bourgeois relations of production as eternal categories", and criticised Ricardo for applying the specifically bourgeois conception of rent to "the landed property of all ages and all countries".[4] The Marxist position was stated by Engels in a letter to Lange of 29 March, 1865:

> "To us so-called 'economic laws' are not eternal laws of nature but historic laws which arise and disappear; and the code of modern political economy, in so far as it has been drawn up with proper objectivity by the economists, is to us simply a summary of the laws and conditions under which

[1] Below, p. 60. [2] Below, p. 83
[3] Cf. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 539, footnote.
[4] *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Lawrence and Wishart edn.), p. 135.

> alone modern bourgeois society can exist—in short the conditions of its production and exchange expressed in an abstract and summary way. To us also, therefore, none of these laws, in so far as it expresses *purely bourgeois conditions*, is older than modern bourgeois society; those which have hitherto been more or less valid throughout all history only express just those relations which are common to the conditions of all society based on class rule and class exploitation. To the former belongs the so-called law of Ricardo, which is valid neither for feudal serfdom nor ancient slavery; to the latter belongs what is tenable in the so-called Malthusian theory."[1]

And even in the case of those laws and conditions which have had a limited validity throughout the whole history of class society, Marx and Engels maintained that the most interesting and important thing about them was the different ways in which they operated in different types of class society. Thus Marx and Engels denied that "the law of population is the same at all times and at all places". On the contrary, they maintained, "every stage of development has its own law of population".[2]

It was not enough, of course, merely to assert this—it had to be *proved*. Marx and Engels do not seem to have made any direct attempt to formulate the laws of population appropriate to earlier forms of class society; had they done so, they would probably have framed these laws in terms of the particular form of pressure of the direct producers against the "means of employment" which was generated by each of these types of society. They considered that the most important job they had to do was to formulate the actual law of population peculiar to the present, bourgeois stage of development, and to demonstrate that this new, *specific* law fitted the contemporary facts

[1] Below, p. 81. Cf. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, p. 8: "One of the distinguishing features of political economy is that its laws, unlike those of natural science, are impermanent, that they, or at least the majority of them, operate for a definite historical period, after which they give place to new laws." It should be noted, however, that Stalin in this work (for reasons which lie outside the scope of the present discussion) lays more emphasis on the economic laws which are common to all forms of society than the founders of Marxism were accustomed to do.

[2] *Capital*, Vol. I, p. xxix (author's preface to the 2nd edn.).

better than the old, "*eternal*" law which Malthus had put forward. Marx's main formulation of the law is reproduced below,[1] and a brief summary—which necessarily does much less than justice to the original—is all that is required here.

To understand the reason for the emergence of "relative surplus-population" under capitalism, says Marx, one must consider the influence of the *growth of capital* upon the lot of the labouring class. And here the most important factor is the composition of capital and the changes it undergoes in the course of the accumulation process. As accumulation proceeds, the value of the means of production (constant capital) tends to rise relatively to the sum total of wages (variable capital). "The accumulation of capital", says Marx, ". . . is effected . . . under a progressive qualitative change in its composition, under a constant increase of its constant, at the expense of its variable constituent." This relative diminution of the variable part of capital proceeds simultaneously with the progress of accumulation and the concentration of capital that accompanies it. Now "the demand for labour is determined not by the amount of capital as a whole, but by its variable constituent alone", so that the demand for labour "falls relatively to the magnitude of the total capital, and at an accelerated rate, as this magnitude increases". Although the demand for labour increases absolutely as the total capital increases, it does so "in a constantly diminishing proportion". Thus "it is capitalistic accumulation itself that constantly produces, and produces in the direct ratio of its own energy and extent, a relatively redundant population of labourers, i.e. a population of greater extent than suffices for the average needs of the self-expansion of capital, and therefore a surplus-population." And after discussing briefly the various ways in which these changes may work themselves out, Marx sums the matter up as follows:

> "The labouring population therefore produces, along with the accumulation of capital produced by it, the means by which itself is made relatively superfluous, is turned into a relative surplus-population; and it does this to an always

[1] Part Two, item (viii).

> increasing extent. This is a law of population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production; and in fact every specific historic mode of production has its own special laws of population, historically valid within its limits alone. An abstract law of population exists for plants and animals only, and only in so far as man has not interfered with them."[1]

It is on the basis of this central thesis that Marx goes on to discuss in greater detail, and with a wealth of historical illustration, the laws of the expansion and contraction of the "industrial reserve army" and the different forms which "relative surplus-population" assumes in modern society. It was in this way that Marx and Engels completed their criticism of Malthus's law of population—by formulating a new law capable of replacing it.

(*c*) *The "Law of Diminishing Returns"*

As mentioned above, it was not long before the so-called "law of diminishing returns" was brought in as the main theoretical foundation for the idea that food production cannot increase as fast as population. Since many of the modern "neo-Malthusians" still rely to a greater or lesser extent upon this "law", something should be said here about the Marxist attitude towards it.

In our own times, this "law" is usually formulated in a very general and abstract manner, in terms of the so-called "factors of production"—i.e. land, labour and capital. If we suppose that one "factor" or group of "factors" is held constant, and that to it is applied another "factor" or group of "factors" in successive equal amounts, then, it is said, after a certain point the successive amounts of output added will diminish. But the law was originally formulated with *land* as the "fixed factor" and labour and capital as the "variable factors", and it is this application of it which is important in the present connection. Each additional investment of labour and capital in land, it is argued, must necessarily produce after a point not a corresponding but a diminishing quantity of product. It is this

[1] The quotations in this paragraph will be found reproduced below, pp. 85–8.

"universal" and "natural" feature of agriculture which is held to be largely responsible for the alleged "overpopulation" which exists in many areas of the world.

In an interesting footnote in *Capital*, referring to the work of the great chemist Liebig, Marx gives a short history of this "law":

> "To have developed from the point of view of natural science, the negative, i.e. destructive side of modern agriculture, is one of Liebig's immortal merits. . . . It is, however, to be regretted that he ventures on such haphazard assertions as the following: 'By greater pulverising and more frequent ploughing, the circulation of air in the interior of porous soil is aided, and the surface exposed to the action of the atmosphere is increased and renewed; but it is easily seen that the increased yield of the land cannot be proportional to the labour spent on that land, but increases in a much smaller proportion. This law', adds Liebig, 'was first enunciated by John Stuart Mill in his *Principles of Political Economy*, Vol. I, p. 17, as follows: "That the produce of land increases, *cæteris paribus*, in a diminishing ratio to the increase of the labourers employed . . . is the universal law of agricultural industry." This is very remarkable, since Mill was ignorant of the reason for this law.' . . . Apart from Liebig's wrong interpretation of the word 'labour', by which word he understands something quite different from what political economy does, it is, in any case, 'very remarkable' that he should make Mr. John Stuart Mill the first propounder of a theory which was first published by James Anderson in A. Smith's days, and was repeated in various works down to the beginning of the nineteenth century; a theory which Malthus, that master in plagiarism (the whole of his population theory is a shameless plagiarism), appropriated to himself in 1815; which West developed at the same time as, and independently of, Anderson; which in the year 1817 was connected by Ricardo with the general theory of value, then made the round of the world as Ricardo's theory, and in 1820 was vulgarised by James Mill, the father of John Stuart Mill; and which, finally, was reproduced by John Stuart Mill

and others, as a dogma already quite common-place and known to every school-boy."[1]

It was in this "law of diminishing returns", as Marx noted eleswhere, that "Malthus found the real ground for his theory of population and . . . his pupils now seek their final sheet anchor".[2] Marx and Engels always held this "law" in the greatest contempt. "The area of land is limited—that is perfectly true", said Engels. "But the labour power to be employed on this area increases together with the population; and even if we assume that the increase of output associated with this increase of labour is not always proportionate to the latter, there still remains a third element—which the economists, however, never consider as important—namely, science, the progress of which is just as limitless and at least as rapid as that of population."[3]

Lenin, in his book on *The Agrarian Question and the "Critics of Marx"*, puts forward a detailed criticism of the "law of diminishing returns". He is attacking a writer called Bulgakov, who "makes the 'law of diminishing returns' the corner-stone of his 'theory of agrarian development' ", and uses it as the basis for an "absurd attempt to revive Malthusianism". Bulgakov implies that technical progress in agriculture should be regarded as a "temporary" tendency, whereas the "law of diminishing returns" should be regarded as possessing "universal significance"—an argument which leads Lenin to remark that "this is the same as saying that the stopping of trains at stations represents the universal law of steam transport, while the motion of trains between stations is a temporary tendency which paralyses the operation of the universal law of stopping". The "law of diminishing returns", says Lenin,

> "does not apply at all to cases in which technique is progressing and methods of production are changing; it has only an extremely relative and restricted application to cases in which technique remains unchanged. That is why neither Marx nor the Marxists refer to this 'law', and why so much

[1] *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 514–15, footnote.

[2] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 27.

[3] Below, p. 63.

noise about it is made only by representatives of bourgeois science like Brentano, who are quite unable to rid themselves of the prejudices of the old political economy, with its abstract eternal and natural laws."[1]

The "law of diminishing returns", therefore, has to be rejected, and with its rejection the Malthusian principle of population is left without any theoretical basis.

The rejection of this "law" also meant that the "Ricardian" theory of rent, which was originally founded upon it, required substantial amendment. The economists who first developed this theory (with the exception of Anderson) were under what Marx called a "primitive misconception of differential rent, . . . to the effect that it necessarily requires a progress toward worse and worse soil, or an ever decreasing productivity of agriculture".[2] In actual fact, Marx argued, this was not so:

> "The law of rent, as laid down by Ricardo in its simplest form, apart from its application, does not assume the diminishing fertility of the soil but (*in spite of the fact that the general fertility of the soil increases as society develops*) only presupposes *different* degrees of fertility in different pieces of land, or different results from the successive application of capital to the same land."[3]

It was on this basis that Marx developed his own theory of differential rent. "The main point in all this", he wrote to Engels in an early letter sketching out his theory, "remains to square the law of rent with the progress of the fertility of agriculture in general; this is the only way in which the historical facts can be explained and the only way of superseding Malthus' theory of the deterioration, not merely of the labour force but of the land."[4]

[1] The quotations in this paragraph are taken from Vol. XII of the *Selected Works* of Lenin (English edn.), pp. 51–8.

[2] *Capital*, Vol. III (Kerr edn.), p. 772.

[3] *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 29–30. See also below, pp. 117–18.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

(d) The Theory of Value and Surplus Value

One of the most important general charges which Marx and Engels made against Malthus was that when dealing with economic theory he was almost exclusively concerned with the superficial aspects of market phenomena, and not at all interested in or even aware of the real social relationships lying behind them. This concern with appearances only, which marked Malthus off as a "vulgar" economist *par excellence*, was particularly evident in his theory of value and profit.

There are two alternative ways of looking at economic phenomena. First, you can "hold fast to the appearance", and accept the explanations of these phenomena given by the capitalists themselves as the last word. If you ask a business man how the value of his commodity is determined, he will probably reply that it is determined by "what the market will bear" —i.e. by what the consumers are prepared to pay. And if you ask him how this value is made up, he will probably answer to the effect that it includes compensation for the labour and raw materials he has purchased, and for the depreciation of his buildings and machinery, *plus* an "addition" of profit at so much per cent. on the total capital he has laid out. Profit thus appears as something which is simply "added on" to the price of the finished commodity by the capitalist.

Or, second, you can try to go behind these appearances and penetrate to the real social relationships which ultimately determine them. The value of a commodity then appears, not as the expression of a relation between consumers and finished goods, but rather as the expression of a relationship between men as producers. And profit appears, not as something which is "added on" by the capitalist, but rather as something which is, as it were, secreted in the process of production by virtue of the particular social relationship existing between wage labourers and capitalists.

In the work of Adam Smith, these two ways of looking at economic phenomena, the superficial and the profound, are to be found side by side. In that of Ricardo, the profound predominates, and it was precisely for this reason that the

Ricardian system, in spite of its many defects, was able to serve as the foundation for the work of the so-called "Ricardian socialists", and, later, for that of Marx. In Malthus, however, the superficial predominates, and it was only natural that Marx and Engels should have made this aspect of his work a special target for criticism.

The value of a commodity, Malthus argued, ought to be "measured", not by the quantity of labour required to produce it (as Ricardo and Marx maintained), but rather by the quantity of labour which it would "command" on the market —i.e. by the quantity of labour which the amount of money obtainable for the commodity would hire at the current wage rate. Malthus was led to this theory of value by his consideration of an important economic phenomenon peculiar to capitalist society. It is a condition of the production and reproduction of a commodity under capitalism that the amount of labour which it will command should be greater than the amount of labour incorporated in it, for the amount of profit received by the capitalist depends upon the size of this excess. For example, if a capitalist hires ten men for a day to produce a commodity, he will clearly not be prepared to repeat the process unless the price he gets for the commodity is sufficient to enable him to hire *more than* ten days' labour. His aim is not to produce commodities, but to produce profit; and "the excess quantity of living labour for which the commodity is exchanged constitutes the source of profit".[1] The sole merit of Malthus's work on value and profit theory, Marx argues, is the emphasis which he lays on this point. And this merit is cancelled out again immediately by reason of the fact that when he proceeds to formulate his theory of value he "confuses the utilisation of money or commodities as capital, and consequently their *value* in their specific function as capital, with the *value* of the commodities as such".[2] In other words, having correctly observed that "when commodities or money . . . are exchanged in the form of capital for living labour, they are always exchanged for a greater quantity of labour than is contained in them",[3] he incorrectly concludes from this that *all* purchasers of *all* commodities, when paying for them "at their

[1] Below, p. 128. [2] Below, p. 128. [3] Below, p. 129.

value", give in exchange for them a greater quantity of labour than is contained in them (or "a value which contains a greater quantity of labour, which amounts to the same thing").[1] This is the origin of Malthus's theory that the value of a commodity ought to be "measured" by the quantity of labour which it will exchange for or command, and not by the quantity of labour contained in it.

This superficial theory of value leads Malthus to a superficial —and apologetic—theory of profit. What Malthus really does in this analysis, as Marx points out, is to transform all buyers into wage labourers, making them return to the capitalist more labour than is contained in the commodities; whereas in reality—

> "his profit is actually derived from the fact that, having *paid* for only a part of the labour contained in the commodities, he *sells all* the labour contained in them. . . . What Malthus does not understand is the difference between the sum total of labour contained in a commodity and the quantity of paid labour contained in it. It is precisely this difference which constitutes the source of profit."[2]

Marx, by emphasising this difference between the paid and unpaid labour contained in a commodity, and by making his important distinction between labour and labour power, was able to show that surplus value was in fact derived from the sale of the commodity *at its value* (that is, for a quantity of labour equal to that contained in it). Malthus, on the other hand, not understanding this—and probably not wishing to understand it—was led directly to "the vulgar idea of profit as originating upon alienation, deriving surplus value from the fact that the seller sells the commodity *above* its value (that is, for more labour time than is contained in it)".[3] What Malthus's theory actually comes down to, said Marx, is this:

> "The value of a commodity consists in the value which the buyer pays for it, and this value is equal to the equivalent (value) of the commodity plus an excess over and above this

[1] Below, p. 134. [2] Below, p. 133.

[3] Below, p. 133.

value, surplus value. Thus we arrive at the vulgar concept. Profit arises from the fact that a commodity *is sold dearer than it is bought.* The buyer buys it for a greater quantity of labour, or embodied labour, than it has cost the seller."[1]

To this theory of profit it seems appropriate to apply a comment which Marx later applies to Malthus's concept of value —that it is "the completely commonplace way of looking at the matter which we meet with in everyday life", the concept "held by the Philistine who is steeped in competition and knows nothing except its outward show".[2]

(e) *The Theory of Capitalist Crises*

Malthus's theory of value, Marx noted, "is curiously in accord with his aim—to act as an apologist for the state of affairs in contemporary England, with its landlordism, 'State and Church', retired officials, tax collectors, tithes, national debt, stock exchange jobbers, law-court officials, parsons and hangers on".[3] For Malthus's theory of value, as we have just seen, led him to regard profit as "originating upon alienation", and from this it was only a short step to Malthus's famous apology for "unproductive consumers" and his explanation of capitalist crises in terms of a deficiency of effective demand.

If profit arises only in the way described by Malthus, it is extremely difficult to see how this profit is actually going to be realised by the capitalists. The demand of the working class alone is clearly not sufficient to enable the capitalists to realise a profit, since working class demand is limited to the wages which the capitalists pay to the workers, and the capitalists will obviously expect to get back something over and above these wages. Consequently, as Marx says,

"a demand other than that of the workers, buyers other than the workers themselves, are necessary, or there would be no profit. Where are they going to come from? If they are themselves capitalists, themselves sellers, then we have . . . [a]

[1] Below, p. 134. [2] Below, pp. 148–9.

[3] Below, p. 157.

> mutual swindling within the capitalist class—each nominally raises the price of the commodity which he sells to the other, and each gains as seller what he loses as buyer. Thus [according to Malthus] *it is necessary to have buyers who are not sellers*, in order that the capitalist [can] realise his profit and sell the commodities 'at their value'. Hence the necessity for landowners, retired officials, holders of sinecures, parsons, etc., not forgetting their lackeys and other hangers-on."[1]

This is the theoretical basis for Malthus's plea for the greatest possible increase in the "unproductive classes", and his answer to the accusation by the Ricardians (already mentioned above) that these classes (and in particular the landlords) no longer performed any useful function in a capitalist society.

If capitalism is going to expand, said Malthus, then the class of "unproductive consumers" must expand with it if crises are to be avoided, for crises are caused by a deficiency of effective demand which is inherent in the capitalist system. The root cause of crises, according to Malthus, was a contradiction *in the sphere of exchange*, which tended (if accumulation were too rapid) to prevent the amount of purchasing power distributed to consumers being sufficient to buy the commodities produced at prices which would give the capitalists a reasonable profit.

Malthus, as we have seen, was not concerned to disguise the contradictions of bourgeois production, but rather to emphasise them—"on the one hand", as Marx said, "in order to demonstrate that the poverty of the working classes is necessary . . ., and on the other hand in order to demonstrate to the capitalists that a well-fed tribe of Church-and-State servants is indispensable for the creation of an adequate demand for their commodities".[2] And Marx was quite prepared to give Malthus credit for emphasising these contradictions—but only as against those of his contemporaries who denied their existence. Malthus's theory of crises, like that of Sismondi (from whom much of it was probably borrowed),[3] was essentially an "underconsumption" theory—i.e. a theory which puts forward a dis-

[1] Below, p. 135. [2] Below, p. 164.

[3] Cf. below, p. 158 ff.

crepancy between production and consumption as the basic cause of crises. The Marxist theory of crises, on the other hand, points out—

> "that it is precisely in the periods which precede crises that the workers' consumption rises,[1] that underconsumption (to which crises are alleged to be due) existed under the most diverse economic systems, whereas crises are the distinguishing feature only of one economic system—the capitalist system.[2] This theory attributes crises to another contradiction, namely, the contradiction between the social character of production (socialized by capitalism) and the private, individual mode of appropriation.[3] . . . The two theories of crises of which we are speaking give totally different explanations of them. The first theory attributes crises to the contradiction between production and consumption by the working class; the second attributes them to the contradiction between the social character of production and the private character of appropriation. Consequently, the former sees the root of the phenomenon *outside of* production . . .; the latter sees it precisely in the conditions of production. To put it more briefly, the former attributes crises to underconsumption . . ., the latter attributes it to anarchy of production. Thus, while both theories attribute crises to a *contradiction* inherent in the economic system itself, they differ entirely on the point of the nature of this contradiction."[4]

This does not mean, however, that the Marxist theory denies that the contradiction between production and consumption, and the phenomenon of underconsumption, actually exist. It fully recognises this fact, as Lenin points out,

> "but puts it in its proper, subordinate, place as a fact that relates only to one of the departments of capitalist production taken as a whole. It teaches that this fact cannot explain

[1] Cf. *Capital*, Vol. II (Kerr edn.), pp. 475–6.

[2] Cf. Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Lawrence and Wishart edn.), p. 314.

[3] Cf. *ibid.*, Part III, Ch. II.

[4] Lenin, *A Characterization of Economic Romanticism*, English edn. (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow), pp. 63–4.

crises, which are called forth by another, more profound, the fundamental contradiction in the present economic system, namely, the contradiction between the social character of production and the private character of appropriation."[1]

Nor does it mean that the Marxist theory denies that it is the lack of demand for commodities which makes crises *possible*. But the question is:

"Does pointing to this condition which makes crises possible mean explaining the cause of crises? Did not Ephrucy[2] understand the difference between pointing to the possibility of a phenomenon and explaining its inevitability? Sismondi says: crises are possible because the manufacturer does not know the demand; they are inevitable because under the capitalist mode of production there can be no balance between production and consumption (i.e. the product cannot be realized). Engels says: crises are possible, because the manufacturer does not know the demand; they are inevitable, but not by any means because the product cannot be realized in general. This is not so: the product can be realized. Crises are inevitable because the collective character of production comes into conflict with the individual character of appropriation."[3]

What it *does* mean, however, is that crises are in fact inseparable from capitalism, and will continue to break out so long as capitalism exists. "If capitalism could adapt production", writes Stalin,

"not to the obtaining of the utmost profit, but to the systematic improvement of the material conditions of the masses of the people, and if it could turn profits not to the satisfaction of the whims of the parasitic classes, not to perfecting the methods of exploitation, not to the export of capital, but

[1] Lenin, *A Characterization of Economic Romanticism*, English edn. (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow) pp. 64–5.

[2] B. Ephrucy, a Russian writer, had written in an article on Sismondi that "on the question of the causes of crises . . ., we have every right to regard Sismondi as the founder of those views which were subsequently developed more consistently and more clearly"—i.e. of the Marxist theory.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 68–9.

to the systematic improvement of the material conditions of the workers and peasants, there would be no crises. But then capitalism would not be capitalism. To abolish crises it is necessary to abolish capitalism."[1]

[1] Stalin, *Report to the Sixteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U. (B.)*, English edn. (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow), pp. 18–19. Cf. Stalin's treatment of the "basic economic laws" of capitalism and socialism in his *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, pp. 42–6.

(iii) MALTHUS TO-DAY

(*a*) *The Theory of Population*

IN our own times, new doctrines concerning "the perfectibility of man and of society", scientific rather than utopian in character, have come to guide the practical day-to-day activities of large sections of mankind. Inspired by Marxism, tremendous social revolutions have occurred in the Soviet Union, China and the People's Democracies—revolutions in which "everything, not this or that thing, but literally everything", has been soaked. In those countries where capitalism still holds sway, those who fear radical social change are again facing a challenge, but a challenge far stronger than anything of which their predecessors in Malthus's time ever dreamed. Once again it is necessary for them to fight back not only on the physical plane, but also in the realm of ideas. And to their aid, faithful as always, has come the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus. The main theoretical weapons which Malthus used against the progressive classes of his own time are being taken from the armoury of reaction, dusted and polished, and used against the progressive classes of to-day.

The Malthusian theory of population, for example, in various modernised forms, is very much in vogue to-day, particularly in the United States. The basic idea of the modern Malthusians is essentially the same as that of Malthus himself—that population tends to increase faster than the means of subsistence. Malthus's prophecy that world population would eventually outstrip world food supplies, they argue, may shortly be fulfilled. "Never before, in history", says William Vogt in his *Road to Survival*, "have so many hundreds of millions teetered at the edge of the precipice."[1] "There are too many people in the world", says the same author elsewhere in the book, "for its limited resources to provide a high standard of living."[2] Such ideas as these, it is evident, are useful weapons against those who feel that if the world is in fact teetering at the edge of a precipice to-day it is for a very different reason, and who

[1] *Road to Survival* (English edn., 1949), p. 265. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

are striving to bring about those social and economic conditions in which alone a high standard of living for everyone can eventually be guaranteed.

Some of the modern Malthusians put the principle of population to uses which might have shocked even Malthus himself. In the hands of writers like Vogt, Malthusianism becomes an important weapon in the "cold war". For example, we are told of India that "in all the world there is probably no region of greater misery, and almost certainly none with less hope";[1] of China that she "quite literally *cannot feed more people*";[2] and of the Soviet Union that she is "certainly overpopulated; there is little possibility that she can raise her people to our [i.e. the American] status".[3] It comes as no surprise, therefore, that we should then also be told that "the greatest potential threat to world peace" comes from certain of the "overpopulated" countries—and in particular, of course, from the Soviet Union. "The major threat in Asia", Vogt writes, ". . . is mounting population pressure in the Soviet Union."[4] The Malthusian principle can be used, in addition, to discourage attempts to assist these "overpopulated" countries. Where it finds "overpopulation", says Vogt, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations should include contraception programmes in its conservation and food-production programmes, and "should not ship food to keep alive ten million Indians and Chinese this year, so that fifty million may die five years hence."[5] And above all, the principle can be used as a justification for American "leadership" of the Western world. "The British people", says Vogt in a curious passage,

> "stimulated by the presence of American G.Is., have cast longing eyes toward the American standard of living. The Socialist government, counting on 'economic' and 'political' prestidigitation that hung in the air without any base on the land, promised to lift the United Kingdom by its own bootstraps, without recognizing that the bootstraps had been worn to the breaking point. Unless we [i.e. America] are

[1] *Road to Survival* (English edn., 1949), p. 227.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 224.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 229.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 281–2. Cf. pp. 224–5: "The greatest tragedy that China could suffer, at the present time, would be a reduction in her death rate."

willing to place fifty million British feet beneath our dining-room table we may well see famine once more stalking the streets of London. And hand in hand with famine will walk the shade of that clear-sighted English clergyman, Thomas Robert Malthus."[1]

Vogt is a "popular" writer, whose aim is to shock by the brutality of his sentiments. But there are other "neo-Malthusians", more subtle and sophisticated and therefore more dangerous, who use Malthus's doctrine in order to reveal a so-called "dilemma of science". Professor A. V. Hill, for example, in his presidential address to the British Association in 1952, chose to speak on this theme. The application of scientific methods to combat diseases, to improve rural and industrial health, and to increase the supply of medical equipment and services, he said, must necessarily increase the pressure of population upon the world's food resources. Hence science is placed in the following dilemma:

"Had it been possible to foresee the enormous success of this application, would humane people have agreed that it could better have been held back, to keep in step with other parallel progress, so that development could be planned and orderly? Some might say yes, taking the purely biological view that if men will breed like rabbits they must be allowed to die like rabbits, until gradually improving education and the demand for a higher standard of life teach them better. Most people would still say no. But suppose it were certain now that the pressure of increasing population, uncontrolled by disease, would lead not only to widespread exhaustion of the soil and of other capital resources but also to continuing and increasing international tension and disorder, making it hard for civilization itself to survive: Would the majority of humane and reasonable people then change their minds? If ethical principles deny our right to do evil in order that good may come, are we justified in doing good when the foreseeable consequence is evil? . . ."[2]

[1] *Road to Survival* (English edn., 1949), pp. 71–2.

[2] Quoted by J. D. Bernal in *The Modern Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 45.

Professor Hill assumes that Malthus's doctrine is essentially true—that population "naturally" increases faster than the supply of food, and that war and famine and disease (the Malthusian "checks") are therefore the inevitable lot of mankind. He is thus able to transform into a dilemma of science something which is in fact a dilemma of the capitalist system.

The modern Malthusians, however, are hard put to it to make convincing use of some of Malthus's original arguments. In particular, the basic principle can no longer be plausibly presented as if it were *purely* a "natural" law which it is quite impossible for man to circumvent. For example, it has become perfectly obvious in the course of the last century and a half that in so far as certain areas of land have declined in fertility this has very largely been the fault not of nature but of man himself—or, rather, of systems of land ownership and forms of social organisation based on exploitation which encourage the squandering of natural resources. And it is also becoming fairly widely known "first, that of the 50 per cent. of the globe's soil which can be cultivated, only 10 per cent. is being used; and second, that production per acre in most of the world could be greatly increased by rational agricultural practices".[1] Thus it is becoming increasingly difficult for the "neo-Malthusians" to deny that political and economic factors are at least *relevant* to the question of the relation between population and food supplies. What has to be denied by the modern Malthusians, therefore, is that political and economic factors are *fundamental*, and that in so far as the relation between population and food supplies does at the moment constitute a real problem in certain countries, it cannot be effectively solved except *on the basis* of radical political and economic changes. Some modern Malthusians therefore assert that man has been "tricked" (presumably by socialists) into "seeking political and/or economic solutions for problems that are political, economic, social, geographic, psychological, genetic, physiological, etc."[2] To talk in such terms as these, of course, is to disguise the primary causes of the trouble by giving them equal status with the secondary causes. As Lenin once remarked, "critical flirtation

[1] J. de Castro, *Geography of Hunger*, p. 25.
[2] *Road to Survival*, p. 53.

with Malthusianism inevitably results in a descent to the most vulgar bourgeois apologetics".[1]

(*b*) *Economic Theory in General*

There is obviously *some* poverty and distress which cannot possibly be associated, even by the most extreme of the "neo-Malthusians", with any "pressure of population against the means of subsistence". The working people of capitalist countries have not, in general, begun to find themselves conspicuously redundant in relation to the existing means of subsistence. Indeed, it is the bogey of underpopulation, rather than that of overpopulation, which is generally raised up before them nowadays. But they have periodically found themselves redundant in relation to the existing *means of employment.* Malthus himself once wrote that "the difficulty of procuring the means of subsistence" is occasioned "partly by the necessary state of the soil, and partly by a premature check to the demand for produce and labour".[2] In the great majority of cases it is this "premature check" which is the really important phenomenon. Under capitalism, the Malthusian pressure of population against the means of subsistence is largely a myth, whereas the periodical pressure of working people against the means of employment is a grim reality.

Malthus, as we have seen, tried to explain the latter form of redundancy in terms of an overall deficiency of "effective demand", and Ricardo replied by denying the very possibility of a "general glut". Subsequent orthodox economists continued in effect to deny this possibility for almost a century—with much less excuse than Ricardo—until the great depression of the early nineteen-thirties made it urgently necessary for them to bring their theory a little more closely into touch with reality.

What they needed was a new economic theory which, while no longer denying the theoretical possibility of periodical and chronic unemployment, would explain it in such terms as to suggest that it could be done away with *within the capitalist social structure* if the appropriate measures were taken by the government. The socialist challenge could no longer be effectively

[1] *Selected Works*, Vol. XII, p. 59.

[2] *Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1824), Vol. VI, p. 316.

met by denying the theoretical possibility of slumps or by blaming them on the workers. It could only be met by demonstrating that the economic advantages of socialism could in fact be obtained under capitalism, provided the latter was "regulated" or "controlled" in the right way. The new "General Theory" put forward by Keynes in 1936 was eventually found to be eminently suitable for these purposes. This theory, which was essentially intended as a means for saving monopoly capitalism from economic ruin, was subsequently presented to the working class movement as a means for achieving its historic demands. Reformism in the labour movement in the West to-day is based almost entirely on the economic theory of Keynes.

Keynes greatly admired Malthus. The *Essay on Population* is described by Keynes as "profoundly in the English tradition of humane science—. . . a tradition marked by a love of truth and a most noble lucidity, by a prosaic sanity free from sentiment or metaphysic, and by an immense disinterestedness and public spirit".[1] And the Malthusian doctrine of effective demand came in for especial praise from Keynes. "If only Malthus, instead of Ricardo", says Keynes, referring to this doctrine, "had been the parent stem from which nineteenth-century economics proceeded, what a much wiser and richer place the world would be to-day!"[2] Again, in the *General Theory*, Keynes remarks that "in the later phase of Malthus the notion of the insufficiency of effective demand takes a definite place as a scientific explanation of unemployment".[3] And there is a great deal more in this panegyrical strain, contrasting strangely with the contempt which Keynes often expressed for Marx.

There is little doubt that Keynes owed much to Malthus's general approach to the problems of unemployment and crisis. This is how Keynes himself described Malthus's basic approach to economic phenomena, comparing it with that of Ricardo:

> "According to Malthus's good common-sense notion prices and profits are primarily determined by something which he

[1] *Essays in Biography*, p. 120. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

[3] *General Theory*, p. 362.

described, though none too clearly, as 'effective demand'. Ricardo favoured a much more rigid approach, went behind 'effective demand' to the underlying conditions of money on the one hand and real costs and the real division of the product on the other hand, conceived these fundamental factors as automatically working themselves out in a unique and unequivocal way, and looked on Malthus's method as very superficial. . . . Malthus, by taking up the tale much nearer its conclusion, had a firmer hold on what may be expected to happen in the real world."[1]

This statement was intended, of course, as pro-Malthus propaganda, but if the emotive language is ignored it will be found to reveal very clearly the completely superficial character of Malthus's—and by implication Keynes's—approach to economic problems. The main task of political economy, surely, is to seek for the *underlying causes* of the phenomena which we observe on the market. To say nothing more than that prices and profits are determined by "effective demand" is, as Ricardo specifically recognised, to say nothing at all. It is necessary to go behind "effective demand" to the real social relationships which ultimately determine these market phenomena. If we "take up the tale much nearer its conclusion" we stand a good chance of missing its beginning and thereby losing the whole point of it. If we say nothing at all about these ultimate determining forces, our theory may well turn out to be "good common-sense" from the bourgeois point of view. But the "good common-sense" of the business man is not necessarily—or indeed usually—a reliable guide to the understanding of the *basic causes* of economic phenomena. The business man "holds fast to the appearance, and takes it for the last word"—and calls the result "good common-sense". Why, then, as Marx asked, the necessity for any *science* at all?[2]

Keynes always claimed Malthus as "the first of the Cambridge economists",[3] and it is at any rate true that Keynes himself followed in the Malthusian tradition in economic

[1] *Essays in Biography*, pp. 122–3.

[2] *Letters to Kugelmann* (Lawrence and Wishart edn.), p. 74.

[3] *Essays in Biography*, pp. 144–5.

theory. That tradition, as we have seen, expressed itself in two main ways—first, in a superficial approach to the problem of value and surplus value which abstracted from real social relationships; and second (and dependent upon this), an explanation of capitalist crises in terms of a subordinate contradiction in the sphere of exchange rather than in terms of the basic contradiction in the sphere of capitalist production. In the first of these fields, Keynes seems to have seen nothing seriously wrong with the orthodox theories of value and distribution, which, as he put it, come into their own again if and when the "central controls" secure full employment.[1] And in the second field, Keynes was equally a Malthusian—so much so, indeed, that many of the criticisms which Marx and Lenin made of the theories of crises put forward by Malthus and Sismondi can be applied with little modification to the theories of Keynes. Starting off from this general approach, then, it is not surprising that Keynes, like Malthus, should eventually have decided that the main economic evils of capitalism could be done away with (by bolstering up "effective demand", etc.) without doing away with capitalism itself.

(*c*) *Malthus and Imperialism*

The theories of Malthus, now as always, are serving as weapons in the hands of people who, whether they are aware of it or not, are hindering the progress of mankind towards a fuller and more abundant life. If the social struggles of the early nineteenth century were essentially summed up in the controversy between Malthus and Ricardo, those of our own times are perhaps not unfairly summed up in that between Malthusians and Marxists. For this reason, it is thought that the present volume, which sets out the main passages in which Marx and Engels criticised Malthus's theories, may serve a useful purpose.

We should not expect, of course, that the detailed criticisms of Malthus made by Marx and Engels can all be automatically and mechanically applied to the doctrines of his present-day admirers and successors. A surprising number of them *can* be

[1] *General Theory*, pp. 378–9.

so applied: what is remarkable here, as in most other aspects of the work of Marx and Engels, is the startling *modernity* of their approach. But what the selections provide which is really useful to the working class movement of to-day is a sustained application of *the Marxist method* to the criticism of certain doctrines which, in different forms and disguises, have been serving the cause of reaction for a century and a half and are still faithfully serving it to-day.

These doctrines have to-day become an important part of the ideological stock-in-trade of imperialism in its present state of crisis. The imperialist countries are facing economic stagnation at home and the revolt of millions of people in the colonial territories abroad, while all the time the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies are growing from strength to strength. In this desperate situation imperialism must seek for allies: it must try to persuade wide sections of the people, if not to join actively in its attempts at repression, at least to adopt a passive attitude towards them. And it has found that Malthusian doctrines, in the various forms which they assume to-day, are an ideal means of persuasion.

Malthus has all the answers the imperialists need. Do you think there is any hope for the future of humanity? Malthus will tell you (through the mouth of Sir Charles Darwin) that "in the very long run of a million years the general course of human history is most of the time likely to be what it has been for most of the past time, a continual pressure of population on its means of subsistence, with a margin of the population unable to survive".[1] Do you think that the colonial territories, if they manage to emancipate themselves from imperialist rule, will be able to improve their standard of living? Malthus will tell you, through the mouths of his modern followers, that there is no possible hope of their doing this—so they might just as well remain dependent. Do you think there is any hope for India, one of the customary text-book examples of an "over-populated" country? The "neo-Malthusians" will tell you that there is no hope at all—any increase in food production would soon be followed by a corresponding increase in India's "teeming millions". And if you suggest that two centuries of British

[1] Quoted by J. D. Bernal in *The Modern Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 48–9.

rule in India may have had something to do with the present situation, and that experience in the West does not seem to bear out the theory that a rise in the standard of living necessarily causes a corresponding rise in the birth-rate, the "neo-Malthusians" will reply to the effect that the "law of population" is an "eternal" law, a "natural" law, and therefore cannot possibly be abrogated. Suppose, finally, that you begin to suspect that the "neo-Malthusians" may be wrong, and look around you at what is going on in the Soviet Union, where the great plans for the increase of food production are making a mockery of the Malthusian theory of population and the "law of diminishing returns". Suppose that you then demand that a socialist system be introduced in Britain, so that we can make similar plans to improve our standard of living. Malthus will then tell you, through the mouths of the Keynesians, that the most serious economic defects in the capitalist system can be cured within the framework of that system, without the necessity of introducing socialism.

And not only this. Malthusian doctrines, in their present-day forms, are encouraging preparations for war, and reducing opposition to the actual waging of war. Many Keynesian economists have proclaimed that the only form of government expenditure which will "bolster up effective demand" sufficiently to prevent a slump in the capitalist world to-day is expenditure on armaments. And, they add, in order to be effective this expenditure must be continuous, and possibly even cumulative. The current arms drive in the West is quite often justified by economists and statesmen on these grounds, and fears are frequently expressed concerning the effect upon the economies of the Western bloc of the ending or even the diminution of the present programme. It is well known that the possession of arms is apt to encourage the use of them. And although there have as yet been few people openly to advocate on Malthusian grounds the use of these arms to reduce the population in "overpopulated" countries like China and the U.S.S.R., there is no doubt that "neo-Malthusian" doctrines are helping to weaken the opposition which any such action would immediately provoke. After all, the advocacy of infanticide or the cessation of medical supplies to "overpopulated" countries is

not very far from the advocacy of more widespread and efficient measures to reduce the population. The struggle against Malthusianism is an integral part of the struggle for peace in the world to-day.

R. L. M.

GLASGOW.
12 *February*, 1953.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATIONS

THE following items have been newly translated into English for this volume: II (i), II (ii), II (v), II (x), II (xi), III (i), III (ii), III (iii), and IV (i). The sources are given in the notes with which each of the sections begins.

Footnotes with no indication as to the author are by Marx or Engels, as the case may be; those marked —*K.* (in the *Theorien* selections) are by Kautsky; and those marked —*Ed.* are by the present editor.

Marx's quotations from British authors have in every case been reproduced in the original English. Except in the cases of Smith and Ricardo, the editions used by Marx have generally been referred to. A number of references have been added and corrected, and some attempt at standardisation has been made.

Italics in the text represent the emphases of Marx and Engels; italics in the quotations represent the emphases of the authors quoted, unless otherwise indicated. The use of foreign words and phrases in the original text is remarked upon in the footnotes only when they are English.

Square brackets [ ] have been used for two purposes: (*a*) in the text of the *Theorien* selections, to indicate words and phrases inserted by Kautsky to make Marx's meaning clearer; and (*b*) in the quotations, to indicate additions or amendments made by Marx or Engels.

These notes apply only to the newly translated items. All the others have been transferred from the indicated sources with only very minor technical alterations.

Part Two

MARX AND ENGELS ON THE MALTHUSIAN THEORY OF POPULATION

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

THE items included in this Part have been selected in order to illustrate the development of the views of Marx and Engels on population theory over the whole period of fifty years from the beginning of their collaboration to the death of Engels.

In the beginning, it was Engels rather than Marx who was the economist. Engels's remarkable article *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, which was published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in 1844, was in fact the starting-point of Marx's economic studies. In this article, and, a year or so later, in his book *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, Engels summed up what he had so far learned from his theoretical studies in political economy and from his personal observations of economic conditions in England. In spite of occasional traces of immaturity and overexuberance—in 1844 Engels was only 24 years of age—both works are to be ranked among the great classics of socialist thought. The first item appearing below is a general criticism of the Malthusian theory of population from the *Outlines*; the third item is an extract from *The Condition of the Working Class* dealing with Malthusianism and the Poor Laws; and the fourth item is another extract from *The Condition of the Working Class* in which the pressure of the workers against the means of employment is more fully discussed.

In the summer of 1844, when Marx was engaged in his first serious economic studies, an article entitled "The King of Prussia and Social Reform", by "A Prussian" (Arnold Ruge), appeared in *Vorwärts*, a paper issued by the German revolutionary exiles in Paris. Marx objected in particular to Ruge's assumption that the problem of chronic poverty was primarily a political one, and on 7 August, 1844, he published in *Vorwärts* his "Critical Comments" on Ruge's contribution. The second item below consists of an extract from Marx's article, in which he discusses the attitude of the English bourgeoisie towards pauperism, illustrating their inability to understand the problem by their uncritical acceptance of Malthus's explanation in terms of an "eternal law of nature".

The fifth item is a short extract from Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value* commenting upon the views of an economist called Barton, one of Ricardo's contemporaries. Barton has some claim to be regarded as one of the pioneers of Marx's own law of population, and the germ of Chapter XXV of Vol. I of *Capital*, in which this law was put forward, is to be found in these comments on Barton. The sixth item is a letter from Engels to F. A. Lange, which contains an excellent short survey of the population question; and the seventh is an amusing comment on "Parson Malthus" (and other parsons) from *Capital*.

The later works of Marx and Engels do not contain any *direct* critique of Malthus's "principle of population" comparable in scope to Engels's account of it in the *Outlines*. They obviously felt that the most effective way of refuting Malthus's principle was to provide an alternative theory which would fit the facts of the modern world better than Malthus's did. They were thus more concerned with the positive task of formulating the specific law of population peculiar to capitalism than with the negative task of refuting Malthus's theory in detail. The most important item reproduced in this Part, therefore, is the eighth—an extract from Chapter XXV of Vol. I of *Capital*, in which the new law is formulated.

The Malthusian theory of population had often been used as the basis for the so-called "iron law of wages". Wages, it was argued, must necessarily tend to the subsistence level, since if they rose above this level the population would eventually increase (according to Malthus's principle) until the increased competition for jobs once again reduced wages to the subsistence level. Marx's new law of population was used by him as the basis for a new theory of wages—a theory much less rigid than the old "iron law". The Malthusian basis of the "iron law" is commented upon by Marx and Engels in the ninth item, the occasion being the inclusion of a reference to the "iron law" in the draft programme of the German Workers' Party (the famous "Gotha programme") in 1875.

The tenth and eleventh items consist of letters written by Engels to Kautsky and Danielson respectively. The letter to Kautsky contains some interesting comments on the question of the regulation of population in a communist society; and in the letter to Danielson Engels points out that in Europe to-day it is the means of subsistence which are pressing against the population, rather than the population which is pressing against the means of subsistence.

The sources of the items (which are arranged in chronological order) are as follows:

(i) Translated from the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. I, Bd. 2, pp. 396–401.

(ii) Translated from the *Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. I, Bd. 3, pp. 8–12.

(iii) From Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, English edn. (Allen and Unwin), pp. 284–7.

(iv) From *ibid.*, pp. 79–85.

(v) Translated from Marx's *Theorien über den Mehrwert* (Kautsky edn.), Vol. II, 2, pp. 372–4.

(vi) From the *Selected Correspondence* of Marx and Engels, English edn. (Lawrence and Wishart), pp. 198–200.

(vii) From Marx's *Capital*, Vol. I (Allen and Unwin edn.), pp. 629–30, footnote.

(viii) From *ibid.*, pp. 642–64.

(ix) (*a*) From the *Selected Correspondence*, p. 335; (*b*) from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Lawrence and Wishart edn.), pp. 21–3.

(x) Translated from *Briefe an A. Bebel, W. Liebknecht, K. Kautsky und andere*, Moscow, 1933, Part I, p. 232.

(xi) Translated from *Die Briefe von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels an Danielson (Nikolai-on)*, Leipzig, 1929, p. 74.

(i) THE MYTH OF OVERPOPULATION
(From Engels's *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* (1844))

THE struggle of capital against capital, labour against labour, and land against land, drives production into a state of feverish activity, in which all natural and reasonable relations are turned upside down. No one capital can stand up against the competition of another if it is not brought to the highest pitch of activity. No one piece of land can be profitably cultivated if its productivity is not constantly being increased. No one worker can hold his own against his competitors if he does not dedicate all his strength to his work. Nobody, in fact, who enters the competitive struggle can endure it without the greatest exertion of his strength, without the abandonment of all truly human purposes. The consequence of this hypertension on the one side is necessarily exhaustion on the other. If the fluctuations of competition are small, if demand and supply, consumption and production, are almost equal to one another, then in the development of production a stage must ensue in which there is so much superfluous productive power in existence that the great mass of the nation has nothing to live on, so that people starve to death from sheer abundance. England has already been in this crazy situation, in this truly absurd condition, for a considerable time. If the fluctuations of competition become stronger, as they necessarily do in such a state of affairs, then we have the alternation of prosperity and crisis, of overproduction and stagnation. The economists have never been able to understand this crazy state of affairs, so in order to explain it they thought up the theory of population, which is just as nonsensical, indeed, even more nonsensical, than this contradiction of the coexistence of wealth and poverty. The economists did not *dare* to see the truth; they did not dare to understand that this contradiction is a simple consequence of competition, because if they had done so their whole system would have collapsed.

For us the explanation of the matter is easy. The productive

power at the disposal of mankind is immeasurable. The productivity of the land can be infinitely increased by the application of capital, labour and science. "Overpopulated" Great Britain, according to the calculations of the ablest economists and statisticians (cf. Alison's *Principles of Population*, Vol. I, Chaps. 1 and 2),[1] could be so developed in the course of ten years as to produce sufficient corn for six times its present population. Capital increases daily; labour power grows together with population; and science masters natural forces for mankind to a greater extent every day. This immeasurable productivity, administered consciously and in the interests of all, would soon reduce to a minimum the labour falling to the lot of mankind; left to competition, it does the same, but only within the limits imposed by the contradiction. One part of the land is cultivated according to the best methods, while another part—in Great Britain and Ireland 30 million acres of good land—lies waste. One part of the capital circulates with phenomenal speed, while another part lies inert in strong-boxes. One part of the working population works 14, 16 hours a day, while another remains unemployed and idle, and dies of hunger. Or this coexistence of idleness and activity gives way to another pattern: to-day trade goes well, demand is very considerable and everyone is working, capital is turned over with wonderful speed, agriculture flourishes, the workers work themselves sick —then, to-morrow, stagnation comes on the scene, agriculture is no longer worth while and whole stretches of land remain uncultivated, capital becomes paralysed in the middle of its course, the workers are unemployed, and the whole country suffers from surplus wealth and surplus population.

The economists cannot regard this account of the matter as the correct one, for if they did, as stated above, they would have to abandon their whole system of competition; they would have to acknowledge the stupidity of its antithesis between production and consumption, between surplus wealth and surplus population. But in order to bring these facts into harmony with theory—since the facts themselves could not be denied—the theory of population was invented.

[1] Archibald Alison, *The Principles of Population, and their Connection with Human Happiness*, London, 1840.—*Ed.*

Malthus, the originator of this doctrine, asserts that population constantly exerts pressure on the means of subsistence; that as production is increased, population increases in the same proportion; and that the inherent tendency of population to multiply beyond the available means of subsistence is the cause of all poverty and all vice. For if there are too many people, then in one way or another they must be eliminated; they must die, either by violence or through starvation. When this has happened, however, a gap appears once more, and this is immediately filled by other propagators of population, so that the old poverty begins anew. Moreover, this is the case under all conditions—not only in the civilised but also in the natural state of man. The savages of New Holland, who live *one* to the square mile, suffer just as much from overpopulation as England. In short, if we want to be logical, we have to recognise *that the earth was already overpopulated when only one man existed.* Now the consequence of this theory is that since it is precisely the poor who constitute this surplus population, nothing ought to be done for them, except to make it as easy as possible for them to starve to death; to convince them that this state of affairs cannot be altered and that there is no salvation for their entire class other than that they should propagate as little as possible; or that if this is not practicable, it is at any rate better that a State institution for the painless killing of the children of the poor should be set up—as suggested by "Marcus",[1]—each working class family being allowed two and a half children, and the excess being painlessly destroyed. The giving of alms would be a crime, since it would encourage the growth of surplus population; but it would be very advantageous to make poverty a crime and the workhouse a corrective institution, as has already happened in England under the new "liberal" Poor Law. It is true, of course, that this theory does not accord at all well with the biblical teaching of the perfection of God and of his creation, but "it is a bad refutation which puts forward the Bible against the facts".

Is it necessary for me to give any more details of this vile

[1] "Marcus" was the pseudonym of an English author who published in 1838 a pamphlet entitled *On the Possibility of Limiting Populousness,* in which Malthus's theory was carried to an absurdity.—*Ed.*

and infamous doctrine, this repulsive blasphemy against man and nature, or to follow up its consequences any further? Here, brought before us at last, is the immorality of the economists in its highest form. What were all the wars and horrors of the monopoly system when compared with this theory? And it is precisely this theory which is the cornerstone of the liberal system of free trade, whose fall will bring the whole edifice down with it. For once competition has here been proved to be the cause of misery, poverty and crime, who will still dare to say a word in its defence?

Alison, in the work mentioned above, has shattered the Malthusian theory by appealing to the productive power of the soil, and by putting forward in opposition to the Malthusian principle the fact that every grown man can produce more than he himself consumes, a fact without which mankind would not be able to multiply, and would not even be able to maintain itself; otherwise what could the rising generation live on? But Alison does not go to the root of the matter, and therefore finally comes back again to the same conclusion as Malthus. Although it is true that he proves Malthus's principle to be wrong, he cannot argue away the facts which led Malthus to his principle.

If Malthus had not taken such a one-sided view of the matter, he could not have missed seeing that surplus population or labour power is always bound up with surplus wealth, surplus capital and surplus landed property. Population is too great only when productive power in general is too great. The state of affairs in every overpopulated country, in particular England, from the time when Malthus wrote onwards, demonstrates this quite unmistakeably. These were the facts which Malthus ought to have examined in their entirety, and whose examination ought to have led to the correct conclusion; instead, he picked out one of these facts, neglecting the others, and thus arrived at his own crazy conclusion. His second mistake was to confuse means of subsistence with means of employment. That population always presses against the means of employment, that the number of people who are propagated corresponds to the number who can be employed, in short, that the propagation of labour power has up to now been regulated

by the law of competition and has therefore also been subject to periodical crises and fluctuations—all these are facts, the establishment of which stands to the credit of Malthus. But means of employment are not means of subsistence. The means of employment increase only as the final result of an increase of machine power and capital; whereas the means of subsistence increase as soon as there is any increase at all in productive power. Here a new contradiction in political economy comes to light. The demand of the economists is not a real demand, their consumption is an artificial consumption. For the economists, only those who can offer an equivalent for what they receive are real demanders, real consumers. If, however, it is a fact that every adult produces more than he can himself consume, that children are like trees, returning abundantly the expenditure laid out on them—and surely these are facts?—one would imagine that every worker ought to be able to produce far more than he needs, and that the community ought therefore to be glad to furnish him with everything that he requires; one would imagine that a large family would be a most desirable gift to the community. But the economists, with their crude outlook, know no other equivalent apart from that which is paid over to them in tangible hard cash. They are so firmly entangled in their contradictions that they are just as little concerned with the most striking facts as they are with the most scientific principles.

We shall destroy the contradiction simply by resolving it. With the fusion of those interests which now conflict with one another, there will disappear the antithesis between surplus population in one place and surplus wealth in another, and also the wonderful phenomenon—more wonderful than all the wonders of all the religions put together—that a nation must starve to death from sheer wealth and abundance; and there will disappear too the crazy assertion that the earth does not possess the power to feed mankind. This assertion is the highest wisdom of Christian economics—and that our economics is essentially Christian I could have demonstrated from its every statement, from its every category, and shall in due time so demonstrate. The Malthusian theory is merely the economic expression of the religious dogma of the contradiction between

spirit and nature, and of the corruption of both resulting from it. I hope I have shown the futility of this contradiction—which has long been resolved for religion and together with it—in the economic sphere also; moreover, I will not accept any defence of the Malthusian theory as competent which does not begin by explaining to me, on the basis of the theory itself, how a people can die of hunger from sheer abundance, and which does not bring this explanation into harmony with reason and the facts.

The Malthusian theory, however, was an absolutely necessary transitional stage, which has taken us infinitely further forward. Thanks to this theory, as also thanks to economics in general, our attention has been drawn to the productive power of the soil and of humanity, so that now, having triumphed over this economic despair, we are forever secure from the fear of overpopulation. From this theory we derive the most powerful economic arguments in favour of a social reorganisation; for even if Malthus were altogether right, it would still be necessary to carry out this reorganisation immediately, since only this reorganisation, only the enlightenment of the masses which it can bring with it, can make possible that moral restraint upon the instinct for reproduction which Malthus himself puts forward as the easiest and most effective countermeasure against overpopulation. Thanks to this theory we have come to recognise in the dependence of man upon competitive conditions his most complete degradation. It has shown us that in the last analysis private property has turned man into a commodity, whose production and consumption also depend only on demand; that the system of competition has thereby slaughtered, and is still slaughtering to-day, millions of people—all this we have seen, and all this impels us to do away with this degradation of humanity by doing away with private property, competition and conflicting interests.

However, in order to deprive the general fear of overpopulation of all foundation, let us return once again to the question of the relation of productive power to population. Malthus puts forward a calculation upon which his whole system is based. Population increases in geometrical progression—1+2+4+8+16+32, etc. The productive power of the land increases in

arithmetical progression—1+2+3+4+5+6. The difference is obvious and horrifying—but is it correct? Where has it been proved that the productivity of the land increases in arithmetical progression? The area of land is limited—that is perfectly true. But the labour power to be employed on this area increases together with the population; and even if we assume that the increase of output associated with this increase of labour is not always proportionate to the latter, there still remains a third element—which the economists, however, never consider as important—namely, science, the progress of which is just as limitless and at least as rapid as that of population. For what great advances is the agriculture of this century obliged to chemistry alone—and indeed to two men alone, Sir Humphry Davy and Justus Liebig? But science increases at least as fast as population; the latter increases in proportion to the size of the previous generation, and science advances in proportion to the body of knowledge passed down to it by the previous generation, that is, in the most normal conditions it also grows in geometrical progression—and what is impossible for science? But it is ridiculous to speak of overpopulation while "the valley of the Mississippi alone contains enough waste land to accommodate the whole population of Europe",[1] while altogether only one-third of the earth can be described as cultivated, and while the productivity of this third could be increased sixfold and more merely by applying improvements which are already known.

[1] This appears to be a paraphrase of a passage occurring in Alison's *Principles of Population*, Vol. I, p. 548.—*Ed.*

(ii) THE ENGLISH POOR LAW

(From Marx's article on *Social Reform* (1844))

Now how does the *English* bourgeoisie and the government and press connected with it regard *pauperism*?

In so far as the English bourgeoisie admits that pauperism is the *fault of politics*, the *Whig* regards the *Tory* and the *Tory* regards the *Whig* as the cause of pauperism. According to the Whig, the monopoly of large landed property and the prohibitive legislation against the import of corn constitute the main source of pauperism. According to the Tory, the whole evil lies in liberalism, in competition, and in a factory system which has been carried too far. Neither of the parties sees the cause in politics in general; each rather sees it only in the politics of the other party. Neither of the two parties even dreams of a reform of society.

The most decisive expression of English insight into pauperism—we speak always of the insight of the English bourgeoisie and government—is *English political economy*, that is, the scientific reflection of English economic conditions.

One of the best and most celebrated of the English economists, McCulloch, who is familiar with contemporary conditions and who must possess a comprehensive view of the movement of bourgeois society, a pupil of the cynical Ricardo, still dares in a public lecture, amid applause, to apply to political economy what Bacon says about philosophy: "The man, who with true and untiring wisdom suspends his judgment, who goes forward step by step, surmounting one after the other the obstacles which, like mountains, hinder the course of study, will eventually reach the summit of science, where peace and pure air may be enjoyed, where nature presents itself to the eye in all its beauty, and from where it is possible to descend, by a comfortably sloping path, to the last details of practice."[1] Good *pure air*—the pestilential atmosphere of the English cellar dwell-

[1] This passage will be found (in the original Latin) in J. R. McCulloch's *A Discourse on the Rise, Progress, Peculiar Objects, and Importance of Political Economy*, 2nd edn., Edinburgh, 1825, pp. 114–15. Marx quotes from the French translation of this work by Gme. Prevost, 1825, pp. 131–2.—*Ed.*

ings! *Great beauty of nature*—the fantastic rags of the English poor, and the wilted, shrunken flesh of the women who are wasted with work and poverty; the children who lie on refuse; the deformed creatures produced by overwork in the monotonous mechanical processes of the factories! And the most charming *last details of practice*—prostitution, murder and the gallows!

Even that part of the English bourgeoisie which is fully aware of the danger of pauperism regards this danger, together with the methods for remedying it, not only *in isolation*, but also, to put it bluntly, in a *childish* and *absurd* manner.

Thus Dr. Kay, for example, in his pamphlet *Recent Measures for the Promotion of Education in England*,[1] reduces everything to *neglected education*. Guess why! Due to a lack of education, the worker does not understand the "*natural laws of trade*",[2] which *necessarily* reduce him to pauperism. He therefore rebels. This is calculated "to *affect* the *prosperity* of [English] manufactures and [English] commerce, to shake the mutual confidence of mercantile men, and to *diminish* the *stability* of . . . political and social institutions".[3]

Such is the stupidity of the English bourgeoisie and its press with regard to pauperism, this national epidemic of England.

Let us assume, then, that the reproaches levelled by our "Prussian" at *German* society are well-founded. Does the reason lie in the *unpolitical* condition of Germany? But if the bourgeoisie of *unpolitical* Germany is unable to form a conception of the general significance of *partial* need, the bourgeoisie of *political* England, on the other hand, manages to misunderstand the general significance of universal need—a need whose general significance has been brought to notice partly through its periodical recurrence in time, partly through its extension in space, and partly through the failure of all attempts to remedy it.

[1] Marx does not quote directly from this anonymous pamphlet by "Dr. Kay" (afterwards Sir J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth), but from the extracts from it reproduced in French translation in Eugène Buret's book *De la Misère des Classes Laborieuses en Angleterre et en France*, Paris, 1840. Buret used the 11th edition (1839) of Kay's pamphlet, references to which are provided in the two following notes. The emphases are Marx's in both cases.—*Ed.*

[2] Buret, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 400; Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 43.—*Ed.*

[3] Buret, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 400–1; Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 44.—*Ed.*

"Prussian" further attributes to the *unpolitical* condition of Germany the fact that the *King* of Prussia finds the cause of pauperism in *shortcomings in administration and charity*, and therefore seeks the remedy for pauperism in *administrative and charitable measures.*

Is this way of looking at it peculiar to the King of Prussia? Let us take a brief look at England, the only country where it is possible to speak of large-scale *political* action against pauperism.

The present English Poor Law dates from the Act of the 43rd Elizabeth.[1] What are the methods adopted in this legislation? They consist of the obligation of parishes to support their poor workers, the poor rate, and legal charity. This legislation —charity by administrative act—has lasted for two centuries. After long and painful experience, what is the attitude which Parliament adopts in its Amendment-Bill[2] of 1834?

To begin with, it explains the horrifying increase in pauperism by "*shortcomings in administration*".

The administration of the poor rate, which was in the hands of officials of the respective parishes, is therefore reformed. *Unions* of approximately 20 parishes are formed, and these are united in one single administration. A committee of officials—Board of Guardians[3]—elected by the taxpayers, meets on an appointed day in the headquarters of the Union and decides upon the admissibility of relief. These committees are directed and supervised by government officials, the Central Commission of Somerset House—the *Ministry of Pauperism*, as a Frenchman has aptly called it. The capital supervised by this administration is almost equal to the sum which the French War Office costs. The number of local administrations which it employs reaches 500, and each of these local administrations, in its turn, gives work to at least 12 officials.[4]

The English Parliament did not confine itself to the *formal* reform of the administration.

It found the main source of the *acute* state of English pauperism

[1] For our purposes it is not necessary to go back to the Statute of Labourers of Edward III.

[2] "Amendment-Bill" is in English in the text.—*Ed.*

[3] In English in the text.—*Ed.*

[4] The information in this paragraph was evidently obtained by Marx from Buret, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 156–7 and 233.—*Ed.*

in the *Poor Law* itself. The legal method of combating social distress, charity, promotes social distress. As regards pauperism *in general*, it is looked upon as an *eternal law of nature*, according to the theory of Malthus: "Since population is constantly tending to overtake the means of subsistence, charity is folly, a public encouragement of poverty. The State can therefore do nothing but leave the poor to their fate, at the most making death easy for them."[1] With this humane theory the English Parliament combines the view that pauperism is *poverty which the workers have brought on themselves*, and that it should therefore be regarded not as a calamity to be prevented but rather as a crime to be suppressed and punished.

Thus arose the system of workhouses[2]—i.e. poor-houses, the internal organisation of which *deters* the poor from seeking a refuge from death by starvation. In the workhouses, charity is ingeniously combined with the *revenge* of the bourgeoisie upon the poor who appeal to its charity.

England, therefore, began by trying to eliminate pauperism by means of *charity* and *administrative measures*. Then it came to see the progressive growth of pauperism as a necessary consequence not of modern *industry* but rather of the *English poor rate*. It regarded universal need merely as a *peculiarity* of English legislation. What had previously been attributed to a *lack of charity* was now attributed to a *superfluity of charity*. Finally, poverty came to be regarded as the fault of the poor, and they were punished for it as such.

The general significance which pauperism has attained in *political* England is confined to the fact that in the course of development, in spite of the administrative measures, pauperism has grown to be a *national institution*, and has therefore unavoidably become the object of a ramified and widely extended administration—an administration, however, which *no longer* has the task of eliminating it, but of *disciplining* and perpetuating it. This administration has given up trying to stop up the source of pauperism through *positive* methods; it is satisfied to dig a grave for it, with policeman-like benevolence, wherever it officially breaks out on the surface of the land. Far from

[1] For the first sentence of this quotation, see Buret, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 152.—*Ed.*

[2] "Workhouses" is in English in the text.—*Ed.*

going beyond administrative and charitable measures, the English State has actually retreated a long way back from them. Now its administration is confined to that pauperism which is sufficiently desperate to allow itself to be caught and imprisoned.

(iii) A DECLARATION OF WAR UPON THE PROLETARIAT.

(From Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845))

MEANWHILE the most open declaration of war of the bourgeoisie upon the proletariat is Malthus' Law of Population and the New Poor Law framed in accordance with it. We have already alluded several times to the theory of Malthus. We may sum up its final result in these few words, that the earth is perennially overpopulated, whence poverty, misery, distress, and immorality must prevail; that it is the lot, the eternal destiny of mankind, to exist in too great numbers, and therefore in diverse classes, of which some are rich, educated, and moral, and others more or less poor, distressed, ignorant, and immoral. Hence it follows in practice, and Malthus himself drew this conclusion, that charities and poor-rates are, properly speaking, nonsense, since they serve only to maintain, and stimulate the increase of, the surplus population whose competition crushes down wages for the employed; that the employment of the poor by the Poor Law Guardians is equally unreasonable, since only a fixed quantity of the products of labour can be consumed, and for every unemployed labourer thus furnished employment, another hitherto employed must be driven into enforced idleness, whence private undertakings suffer at cost of Poor Law industry; that, in other words, the whole problem is not how to support the surplus population, but how to restrain it as far as possible. Malthus declares in plain English that the right to live, a right previously asserted in favour of every man in the world, is nonsense. He quotes the words of a poet, that the poor man comes to the feast of Nature and finds no cover laid for him, and adds that "she bids him begone", for he did not before his birth ask of society whether or not he is welcome. This is now the pet theory of all genuine English bourgeois, and very naturally, since it is the most specious excuse for them, and has, moreover, a good deal of truth in it under existing conditions. If, then, the problem is not to make the

"surplus population" useful, to transform it into available population, but merely to let it starve to death in the least objectionable way and to prevent its having too many children, this, of course, is simple enough, provided the surplus population perceives its own superfluousness and takes kindly to starvation. There is, however, in spite of the violent exertions of the humane bourgeoisie, no immediate prospect of its succeeding in bringing about such a disposition among the workers. The workers have taken it into their heads that they, with their busy hands, are the necessary, and the rich capitalists, who do nothing, the surplus population.

Since, however, the rich hold all the power, the proletarians must submit, if they will not good-temperedly perceive it for themselves, to have the law actually declare them superfluous. This has been done by the New Poor Law. The Old Poor Law which rested upon the Act of 1601 (the 43rd of Elizabeth), naively started from the notion that it is the duty of the parish to provide for the maintenance of the poor. Whoever had no work received relief, and the poor man regarded the parish as pledged to protect him from starvation. He demanded his weekly relief as his right, not as a favour, and this became, at last, too much for the bourgeoisie. In 1833, when the bourgeoisie had just come into power through the Reform Bill, and pauperism in the country districts had just reached its full development, the bourgeoisie began the reform of the Poor Law according to its own point of view. A commission was appointed, which investigated the administration of the Poor Laws, and revealed a multitude of abuses. It was discovered that the whole working class in the country was pauperised and more or less dependent upon the rates, from which they received relief when wages were low; it was found that this system by which the unemployed were maintained, the ill-paid and the parents of large families relieved, fathers of illegitimate children required to pay alimony, and poverty, in general, recognised as needing protection, it was found that this system was ruining the nation, was

"a check upon industry, a reward for improvident marriage, a stimulus to increased population, and a means of counter-

> balancing the effect of an increased population upon wages; a national provision for discouraging the honest and industrious, and protecting the lazy, vicious, and improvident; calculated to destroy the bonds of family life, hinder systematically the accumulation of capital, scatter that which is already accumulated, and ruin the taxpayers. Moreover, in the provision of aliment, it sets a premium upon illegitimate children."

(Words of the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners).[1] This description of the action of the Old Poor Law is certainly correct; relief fosters laziness and increase of "surplus population". Under present social conditions it is perfectly clear that the poor man is compelled to be an egotist, and when he can choose, living equally well in either case, he prefers doing nothing to working. But what follows therefrom? That our present social conditions are good for nothing, and not as the Malthusian Commissioners conclude, that poverty is a crime, and, as such, to be visited with heinous penalties which may serve as a warning to others.

But these wise Malthusians were so thoroughly convinced of the infallibility of their theory that they did not for one moment hesitate to cast the poor into the Procrustean bed of their economic notions and treat them with the most revolting cruelty. Convinced with Malthus and the rest of the adherents of free competition that it is best to let each one take care of himself, they would have preferred to abolish the Poor Laws altogether. Since, however, they had neither the courage nor the authority to do this, they proposed a Poor Law constructed as far as possible in harmony with the doctrine of Malthus, which is yet more barbarous than that of *laissez-faire*, because it interferes actively in cases in which the latter is passive. We have seen how Malthus characterises poverty, or rather the want of employment, as a crime under the title "superfluity", and recommends for it punishment by starvation. The commissioners were not quite so barbarous; death outright by starvation was something too terrible even for a Poor Law Commissioner. "Good", said they, "we grant you poor a right to exist, but only to exist;

[1] Extracts from Information received from the Poor Law Commissioners. Published by authority. London, 1833.

the right to multiply you have not, nor the right to exist as befits human beings. You are a pest, and if we cannot get rid of you as we do of other pests, you shall feel, at least, that you are a pest, and you shall at least be held in check, kept from bringing into the world other 'surplus', either directly or through inducing in others laziness and want of employment. Live you shall, but live as an awful warning to all those who might have inducements to become 'superfluous'."

They accordingly brought in the New Poor Law, which was passed by Parliament in 1834, and continues in force down to the present day. All relief in money and provisions was abolished; the only relief allowed was admission to the workhouses immediately built. The regulations for these workhouses, or, as the people call them, Poor Law Bastilles, is such as to frighten away every one who has the slightest prospect of life without this form of public charity. To make sure that relief be applied for only in the most extreme cases and after every other effort had failed, the workhouse has been made the most repulsive residence which the refined ingenuity of a Malthusian can invent.

(iv) THE RESERVE ARMY OF LABOUR

(From Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845))

THE worker is, in law and in fact, the slave of the property-holding class, so effectually a slave that he is sold like a piece of goods, rises and falls in value like a commodity. If the demand for workers increases, the price of workers rises; if it falls, their price falls. If it falls so greatly that a number of them become unsaleable, if they are left in stock, they are simply left idle; and as they cannot live upon that, they die of starvation. For, to speak in the words of the economists, the expense incurred in maintaining them would not be reproduced, would be money thrown away, and to this end no man advances capital; and, so far, Malthus was perfectly right in his theory of population. The only difference as compared with the old, outspoken slavery is this, that the worker of to-day seems to be free because he is not sold once for all, but piecemeal by the day, the week, the year, and because no one owner sells him to another, but he is forced to sell himself in this way instead, being the slave of no particular person, but of the whole property-holding class. For him the matter is unchanged at bottom, and if this semblance of liberty necessarily gives him some real freedom on the one hand, it entails on the other the disadvantage that no one guarantees him a subsistence, he is in danger of being repudiated at any moment by his master, the bourgeoisie, and left to die of starvation, if the bourgeoisie ceases to have an interest in his employment, his existence. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is far better off under the present arrangement than under the old slave system; it can dismiss its employees at discretion without sacrificing invested capital, and gets its work done much more cheaply than is possible with slave labour, as Adam Smith comfortingly pointed out.[1]

[1] Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, I, McCulloch's edition in one volume, sect. 8, p 36: "The wear and tear of a slave, it has been said, is at the expense of his master, but that of a free servant is at his own expense. The wear and tear of the latter, however, is, in reality, as much at the expense of his master as that of the

Hence it follows, too, that Adam Smith was perfectly right in making the assertion: "That the demand for men, like that for any other commodity, necessarily regulates the production of men, quickens it when it goes on too slowly, and stops it when it advances too fast." *Just as in the case of any other commodity!* If there are too few labourers at hand, prices, i.e. wages, rise, the workers are more prosperous, marriages multiply, more children are born and more live to grow up, until a sufficient number of labourers has been secured. If there are too many on hand, prices fall, want of work, poverty, and starvation, and consequent diseases arise, and the "surplus population" is put out of the way. And Malthus, who carried the foregoing proposition of Smith farther, was also right, in his way, in asserting that there are always more people on hand than can be maintained from the available means of subsistence. Surplus population is engendered rather by the competition of the workers among themselves, which forces each separate worker to labour as much each day as his strength can possibly admit. If a manufacturer can employ ten hands nine hours daily, he can employ nine if each works ten hours, and the tenth goes hungry. And if a manufacturer can force the nine hands to work an extra hour daily for the same wages by threatening to discharge them at a time when the demand for hands is not very great, he discharges the tenth and saves so much wages. This is the process on a small scale, which goes on in a nation on a large one. The productiveness of each hand raised to the highest pitch by the competition of the workers among themselves, the division of labour, the introduction of machinery, the subjugation of the forces of nature, deprive a multitude of workers of bread. These starving workers are then removed from the market, they can buy nothing, and the quantity of articles of consumption previously required by them is no longer in demand, need no longer be produced; the workers previously employed in producing them are there-

former. The wages paid to journeymen and servants of every kind, must be such as may enable them, one with another, to continue the race of journeymen and servants, according as the increasing, diminishing, or stationary demand of the society may happen to require. But though the wear and tear of a free servant be equally at the expense of his master, it generally costs him much less than that of a slave. The fund for replacing or repairing, if I may say so, the wear and tear of the slave, is commonly managed by a negligent master or careless overseer."

fore driven out of work, and are also removed from the market, and so it goes on, always the same old round, or rather, so it would go if other circumstances did not intervene. The introduction of the industrial forces already referred to for increasing production leads, in the course of time, to a reduction of prices of the articles produced and to consequent increased consumption, so that a large part of the displaced workers finally, after long suffering, find work again. If, in addition to this, the conquest of foreign markets constantly and rapidly increases the demand for manufactured goods, as has been the case in England during the past sixty years, the demand for hands increases, and, in proportion to it, the population. Thus, instead of diminishing, the population of the British Empire has increased with extraordinary rapidity, and is still increasing. Yet, in spite of the extension of industry, in spite of the demand for working-men which, in general, has increased, there is, according to the confession of all the official political parties (Tory, Whig, and Radical), permanent surplus, superfluous population; the competition among the workers is constantly greater than the competition to secure workers.

Whence comes this incongruity? It lies in the nature of industrial competition and the commercial crises which arise from them. In the present unregulated production and distribution of the means of subsistence, which is carried on not directly for the sake of supplying needs, but for profit, in the system under which every one works for himself to enrich himself, disturbances inevitably arise at every moment. For example, England supplies a number of countries with most diverse goods. Now, although the manufacturer may know how much of each article is consumed in each country annually, he cannot know how much is on hand at every given moment, much less can he know how much his competitors export thither. He can only draw most uncertain inferences from the perpetual fluctuations in prices, as to the quantities on hand and the needs of the moment. He must trust to luck in exporting his goods. Everything is done blindly, as guess-work, more or less at the mercy of accident. Upon the slightest favourable report, each one exports what he can, and before long such a market is glutted, sales stop, capital remains inactive, prices fall, and

English manufacture has no further employment for its hands. In the beginning of the development of manufacture, these checks were limited to single branches and single markets; but the centralising tendency of competition which drives the hands thrown out of one branch into such other branches as are most easily accessible, and transfers the goods which cannot be disposed of in one market to other markets, has gradually brought the single minor crises nearer together and united them into one periodically recurring crisis. Such a crisis usually recurs once in five years after a brief period of activity and general prosperity; the home market, like all foreign ones, is glutted with English goods, which it can only slowly absorb, the industrial movement comes to a standstill in almost every branch, the small manufacturers and merchants who cannot survive a prolonged inactivity of their invested capital fail, the larger ones suspend business during the worst season, close their mills or work short time, perhaps half the day; wages fall by reason of the competition of the unemployed, the diminution of working-time and the lack of profitable sales; want becomes universal among the workers, the small savings, which individuals may have made, are rapidly consumed, the philanthropic institutions are overburdened, the poor-rates are doubled, trebled, and still insufficient, the number of the starving increases, and the whole multitude of "surplus" population presses in terrific numbers into the foreground. This continues for a time; the "surplus" exist as best they may, or perish; philanthropy and the Poor Law help many of them to a painful prolongation of their existence. Others find scant means of subsistence here and there in such kinds of work as have been least open to competition, are most remote from manufacture. And with how little can a human being keep body and soul together for a time! Gradually the state of things improves; the accumulations of goods are consumed, the general depression among the men of commerce and manufacture prevents a too hasty replenishing of the markets, and at last rising prices and favourable reports from all directions restore activity. Most of the markets are distant ones; demand increases and prices rise constantly while the first exports are arriving; people struggle for the first goods, the first sales

enliven trade still more, the prospective ones promise still higher prices; expecting a further rise, merchants begin to buy upon speculation, and so to withdraw from consumption the articles intended for it, just when they are most needed. Speculation forces prices still higher, by inspiring others to purchase, and appropriating new importations at once. All this is reported to England, manufacturers begin to produce with a will, new mills are built, every means is employed to make the most of the favourable moment. Speculation arises here, too, exerting the same influence as upon foreign markets, raising prices, withdrawing goods from consumption, spurring manufacture in both ways to the highest pitch of effort. Then come the daring speculators working with fictitious capital, living upon credit, ruined if they cannot speedily sell; they hurl themselves into this universal, disorderly race for profits, multiply the disorder and haste by their unbridled passion, which drives prices and production to madness. It is a frantic struggle, which carries away even the most experienced and phlegmatic; goods are spun, woven, hammered, as if all mankind were to be newly equipped, as though two thousand million new consumers had been discovered in the moon. All at once the shaky speculators abroad, who must have money, begin to sell, below market price, of course, for their need is urgent; one sale is followed by others, prices fluctuate, speculators throw their goods upon the market in terror, the market is disordered, credit shaken, one house after another stops payments, bankruptcy follows bankruptcy, and the discovery is made that three times more goods are on hand or under way than can be consumed. The news reaches England, where production has been going on at full speed meanwhile, panic seizes all hands, failures abroad cause others in England, the panic crushes a number of firms, all reserves are thrown upon the market here, too, in the moment of anxiety, and the alarm is still further exaggerated. This is the beginning of the crisis, which then takes precisely the same course as its predecessor, and gives place in turn to a season of prosperity. So it goes on perpetually,—prosperity, crisis, prosperity, crisis, and this perennial round in which English industry moves is, as has been before observed, usually completed once in five or six years.

From this it is clear that English manufacture must have, at all times save the brief periods of highest prosperity, an unemployed reserve army of workers, in order to be able to produce the masses of goods required by the market in the liveliest months. This reserve army is larger or smaller, according as the state of the market occasions the employment of a larger or smaller proportion of its members. And if at the moment of highest activity of the market the agricultural districts and the branches least affected by the general prosperity temporarily supply to manufacture a number of workers, these are a mere minority, and these too belong to the reserve army, with the single difference that the prosperity of the moment was required to reveal their connection with it. When they enter upon the more active branches of work, their former employers draw in somewhat, in order to feel the loss less, work longer hours, employ women and younger workers, and when the wanderers discharged at the beginning of the crisis return, they find their places filled and themselves superfluous—at least in the majority of cases. This reserve army, which embraces an immense multitude during the crisis and a large number during the period which may be regarded as the average between the highest prosperity and the crisis, is the "surplus population" of England, which keeps body and soul together by begging, stealing, street-sweeping, collecting manure, pushing handcarts, driving donkeys, peddling, or performing occasional small jobs. In every great town a multitude of such people may be found.

(v) BARTON, MALTHUS AND RICARDO ON "OVERPOPULATION"

(From Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. II (written 1861–3))

BARTON unquestionably has very great merit. Adam Smith considers that the demand for labour increases in direct proportion to the accumulation of capital. Malthus derives overpopulation from the fact that capital is not accumulated and reproduced on an increasing scale as rapidly as population. Barton was the first to point out that the different organic constituents of capital do not increase at the same rate when capital is accumulated and the productive forces develop, but that on the contrary, in the process of growth that part of capital which resolves itself into wages diminishes in proportion to that part —he calls it fixed capital—which in relation to its size alters the demand for labour only insignificantly. He is therefore the first to establish the following important proposition: "that the number of labourers employed" is not "in proportion to the wealth of the State",[1] and that it is relatively greater in an industrially undeveloped country than it is in an industrially developed country. In the third edition of his *Principles*, in Chapter XXXI, which deals with machinery, Ricardo—who in his earlier editions had still followed completely in the footsteps of Smith on this point—takes up Barton's correction, but in the same one-sided form in which it is made by Barton himself. The only point in which Ricardo goes further—and this is important—is that he not only puts forward, as Barton does, the proposition that the demand for labour does not increase in proportion to the development of machinery, but also affirms that the machine itself causes a "redundancy of people",[2] thus creating overpopulation. But he incorrectly confines this effect to a case which occurs only in agriculture, but which he also extends to industry, a case in which the net product is increased

[1] John Barton, *Observations on the Circumstances which Influence the Condition of the Labouring Classes of Society*, London, 1817, p. 16.—*Ed.*

[2] Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy*, Sraffa's edn., Vol. I, p. 390.—*Ed.*

at the expense of the total product. *In nuce*, however, the whole absurd "theory of population" was overturned by this, and also, in particular, the empty assertion of the vulgar economists to the effect that the workers must strive to keep their rate of reproduction below that of the accumulation of capital. It follows on the contrary from the arguments of Barton and Ricardo that such a restriction on the reproduction of the working population, because of the decrease in the supply of labour and the consequent rise in its price, would only speed up the employment of machinery, the transformation of circulating capital into fixed capital, and would therefore artificially create a surplus population—a surplus which is usually caused not by a lack of means of subsistence but by a lack of means for the employment of the workers, a lack of demand for labour.

Barton's error or shortcoming consists in this—that he conceives of the organic differentiation or composition of capital only in that form in which it appears in the process of circulation—as fixed capital and circulating capital. This distinction, which had already been discovered by the Physiocrats, was further developed by Adam Smith, since whose day it has become a prejudice of the economists—a prejudice, that is, in so far as they see only this difference—which has been handed down to them—in the organic composition of capital. This distinction, which has its origin in the process of circulation, has a considerable influence on the reproduction of wealth in general, and therefore also on that part of it which forms the labouring funds.[1] But this is not the decisive factor here. As fixed capital, machinery, buildings, cattle, etc., are distinguished from circulating capital *directly* not through a relationship with wages, but only through their mode of circulation and reproduction.

The direct relation of the different constituents of capital to living labour has no connection with the phenomenon of the process of circulation, being derived not from it but from the immediate process of production; it is the relation between constant and variable capital, the distinction between which is established only on the basis of their relation to living labour.

[1] The last two words are in both German and English in the text.—*Ed.*

(vi) THE PRESSURE OF POPULATION UPON THE MEANS OF EMPLOYMENT

(From Engels's letter to Lange of 29 March, 1865)

MEANWHILE my involuntary delay in answering you has given me the opportunity of getting your book on the labour question; I have read it with much interest. I too was struck, the very first time I read Darwin, with the remarkable likeness between his account of plant and animal life and the Malthusian theory. Only I came to a different conclusion from yours: namely, that nothing discredits modern bourgeois development so much as the fact that it has not yet succeeded in getting beyond the economic forms of the animal world. To us so-called "economic laws" are not eternal laws of nature but historic laws which arise and disappear; and the code of modern political economy, in so far as it has been drawn up with proper objectivity by the economists, is to us simply a summary of the laws and conditions under which alone modern bourgeois society can exist—in short the conditions of its production and exchange expressed in an abstract and summary way. To us also, therefore, none of these laws, in so far as it expresses *purely bourgeois conditions*, is older than modern bourgeois society; those which have hitherto been more or less valid throughout all history only express just those relations which are common to the conditions of all society based on class rule and class exploitation. To the former belongs the so-called law of Ricardo, which is valid neither for feudal serfdom nor ancient slavery; to the latter belongs what is tenable in the so-called Malthusian theory.

Like all his other ideas, Parson Malthus had stolen this theory direct from his predecessors; all that belongs to him is the purely arbitrary application of the two progressions. In England the theory itself has long ago been reduced to a rational scale by the economists; the pressure of population is not upon the means of subsistence but upon the means of *employment*; mankind is capable of increasing more rapidly than modern bourgeois society can stand. To us a further reason for declaring

this bourgeois society a barrier to development which must fall.

You yourself ask how increase of population and increase in the means of subsistence are to be brought into harmony; but except for one sentence in the preface I find no attempt to solve the question. We start from the premise that the same forces which have created modern bourgeois society—the steam-engine, modern machinery, mass colonisation, railways, steamships, world trade[a]—and which are now already, through the permanent trade crises, working towards its ruin and ultimate destruction—these same means of production and exchange will also suffice to reverse the relation in a short time, and to raise the productive power of each individual so much that he can produce enough for the consumption of two, three, four, five or six individuals. Then town industry as it is to-day will be able to spare people enough to give agriculture quite other forces than it has had up to now; science also will then at last be applied in agriculture on a large scale and with the same consistency as in industry; the exploitation of the inexhaustible regions fertilised by nature herself in South-Eastern Europe and Western America will be carried out on an enormous scale hitherto quite unknown. If all these regions have been ploughed up and after that a shortage sets in, then will be the time to say *caveant consules* [to sound the alarm].

Too little is produced, that is the cause of the whole thing. But *why* is too little produced? Not because the limits of production—even to-day and with present-day means—are exhausted. No, but because the limits of production are determined not by the number of hungry bellies but by the number of *purses* able to buy and to pay. Bourgeois society does not and cannot wish to produce any more. The moneyless bellies, the labour which cannot be utilised *for profit* and therefore cannot buy, is left to the death-rate. Let a sudden industrial boom, such as is constantly occurring, make it possible for this labour to be employed with profit, then it will get money to spend, and the means of subsistence have never hitherto been lacking. This is the endless vicious circle in which the whole economic system revolves. One presupposes bourgeois conditions as a whole, and then proves that every part of them is a necessary part—and therefore an "eternal law".

(vii) PARSON MALTHUS

(From Marx's *Capital*, Vol. I (1867))

If the reader reminds me of Malthus,[1] whose "Essay on Population" appeared in 1798, I remind him that this work in its first form is nothing more than a schoolboyish, superficial plagiary of De Foe, Sir James Steuart, Townsend, Franklin, Wallace, etc., and does not contain a single sentence thought out by himself. The great sensation this pamphlet caused, was due solely to party interest. The French Revolution had found passionate defenders in the United Kingdom; the "principle of population", slowly worked-out in the eighteenth century, and then, in the midst of a great social crisis, proclaimed with drums and trumpets as the infallible antidote to the teachings of Condorcet, etc., was greeted with jubilance by the English oligarchy as the great destroyer of all hankerings after human development. Malthus, hugely astonished at his success, gave himself to stuffing into his book materials superficially compiled, and adding to it new matter, not discovered but annexed by him. Note further: Although Malthus was a parson of the English State Church, he had taken the monastic vow of celibacy—one of the conditions of holding a Fellowship in Protestant Cambridge University: "Socios collegiorum maritos esse non permittimus, sed statim postquam quis uxorem duxerit, socius collegii desinat esse" (*Reports of Cambridge University Commission*, p. 172). This circumstance favourably distinguishes Malthus from the other Protestant parsons, who have shuffled off the command enjoining celibacy of the priesthood and have taken, "Be fruitful and multiply", as their special Biblical mission in such a degree that they generally contribute to the increase of population to a really unbecoming extent, whilst they preach at the same time to the labourers the "principle of population". It is characteristic that the economic fall of man, the Adam's apple, the urgent appetite, "the checks which tend to blunt the shafts of Cupid", as Parson Townsend waggishly

[1] This passage is taken from a footnote to a statement in the text to the effect that "Sir F. M. Eden . . . is the only disciple of Adam Smith during the eighteenth century that produced any work of importance."—*Ed.*

puts it, that this delicate question was and is monopolised by the Reverends of Protestant Theology, or rather of the Protestant Church. With the exception of the Venetian monk, Ortes, an original and clever writer, most of the population-theory teachers are Protestant parsons. For instance, Bruckner, *Théorie du Système Animal*, Leyden, 1767, in which the whole subject of the modern population theory is exhausted, and to which the passing quarrel between Quesnay and his pupil, the elder Mirabeau, furnished ideas on the same topic; then Parson Wallace, Parson Townsend, Parson Malthus and his pupil, the arch-Parson Thomas Chalmers, to say nothing of lesser reverend scribblers in this line. Originally, political economy was studied by philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, Hume; by business men and statesmen, like Thomas More, Temple, Sully, De Witt, North, Law, Vanderlint, Cantillon, Franklin; and especially, and with the greatest success, by medical men like Petty, Barbon, Mandeville, Quesnay. Even in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Rev. Mr. Tucker, a notable economist of his time, excused himself for meddling with the things of Mammon. Later on, and in truth with this very "principle of population", struck the hour of the Protestant parsons. Petty, who regarded the population as the basis of wealth, and was, like Adam Smith, an outspoken foe to parsons, says, as if he had a presentiment of their bungling interference, "that Religion best flourishes when the Priests are most mortified, as was before said of the Law, which best flourisheth when lawyers have least to do". He advises the Protestant priests, therefore, if they, once for all, will not follow the Apostle Paul and "mortify" themselves by celibacy, "not to breed more Churchmen than the Benefices, as they now stand shared out, will receive, that is to say, if there be places for about twelve thousand in England and Wales, it will not be safe to breed up 24,000 ministers, for then the twelve thousand which are unprovided for, will seek ways how to get themselves a livelihood, which they cannot do more easily than by persuading the people that the twelve thousand incumbents do poison or starve their souls, and misguide them in their way to Heaven" (Petty, *A Treatise on Taxes and Contributions*, London, 1667, p. 57).

(viii) RELATIVE SURPLUS-POPULATION UNDER CAPITALISM

(From Marx's *Capital*, Vol. I (1867))

THE accumulation of capital, though originally appearing as its quantitative extension only, is effected, as we have seen, under a progressive qualitative change in its composition, under a constant increase of its constant, at the expense of its variable constituent.[1]

The specifically capitalist mode of production, the development of the productive power of labour corresponding to it, and the change thence resulting in the organic composition of capital, do not merely keep pace with the advance of accumulation, or with the growth of social wealth. They develop at a much quicker rate, because mere accumulation, the absolute increase of the total social capital, is accompanied by the centralisation of the individual capitals of which that total is made up; and because the change in the technological composition of the additional capital goes hand in hand with a similar change in the technological composition of the original capital. With the advance of accumulation, therefore, the proportion of constant to variable capital changes. If it was originally say 1 : 1, it now becomes successively 2 : 1, 3 : 1, 4 : 1, 5 : 1, 7 : 1, etc., so that, as the capital increases, instead of $\frac{1}{2}$ of its total value, only $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{5}$, $\frac{1}{6}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, etc., is transformed into labour-power, and, on the other hand, $\frac{2}{3}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{5}$, $\frac{5}{6}$, $\frac{7}{8}$ into means of production. Since the demand for labour is determined not by the amount of capital as a whole, but by its variable constituent alone, that demand falls progressively with the increase of the total capital, instead of, as previously assumed, rising in proportion to it. It falls relatively to the magnitude of the total capital, and at an accelerated rate, as this magnitude increases. With the growth of the total capital, its variable constituent or the

[1] Note to the 3rd edition. In Marx's copy there is here the marginal note: "Here note for working out later; if the extension is only quantitative, then for a greater and a smaller capital in the same branch of business the profits are as the magnitudes of the capitals advanced. If the quantitative extension induces qualitative change, then the rate of profit on the larger capital rises simultaneously."

labour incorporated in it, also does increase, but in a constantly diminishing proportion. The intermediate pauses are shortened, in which accumulation works as simple extension of production, on a given technical basis. It is not merely that an accelerated accumulation of total capital, accelerated in a constantly growing progression, is needed to absorb an additional number of labourers, or even, on account of the constant metamorphosis of old capital, to keep employed those already functioning. In its turn, this increasing accumulation and centralisation becomes a source of new changes in the composition of capital, of a more accelerated diminution of its variable, as compared with its constant constituent. This accelerated relative diminution of the variable constituent, that goes along with the accelerated increase of the total capital, and moves more rapidly than this increase, takes the inverse form, at the other pole, of an apparently absolute increase of the labouring population, an increase always moving more rapidly than that of the variable capital or the means of employment. But in fact, it is capitalistic accumulation itself that constantly produces, and produces in the direct ratio of its own energy and extent, a relatively redundant population of labourers, i.e. a population of greater extent than suffices for the average needs of the self-expansion of capital, and therefore a surplus-population.

Considering the social capital in its totality, the movement of its accumulation now causes periodical changes, affecting it more or less as a whole, now distributes its various phases simultaneously over the different spheres of production. In some spheres a change in the composition of capital occurs without increase of its absolute magnitude, as a consequence of simple centralisation; in others the absolute growth of capital is connected with absolute diminution of its variable constituent, or of the labour-power absorbed by it; in others again, capital continues growing for a time on its given technical basis, and attracts additional labour-power in proportion to its increase, while at other times it undergoes organic change, and lessens its variable constituent; in all spheres, the increase of the variable part of capital, and therefore of the number of labourers employed by it, is always connected with violent fluctuations and transitory production of surplus-population,

whether this takes the more striking form of the repulsion of labourers already employed, or the less evident but not less real form of the more difficult absorption of the additional labouring population through the usual channels.[1] With the magnitude of social capital already functioning, and the degree of its increase, with the extension of the scale of production, and the mass of the labourers set in motion, with the development of the productiveness of their labour, with the greater breadth and fullness of all sources of wealth, there is also an extension of the scale on which greater attraction of labourers by capital is accompanied by their greater repulsion; the rapidity of the change in the organic composition of capital, and in its technical form increases, and an increasing number of spheres of production becomes involved in this change, now simultaneously, now alternately. The labouring population therefore produces, along with the accumulation of capital produced by it, the means by which itself is made relatively superfluous, is turned into a relative surplus population; and it does this to an always increasing extent.[2] This is a law of

[1] The census of England and Wales shows: all persons employed in agriculture (landlords, farmers, gardeners, shepherds, etc., included): 1851, 2,011,447; 1861, 1,924,110. Fall, 87,337. Worsted manufacture: 1851, 102,714 persons; 1861, 79,242. Silk weaving: 1851, 111,940; 1861, 101,678. Calico-printing: 1851, 12,098; 1861, 12,556. A small rise that, in the face of the enormous extension of this industry and implying a great fall proportionally in the number of labourers employed. Hat-making: 1851, 15,957, 1861, 13,814. Straw-hat and bonnet-making: 1851, 20,393; 1861, 18,176. Malting: 1851, 10,566; 1861, 10,677. Chandlery: 1851, 4,949; 1861, 4,686. This fall is due, besides other causes, to the increase in lighting by gas. Comb-making: 1851, 2,038; 1861, 1,478. Sawyers: 1851, 30,552; 1861, 31,647—a small rise in consequence of the increase of sawing-machines. Nail-making: 1851, 26,940; 1861, 26,130—fall in consequence of the competition of machinery. Tin and copper-mining: 1851, 31,360; 1861, 32,041. On the other hand: Cotton-spinning and weaving: 1851, 371,777; 1861, 456,646. Coal-mining: 1851, 183,389; 1861, 246,613. "The increase of labourers is generally greatest, since 1851, in such branches of industry in which machinery has not up to the present been employed with success" (Census of England and Wales, 1862. Vol. III. London, 1863, p. 36).

[2] The law of the progressive diminution in the relative magnitude of variable capital, together with its effects upon the condition of the wage-earning class, was suspected rather than understood by some excellent economists of the classical school. In this respect the greatest merit is due to John Barton, although like all the others he mixes up constant with fixed capital and variable with circulating capital. He says: "The demand for labour depends on the increase of circulating, and not of fixed capital. Were it true that the proportion between these two sorts of capital is the same at all times, and in all circumstances, then, indeed, it follows that the number of labourers employed is in proportion to the wealth of the state. But such a proposition has not the semblance of probability. As arts are cultivated, and civilization is extended, fixed capital bears a larger and larger proportion to

population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production; and in fact every special historic mode of production has its own special laws of population, historically valid within its limits alone. An abstract law of population exists for plants and animals only, and only in so far as man has not interfered with them.

But if a surplus labouring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalistic accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation. With accumulation, and the development of the productiveness of labour that accompanies it, the power of sudden expansion of capital grows also; it grows, not merely because the elasticity of the capital already functioning increases, not merely because the absolute wealth of society expands, of which capital only forms an elastic part, not merely because credit, under every special stimulus, at once places an unusual part of this wealth at the disposal of production in the form of additional capital; it grows, also,

circulating capital. The amount of fixed capital employed in the production of a piece of British muslin is at least a hundred, probably a thousand times greater than that employed in a similar piece of Indian muslin. And the proportion of circulating capital is a hundred or thousand times less. . . . The whole of the annual savings, added to the fixed capital, would have no effect in increasing the demand for labour" (John Barton, *Observations on the Circumstances which Influence the Condition of the Labouring Classes of Society*, London, 1817, pp. 16, 17). "The same cause which may increase the net revenue of the country may at the same time render the population redundant, and deteriorate the condition of the labourer" (Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy*, 3rd edn., London, 1821, p. 469). With increase of capital, "the demand [for labour] will be in a diminishing ratio" (*ibid.*, p. 480, Note). "The amount of capital devoted to the maintenance of labour may vary, independently of any changes in the whole amount of capital. . . . Great fluctuations in the amount of employment, and great suffering may become more frequent as capital itself becomes more plentiful" (Richard Jones, *An Introductory Lecture on Pol. Econ.*, London, 1833, p. 13). "Demand [for labour] will rise . . . not in proportion to the accumulation of the general capital. . . . Every augmentation, therefore, in the national stock destined for reproduction, comes, in the progress of society, to have less and less influence upon the condition of the labourer" (Ramsay, *An Essay on the Distribution of Wealth*, Edinburgh, 1836, pp. 90, 91).

because the technical conditions of the process of production themselves—machinery, means of transport, etc.—now admit of the rapidest transformation of masses of surplus product into additional means of production. The mass of social wealth, overflowing with the advance of accumulation, and transformable into additional capital, thrusts itself frantically into old branches of production, whose market suddenly expands, or into newly formed branches, such as railways, etc., the need for which grows out of the development of the old ones. In all such cases, there must be the possibility of throwing great masses of men suddenly on the decisive points without injury to the scale of production in other spheres. Over-population supplies these masses. The course characteristic of modern industry, viz., a decennial cycle (interrupted by smaller oscillations), of periods of average activity, production at high pressure, crisis and stagnation, depends on the constant formation, the greater or less absorption, and the re-formation of the industrial reserve army or surplus population. In their turn, the varying phases of the industrial cycle recruit the surplus population, and become one of the most energetic agents of its reproduction. This peculiar course of modern industry, which occurs in no earlier period of human history, was also impossible in the childhood of capitalist production. The composition of capital changed but very slowly. With its accumulation, therefore, there kept pace, on the whole, a corresponding growth in the demand for labour. Slow as was the advance of accumulation compared with that of more modern times, it found a check in the natural limits of the exploitable labouring population, limits which could only be got rid of by forcible means to be mentioned later. The expansion by fits and starts of the scale of production is the preliminary to its equally sudden contraction; the latter again evokes the former, but the former is impossible without disposable human material, without an increase in the number of labourers independently of the absolute growth of the population. This increase is effected by the simple process that constantly "sets free" a part of the labourers; by methods which lessen the number of labourers employed in proportion to the increased production. The whole form of the movement of modern industry

depends, therefore, upon the constant transformation of a part of the labouring population into unemployed or half-employed hands. The superficiality of Political Economy shows itself in the fact that it looks upon the expansion and contraction of credit, which is a mere symptom of the periodic changes of the industrial cycle, as their cause. As the heavenly bodies, once thrown into a certain definite motion, always repeat this, so is it with social production as soon as it is once thrown into this movement of alternate expansion and contraction. Effects, in their turn, become causes, and the varying accidents of the whole process, which always reproduces its own conditions, take on the form of periodicity. When this periodicity is once consolidated, even Political Economy then sees that the production of a relative surplus population—i.e. surplus with regard to the average needs of the self-expansion of capital—is a necessary condition of modern industry.

"Suppose", says H. Merivale, formerly Professor of Political Economy at Oxford, subsequently employed in the English Colonial Office, "suppose that, on the occasion of some of these crises, the nation were to rouse itself to the effort of getting rid by emigration of some hundreds of thousands of superfluous arms, what would be the consequence? That, at the first returning demand for labour, there would be a deficiency. However rapid reproduction may be, it takes, at all events, the space of a generation to replace the loss of adult labour. Now, the profits of our manufacturers depend mainly on the power of making use of the prosperous moment when demand is brisk, and thus compensating themselves for the interval during which it is slack. This power is secured to them only by the command of machinery and of manual labour. They must have hands ready by them, they must be able to increase the activity of their operations when required, and to slacken it again, according to the state of the market, or they cannot possibly maintain that pre-eminence in the race of competition on which the wealth of the country is founded."[1] Even Malthus recognises over-population as a necessity of modern industry, though, after his narrow fashion, he explains it by the absolute over-growth of the labouring population,

[1] H. Merivale, *Lectures on Colonization and Colonies*, 1841. Vol. I, p. 146.

not by their becoming relatively supernumerary. He says: "Prudential habits with regard to marriage, carried to a considerable extent among the labouring class of a country mainly depending upon manufactures and commerce, might injure it. . . . From the nature of a population, an increase of labourers cannot be brought into market in consequence of a particular demand till after the lapse of 16 or 18 years, and the conversion of revenue into capital, by saving, may take place much more rapidly; a country is always liable to an increase in the quantity of the funds for the maintenance of labour faster than the increase of population."[1] After Political Economy has thus demonstrated the constant production of a relative surplus-population of labourers to be a necessity of capitalistic accumulation, she very aptly, in the guise of an old maid, puts in the mouth of her "beau ideal" of a capitalist the following words addressed to those supernumeraries thrown on the streets by their own creation of additional capital: "We manufacturers do what we can for you, whilst we are increasing that capital on which you must subsist, and you must do the rest by accommodating your numbers to the means of subsistence."[2]

Capitalist production can by no means content itself with the quantity of disposable labour-power which the natural increase of population yields. It requires for its free play an industrial reserve army independent of these natural limits.

Up to this point it has been assumed that the increase or diminution of the variable capital corresponds rigidly with the increase or diminution of the number of labourers employed.

The number of labourers commanded by capital may remain the same, or even fall, while the variable capital increases. This is the case if the individual labourer yields more labour, and therefore his wages increase, and this although the price of labour remains the same or even falls, only more slowly than the mass of labour rises. Increase of variable capital, in this case becomes an index of more labour, but not of more

[1] Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy*, pp. 254, 319, 320. In this work, Malthus finally discovers, with the help of Sismondi, the beautiful Trinity of capitalistic production: over-production, over-population, over-consumption—three very delicate monsters, indeed. Cf. F. Engels, *Umrisse zu einer Kritik der National-Oekonomie, Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher*, Paris, 1844, p. 107, *et seq.*

[2] Harriet Martineau, *The Manchester Strike*, 1842, p. 101.

labourers employed. It is the absolute interest of every capitalist to press a given quantity of labour out of a smaller, rather than a greater number of labourers, if the cost is about the same. In the latter case, the outlay of constant capital increases in proportion to the mass of labour set in action; in the former that increase is much smaller. The more extended the scale of production, the stronger this motive. Its force increases with the accumulation of capital.

We have seen that the development of the capitalist mode of production and of the productive power of labour—at once the cause and effect of accumulation—enables the capitalist, with the same outlay of variable capital, to set in action more labour by greater exploitation (extensive or intensive) of each individual labour-power. We have further seen that the capitalist buys with the same capital a greater mass of labour-power, as he progressively replaces skilled labourers by less skilled, mature labour-power by immature, male by female, that of adults by that of young persons or children.

On the one hand, therefore, with the progress of accumulation, a larger variable capital sets more labour in action without enlisting more labourers; on the other, a variable capital of the same magnitude sets in action more labour with the same mass of labour-power; and, finally, a greater number of inferior labour-powers by displacement of higher.

The production of a relative surplus-population, or the setting free of labourers, goes on therefore yet more rapidly than the technical revolution of the process of production that accompanies, and is accelerated by, the advance of accumulation; and more rapidly than the corresponding diminution of the variable part of capital as compared with the constant. If the means of production, as they increase in extent and effective power, become to a less extent means of employment of labourers, this state of things is again modified by the fact that in proportion as the productiveness of labour increases, capital increases its supply of labour more quickly than its demand for labourers. The over-work of the employed part of the working class swells the ranks of the reserve, whilst conversely the greater pressure that the latter by its competition exerts on the former, forces these to submit to over-work and

to subjugation under the dictates of capital. The condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness by the over-work of the other part, and the converse, becomes a means of enriching the individual capitalists,[1] and accelerates at the same time the production of the industrial reserve army on a scale corresponding with the advance of social accumulation. How important is this element in the formation of the relative surplus-population, is shown by the example of England. Her technical means for saving labour are colossal. Nevertheless, if to-morrow morning labour generally were reduced to a rational amount, and proportioned to the different sections of the working class according to age and sex, the working population to hand would be absolutely insufficient for the carrying on of national production on its present scale. The great majority of the labourers now "unproductive" would have to be turned into "productive" ones.

Taking them as a whole, the general movements of wages are exclusively regulated by the expansion and contraction of the industrial reserve army, and these again correspond to the periodic changes of the industrial cycle. They are, therefore, not determined by the variations of the absolute number of the working population, but by the varying proportions in

[1] Even in the cotton famine of 1863 we find, in a pamphlet of the operative cotton-spinners of Blackburn, fierce denunciations of overwork, which, in consequence of the Factory Acts, of course only affected adult male labourers. "The adult operatives at this mill have been asked to work from 12 to 13 hours per day, while there are hundreds who are compelled to be idle who would willingly work partial time, in order to maintain their families and save their brethren from a premature grave through being overworked. . . . We", it goes on to say, "would ask if the practice of working overtime by a number of hands, is likely to create a good feeling between masters and servants. Those who are worked overtime feel the injustice equally with those who are condemned to forced idleness. There is in the district almost sufficient work to give to all partial employment if fairly distributed. We are only asking what is right in requesting the masters generally to pursue a system of short hours, particularly until a better state of things begins to dawn upon us, rather than to work a portion of the hands overtime, while others, for want of work, are compelled to exist upon charity" (*Reports of Insp. of Fact.*, 31 October, 1863, p. 8). The author of the *Essay on Trade and Commerce* (London, 1770) grasps the effect of a relative surplus-population on the employed labourers with his usual unerring bourgeois instinct. "Another cause of idleness in this kingdom is the want of a sufficient number of labouring hands. . . . Whenever from an extraordinary demand for manufactures, labour grows scarce, the labourers feel their own consequence, and will make their masters feel it likewise —it is amazing; but so depraved are the dispositions of these people, that in such cases a set of workmen have combined to distress the employer, by idling a whole day together" (*Essay, etc.*, pp. 27, 28). The fellows in fact were hankering after a rise in wages.

which the working class is divided into active and reserve army, by the increase or diminution in the relative amount of the surplus-population, by the extent to which it is now absorbed, now set free. For Modern Industry with its decennial cycles and periodic phases, which, moreover, as accumulation advances, are complicated by irregular oscillations following each other more and more quickly, that would indeed be a beautiful law, which pretends to make the action of capital dependent on the absolute variation of the population, instead of regulating the demand and supply of labour by the alternate expansion and contraction of capital, the labour-market now appearing relatively under-full, because capital is expanding, now again over-full, because it is contracting. Yet this is the dogma of the economists. According to them, wages rise in consequence of accumulation of capital. The higher wages stimulate the working population to more rapid multiplication, and this goes on until the labour-market becomes too full, and therefore capital, relatively to the supply of labour, becomes insufficient. Wages fall, and now we have the reverse of the medal. The working population is little by little decimated as the result of the fall in wages, so that capital is again in excess relatively to them, or, as others explain it, falling wages and the corresponding increase in the exploitation of the labourer again accelerates accumulation, whilst, at the same time, the lower wages hold the increase of the working-class in check. Then comes again the time, when the supply of labour is less than the demand, wages rise, and so on. A beautiful mode of motion this for developed capitalist production! Before, in consequence of the rise of wages, any positive increase of the population really fit for work could occur, the time would have been passed again and again, during which the industrial campaign must have been carried through, the battle fought and won.

Between 1849 and 1859, a rise of wages practically insignificant, though accompanied by falling prices of corn, took place in the English agricultural districts. In Wiltshire, e.g., the weekly wages rose from 7*s.* to 8*s.*; in Dorsetshire from 7*s.* or 8*s.*, to 9*s.*, etc. This was the result of an unusual exodus of the agricultural surplus-population caused by the demands of war,

the vast extension of railroads, factories, mines, etc. The lower the wages, the higher is the proportion in which ever so insignificant a rise of them expresses itself. If the weekly wage, e.g., is 20*s*. and it rises to 22*s*., that is a rise of 10 per cent.; but if it is only 7*s*. and it rises to 9*s*., that is a rise of $28\frac{4}{7}$ per cent., which sounds very fine. Everywhere the farmers were howling, and the *London Economist*, with reference to these starvation-wages, prattled quite seriously of "a general and substantial advance".[1] What did the farmers do now? Did they wait until, in consequence of this brilliant remuneration, the agricultural labourers had so increased and multiplied that their wages must fall again, as prescribed by the dogmatic economic brain? They introduced more machinery, and in a moment the labourers were redundant again in a proportion satisfactory even to the farmers. There was now "more capital" laid out in agriculture than before, and in a more productive form. With this the demand for labour fell, not only relatively, but absolutely.

The above economic fiction confuses the laws that regulate the general movement of wages, or the ratio between the working class—i.e. the total labour-power—and the total social capital, with the laws that distribute the working population over the different spheres of production. If, e.g. in consequence of favourable circumstances, accumulation in a particular sphere of production becomes especially active, and profits in it, being greater than the average profits, attract additional capital, of course the demand for labour rises and wages also rise. The higher wages draw a larger part of the working population into the more favoured sphere, until it is glutted with labour-power, and wages at length fall again to their average level or below it, if the pressure is too great. Then, not only does the immigration of labourers into the branch of industry in question cease; it gives place to their emigration. Here the political economist thinks he sees the why and wherefore of an absolute increase of workers accompanying an increase of wages, and of a diminution of wages accompanying an absolute increase of labourers. But he sees really only the local oscillation of the labour-market in a par-

[1] *Economist*, 21 January, 1860.

ticular sphere of production—he sees only the phenomena accompanying the distribution of the working population into the different spheres of outlay of capital, according to its varying needs.

The industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active labour-army; during the periods of over-production and paroxysm, it holds its pretensions in check. Relative surplus-population is therefore the pivot upon which the law of demand and supply of labour works. It confines the field of action of this law within the limits absolutely convenient to the activity of exploitation and to the domination of capital.

This is the place to return to one of the grand exploits of economic apologetics. It will be remembered that if through the introduction of new, or the extension of old, machinery, a portion of variable capital is transformed into constant, the economic apologist interprets this operation which "fixes" capital and by that very act sets labourers "free", in exactly the opposite way, pretending that it sets free capital for the labourers. Only now can one fully understand the effrontery of these apologists. What are set free are not only the labourers immediately turned out by the machines, but also their future substitutes in the rising generation, and the additional contingent, that with the usual extension of trade on the old basis would be regularly absorbed. They are now all "set free", and every new bit of capital looking out for employment can dispose of them. Whether it attracts them or others, the effect on the general labour demand will be nil, if this capital is just sufficient to take out of the market as many labourers as the machines threw upon it. If it employs a smaller number, that of the supernumeraries increases; if it employs a greater, the general demand for labour only increases to the extent of the excess of the employed over those "set free". The impulse that additional capital, seeking an outlet, would otherwise have given to the general demand for labour, is therefore in every case neutralised to the extent of the labourers thrown out of employment by the machine. That is to say, the mechanism of capitalistic production so manages matters that the absolute increase of capital is accompanied by no corresponding rise in

the general demand for labour. And this the apologist calls a compensation for the misery, the sufferings, the possible death of the displaced labourers during the transition period that banishes them into the industrial reserve army! The demand for labour is not identical with increase of capital, nor supply of labour with increase of the working class. It is not a case of two independent forces working on one another. *Les dés sont pipés*. Capital works on both sides at the same time. If its accumulation, on the one hand, increases the demand for labour, it increases on the other the supply of labourers by the "setting free" of them, whilst at the same time the pressure of the unemployed compels those that are employed to furnish more labour, and therefore makes the supply of labour, to a certain extent, independent of the supply of labourers. The action of the law of supply and demand of labour on this basis completes the despotism of capital. As soon, therefore, as the labourers learn the secret, how it comes to pass that in the same measure as they work more, as they produce more wealth for others, and as the productive power of their labour increases, so in the same measure even their function as a means of the self-expansion of capital becomes more and more precarious for them; as soon as they discover that the degree of intensity of the competition among themselves depends wholly on the pressure of the relative surplus-population; as soon as, by Trades' Unions, etc., they try to organise a regular co-operation between employed and unemployed in order to destroy or to weaken the ruinous effects of this natural law of capitalistic production on their class, so soon capital and its sycophant, political economy, cry out at the infringement of the "eternal" and so to say "sacred" law of supply and demand. Every combination of employed and unemployed disturbs the "harmonious" action of this law. But as soon as (in the colonies, e.g.) adverse circumstances prevent the creation of an industrial reserve army and, with it, the absolute dependence of the working class upon the capitalist class, capital, along with its commonplace Sancho Panza, rebels against the "sacred" law of supply and demand, and tries to check its inconvenient action by forcible means and State interference.

The relative surplus population exists in every possible form. Every labourer belongs to it during the time when he is only partially employed or wholly unemployed. Not taking into account the great periodically recurring forms that the changing phases of the industrial cycle impress on it, now an acute form during the crisis, then again a chronic form during dull times—it has always three forms, the floating, the latent, the stagnant.

In the centres of modern industry—factories, manufactures, ironworks, mines, etc.—the labourers are sometimes repelled, sometimes attracted again in greater masses, the number of those employed increasing on the whole, although in a constantly decreasing proportion to the scale of production. Here the surplus population exists in the floating form.

In the automatic factories, as in all the great workshops, where machinery enters as a factor, or where only the modern division of labour is carried out, large numbers of boys are employed up to the age of maturity. When this term is once reached, only a very small number continue to find employment in the same branches of industry, whilst the majority are regularly discharged. This majority forms an element of the floating surplus-population, growing with the extension of those branches of industry. Part of them emigrates, following in fact capital that has emigrated. One consequence is that the female population grows more rapidly than the male, *teste* England. That the natural increase of the number of labourers does not satisfy the requirements of the accumulation of capital, and yet all the time is in excess of them, is a contradiction inherent to the movement of capital itself. It wants larger numbers of youthful labourers, a smaller number of adults. The contradiction is not more glaring than that other one that there is a complaint of the want of hands, while at the same time many thousands are out of work, because the division of labour chains them to a particular branch of industry.[1]

The consumption of labour-power by capital is, besides, so rapid that the labourer, half-way through his life, has already

[1] Whilst during the last six months of 1866, 80–90,000 working people in London were thrown out of work, the Factory Report for that same half-year says: "It does not appear absolutely true to say that demand will always produce supply just at the moment when it is needed. It has not done so with labour, for much machinery has been idle last year for want of hands" (*Rep. of Insp. of Fact.*, 31 October, 1866, p. 81).

more or less completely lived himself out. He falls into the ranks of the supernumeraries, or is thrust down from a higher to a lower step in the scale. It is precisely among the workpeople of modern industry that we meet with the shortest duration of life. Dr. Lee, Medical Officer of Health for Manchester, stated "that the average age at death of the Manchester . . . upper middle class was 38 years, while the average age at death of the labouring class was 17; while at Liverpool those figures were represented as 35 against 15. It thus appeared that the well-to-do classes had a lease of life which was more than double the value of that which fell to the lot of the less favoured citizens."[1] In order to conform to these circumstances, the absolute increase of this section of the proletariat must take place under conditions that shall swell their numbers, although the individual elements are used up rapidly. Hence, rapid renewal of the generations of labourers (this law does not hold for the other classes of the population). This social need is met by early marriages, a necessary consequence of the conditions in which the labourers of modern industry live, and by the premium that the exploitation of children sets on their production.

As soon as capitalist production takes possession of agriculture, and in proportion to the extent to which it does so, the demand for an agricultural labouring population falls absolutely, while the accumulation of the capital employed in agriculture advances, without this repulsion being, as in non-agricultural industries, compensated by a greater attraction. Part of the agricultural population is therefore constantly on the point of passing over into an urban or manufacturing proletariat, and on the look-out for circumstances favourable to this transformation. (Manufacture is used here in the sense of all non-agricultural industries.)[2] This source of relative

[1] Opening address to the Sanitary Conference, Birmingham, 15 January, 1875, by J. Chamberlain, Mayor of the town, now (1883) President of the Board of Trade.

[2] 781 towns given in the census for 1861 for England and Wales "contained 10,960,998 inhabitants, while the villages and country parishes contained 9,105,226. In 1851, 580 towns were distinguished, and the population in them and in the surrounding country was nearly equal. But while in the subsequent ten years the population in the villages and the country increased half a million, the population in the 580 towns increased by a million and a half (1,554,067). The increase of the population of the country parishes is 6·5 per cent., and of the towns 17·3 per cent. The difference in the rates of increase is due to the migration from country to town. Three-fourths of the total increase of population has taken place in the towns (*Census, etc.*, pp. 11 and 12).

surplus-population is thus constantly flowing. But the constant flow towards the towns presupposes, in the country itself, a constant latent surplus-population, the extent of which becomes evident only when its channels of outlet open to exceptional width. The agricultural labourer is therefore reduced to the minimum of wages, and always stands with one foot already in the swamp of pauperism.

The third category of the relative surplus-population, the stagnant, forms a part of the active labour army, but with extremely irregular employment. Hence it furnishes to capital an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour-power. Its conditions of life sink below the average normal level of the working class; this makes it at once the broad basis of special branches of capitalist exploitation. It is characterised by maximum of working time, and minimum of wages. We have learnt to know its chief form under the rubric of "domestic industry". It recruits itself constantly from the supernumerary forces of modern industry and agriculture, and specially from those decaying branches of industry where handicraft is yielding to manufacture, manufacture to machinery. Its extent grows, as with the extent and energy of accumulation, the creation of a surplus population advances. But it forms at the same time a self-reproducing and self-perpetuating element of the working class, taking a proportionally greater part in the general increase of that class than the other elements. In fact, not only the number of births and deaths, but the absolute size of the families stand in inverse proportion to the height of wages, and therefore to the amount of means of subsistence of which the different categories of labourers dispose. This law of capitalistic society would sound absurd to savages, or even civilised colonists. It calls to mind the boundless reproduction of animals individually weak and constantly hunted down.[1]

The lowest sediment of the relative surplus-population finally

[1] "Poverty seems favourable to generation" (A. Smith). This is even a specially wise arrangement of God, according to the gallant and witty Abbé Galiani. "Iddio af che gli uomini che esercitano mestieri di prima utilità nascono abbondantemente" (Galiani, *Della Moneta*, in Custodi, *Parte Moderna*, Vol. III, p. 78). "Misery up to the extreme point of famine and pestilence, instead of checking, tends to increase population" (S. Laing, *National Distress*, 1844, p. 69). After Laing has illustrated this by statistics, he continues: "If the people were all in easy circumstances, the world would soon be depopulated."

dwells in the sphere of pauperism. Exclusive of vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes, in a word, the "dangerous" classes, this layer of society consists of three categories. First, those able to work. One need only glance superficially at the statistics of English pauperism to find that the quantity of paupers increases with every crisis, and diminishes with every revival of trade. Second, orphans and pauper children. These are candidates for the industrial reserve-army, and are, in times of great prosperity, as 1860, e.g., speedily and in large numbers enrolled in the active army of labourers. Third, the demoralised and ragged, and those unable to work, chiefly people who succumb to their incapacity for adaptation, due to the division of labour; people who have passed the normal age of the labourer; the victims of industry, whose number increases with the increase of dangerous machinery, of mines, chemical works, etc., the mutilated, the sickly, the widows, etc. Pauperism is the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve-army. Its production is included in that of the relative surplus-population, its necessity in theirs; along with the surplus-population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth. It enters into the *faux frais* of capitalist production; but capital knows how to throw these, for the most part, from its own shoulders on to those of the working class and the lower middle class.

The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and, therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve-army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, develop also the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve-army increases therefore with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve-army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus-population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour. The more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working class, and the industrial reserve-army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation.* Like all other laws it is modified in its working by

many circumstances, the analysis of which does not concern us here.

The folly is now patent of the economic wisdom that preaches to the labourers the accommodation of their number to the requirements of capital. The mechanism of capitalist production and accumulation constantly effects this adjustment. The first word of this adaptation is the creation of a relative surplus-population, or industrial reserve-army. Its last word is the misery of constantly extending strata of the active army of labour, and the dead weight of pauperism.

The law by which a constantly increasing quantity of means of production, thanks to the advance in the productiveness of social labour, may be set in movement by a progressively diminishing expenditure of human power, this law, in a capitalist society—where the labourer does not employ the means of production, but the means of production employ the labourer—undergoes a complete inversion and is expressed thus; the higher the productiveness of labour, the greater is the pressure of the labourers on the means of employment, the more precarious, therefore, becomes their condition of existence, viz., the sale of their own labour-power for the increasing of another's wealth, or for the self-expansion of capital. The fact that the means of production, and the productiveness of labour, increase more rapidly than the productive population, expresses itself, therefore, capitalistically in the inverse form that the labouring population always increases more rapidly than the conditions under which capital can employ this increase for its own self-expansion.

We saw in Part IV, when analysing the production of relative surplus-value: within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work, and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an

independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus-value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus-population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.

This antagonistic character of capitalistic accumulation[1] is enunciated in various forms by political economists, although by them it is confounded with phenomena, certainly to some extent analogous, but nevertheless essentially distinct, and belonging to precapitalistic modes of production.

The Venetian monk Ortes, one of the great economic writers of the 18th century, regards the antagonism of capitalist production as a general natural law of social wealth. "In the economy of a nation, advantages and evils always balance one another (il bene ed il male economico in una nazione sempre all, istessa misura): the abundance of wealth with some people, is always equal to the want of it with others (la copia dei beni in alcuni sempre eguale alla mancanza di essi in altri): the

[1] "From day to day it thus becomes clearer that the production relations in which the bourgeoisie moves have not a simple, uniform character, but a dual character; that in the self-same relations in which wealth is produced, poverty is produced also; that in the self-same relations in which there is a development of the productive forces, there is also a driving force of repression; that these relations produce *bourgeois wealth*, i.e. the wealth of the bourgeois class, only by continually annihilating the wealth of the individual members of this class and by producing an ever-growing proletariat" (Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Lawrence and Wishart edn., p. 104).

great riches of a small number are always accompanied by the absolute privation of the first necessaries of life for many others. The wealth of a nation corresponds with its population, and its misery corresponds with its wealth. Diligence in some compels idleness in others. The poor and idle are a necessary consequence of the rich and active", etc.[1] In a thoroughly brutal way about 100 years after Ortes, the Church of England parson, Townsend, glorified misery as a necessary condition of wealth. "Legal constraint (to labour) is attended with too much trouble, violence, and noise, . . . whereas hunger is not only a peaceable, silent, unremitted pressure, but as the most natural motive to industry and labour, it calls forth the most powerful exertions." Everything therefore depends upon making hunger permanent among the working class, and for this, according to Townsend, the principle of population, especially active among the poor, provides. "It seems to be a law of nature that the poor should be to a certain degree improvident" [i.e. so improvident as to be born *without* a silver spoon in the mouth], "that there may always be some to fulfil the most servile, the most sordid, and the most ignoble offices in the community. The stock of human happiness is thereby much increased, whilst the more delicate are not only relieved from drudgery . . . but are left at liberty without interruption to pursue those callings which are suited to their various dispositions . . . it [the Poor Law] tends to destroy the harmony and beauty, the symmetry and order of that system which God and Nature have established in the world."[2] If the Venetian monk

[1] G. Ortes, *Della Economia Nazionale*, Vol. VII, 1777, in Custodi, *Parte Moderna*, t. xxi, pp. 6, 9, 22, 25, etc. Ortes says, *l.c.*, p. 32: "In luoco di progettar sistemi inutili per la felicità de'popoli, mi limiterò a investigare la ragione della loro infelicità."

[2] *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws*. By a Well-wisher of Mankind (the Rev. J. Townsend), 1786, republished London, 1817, pp. 15, 39, 41. This "delicate" parson, from whose work just quoted, as well as from his *Journey through Spain*, Malthus often copies whole pages, himself borrowed the greater part of his doctrine from Sir James Steuart, whom he however alters in the borrowing. E.g. when Steuart says: "Here, in slavery, was a forcible method of making mankind diligent", [for the non-workers] . . . "Men were then forced to work" [i.e. to work gratis for others], "because they were slaves of others; men are now forced to work" [i.e. to work gratis for non-workers] "because they are the slaves of their necessities", he does not thence conclude, like the fat holder of benefices, that the wage-labourer must always go fasting. He wishes, on the contrary, to increase their wants and to make the increasing number of their wants a stimulus to their labour for the "more delicate".

found in the fatal destiny that makes misery eternal, the *raison d'être* of Christian charity, celibacy, monasteries and holy houses, the Protestant prebendary finds in it a pretext for condemning the laws in virtue of which the poor possessed a right to a miserable public relief.

"The progress of social wealth", says Storch, "begets this useful class of society . . . which performs the most wearisome, the vilest, the most disgusting functions, which takes, in a word, on its shoulders all that is disagreeable and servile in life, and procures thus for other classes leisure, serenity of mind and conventional [c'est bon!] dignity of character."[1] Storch asks himself in what then really consist the progress of this capitalistic civilisation with its misery and its degradation of the masses, as compared with barbarism. He finds but one answer: security!

"Thanks to the advance of industry and science", says Sismondi, "every labourer can produce every day much more than his consumption requires. But at the same time, whilst his labour produces wealth, that wealth would, were he called on to consume it himself, make him less fit for labour." According to him, "men" [i.e. non-workers] "would probably prefer to do without all artistic perfection, and all the enjoyments that manufactures procure for us, if it were necessary that all should buy them by constant toil like that of the labourer. . . . Exertion to-day is separated from its recompense; it is not the same man that first works, and then reposes; but it is because the one works that the other rests. . . . The indefinite multiplication of the productive powers of labour can then only have for result the increase of luxury and enjoyment of the idle rich."[2]

Finally Destutt de Tracy, the fish-blooded bourgeois doctrinaire, blurts out brutally: "In poor nations the people are comfortable, in rich nations they are generally poor."[3]

[1] Storch, *Cours d'Economie Politique*, Paris, 1823, t. iii, p. 223.

[2] Sismondi, *De la Richesse Commerciale ou Principes d'Economie Politique*, Vol. I, Genève, 1803, pp. 79, 80, 85.

[3] Destutt de Tracy, *Traité de la Volunté et de Ses Effets*, Paris, 1826, p. 231: "Les nations pauvres, c'est là où le peuple est à son aise; et les nations riches, c'est là où il est ordinairement pauvre."

(ix) THE "IRON LAW OF WAGES"

((*a*) From Engels's letter to Bebel of 18–28 March, 1875; and (*b*) from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875))

(*a*)

. . . THIRDLY, our people have allowed the Lassallean "iron law of wages" to be foisted upon them, and this is based on a quite antiquated economic view, namely, that the worker only receives on the average the *minimum* of the labour wage, because, according to Malthus's theory of population, there are always too many workers (this was Lassalle's argument). Now Marx has proved in detail in *Capital* that the laws regulating wages are very complicated, that sometimes one predominates and sometimes another, according to circumstances, that therefore they are in no sense iron but on the contrary very elastic, and that the thing can by no means be dismissed in a few words, as Lassalle imagines. The Malthusian basis for the law which Lassalle copied from Malthus and Ricardo (with a falsification of the latter), as it is to be found for instance in the *Arbeiterlesebuch* [*Workers' Reader*], p. 5, quoted from another pamphlet of Lassalle, has been refuted in detail by Marx in the section on the *Process of Capital Accumulation*. Thus by adopting Lassalle's "iron law" we commit ourselves to a false statement with a false basis.

(*b*)

> "Starting from these basic principles, the German Workers' Party strives by all legal means for the *free state—and*—socialist society; the abolition of the wage system *together with* the *iron law of wages*—and—exploitation in every form; the removal of all social and political inequality."

I shall return to the "free" state later.

Thus, in future, the German Workers' Party has got to believe in Lassalle's "iron law of wages"! That this shall not be lost,

the nonsense is perpetrated of speaking of the "abolition of the wage system" (it should read: system of wage labour) *together with* the "iron law of wages". If I abolish wage labour, then naturally I abolish its laws also, whether they are of "iron" or sponge. But Lassalle's attack on wage labour turns almost solely on this so-called law. In order, therefore, to prove that Lassalle's sect has conquered, the "wage system" must be abolished "*together* with the iron law of wages" and not without it.

It is well known that nothing of the "iron law of wages" belongs to Lassalle except the word "iron" borrowed from Goethe's "great, eternal, iron laws". The word *iron* is a label by which the true believers recognise one another. But if I take the law with Lassalle's stamp on it and consequently in his sense then I must also take it with his basis for it. And what is that? As Lange already showed, shortly after Lassalle's death, it is the Malthusian theory of population (preached by Lange himself). But if this theory is correct, then again I can *not* abolish the law even if I abolish wage labour a hundred times over, because the law then governs not only the system of wage labour but *every* social system. Basing themselves directly on this, the economists have proved for fifty years and more that socialism cannot abolish poverty, *which has its basis in nature*, but can only *generalise* it, distribute it simultaneously over the whole surface of society!

(x) POPULATION AND COMMUNISM

(From Engels's letter to Kautsky of 1 February, 1881)

EVEN if the professorial socialists are persistently demanding that we, the proletarian socialists, should solve for them the problem of how to avoid the possible setting in of overpopulation and the imminent danger of a collapse of the new social order which it would bring with it, this is far from being a sufficient reason why I should do them this favour. I should consider it as a sheer waste of time to remove for these people all the scruples and doubts which they have acquired thanks to their own confused hyper-wisdom, or even, for example, to refute all the awful rubbish which Schäffle alone has put together in his many bulky tomes. It would take a large-sized volume merely to correct the *misquotations* from *Capital* which these gentlemen put in inverted commas. Let them first learn to read and copy before they demand answers to their questions.

Moreover, I do not consider the question to be at all a burning one at a time when American mass-production and *real* large-scale agriculture, which are only now coming into existence, are literally threatening to suffocate us under the weight of the means of subsistence they have produced; on the eve of a revolution which must have this consequence among others, that *the earth will now be populated*—what you say about this on pp. 169–70[1] touches far too superficially on this point —and which in Europe will also be *certain to require* a large increase of population.

Euler's calculation is of exactly the same value as that concerning the kreutzer[2] which is put out at compound interest in the first year of our era, which doubles itself every thirteen years, and which therefore now amounts to about $\frac{1 \times 2^{144}}{60}$ gulden, a lump of silver bigger than the earth. When you say on p. 169

[1] The reference is to Kautsky's book *Der Einfluss der Volksvermehrung auf den Fortschritt der Gesellschaft* [The Influence of the Increase of Population on the Progress of Society], Vienna, 1880.—*Ed.*

[2] A small coin, formerly current in Germany and Austria.—*Ed.*

that there is not much difference between the social conditions of America and those of Europe, surely this is only true as regards the large coastal towns, or the outward legal forms in which these conditions are clothed. The great mass of the American population certainly lives under conditions which are extremely favourable to an increase of population. This is proved by the flow of immigration. And yet it will take more than thirty years for the population to double itself. That doesn't scare me!

There is, of course, the abstract possibility that the number of people will become so great that limits will have to be set to their increase. But if at some stage communist society finds itself obliged to regulate the production of human beings, just as it has already come to regulate the production of things, it will be precisely this society, and this society alone, which can carry this out without difficulty. It does not seem to me that it would be at all difficult in such a society to achieve by planning a result which has already been produced spontaneously, without planning, in France and Lower Austria. At any rate, it is for the people in the communist society themselves to decide whether, when, and how this is to be done, and what means they wish to employ for the purpose. I do not feel called upon to make proposals or give them advice about it. These people, in any case, will surely not be any less intelligent than we are.

Incidentally, as early as 1844 I wrote (*Deutsch-Französische Jahrb.*, p. 109): "Even if Malthus were altogether right, it would still be necessary to carry out this (socialist) reorganisation immediately, since only this reorganisation, only the enlightenment of the masses which it can bring with it, can make possible that moral restraint upon the instinct for reproduction which Malthus himself puts forward as the easiest and most effective countermeasure against overpopulation."

(xi) THE MALTHUSIAN THEORY IN REVERSE

(From Engels's letter to Danielson of 9 January, 1895)

I HAVE received your letter of 1 December. I do not understand what Mr. von Struve means when he asserts that Marx *completes* Malthus's theory of population, but does not *repudiate* it.[1] I should have thought that the note on Malthus in Volume I, footnote 75 to Chapter 23, 1,[2] would be plain enough for anybody. Moreover, I do not understand how anyone can to-day speak of a completion of the Malthusian theory that *the population presses against the means of subsistence*, at a time when corn in London costs 20 shillings a quarter, or half the average price of 1848–70, and when it is generally recognised that *the means of subsistence are pressing against the population*, which is not large enough to consume them! And if in Russia the farmer is forced to sell corn which he really should consume, he is forced to do this not by the pressure of population, but by the pressure of the tax-collector, the landlord, the kulak, etc., etc. As far as I know, it is the low price of Argentine wheat more than anything else which is to blame for the agrarian distress in the whole of Europe, Russia included.

[1] P. von Struve, *Critical Notes on the Development of Capitalism in Russia*, St. Petersburg, 1894.—*Ed.*

[2] Engels refers to the footnote which is partly reproduced above, pp. 83–4.—*Ed.*

Part Three

MARX ON MALTHUS AND ECONOMIC THEORY IN GENERAL

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

MARX originally intended to conclude *Capital* with a final volume in which "the history of the theory" was to be discussed. Between 1861 and 1863 he prepared a great deal of material with this end in view. After Marx's death, Engels took over this material with the intention of putting it into a publishable form, but he himself died before he had time to do so. The task was therefore entrusted to Kautsky, who edited Marx's manuscript (by no means satisfactorily) and published the work under the title *Theorien über den Mehrwert* ("Theories of Surplus Value") between 1905 and 1910. An excellent English translation of selections from the work was published in 1951, but up to now there has been no English translation of the important sections dealing with Malthus.

Three extracts from the *Theorien* are translated below. The first of these occurs in the course of Marx's extended discussion of Ricardo, at the beginning of a section dealing with the history of the discovery of the so-called "Ricardian" theory of rent. The "Ricardian" theory of rent, although it has come to be associated with Ricardo's name, was in fact put forward almost at the same time—early in 1815—by four economists (Malthus, West, Torrens and Ricardo), and priorities are very difficult to establish. Almost forty years before this, however, a Scottish farmer called James Anderson had substantially anticipated the theory in a pamphlet on the Corn Laws. Marx, in the first extract from the *Theorien* translated below, begins by discussing the unprincipled manner in which Malthus used Anderson's theory. But the discussion soon leaves this rather specialist field and develops into a general attack upon what Marx calls the "meanness" of Malthus's approach to political economy. The brilliant comparison between the "considerate" character of Malthus's outlook and the "inconsiderate" character of Ricardo's is especially noteworthy.

The second and third of the extracts translated below are both taken from the special section of the *Theorien* which Marx devoted to Malthus. This section follows upon Marx's lengthy study of Ricardo, and immediately precedes a section dealing with "The Dissolution of the Ricardian School". It consists of five parts: (1) Value and Surplus Value; (2) Variable Capital and Accumulation; (3) Overproduction and Overconsumption; (4) The Author of the *Inquiry*; (5) The Author of the *Outlines*. "Value and Surplus Value" appears below in its entirety as the second extract, and "Overproduction and Overconsumption" in a shortened form as the third. The other parts, which are short and of secondary importance, have not been included.

The second extract contains an exhaustive analysis of Malthus's theories of value and profit. Marx shows in particular how Malthus's superficial theory of value leads him directly to the "vulgar" idea that profit is something which the capitalist simply "adds on" when he sells his commodity.

In the third extract, he shows how these theories of value and profit in turn lead Malthus to the apologetic doctrine of "the necessity for an ever-increasing unproductive consumption". The third extract concludes with a remarkable survey of the differences and resemblances between Malthus, Ricardo and Sismondi, and an incisive summary indictment of Malthus's economic work as a whole. A review of Marx's main arguments in these sections will be found in the Introductory Essay in the present volume.

The first extract is translated from Vol. II, 1, of the Kautsky edition of the *Theorien*, pp. 304–15, and the second and third from Vol. III, pp. 1–29 and 35–61.

(i) MALTHUS AS AN APOLOGIST

(From Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. II (written 1861–3))

ANDERSON AND MALTHUS

ANDERSON was a practical farmer. His first work, in which he *incidentally* discusses the nature of rent, appeared in 1777,[1] at a time when in the eyes of a large part of the public Sir James Steuart was still the leading economist, but when general attention was also being directed to the *Wealth of Nations*, which had appeared in the previous year. In this situation, the work of the Scottish farmer, which was concerned with a controversial question of immediate practical interest, and which did not deal with rent "*ex professo*" but merely explained its nature in passing, could not attract any attention. Just as incidentally, this theory of his turns up again in one or two of his essays in a three-volume collection, edited by himself, which appeared under the title *Essays Relating to Agriculture and Rural Affairs*, 3 vols., Edinburgh, 1777–1796.[2] The same goes for *Recreations in Agriculture, Natural-History, Arts and Miscellaneous Literature*, London, which was published in 1799–1802. Both these works were directly intended for farmers and agriculturists. If Anderson had had a presentiment of the importance of his find, and had put it before the public on its own in the form of an examination of the nature of ground rent, or if he had possessed even a part of the talent for trading in his own ideas which his compatriot McCulloch displayed so successfully with those of other people,[3] matters [would have turned out] differently. When his theory was reproduced in 1815, it appeared straight away in the form of an independent *theoretical* examination of the nature of rent, as is shown by the very

[1] *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Corn-Laws, etc.*, Edinburgh, 1777. Marx is mistaken in saying that this was Anderson's first work.—*Ed.*

[2] Marx's reference is to the second edition. The first edition, in one volume, was published in 1775.—*Ed.*

[3] Marx is probably referring to McCulloch's habit of publishing the same (often unoriginal) material in several different places.—*Ed.*

titles of the respective works of West and Malthus—*Essay on the Application of Capital to Land*, and *Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent.*

Malthus used this theory of rent of Anderson's in order to endow his law of population for the first time with an economic and real, natural-historical foundation, for his nonsense [borrowed] from earlier writers about the geometrical and arithmetical progressions was a purely chimerical hypothesis. Malthus availed himself of the opportunity at once. And Ricardo, as he himself says in the preface,[1] even made this doctrine of rent into one of the most important elements of the whole system of political economy, and gave to it—not to mention an exact formulation—an entirely new theoretical importance.

Ricardo was evidently unaware of Anderson's work, since in the preface to his *Principles of Political Economy* he speaks only of West and Malthus as the discoverers of the law of rent. Judging from the original manner in which West presents the law, it is possible that he too was unacquainted with Anderson, as Tooke was with Steuart.[2] This is not the case with Malthus. A careful comparison of their work shows that he knows Anderson and uses him. Malthus was altogether a *plagiarist* by profession. One has only to compare the first edition of his work on population with the work by the Rev. Townsend[3] to become convinced that he does not use the latter as raw material, as an independent producer would, but that he copies and paraphrases him, like a slavish plagiarist, although he *nowhere mentions* him, keeping his existence a *secret.* The manner in which Malthus used Anderson is characteristic. Anderson had defended bounties on the export and duties on the import of corn, not in any way out of concern for the landlords, but because he considered that legislation of this kind would lower the price of production of corn and ensure the even development of the productive powers of agriculture. Malthus took over this practical conclusion from Anderson because, like a

[1] To his *Principles of Political Economy*. See Sraffa's edn. of Ricardo's *Works and Correspondence*, Vol. I, pp. 5–6.—*Ed.*

[2] For an explanation of this reference to Tooke and Steuart, see Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*, Kerr edn., p. 260.—*Ed.*

[3] Joseph Townsend, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws*, 1786.—*Ed.*

true member of the English State Church, he was a professional sycophant of the landed aristocracy, whose rents, sinecures, extravagance, heartlessness, etc., he justified from the economic point of view. Malthus defends the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie only in so far as they are identical with the interests of landed property, of the aristocracy, that is, in so far as they are *opposed to* the interests of the mass of the people, of the proletariat; but where the interests of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy diverge and come into conflict with one another, he stands on the side of the aristocracy in opposition to the bourgeoisie. Hence his defence of "*unproductive* labourers", overconsumption, etc.

Anderson, on the other hand, had explained the difference between land which pays rent and [land which] does not pay rent, or between pieces of land which pay unequal rents, in terms of the relative infertility of the soil which yields no rent, or which yields a smaller rent, compared with that of the soil which does yield rent, or which yields a larger rent. But he had expressly stated that these degrees of relative fertility of different grades of soil, and thus also the relative infertility of the worse grades of soil compared with the better grades, have no connection whatsoever with the absolute fertility of agriculture. On the contrary, he had not only emphasised that the absolute fertility of all grades of soil could be constantly increased, and with the growth of population must be constantly increased, but had also gone further, asserting that the inequalities in the fertility of the different grades of soil could be progressively evened out. He said that the present degree of development of agriculture in England gave no indication of its possibilities of further development. He [also] said that the price of corn could be high and rent low in one country, while in another country the price of corn was low and rent high. This followed from his principle, since in both countries the existence and level of rent are determined by the difference between the fertile and infertile soils, and in neither of them by the absolute fertility; in each of the countries the existence and level of rent are determined only by the differences of degree in the fertility of the grades of soil to be found there, and in neither of them by the average fertility of these grades

of soil. He concludes from this that the absolute fertility of agriculture has nothing whatsoever to do with rent. That is why he revealed himself subsequently, as we shall see below, as a confirmed enemy of the Malthusian theory of population, never suspecting that his own theory of rent was destined to serve as the foundation for this monstrous invention. Anderson explained the rise in the price of corn in England between 1750 and 1801, as compared with the period from 1700 to 1750, not at all by the cultivation of progressively more infertile grades of soil, but by the influence of legislation upon agriculture during these two periods.

Now what does Malthus do?

In place of his chimera (also plagiarised) of the geometrical and arithmetical progressions, which he retained as a form of words, Malthus used Anderson's theory to confirm his theory of population. He retained the practical conclusions drawn by Anderson from the theory in so far as they coincided with the interests of the landlords—a fact which alone is sufficient to prove that he understood the connection of this theory with the system of political economy as little as did Anderson himself. Without going into the evidence to the contrary put forward by the discoverer of the theory, he turned it against the proletariat. He left it to Ricardo to make the theoretical and practical progress which was possible with the help of this theory—theoretical progress, in the determination of the *value* of commodities, etc., and in gaining an insight into the nature of landed property; practical progress, in opposing the necessity for private property in land on the basis of bourgeois production, and also in opposing all State measures, such as duties on corn, which augmented this landed property. The only practical conclusions which Malthus drew from the theory were a defence of the protective tariff which the landlords of 1815 were demanding—a sycophantic service to the aristocracy,—and a new justification of the poverty of the producers of wealth, a new apology for the exploiters of labour. [Viewed from this angle, his practical conclusion from the theory is also a] sycophantic service to the industrial capitalists.

What characterises Malthus is the *fundamental meanness* of his outlook; a meanness which only a parson could permit himself

to display, a parson who looks upon human misery as the punishment for the Fall of man and stands in general need of "an earthly vale of tears", but who at the same time, out of consideration for the benefices accruing to him, finds it most advantageous, with the help of the dogma of predestination, to "sweeten" the sojourn of the ruling classes in the vale of tears.

This meanness of outlook also reveals itself in his standards of scholarship. *First*, in his shameless and mechanical *plagiarism*. *Second*, in the *considerate*, not *inconsiderate*,[1] conclusions which he draws from scientific premises. Ricardo was right, for his time, in regarding the capitalist mode of production as the most advantageous for production in general, as the most advantageous for the production of wealth. He wants *production for the sake of production*, and in this [he is] *right*. Those who assert, as Ricardo's sentimental opponents have done, that production as such is not the end, forget that production for the sake of production merely means the development of human productive power, that is, *the development of the wealth of the human race as an end in itself*. If, as Sismondi does, one sets up the welfare of the individual in opposition to this end, this is tantamount to asserting that the development of the species must be *checked* in order to ensure the welfare of the individual—for example, that wars should never be waged, since individuals are necessarily destroyed in them. Sismondi is right only as against those economists who *gloss over* this antithesis or deny it. What is not understood is that the development of the capabilities of the species *man*, although it [proceeds] at first at the expense of the majority of human individuals and of certain human classes, will eventually break through this antagonism and coincide with the development of the individual person, and that therefore the higher development of individuality can only be purchased through a historical process in which individuals are sacrificed. And this is to say nothing of the sterility of such views, since the gains of the species in the human

[1] In the original German the two words are *rucksichtsvoll*, "full of (kind) consideration", and *rücksichtslos*, "without consideration (for other people)". Marx is using the words ironically in order to contrast the "considerate" manner in which Malthus tended to falsify his scientific conclusions in the interests of the landlords and capitalists, with Ricardo's "inconsiderate" lack of concern for the effect of his conclusions upon the interests of any particular class.—*Ed.*

kingdom, as in the animal and plant kingdoms, are always made at the expense of individual advantage. Ricardo's inconsiderateness was thus not only *scientifically honest*, but also, given his point of view, *scientifically necessary*. This means, however, that he was also entirely indifferent as to whether the development of productive power destroyed landed property or whether it destroyed the workers. If this progress reduces the value of the capital of the industrial bourgeoisie, it is just as welcome to him. If the development of the productive power of labour reduces the value of the existing fixed capital by a half, what does that matter, asks Ricardo. The productivity of human labour has doubled. Here, then, is *scientific honesty*. If Ricardo's theories taken together are in the interests of the *industrial bourgeoisie*, this is the case only *because* and in so far as the interests of this class coincide with those of production or of the productive development of human labour. Where they do not coincide but are in conflict with one another, Ricardo comes out just as *inconsiderately* against the bourgeoisie as in other cases he comes out against the proletariat and the aristocracy.

In connection with the characterisation of Ricardo, the two following passages are of decisive importance:

> "I shall greatly regret that considerations for any particular class, are allowed to check the progress of the wealth and population of the country" (Ricardo, *An Essay on the Influence of a Low Price of Corn on the Profits of Stock, etc.*, 1815, Sraffa's edn., Vol. IV, p. 41).

When the import of corn is free, "land is abandoned" (*ibid.*, p. 39). [But industrial production is advanced.] Thus landed property is sacrificed to the development of production.

But, in the same case of free import of corn:

> "That some capital would be lost cannot be disputed, but is the possession or preservation of capital the end, or the means? The means, undoubtedly. What we want is an abundance of commodities,[1] and if it could be proved that by the sacrifice of a part of our capital we should augment the annual produce of those objects which contribute to our

[1] Wealth in general.

enjoyment and happiness, we ought not, I should think, to repine at the loss of a part of our capital" (*On Protection to Agriculture*, 1822, Sraffa's edn., Vol. IV, pp. 248–9).

By "*our capital*" Ricardo means capital which belongs neither to *us* nor to *him*, but which is laid out by *the capitalists* on landed property. But *we* (!) represent the nation as a whole. The increase of "*our*" wealth is the increase of *social* wealth, which is an end in itself, irrespective of those who participate in this wealth!

> "To an individual with a capital of 20,000*l.*, whose profits were 2,000*l.* per annum, it would be a matter quite indifferent whether his capital would employ a hundred or a thousand men, whether the commodity produced sold for 10,000*l.*, or for 2,000*l.*, provided, in all cases, his profits were not diminished below 2,000*l.* Is not the real interest of the nation similar? Provided its net real income, its rent and profits be the same, it is of no importance whether the nation consists of ten or of twelve millions of inhabitants" (*Principles of Political Economy*, Sraffa's edn., Vol. I, p. 348).

Here the "proletariat" is sacrificed to wealth. In so far as the proletariat is of no importance for the existence of wealth, wealth places no importance on the existence of the proletariat. It is a mere mass—a human mass—and is of no value.

In these three examples, then, we see Ricardo's scientific impartiality.

But the contemptible Malthus draws from the scientifically established premises—which he always *steals*—only those conclusions which are *acceptable* and useful to the aristocracy as against the bourgeoisie and to both *as against* the proletariat. He therefore wants *production*, not *for the sake of production*, but only in so far as it maintains or consolidates[1] *the existing order of things* and serves to further the advantage of the ruling classes. His very first book—one of the most remarkable examples in literature of a plagiarism which was successful at the expense of the original work—had the practical aim of proving, in the

[1] In the manuscript: *ausbauscht.*—*K.* (Kautsky takes *ausbauscht*, "swells", as a slip for *ausbaut*, "consolidates".—*Ed.*)

interests of the then English government and landed aristocracy, that the doctrines of perfectibility of the French Revolution and of its supporters in England were "economically" utopian. In other words, it was a panegyrical tract in favour of the existing state of affairs as against historical development, and in addition a justification of the war against revolutionary France. His writings of 1815 on protective tariffs and ground rent were intended to corroborate his earlier apology for the poverty of the producers; but in particular they were intended to defend reactionary landed property against "enlightened", "liberal" and "progressive" capital, and above all to justify a retrograde piece of legislation put forward in England in the interests of the aristocracy as against the industrial bourgeoisie. Finally his *Principles of Political Economy*, directed against Ricardo, had essentially the aim of confining the absolute demands of industrial capital, and the laws according to which its productivity develops, within limits which would be "advantageous" and "desirable" from the point of view of the landed aristocracy, the State Church to which Malthus belonged, government officials (*Regierungspersonen*), and tax-consumers (*Steuerverzehrer*). But a man who tries to *accommodate* science to a point of view which is not derived from science itself, however erroneous it may be, but which is borrowed from outside, from *extrinsic interests* which are *foreign* to it, I call "*mean*". Ricardo is not mean when he places the proletarians on the same level as machinery, beasts of burden or commodities, because from his point of view "production" demands that they should be merely machinery or beasts of burden and because in actual fact they are only commodities in capitalist production. This is stoical, objective, and scientific. In so far as it is possible without sinning against his science, Ricardo is always a philanthropist, as he was in practice. Parson Malthus, [it is true, also] reduces the workers to beasts of burden for the sake of production, and even condemns them to live in celibacy and to die of hunger. [But] where the same demands of production reduce the landlord's "rent", or encroach too much on the "tithes" of the State Church or the interests of the tax-consumers, or where they sacrifice that section of the industrial bourgeoisie whose interests hinder progress to that section

of the bourgeoisie which advocates the progress of production —that is, where it is a question of any interest of the aristocracy as against the bourgeoisie, or of the conservative and stagnating bourgeoisie as against the progressive bourgeoisie—in all these cases "Parson" Malthus does not sacrifice the exclusive interests to production, but does his best to sacrifice the demands of production to the exclusive interests of the existing ruling classes or sections of them, and to this end he falsifies his scientific conclusions. That is his scientific meanness, his sin against science, quite apart from his shameless and mechanical plagiarism. Malthus's scientific conclusions are *considerate* where the ruling classes in general and the reactionary elements among these ruling classes in particular are concerned; that is, he *falsifies* science on behalf of these interests. His conclusions are, however, *inconsiderate* where the oppressed classes are concerned. And it is not only that he is inconsiderate. He *affects* inconsiderateness, takes a cynical pleasure in this role, and *exaggerates* the conclusions—in so far as they are directed against those living in poverty—to an even *greater* extent than could be scientifically justified from his own point of view.

The hatred of the English working class against Malthus—the "mountebank-parson",[1] as Cobbett rudely calls him—is therefore entirely justified. The people were right here in sensing instinctively that they were confronted not with a *man of science* but with a *bought advocate*, a pleader on behalf of their enemies, a shameless sycophant of the ruling classes.

The author of an idea can exaggerate it and remain honest; but the plagiarist who exaggerates it always trades on this exaggeration.

[In its] first edition, Malthus's work *On Population*, since it does not contain a [single] new word of science, [is] to be regarded merely as an importunate Capuchin's sermon,[2] an Abraham à Sancta Clara[3] version of the treatment of the subject by Townsend, Steuart, Wallace, Herbert, etc. Since in actual fact it sets out to impress only by means of its *popular*

[1] In both German and English in the text.—*Ed.*

[2] I.e. a trivial, canting sermon.—*Ed.*

[3] A Roman Catholic preacher (1642–1709), remarkable for his eccentric writings.—*Ed.*

form, it is right that *popular* hatred should be directed against it.

Malthus's only merit, as against the pitiable doctrines of harmony in bourgeois political economy, is precisely his pointed emphasis on the disharmonies. Although in no instance did he discover these, yet in every instance he clings to them with parsonic satisfaction, amplifies them and blazons them forth.

Charles Darwin says in the introduction to his work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*:

> "In the next chapter the *Struggle for Existence*[1] amongst all organic beings throughout the world, which inevitably follows from the high geometrical ratio of their increase, will be treated of. This is the doctrine of Malthus, applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms" (1860 edn., London, pp. 4–5).

In his excellent work, Darwin did not see that his discovery of the "geometrical" progression in the animal and vegetable kingdoms overturns Malthus's theory. Malthus's theory is based precisely on the fact that he opposes Wallace's geometrical progression of human beings to the chimerical "arithmetical" progression of animals and plants. In Darwin's work, for example in his discussion of the extinction of species, we find a natural-historical refutation of the Malthusian theory, not only of its fundamental principle but also of its details. In so far as Malthus's theory was based on Anderson's theory of rent, it was refuted by *Anderson himself*. Ricardo, for example, when his theory leads him to the view that the rise of wages above their minimum does not increase the value of commodities, says so straight out. Malthus wants to keep wages low so that the bourgeoisie should profit.

[1] Marx's emphasis.—*Ed.*

(ii) MALTHUS ON VALUE AND SURPLUS VALUE

(From Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. III (written 1861–3))

THOMAS ROBERT MALTHUS

Value and Surplus Value

THE works by Malthus which will be considered here are:

1. *The Measure of Value Stated and Illustrated, with an application of it to the alterations in the value of the English currency since 1790*, London, 1823.

2. *Definitions in Political Economy, etc.*, London, 1827. See also the edition of the same work edited by John Cazenove, London, 1853, with "notes and supplementary remarks".

3. *Principles of Political Economy, etc.*, 2nd edn., London, 1836 (1st edn., 1820).

4. The following work by a Malthusian (that is, Malthusian in contrast to the Ricardians) will also be considered: *Outlines of Political Economy, etc.*, London, 1832.

In his work *Observations on the Effects of the Corn Laws, etc.* (1814), Malthus was still saying about Smith:

> "Dr. Smith was evidently led into this train of argument, from his habit of considering labour[1] as the standard *measure of value*,[2] and corn as the measure of labour. . . . That neither labour nor any other commodity can be an accurate measure of real value in exchange, is now considered as one of the most incontrovertible doctrines of political economy: and indeed follows, as a necessary consequence, from the very definition of value in exchange" (*Observations*, 1st edn., pp. 11–12).

But in his work of 1820, *Principles of Political Economy*, Malthus took up and used against Ricardo this very "measure of value",

[1] That is, the value of labour. [2] Marx's emphasis.—*Ed.*

which Smith himself had never used in the real (*wirklich*) parts of his theory.[1] In the work on rent mentioned above,[2] Malthus himself had held to Smith's other definition, the determination of the value of an article by the quantity of capital (accumulated labour) and labour (immediate) which is required for the production of this article.

It is quite obvious that both Malthus's *Principles*, and the two other works mentioned above which were intended to follow up individual points in the *Principles*, largely owed their origin to the fact that Malthus, jealous of the success of Ricardo's book, was making an attempt to force his way back to that position of predominance into which he had wormed himself, by means of his clever plagiarism, prior to the appearance of Ricardo's book. In addition to this, the exposition of the determination of value in Ricardo's work, although still abstract, was directed against the interests of the land-owners and their hangers-on—interests which Malthus represented even more directly than those of the industrial bourgeoisie. It cannot be denied, however, that Malthus had a certain interest in theoretical sophistication. Nevertheless his opposition to Ricardo—and his method of attack—were possible only because Ricardo had become entangled in all kinds of inconsistencies. Malthus's attack seizes in the first place upon the genesis of surplus value; upon the way in which Ricardo conceives the levelling out of prices of production in the different spheres of employment of capital as a modification of the law of value itself; and upon his general confusion of profit and surplus value (a direct identification of the two). Malthus does not disentangle these contradictions and *quid pro quos*,[3] but takes them over from

[1] Earlier in the *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx refers to the manner in which Adam Smith "moves with great *naïveté* in a continuous contradiction". On the one hand, "he traces the inner connection between the economic categories—or the hidden structure of the bourgeois economic system". On the other hand, "alongside this inner connection he sets up also the connection as it is manifested in the phenomena of competition, and therefore as it presents itself to the unscientific observer" (see *Theories of Surplus Value*, Selections, translated by G. A. Bonner and Emile Burns, pp. 202 ff.). Marx sometimes (as here) refers to the first of these two modes of approach as the "real" part of Smith's theory; at other times (as occasionally below) he refers to it as Smith's "strong side", as opposed to his "weak side"—i.e. to the second mode of approach. Cf. p. 32, above.—*Ed.*

[2] Malthus's *Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent* (1815).—*Ed.*

[3] Marx uses this expression in a sense which is now rare, meaning mistakes made by using one thing for another.—*Ed.*

Ricardo in order to overturn, with the support of this confusion, the basic Ricardian law of value, etc., and to draw conclusions which will be acceptable to his patrons.

Malthus's real merit in these three works consists in the fact that he lays the main emphasis upon the *unequal* exchange between capital and wage labour, whereas Ricardo does not in fact show how the unequal exchange between capital and living labour, between a quantity of accumulated labour and a given quantity of immediate labour, proceeds from the exchange of commodities according to the law of value—i.e. according to the labour time contained in them. Thus Ricardo in fact leaves the origin of surplus value obscure, since with him capital is exchanged directly against labour and not against labour power. Cazenove, one of the few subsequent disciples of Malthus, has a presentiment of this in his preface to the work mentioned above (*Definitions, etc.*), saying:

> "The *Interchange* of commodities and *Distribution* (*Wages, Rent,* and *Profits*) must be kept distinct from each other. . . . *The Laws of Distribution* are not dependent upon those relating to Interchange" (*Definitions*, Cazenove's edn., pp. v–vii).[1]

This can only mean that the relation of wages and profit, the exchange of capital and wage labour, of accumulated labour and living labour, does not *directly* conform to the law of exchange of commodities.

If we consider the *utilisation* (*Verwertung*) of money or commodities as capital—that is, not their value (*Wert*) but the capitalist *utilisation of their value* (*Verwertung*)[2]—it becomes clear that *surplus value* is nothing else but the excess quantity of labour (unpaid labour) which the capital, in the form of money or commodities, commands over and above the quantity of labour which the capital itself contains. The commodity used as capital purchases, over and above the quantity of labour contained in it, an excess quantity of labour which was not incorporated in it. This excess quantity forms the surplus value; and the extent

[1] A paraphrase of extracts from three separate passages, not a direct quotation.—*Ed.*

[2] *Verwertung* normally means "utilisation" or "turning to account", but commercially it means "realisation" or "conversion into money".—*Ed.*

of the gain upon realisation (*die Proportion der Verwertung*) depends upon the size of this excess. The excess quantity of living labour for which the commodity is exchanged constitutes the source of profit. Profit (or rather surplus value) does not arise from the equivalent of embodied labour which is given in exchange for an equal quantity of living labour, but from the portion of living labour which is appropriated in this exchange without an equivalent being paid for it, the unpaid labour which capital appropriates for itself in this semblance of an exchange. If we leave out of account the intermediate links in this process—and Malthus is the more justified in doing this since they are absent in Ricardo—if we consider only the real content and result of the process, then gain upon realisation (*Verwertung*), profit, the transformation of money or commodities into capital, are seen to arise not from the fact that the commodities are exchanged in conformity with the law of value, i.e. in proportion to the relative quantities of labour time which they have cost, but rather, on the contrary, from the fact that the commodities or money (embodied labour) are exchanged for a *greater* quantity of living labour than is contained or worked up in them. The sole merit of Malthus in the above works is the emphasis which he lays on this point—a point which stands out less clearly in Ricardo since the latter always presupposes a finished product which is divided between capitalist and worker, without taking into account the exchanges, the intermediate links in the process, which lead up to this division of the product. And this merit is cancelled out again by reason of the fact that Malthus confuses the utilisation (*Verwertung*) of money or commodities as capital, and consequently their *value* (*Wert*) in their specific function as capital, with the *value* of the commodities as such. Thus in his argument, as we shall see, he falls back on the empty idea of the monetary system that profit arises from alienation (Profit upon expropriation),[1] and entangles himself completely in the most unedifying confusion. Thus instead of going beyond Ricardo, Malthus tries in his work to force political economy back to what it was before Ricardo, and even before Smith and the Physiocrats.

[1] The phrase in brackets is in English in the text.—*Ed.*

"In the same country, and at the same time, the exchangeable value of those commodities which can be resolved into labour and profits alone, would be accurately measured by the quantity of labour which would result from adding to the accumulated and immediate labour actually worked up in them the varying amount of the profits on all the advances estimated in labour. But this must necessarily be the same as the quantity of labour which they will command" (*The Measure of Value*, pp. 15–16).

"The labour which a commodity can command is a measure of its value" (*ibid.*, p. 61).[1]

"I had nowhere seen it stated,[2] that the ordinary quantity of labour which a commodity will command must represent and measure the quantity of labour worked up in it, with the addition of profits" (*Definitions*, 1827 edn., p. 196).

Malthus wants to incorporate "profit" in the very definition of *value*, in order that it should be directly derived from this definition, which is not the case with Ricardo. This shows that he has a presentiment of where the difficulty lies.

Moreover it is perfectly ridiculous for him to identify the *value of a commodity* with its *utilisation as capital*. When commodities or money (embodied labour, in short) are exchanged in the form of capital for living labour, they are always exchanged for a greater quantity of labour than is contained in them; and if one compares on the one hand the commodities before the exchange and on the other hand the product which results from their exchange with the living labour, then one finds that the commodities have been exchanged for their own value (equivalent) plus an excess over and above their own value, the surplus value. But it is absurd to conclude from this that the value of a commodity is equal to its value plus an excess over and above this value. Thus when a commodity is exchanged as a commodity for another commodity, and not as capital for living labour, it is exchanged—in so far as it is exchanged for an equivalent—for the same quantity of embodied labour as is contained in it.

[1] A paraphrase, not a direct quotation.—*Ed.*

[2] That is, before his own work *The Measure of Value, etc.*

Thus all that is worthy of note is that according to Malthus profit is already directly included in the value of a commodity, and that one thing is clear to him—that a commodity always commands more labour than is contained in it.

"It is precisely because the labour which a commodity will ordinarily command measures the labour actually worked up in it with the addition of profits, that it is justifiable to consider it as a measure of value. If then the ordinary value of a commodity be considered as determined by the natural and necessary conditions of its supply,[1] it is certain that the labour which it will ordinarily command is alone the measure of these conditions" (*Definitions*, 1827 edn., p. 214).

"Elementary Costs of Production: An expression exactly equivalent to the conditions of the supply" (*ibid.*, Cazenove's edn., p. 14).

"Measure of the Conditions of the Supply . . .: The quantity of labour for which the commodity will exchange, when it is in its natural and ordinary state" (*ibid.*, p. 14).

"The quantity of labour which a commodity commands represents exactly the quantity of labour worked up in it, with the profits upon the advances, and does therefore really represent and measure those natural and necessary conditions of the supply, those elementary costs of production which determine value" (*ibid.*, p. 125).

"But the demand for a commodity, though not proportioned to the *quantity* of any other commodity which the purchaser is willing and able to give for it, is really proportioned to *the quantity of labour* which he will give for it; and for this reason: the quantity of labour which a commodity will *ordinarily* command, represents exactly the effectual demand for it; because it represents exactly that quantity of labour and profits united necessary to effect its supply; while the *actual* quantity of labour which a commodity will command when it differs from the *ordinary* quantity, represents the excess or defect of demand arising from temporary causes" (*ibid.*, p. 135).

[1] According to Malthus (*Definitions*, p. 213), these conditions are "the accumulated and immediate labour worked up in commodities with the ordinary profits upon the whole advances for the time that they were advanced".—*K.*

Here too Malthus is right. The condition of the manufacture, that is of the production or rather reproduction, of a commodity on the basis of capitalist production, is that the commodity or its value (the money into which it is converted) should be exchanged in the process of its production or reproduction for a greater quantity of labour than is contained in it; for it is only produced in order to realise a profit.

For example, a calico manufacturer has sold his calico. The condition of the manufacture of further calico is that he should exchange the money—the exchange value of the calico—in the process of reproduction of the calico for a greater quantity of labour than was contained in it or is represented by the money. For the calico manufacturer produces the calico as a capitalist. What he wants to produce is not calico but profit. The production of calico is only a means for the production of profit. But what are the consequences of this? More labour time, more labour, is contained in the newly manufactured calico than in the advanced calico. This surplus labour time, surplus value, also takes the form of surplus product, a *surplus* of calico over that which was exchanged for the labour. Thus a portion of the product does not compensate for the calico which was exchanged for labour, but forms a surplus product belonging to the manufacturer. Or if we consider the whole product, every yard of calico contains an aliquot part, or its value contains an aliquot part, for which no equivalent has been paid and which represents *unpaid* labour. If, then, the manufacturer sells a yard of calico at its value, that is if he exchanges it for money or commodities containing an equal quantity of labour time, he will realise a sum of money or receive a quantity of commodities which do not cost him anything. For he sells the calico, not according to the labour time which he has paid for, but according to the labour time which is contained in it—and he has not paid for a part of this labour time.

The calico contains, let us suppose, labour time equal to 12 shillings. The manufacturer has paid only 8 shillings of this. Assuming that he sells the commodity at its value, he will sell it for 12 shillings, thus gaining 4 shillings. So far as the buyer is concerned, he always pays, on this assumption, *only* the value of the calico. That is, he gives a sum of money which contains

as much labour time as is contained in the calico. Three cases are possible here. First, the buyer is a capitalist. The money (that is, the value of the commodity) with which he makes payment likewise contains a portion of unpaid labour. Thus while one of the parties sells unpaid labour, the other buys with unpaid labour. Both realise unpaid labour, the one as seller and the other as buyer. Or, second, the buyer is an independent producer. In this case he receives equivalent for equivalent. Whether the labour which the seller sells to him in the commodity is paid for or not does not concern him. He receives as much embodied labour as he gives. Or, finally, the buyer is a wage labourer. In this case, too, he receives, just like any other buyer—assuming that the commodity is sold at its value—an equivalent in commodities for his money. He receives as much embodied labour in the form of commodities as he gives in the form of money. But for the money which constitutes his wages he has given more labour than is contained in the money. Having thus paid for the money above its value, he therefore also pays for the equivalent of the money, the calico, above its value. The cost is accordingly greater for him as buyer than it is for the seller of any commodity, even though he receives in the commodity an equivalent for his money. He did not receive in the money an equivalent for his labour; rather did he give more than an equivalent in labour. Thus the worker is the only one who pays for all commodities above their value even when he buys them at their value, since he has bought the money, the general equivalent for labour, above its value. This does not mean that the man who sells a commodity to a worker gains any [special] advantage. The worker pays him the value of the labour, which is no more than any other buyer pays him. The capitalist, who sells back to the worker the commodity produced by the worker, certainly realises a profit on this sale, but only the same profit which he realises on a sale to any other buyer. In relation to the worker, the capitalist's profit does not originate from the fact that he sells him the commodity *above* its value, but from the fact that earlier, in the process of production, he really bought it from the worker *below* its value.

Just as Malthus transforms the utilisation (*Verwertung*) of a commodity as capital into its value (*wert*), so he consistently transforms all buyers into wage labourers,—that is, he makes them give in exchange to the capitalist immediate labour instead of commodities. And according to Malthus they all return to the capitalist more labour than is *contained* in the commodities, whereas on the contrary his profit is actually derived from the fact that, having *paid* for only a part of the labour contained in the commodities, he *sells all* the labour contained in them. Thus, whereas with Ricardo the difficulty [lies in the fact] that the law of exchange of commodities does not directly explain the exchange between capital and wage labour but rather seems to contradict it, Malthus resolves the difficulty by transforming the purchase (exchange) of commodities into an exchange between capital and wage labour. What Malthus does not understand is the difference between the sum total of labour contained in a commodity and the quantity of paid labour contained in it. It is precisely this difference which constitutes the source of profit. Further, he is led to the inevitable conclusion that profit is derived from the fact that the seller sells his commodity not only *above* [the price] which represents its cost *to him* (which the capitalist in fact does), but also above the price which represents *its cost.* He thus reverts to the vulgar idea of profit as originating upon alienation, deriving surplus value from the fact that the seller sells the commodity *above* its value (that is, for more labour time than is contained in it). But what he gains in this way as the seller of one commodity he loses as the buyer of another commodity, and it is absolutely impossible to understand how real "profit" can arise through a general nominal running-up of prices of this type. In particular, it is impossible to understand how the community *en masse* can enrich itself by this procedure, and how any real surplus value or surplus product can come into being. It is an absurd and empty idea.

Adam Smith, as we have seen, naïvely gives expression to the most contradictory elements, and thus becomes the source, the point of departure, for diametrically opposed ideas. Malthus, relying on these observations of Smith's, makes a confused

attempt—which is nevertheless founded on a correct perception and consciousness of an unresolved difficulty—to bring forward a new theory in opposition to Ricardo, and thus to gain pride of place. The transition from this attempt to the meaningless vulgar view is effected as follows:

If we look at the utilisation of a commodity as capital—that is, in its exchange with living productive labour—we find that the commodity commands, in the equivalent reproduced by the worker, a surplus of labour time over and above the labour time contained in it, a surplus which constitutes the source of profit. If we now transfer to the *value* of the commodity the concepts appropriate to this *utilisation of it as capital*, then each buyer of the commodity must stand in the same relationship to it as a worker does, that is, when buying the commodity, he must give in exchange for it an additional quantity of labour over and above the quantity which it contains. Since *apart from the workers* the other buyers do *not* stand in the same relationship to the commodity as a worker does (even when the worker appears simply as a buyer of commodities, as we have seen, the original basic distinction is maintained indirectly), it must be supposed that when they give in exchange for it a greater quantity of labour than it contains, they do not do this directly, but by giving a value which contains a greater quantity of labour, which amounts to the same thing. The transition is effected by means of this "greater quantity of labour, or, what amounts to the same thing, the value of a greater quantity of labour". What it actually comes down to, then, is this: the value of a commodity consists in the value which the buyer pays for it, and this value is equal to the equivalent (value) of the commodity plus an excess over and above this value, surplus value. Thus we arrive at the vulgar concept. Profit arises from the fact that a commodity *is sold dearer than it is bought.* The buyer buys it for a greater quantity of labour, or embodied labour, than it has cost the seller.

But if the buyer [is] himself a capitalist, a seller of commodities, and if his money—his capital—only represents sold commodities, then it merely follows from this that both [buyer and seller] must sell each other their commodities too dear,

thus mutually swindling one another—and swindling one another to the same extent, too, if they both realise only the general rate of profit. From where, then, are the buyers to come who will pay the capitalist a quantity of labour which is equal to the labour contained in his commodity plus his profit? Take an example. A commodity costs the seller 10*s*. He sells it for 12*s*. By this means he commands not just 10*s*. worth of labour, but an additional 2*s*. worth. But the buyer likewise sells his commodity, which costs 10*s*., for 12*s*. Thus each loses as buyer what he has gained as seller. The working class constitutes the only exception. For, since the price of the product is raised above its cost price, they can only buy back a portion of the product, so that another portion of the product, or the price of this other portion, constitutes the capitalist's profit. But since this profit arises from the very fact that the workers are unable to buy back more than a portion of the product, the capitalist class can never realise its profit through the demand of the workers alone. It can never realise it by exchanging the whole product for the wage; on the contrary, it can only do so by exchanging the *whole* wage for no more than a portion of the product. Consequently, a demand other than that of the workers, buyers other than the workers themselves, are necessary, or there would be no profit. Where are they going to come from? If they are themselves capitalists, themselves sellers, then we have the above-mentioned mutual swindling within the capitalist class—each nominally raises the price of the commodity which he sells to the other, and each gains as seller what he loses as buyer. Thus [according to Malthus] *it is necessary to have buyers who are not sellers*, in order that the capitalist [can] realise his profit and sell the commodities "at their value". Hence the necessity for landowners, retired officials (*Pensionäre*), holders of sinecures, parsons, etc., not forgetting their lackeys and other hangers-on. How these "buyers" come to acquire the means of buying—how they must first take away from the capitalists a portion of their product without furnishing an equivalent in order to buy back less than an equivalent with what they have thus taken away—Malthus does not explain. Anyway, this is the basis of his plea for the greatest possible increase in the unproductive classes, so that

the seller should find a market, a demand for his supply. And it is for this reason too that the author of the tract on population preaches constant over-consumption, and the appropriation by idlers of as large as possible a proportion of the annual product, as a condition of production. By way of further justification—in addition to that which necessarily follows from the theory—Malthus maintains that capital represents the *impulse towards abstract wealth, the impulse towards profit* (*Verwertungstrieb*), which however can only be realised by means of a class of buyers who represent the impulse towards *spending, consumption and prodigality*—that is, the unproductive classes, who are buyers without being sellers. On this basis a pretty squabble [developed] in the '20's between Malthusians and Ricardians (from 1820 to 1830, on the whole, is the great metaphysical period in English political economy). The Ricardians, just like the Malthusians, consider it necessary that the labourer should not himself appropriate his [whole] product, but that a portion of it should go to the capitalist, in order that the worker should have an *incentive to produce*, thus ensuring the growth of wealth. But they are very angry about the Malthusians' view that the landlords, holders of Church and State sinecures, and a whole flock of idle retainers[1] must first appropriate a portion of the capitalists' product without giving any equivalent for it—exactly as the capitalist does in relation to the worker—in order that they may then buy from [the capitalists], at a price which gives a profit to the latter, their own commodities. The Ricardians, however, put up the same argument as against the worker. In order that accumulation should increase, and with it the demand for labour, the worker must gratuitously surrender to the capitalist as much of his own product as possible, so that the capitalist can change back into capital the net revenue which has thus come into existence. The Malthusians [argue] in just the same way. As much as possible [ought] to be taken away for nothing from the industrial capitalists, in the form of rent, taxes, etc., in order that they should be able to sell back to their involuntary "partners", at a profit, the remaining portion which they retain. According to both the Ricardians and the Malthusians, the worker must not appropriate his own

[1] "Retainers" is in both German and English in the text.—*Ed.*

product, lest he lose the incentive to work. The industrial capitalist must give up a portion of his product to the classes which do nothing but consume—*fruges consumere nati*—in order that the latter may again exchange with him, on unfavourable terms, what he has given up. Otherwise the capitalist would lose the incentive to produce, which consists precisely in the fact that he makes a large profit, selling his commodity far above its value. We shall come back again later to this comical struggle. First, [a few more quotations] to show that Malthus comes round to the thoroughly commonplace concept:

> "Whatever may be the number of intermediate acts of barter which may take place in regard to commodities—whether the producers send them to China, or sell them in the place where they are produced: the question as to an adequate market for them, depends exclusively upon whether the producers can replace their capitals with ordinary profits, so as to enable them successfully to go on with their business. But what are their capitals? They are, as Adam Smith states, the tools to work with, the materials to work upon, and the means of commanding the necessary quantity of labour" (*Definitions*, Cazenove's edn., p. 70).

And this, he imagines, is all the labour bestowed upon a commodity.

Profit is an *excess* over and above the labour thus expended upon the production of the commodity. Thus in reality it is only a nominal addition to the cost price of the commodity. And in order that no doubt concerning his opinion should remain, he quotes approvingly from Colonel Torrens (*On the Production of Wealth*, 1821, Ch. 6, sec. 6) in confirmation of his own view: "Effectual demand consists in the power and inclination, on the part of consumers,[1] to give for commodities, either by immediate or circuitous barter, some greater proportion of all the ingredients of capital than their production costs" (*Definitions*, Cazenove's edn., pp. 70–1).[2]

[1] The antithesis between buyer and seller becomes one between consumer and producer.

[2] This is a paraphrase by Malthus of certain passages appearing on pp. 342 ff. of Torrens's book, and not a direct quotation.—*Ed.*

And Cazenove himself, the editor, apologist and annotator of Malthus's *Definitions*, says:

> "Profit does not depend upon the proportion in which commodities are exchanged with each other[1] (seeing that the same proportion may be maintained under every variety of profit), but upon the proportion which goes to wages, or is required to cover the prime cost, and which is in all cases determined by the degree in which the sacrifice made by the purchaser (or the labour's worth which he gives) in order to acquire a commodity, exceeds *that* made by the producer, in order to bring it to market" (*ibid.*, p. 46).

In order to arrive at these wonderful results, Malthus had to indulge in a considerable amount of theoretical spadework. First and foremost, [having taken up] that side of Adam Smith's doctrine according to which the value of a commodity is equal to the quantity of labour which it commands or by means of which it is commanded or against which it is exchanged, it was necessary to dispose of the objections which had been brought forward against this view that value could be a measure of value by Adam Smith himself, by his successors—and also even by Malthus.

Malthus's work *The Measure of Value, etc.* (London, 1823) is a very model of intellectual imbecility, winding its way casuistically through its own inner confusion. Its difficult and clumsy style leaves the [open-minded] and insufficiently instructed reader with the impression that the difficulty of making clarity out of the confusion does not lie in the contradiction between confusion and clarity, but in a lack of understanding on the part of the reader himself.

What Malthus had to do first of all was to obliterate again the distinction which Ricardo had made between "value of labour" and "quantity of labour", and to reduce the two con-

[1] For if we took account only of the exchange of commodities between capitalists, then, since there is no exchange with workers who have at their disposal *no* commodity other than labour to exchange with the capitalist, Malthus's theory would appear absurd, because there would be merely a mutual raising of prices, a nominal rise in the prices of their commodities. Therefore the exchange of commodities must be abstracted from, and people who do *not* produce commodities must exchange money.

ceptions which had stood side by side in Smith's work to one —the incorrect one.

> "Any given quantity of labour must be of the same value as the wages which command it, or for which it actually exchanges" (*The Measure of Value*, p. 5).

What this statement aims to do is to reduce the expressions *quantity of labour* and *value of labour* to an identity. In itself the statement expresses a mere tautology, an absurd commonplace. Since the wages, or that "for which it (the quantity of labour) actually exchanges", constitute the *value* of this quantity of labour, it is a tautology to say that the *value* of a given quantity of labour is equal to the *wages*, or to the quantity of money or commodities for which this labour is exchanged. In other words, this means nothing else but that the exchange value of a given quantity of labour is equal to its exchange value, *alias* wages. But, even if we leave aside the fact that it is not labour but labour power which is directly exchanged for wages—it is through mixing up these concepts that the nonsense is made possible—even if we leave this aside, it does not in any way follow from what was stated above that a given quantity of labour is equal to the quantity of labour worked up in the wages, or in the money or the commodities in which the wages are expressed. If a worker works for 12 hours and receives as wages the product of 6 hours, then this product of 6 hours (since it constitutes the wages, the commodity which is exchanged for the labour) constitutes the value of 12 hours' labour. It does not follow from this that 6 hours' labour is equal to 12 hours', or that the commodity in which 6 hours' labour is expressed is equal to the commodity in which 12 hours' is expressed. It does not follow that the value of the wages is equal to the value of the product in which the labour is expressed. It only follows that the value of a given quantity of labour (since the value of labour is measured by the value of labour power, and not by the labour carried out by this labour power) contains less labour than it purchases; and that therefore the *value of the commodity* in which the labour purchased is expressed is very different from the value of the

commodities with which this given quantity of labour was purchased or commanded. Malthus draws the opposite conclusion. Since the *value* of a given quantity of labour is equal to its value, it follows, according to him, that the value in which this quantity of labour is expressed is equal to the value of the wages. Hence it follows further that the immediate labour (that is, the labour after the means of production have been deducted) which is absorbed or contained in a commodity does not create a value greater than that which is paid for it—that it only reproduces the value of the wages. From this alone it is self-evident that profit cannot be explained if the value of commodities is determined by the labour contained in them, and that another explanation must be found—that is, if we assume that the value of a commodity must include the profit which it realises. For the labour worked up in it consists, first, of the labour which is contained in the worn-out machinery, etc., and which therefore reappears in the value of the product; and, second, of the labour contained in the raw materials which are used up. Obviously the labour contained in these two elements before the production of the new commodity does not increase by virtue of the fact that they become elements in the production of a new commodity. Thus there remains, third, the labour contained in the wages which were exchanged for the living labour. But according to Malthus the latter is no greater than the embodied labour for which it was exchanged. Hence it follows that if the value of a commodity were determined by the labour contained in it, it would not yield any profit. Consequently, if it does yield a profit, the latter is an *excess* of its price over and above the labour contained in it. In order to be sold at its value (which includes profit), the commodity must therefore command a quantity of labour equal to the quantity of labour used to produce it, plus an excess quantity of labour representing the profit yielded in the sale of the commodity.

Further, in order that *labour*—not the quantity of labour required for production, but labour as a commodity—should serve as a measure of value, Malthus asserts (*The Measure of Value*, p. 29, footnote) that "*the value of labour is constant*".[1]

[1] A paraphrase, not a direct quotation.—*Ed.*

There is nothing original in this—it is simply a paraphrase and further elaboration of the thesis put forward by Adam Smith in Book I, Chapter V, of the *Wealth of Nations*:

> "Equal quantities of labour, at all times and places, may be said to be of equal value to the labourer. In his ordinary state of health, strength and spirits . . . he must always lay down the same portion of his ease, his liberty, and his happiness. The price which he pays must always be the same, whatever may be the quantity of goods which he receives in return for it. Of these, indeed, it may sometimes purchase a greater and sometimes a smaller quantity; but it is their value which varies, not that of the labour which purchases them. At all times and places that is dear which it is difficult to come at, or which it costs much labour to acquire; and that cheap which is to be had easily, or with very little labour. Labour alone, therefore, never varying in its own value, is alone the ultimate and real standard by which the value of all commodities can at all times and places be estimated and compared" (*Wealth of Nations*, Cannan's edn., Vol. I, p. 35).

Also [related to this is] Malthus's discovery—of which he is so proud and which he says he was the first to make—namely, that value is equal to the quantity of labour contained in a commodity, plus a quantity of labour which represents the profit. But this discovery, too, appears [to be] quite simply an amalgamation of the two theses put forward by Smith (Malthus can never get away from being a plagiarist):

> "The real value of all the different component parts of price, it must be observed, is measured by the quantity of labour which they can, each of them, purchase or command. Labour measures the value not only of that part of price which resolves itself into labour, but of that which resolves itself into rent, and of that which resolves itself into profit" (*ibid.*, p. 52).

Malthus says in this connection:

"If the demand for labour rises, the greater earnings of the labourer are occasioned, not by a rise in the value of labour, but by a fall in the value of the produce for which the labour is exchanged. And in the case of an abundance of labour, the small earnings of the labourer are occasioned by a rise in the value of the produce, and not by a fall in the value of the labour" (*The Measure of Value*, p. 35; cf. pp. 33–4).[1]

In the following passage, Bailey very effectively ridicules Malthus's *reasoning* to the effect that the value of labour is invariable—[in connection with which it should be noted that] Malthus's additional line of argument is not that of Smith:

"In the same way any article might be proved to be of invariable value; for instance, 10 yards of cloth. For whether we gave £5 or £10 for the 10 yards, the sum given would always be equal in value to the cloth for which it was paid, or, in other words, of invariable value in relation to cloth. But that which is given for a thing of invariable value, must itself be invariable, whence the 10 yards of cloth must be of invariable value. . . . It is just the same kind of futility to call wages invariable in value, because though variable in quantity they command the same portion of labour, as to call the sum given for a hat, of invariable value, because, although sometimes more and sometimes less, it always purchases the hat" (Samuel Bailey, *A Critical Dissertation on the Nature, Measures, and Causes of Value, etc.*, London, 1825, pp. 145–7).

In the same work, Bailey ridicules very caustically the absurd arithmetical tables, with their pretensions to profundity, with which Malthus "illustrates" his measure of value. In his *Definitions in Political Economy*, Malthus gives vent to his anger over Bailey's sarcasm, and among other things tries as follows to prove that the value of labour is invariable: "While there is one large class of commodities, such as raw products, which in the progress of society tends to rise as compared with labour, there is another large class of commodities, such as manufactured articles, which at the same time tends to fall; [therefore]

[1] In part a paraphrase, not a direct quotation.—*Ed.*

it may not be far from the truth to say, that the portion of the average mass of commodities which a given quantity of labour will command in the same country, during the course of some centuries, may not very essentially vâry" (*Definitions*, 1827 edn., p. 206).

According to Malthus, the value of labour never changes, but only the value of the commodity which I receive for it. Let us assume that at one time wages = 2 shillings for one working day, while at another time they = 1 shilling. In the first case the capitalist gives twice as many shillings for the same labour time as he does in the second. But in the second case the worker gives double the quantity of labour for the same product as he does in the first, for in the second case he gives a whole working day for 1 shilling and in the first only half a working day. Malthus believes, then, that the capitalist gives now more, now fewer shillings for the same labour. What he does not see is that the worker, in exactly the same way, gives more or less labour for a given product.

> "Giving more produce for a given quantity of labour, or getting more labour for a given quantity of produce, are one and the same thing in his 'view' [Malthus's]; instead of being, as one would have supposed, just the contrary!" (*Observations on Certain Verbal Disputes in Political Economy, etc.*, London, 1821, p. 52).

Earlier in the latter work we read the following:

> "[Mr. Malthus says:] 'In the *same* place, and at the *same* time, the different quantities of day-labour, which different commodities can command, will be exactly in proportion to their relative values in exchange', and vice versâ. *If* this is true of labour, it is just as true of any thing else" (*ibid.*, p. 49).
>
> "*Money* does very well as a measure at the same time and place. . . . But it [Malthus's statement] seems *not* to be true of labour. Labour is not a measure even at the same time and place. Take a portion of corn, such as is at the same time and place said to be of equal value with a given diamond; will the corn and the diamond, paid in specie, command equal portions of labour? It may be said . . . No;

but the diamond will buy *money*, which will command an equal portion of labour. . . . The test is of no use, for it cannot be applied without being *rectified* by the application of the other test, which it professed to supersede. We can only infer, that the corn and the diamond will command equal quantities of labour, *because* they are of equal value, in money. But we were told to infer, that two things were of equal value, because they would command equal quantities of labour" (*ibid.*, pp. 49–50).

It is noted quite correctly in these *Observations* that labour as a measure of value in the sense in which Malthus uses it here, in accordance with one of Smith's concepts, would serve as a measure of value in just the same way as any other commodity, and that in practice it would not be as good as money. Here our whole concern would be only with a measure of value in the sense in which money is a measure of value.

It is never at all the *measure of values* (in the sense of money) which makes commodities commensurable. See my book [*The Critique of Political Economy*], Book 1, p. 45: "It is rather the commensurability of commodities as embodied labour time, that turns gold into money."[1] As values commodities constitute a *unity*, mere expressions of one and the same unity, social labour. The *measure of value* (money) presupposes them as values, and relates only to the expression and the magnitude of these values. The *measure of value* of commodities always relates to the transformation of values into prices, and already presupposes value.

Just as prettily as in the case of the "invariable value of labour", Malthus proves that a rise in the money price of wages must cause a general rise in the money prices of commodities. "If the money wages of labour universally rise, the value of money proportionably falls; and when the value of money falls . . . the prices of goods always rise" (*Definitions*, 1827 edn., p. 34).

If the value of money has fallen relatively to labour, then what has to be proved is that the value of all commodities

[1] In the Kerr edn. of the *Critique* this sentence (in a slightly different translation) will be found on pp. 78–9. In the German original "gold into money" appears as "*Geld zu Geld*".—*Ed.*

has risen relatively to money, or that the value of money, measured not in labour but in other commodities, has [fallen]. And Malthus proves this by presupposing it.

Malthus's polemic against Ricardo's analysis of value is taken entirely from the propositions, first put forward by Ricardo himself, concerning the modifications which are brought about in the exchange values of commodities, independently of the labour contained in them, by differences in the composition of capital arising out of the process of circulation of capital—different proportions of circulating and fixed capital, different degrees of durability of the fixed capital employed, and different times of turnover of the circulating capital. In short, it rests on Ricardo's confusion between price of production and value—on the fact that he regards the levelling out of the prices of production, which are independent of the quantity of labour applied in the separate spheres of production, as a modification of the values themselves, thus abandoning the whole principle. Malthus takes up these contradictions, which were first discovered by Ricardo himself and brought forward by him against the determination of value by labour time, not in order to resolve them, but in order to revert to absolutely empty concepts, putting forward the *expression* of the contradictory phenomena, their translation into words, as if this were their resolution. In the section below dealing with the dissolution of the Ricardian school, we shall see the same method used by Mill and McCulloch, who try to talk the contradictory phenomena into direct accord with the general law by means of absurdly scholastic definitions and distinctions, in order to argue the contradictions away—but in the process the foundation itself goes west. Here are some of the passages in which Malthus directs against Ricardo the arguments which Ricardo himself had provided against the law of value:

> "It is observed by Adam Smith that corn is an annual crop, butchers' meat a crop which requires four or five years to grow; and consequently, if we compare two quantities of corn and beef which are of equal exchangeable value, it is certain that a difference of three or four additional years profit at fifteen per cent. upon the capital employed in the

production of the beef would, exclusively of any other considerations, make up in value for a much smaller quantity of labour, and thus we might have two commodities of the same exchangeable value, while the accumulated and immediate labour of the one was forty or fifty per cent. less than that of the other. This is an event of daily occurrence in reference to a vast mass of the most important commodities in the country; and if profits were to fall from fifteen per cent. to eight per cent. the value of beef compared with corn would fall above twenty per cent." (*The Measure of Value*, pp. 10–11).

Now capital consists of commodities, and a large part of the commodities of which it is constituted or which enter into it possesses a price (that is, exchange value in the ordinary sense) which consists neither of accumulated nor of living labour, but —in so far as we consider only this particular commodity—of a purely nominal increase [in] value, caused through the addition of the average profit. Therefore Malthus says:

"Labour is not the only element worked up in capital" (*Definitions*, Cazenove's edn., p. 29). "What are the costs of production? . . . The quantity of labour in kind required to be worked up in the commodity, and in the tools and materials consumed in its production with such an additional quantity as is equivalent to the ordinary profits upon the advances for the time that they have been advanced" (*ibid.*, pp. 74–5).

"On the same grounds Mr. Mill is quite incorrect, in calling capital hoarded labour. It may, perhaps, be called hoarded labour and profits; but certainly not hoarded labour alone, unless we determine to call profits labour" (*ibid.*, pp. 60–1).

"To say that the values of commodities are regulated or determined by the quantity of *Labour and Capital* necessary to produce them, is essentially false. To say that they are regulated by the quantity of *Labour and Profits* necessary to produce them, is essentially true" (*ibid.*, p. 129).

With reference to this point, Cazenove remarks:

"The expression *Labour and Profits* is liable to this objection, that the two are not correlative terms,—labour being an *agent* and profits a *result*; the one a *cause*, the other a *consequence*. On this account Mr. Senior has substituted for it the expression *Labour and Abstinence*. . . . It must be acknowledged, indeed, that it is not the abstinence, but the *use* of the capital productively, which is the cause of profits" (*ibid.*, p. 130, footnote).

For, according to Senior—

"He who converts his revenue into capital, *abstains* from the enjoyment which its expenditure would afford him" (*ibid.*).[1]

A fine explanation! The value of a commodity consists of the labour contained in it plus the profit—of labour which is contained in it, and of labour which is not contained in it but which must be paid for.

Here is another of Malthus's polemics against Ricardo:

"[Ricardo's] proposition, that as the value of wages rises profits proportionably fall, cannot be true, except on the assumption that commodities, which have the same quantity of labour worked up in them, are always of the same value, an assumption which probably will not be found to be true in one case out of five hundred; and this, not from accidental or temporary causes, but from that natural and necessary state of things, which, in the progress of civilisation and improvement, tends continually to increase the quantity of fixed capital employed, and to render more various and unequal the times of the returns of the circulating capital" (*Definitions*, 1827 edn., pp. 31–2).

The same idea is to be found on pp. 53–4 of Cazenove's edition, where Malthus says literally: Ricardo's measure of value is contrary to the natural state of things, since this state of things "in the progress of civilisation and improvement, tends continually to increase the quantity of fixed capital

[1] This is Cazenove's summary of Senior's views, and not a direct quotation from Senior.—*Ed.*

employed, and to render more various and unequal the times of the returns of the circulating capital" (*Definitions*, Cazenove's edn., pp. 53–4).

> "Mr. Ricardo, indeed, himself admits of considerable exceptions to his rule; but if we examine the classes which come under his exceptions, that is, where the quantities of fixed capital employed are different and of different degrees of duration, and where the periods of the returns of the circulating capital employed are not the same, we shall find that they are so numerous, that the rule may be considered as the exception, and the exceptions the rule" (*ibid.*, p. 50).

Malthus, in conformity with the above, defines value as follows:

> "The estimation in which a commodity is held, founded upon its *cost to the purchaser* or the *sacrifice* which *he* must make in order to acquire it, which sacrifice is measured by the quantity of labour that he gives in exchange for it, *or*[1] what comes to the same thing, by the labour which it will command" (*ibid.*, pp. 8–9).

Cazenove also points out the following as a difference between Malthus and Ricardo:

> "Mr. Ricardo has, with Adam Smith, adopted labour as the true standard of cost; but he has applied it to the *producing cost* only. . . . It is equally applicable as a measure of *cost to the purchaser*" (*ibid.*, pp. 56–7).

In other words, the value of a commodity is equal to the sum of money which the buyer must pay, and this sum of money is best estimated in terms of the quantity of simple labour which can be bought with it.[2] But how the sum of money is determined is of course not stated. This is the completely commonplace way of looking at the matter which we

[1] Marx's emphasis.—*Ed.*

[2] Malthus *presupposes* the *existence of profit*, in order subsequently to measure the magnitude of its value with an extrinsic measuring-rod. He does not touch on the question of the origin and intrinsic possibility of profit.

meet with in everyday life. It is mere banality, expressed in high-sounding phrases. All that it means, to put it another way, is that *price of production* and *value* are identical—a confusion which in the case of Adam Smith and even more of Ricardo stands in contradiction to their real concepts, but which in the case of Malthus is now raised to the status of a law. This is the concept of value held by the Philistine who is steeped in competition and knows nothing except its outward show. How is the price of production determined? By the magnitude of the advanced capital plus profit. And how is the profit determined? What is the origin of the fund out of which it is paid? Where does the surplus product come from in which this surplus value is expressed? If it is only a matter of a nominal rise in the money price, then there is nothing simpler than to raise the value of commodities. And how is the value of the advanced capital determined? By the *value* of the labour contained in it, says Malthus. And how is the latter determined? By the *value* of the commodities in which the wages are laid out. And the value of these commodities? By the value of the labour plus profit. And so we go on, in a vicious circle. If we suppose that the worker is actually paid the value of his labour—i.e. that the commodities (or the sum of money) which form his wages are equal to the value (sum of money) of the commodities in which his labour is realised, so that if he receives wages of 100 shillings he contributes only 100 shillings in value to the raw material, etc., in short to the advanced capital—then profit can only consist of an addition which the seller makes in the sale to the *real* value of the commodity. And this is done by every seller. Thus in so far as capitalists exchange commodities with one another, no one can realise anything by means of this addition, and least of all can a surplus fund be formed in this way from which they can draw their revenue. Only those capitalists whose commodities enter into the consumption of the working class will make a real and not an imaginary profit, since they will sell back the commodities to the workers dearer than they have bought them from them. They will sell back to the workers for 110 shillings a commodity which they have bought from them for 100. This means that they will sell back to them only $\frac{10}{11}$ of the

product, keeping $\frac{1}{11}$ for themselves. But what does this mean other than that of the 11 hours, say, which the worker has worked, he is only paid 10; that he is only given the product of 10 hours, while 1 hour or the product of 1 hour falls to the capitalist without payment of any equivalent? And what in turn does this mean other than that—with reference to the working class—profit is made by their giving a portion of their labour *gratuitously* to the capitalist, and that consequently the "*quantity* of labour [expended]" does not mean the same as the "*value* of labour [expended]"? The other capitalists, however, since they cannot resort to this expedient, will only make an imaginary profit.

How little Malthus has understood of Ricardo's elementary propositions, and how completely he fails to grasp the fact that profit can arise otherwise than through an addition to the price, is strikingly shown, among other things, by the following statement:

> "Allowing that the first commodities, if completed and brought into use immediately, might be the result of pure labour, and that their value would therefore be determined by the quantity of that labour; yet it is quite impossible that such commodities should be employed as capital to assist in the production of other commodities, without the capitalist being deprived of the use of his advances for a certain period, and requiring a remuneration in the shape of profits. In the early periods of society, on account of the comparative scarcity of these advances of labour, this remuneration would be high, and would affect the value of such commodities to a considerable degree, owing to the high rate of profits. In the more advanced stages of society, the value of capital and commodities is largely affected by profits, on account of the greatly increased quantity of fixed capital employed, and the greater length of time for which much of the circulating capital is advanced before the capitalist is repaid by the returns. In both cases, the rate at which commodities exchange with each other, is essentially affected by the varying amount of profits" (*Definitions*, Cazenove's edn., p. 60).

The concept of *relative* wages is one of the greatest merits of Ricardo. The essence of it is that the *value of wages* (and therefore also of *profit*) is absolutely dependent upon the relation which the portion of the working day in which the *worker works for himself* (for the production or reproduction of his wages) bears to the portion of his time which belongs to the capitalist. This is important from the point of view of economics: in fact, it is only another way of stating the correct theory of surplus value. It is also important from the point of view of the social relations between the two classes. Malthus gets wind of something amiss here, and is therefore obliged to state his objections:

> "No writer that I have met with, anterior to Mr. Ricardo, ever used the term wages, or real wages, as implying proportions.[1] Profits, indeed, imply proportions; and the rate of profits had always justly been estimated by a percentage upon the value of the advances.[2] But wages had uniformly been considered as rising or falling, not according to any *proportion* which they might bear to the whole produce obtained by a certain quantity of labour, but by the greater or smaller quantity of any particular produce received by the labourer, or by the greater or smaller power which such produce would convey, of commanding the necessaries and conveniencies of life" (*Definitions*, 1827 edn., pp. 29–30).

Since in capitalist production it is *exchange value*—the increase of exchange value—which is the immediate aim, it is important to know how to measure it. Since the value of the advanced capital is expressed in money (real money or money of account), the extent of this increase is measured by the monetary magnitude of the capital itself, and a capital (sum of money) of a

[1] Ricardo speaks of the *value* of wages, which is certainly also expressed as the portion of the product which falls to the worker.

[2] Even Malthus himself finds it impossible to say what he means by "the value of the advances", and it is indeed difficult to do so. According to him, the value of a commodity is equal to the advanced capital contained in it plus profit. Now since the advanced capital, leaving aside the immediate labour, also consists of commodities, the value of the advanced capital is equal to the advanced capital contained in it plus profit. Thus profit is equal to profit on the advanced capital plus profit. And so *ad infinitum*.

given magnitude—100—is taken as a measuring-rod. Malthus says:

> "Profits consist of the difference between the value of the capital advanced, and the value of the commodity when sold or used" (*ibid.*, p. 241).

(iii) MALTHUS ON OVERPRODUCTION AND OVERCONSUMPTION

(From Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. III (written 1861–3))

THOMAS ROBERT MALTHUS

Overproduction and Overconsumption

FROM Malthus's theory of value there springs the whole doctrine of the necessity for an ever-increasing unproductive consumption, a doctrine which this theoretician of overpopulation (arising from a lack of means of subsistence) has preached so emphatically. The value of a commodity is equal to the value of the advanced materials, machinery, etc., plus the quantity of immediate labour contained in it, which with Malthus is made equal to the *value* of the wages contained in it, plus an addition of profit on these advances according to the level of the general rate of profit. This nominal addition to the price forms the profit, and is a condition of the supply, that is, of the reproduction of the commodity. These elements make up the price for the buyer, as distinct from the price for the producer; and the price for the buyer is the real value of the commodity. The question now arises, how is this price to be realised? Who is to pay it? And out of which fund is it to be paid?

When considering Malthus's theory, we must make the following distinction (which Malthus himself neglected to make). One section of the capitalists produces commodities which enter *directly* into the consumption of the workers. Another section produces either commodities which enter into this consumption *only* indirectly, that is, by entering as raw materials, machinery, etc., into the capital necessary for the production of means of subsistence; or commodities which *do not enter at all into the consumption* of the workers, since they enter only into the revenue of the non-workers.

[*A passage of about* 4,500 *words is omitted here.* In this passage—which consists largely of rather sketchy notes obviously intended for later elaboration—Marx assumes for the moment

that Malthus's account of value and surplus value is true, and asks whether it would in fact be possible, on this assumption, for the capitalists to realise a profit on the sale of their commodities. Marx argues that the first section of the capitalists—those who produce "commodities which enter *directly* into the consumption of the workers"—could in fact create a real "surplus fund" for themselves merely by making a "nominal addition" to the price of their commodities. By making such an addition, these capitalists could render their workers incapable of buying back their whole product with the wages paid to them, so that the capitalists would thus be able to appropriate a portion of it for themselves. But no other section of the capitalists (on Malthus's assumptions) would be able to create a "surplus fund" artificially in this way. The only way in which these other capitalists could realise a profit would be by making an advantageous exchange with the first section of the capitalists, thus indirectly participating to some extent in the surplus product appropriated from the workers by that section. The main point which Marx is concerned to emphasise in all this is that no profit at all can be "created" or "realised" *merely* through exchanges between capitalists in which the parties simply make a "nominal addition" to the prices of the commodities they sell. It is clear that if this were the case everyone would lose as buyer just as much as he gained as seller, and no profit would result. Profit can only arise if a *real* "surplus fund" is created—and this in fact can only happen through the exploitation of the workers.—*Ed.*]

It is difficult to understand how any profit at all can originate from these exchanges, in which the parties sell one another their commodities at prices which are uniformly increased, thus defrauding one another in the same proportion.

This defect would be remedied if, in addition to the exchanges of one class of capitalists with their workers and the exchanges of the different classes of capitalists among themselves, there were also exchanges with a *third class of buyers*—a *deus ex machina*, a class which would pay for the commodities at their nominal value without in its turn reselling them, without in its turn carrying on the farce; a class, that is, which passes through the stage M—C, but not through M—C—M; a class which buys

without selling. In this case the capitalists would not realise their profit by exchanging their commodities among themselves. They would realise it, in the first place, by means of an exchange with the workers, to whom they would sell back a portion of the whole product for the same money which they have spent in buying the whole product from them (constant capital having been deducted). And they would realise it, in the second place, by means of a sale of a portion both of means of subsistence and luxury goods to the third group of buyers. Since the latter pay 110 for 100, without in their turn selling 100 for 110, a profit of 10 per cent.—a profit which would not be merely nominal—would thus in fact be realised. This profit would have a two-fold origin, in that as little as possible of the whole product would be sold back to the workers, and as much as possible would be sold to the third class which pays in ready cash without itself selling, which buys in order to consume. But buyers who are not at the same time sellers must be consumers who are not at the same time producers—i.e. *unproductive consumers*; and it is by means of this class of unproductive consumers that Malthus resolves the conflict. But these unproductive consumers must at the same time be solvent consumers; they must engender a real demand, and the sums of money which they possess and which they spend every year must be sufficient to pay not only the production value of the commodities which they buy and consume, but also the nominal addition of profit, the surplus value, the difference between the sale value and the production value. In society, this class will represent consumption for the sake of consumption, just as the capitalist class represents production for the sake of production; the one the "passion for expenditure" and the other the "passion for accumulation" (*Principles*, 2nd edn., p. 326). The impulse towards accumulation is kept alive in the capitalist class through the fact that their receipts constantly [run] at a higher level than their outlays—and it is profit, of course, which supplies the incentive to accumulate. In spite of this zeal of theirs for accumulation, they are not driven into overproduction, or at least only with great difficulty, since the *unproductive consumers* not only form a huge channel for the products which are thrown on to the market, but also refrain

from throwing any products on to the market themselves. Thus, however many of them there may be, they do not represent any competition for the capitalists; rather, they all simply constitute a demand without a supply, and they therefore compensate the preponderance of supply over demand on the capitalist side.

But where do the annual means of payment of this class come from? To begin with, the class includes the *landowners*, who appropriate a large part of the annual product under the name of rent, and who spend the money which they have thus taken from the capitalists in the consumption of the commodities produced by the capitalists—a transaction in which they are defrauded. These landowners must not themselves be producers, and, in general, they are not producers. It is important that, in so far as they spend money in purchasing labour, they should not maintain any productive workers, but only co-consumers of their wealth—*menial servants*, who keep the price of means of subsistence high by buying them without themselves helping to increase their supply or that of any other commodity. But these rent-receivers are not enough to create "a sufficient demand". Recourse must be had to artificial methods. These consist in heavy *taxes*, a host of holders of State and Church sinecures, great armies, retired officials, tithes for the parsons, a considerable national debt, and from time to time costly wars. Such are Malthus's "remedies" (*Principles*, 2nd edn., pp. 408 ff.).

Thus the third class, which Malthus brings in as a "remedy", a class which buys without selling and consumes without producing, receives in the first instance a considerable portion of the value of the annual product without *paying* for it, and enriches the producers by virtue of the fact that the latter, having first had to cede to it gratuitously the money required for the purchase of their commodities, subsequently appropriate this money once more by selling their commodities above their value to this class, thus receiving back from it more value in the form of money than they supply to it in the form of commodities. And this transaction goes on repeating itself every year.

Malthus's conclusions follow quite logically from his basic

theory of value; but this theory of value itself is curiously in accord with his aim—to act as an apologist for the state of affairs in contemporary England, with its landlordism, "State and Church", retired officials, tax collectors, tithes, national debt, stock exchange jobbers, law-court officials (*Büttel*), parsons and hangers-on ("national expenditure"),[1] against which the Ricardians fought as so many useless, outlived, detrimental and malignant phenomena of bourgeois production. Ricardo disinterestedly defends bourgeois production in so far as it [stands for] as unbridled a development as possible of the social forces of production. He is unconcerned with the fate of the agents of production, whether they be capitalists or workers. He maintained the *historical* validity and necessity of this stage of development. If his historical sense of the past was very weak, his perception of the mainspring of historical development in his own times was correspondingly strong. Malthus, too, wants as free a development as possible of capitalist production, in so far as only the poverty of its main agents, the working class, is a condition of this development; but according to him this production should at the same time adapt itself to the "needs of consumption" of the aristocracy and its representatives in State and Church, and serve as a material basis for the obsolete demands of those who represent interests inherited from feudalism and absolute monarchy. Malthus wants bourgeois production in so far as it is not revolutionary, in so far as it is not a historical force, but merely creates a broader and more convenient material basis for the "old" society.

First, then, we have the working class, which because of the principle of population is always too numerous relatively to the means of subsistence allotted to it—i.e. overpopulation due to underproduction. Second, we have the capitalist class, which as a consequence of the same principle of population is always able to sell back their own product to the workers at such a price that they get back only just as much of it as is necessary to keep body and soul together. And third, we have an immense section of society which consists of parasites and self-indulgent drones, in part masters and in part servants, who appropriate gratuitously a considerable quantity of wealth—

[1] The words in brackets are in English in the text.—*Ed.*

partly under the name of rent and partly under political titles —from the capitalist class, paying for the commodities produced by the latter above their value with the money they have taken from the capitalists themselves. The capitalist class is spurred on in production by the impulse towards accumulation; the unproductive classes, from the economic point of view, represent merely the impulse towards consumption and prodigality. And this is the only means of escape from overproduction, which exists alongside overpopulation relatively to production. Overconsumption by the classes standing outside production is [recommended] as the best remedy for both overproduction and overpopulation. The disproportion between the working population and production is neutralised by means of the consumption of a portion of the product by those who do not produce, by idlers. The disproportion represented by the overproduction of the capitalists [is cancelled out] by the overconsumption of the extravagant rich.

We have seen how childishly weak, trivial and meaningless Malthus is when, basing himself on the weak side of Adam Smith, he tries to put forward a counter-theory in opposition to that formulated by Ricardo on the basis of the strong side of Adam Smith. One could hardly imagine a more comical exhibition of impotence than Malthus's work on value. But as soon as he comes on to the practical conclusions, thus once again entering the field which he occupied as a sort of economic Abraham à Sancta Clara,[1] he is entirely in his element. Nevertheless even here this born plagiarist remains true to himself. Who would think at first sight that Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy* was merely a Malthusianised version of Sismondi's *Nouveaux Principes de l'Économie Politique*? And yet this is in fact the case. Sismondi's book appeared in 1819. One year later Malthus's English caricature of it saw the light of day. Just as previously with Townsend and Anderson, so here too with Sismondi he found a theoretical foothold for one of his bulky economic tracts—in which, incidentally, the new theories which he had learned from Ricardo's *Principles* also came in handy.

Just as Malthus, when opposing Ricardo, fought against

[1] See footnote 3, p. 123, above.—*Ed.*

those tendencies of capitalist production which were revolutionary in relation to the old society, so with the unerring instinct of a parson he took from Sismondi only what was reactionary in relation to capitalist production, in relation to modern bourgeois society.

I am excluding Sismondi from my historical survey, since the criticism of his views pertains to a subject with which I shall only be able to deal after the present work—the real movement of capital (competition and credit).

To see that Malthus adopted Sismondi's views, one has only to look at the heading of one of the chapters of Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy*: "Of the Necessity of a Union of the Powers of Production with the Means of Distribution, in order to ensure a continued Increase of Wealth" (*Principles*, 2nd edn., p. 361). We read in this chapter:

> "The powers of production, to whatever extent they may exist, are not alone sufficient to secure the creation of a proportionate degree of wealth. Something else seems to be necessary in order to call these powers fully into action. This is an effectual and unchecked demand for all that is produced. And what appears to contribute most to the attainment of this object, is, such a *distribution of produce*,[1] and such an adaptation of this produce to the wants of those who are to consume it, as constantly to increase the exchangeable value of the whole mass" (*Principles*, 2nd edn., p. 361).

Here is a further quotation, equally Sismondian and also directed against Ricardo:

> "The wealth of a country depends partly upon the quantity of produce obtained by its labour, and partly upon such an adaptation of this quantity to the wants and powers of the existing population as is calculated to give it value. Nothing can be more certain than that it is not determined by either of them alone. But where wealth and value are perhaps the most nearly connected, is in the *necessity of the latter to the production of the former*"[2] (*ibid.*, p. 301).

[1] Marx's emphasis.—*Ed.*

[2] Marx's emphasis.—*Ed.*

This is specially directed against Ricardo—*Principles of Political Economy*, Chapter 20, "Value and Riches, their Distinctive Properties".

Ricardo says here, among other things:

> "Value, then, essentially differs from riches, for value depends not on abundance, but on the difficulty or facility of production" (*Principles*, Sraffa's edn., Vol. I, p. 273).[1]
>
> "Riches do not depend on value. A man is rich or poor, according to the abundance of necessaries and luxuries which he can command. . . . It is through confounding the ideas of value and wealth, or riches that it has been asserted, that by diminishing the quantity of commodities, that is to say of the necessaries, conveniences, and enjoyments of human life, riches may be increased. If value were the measure of riches, this could not be denied, because by scarcity the value of commodities is raised; but if Adam Smith be correct, if riches consist in necessaries and enjoyments, then they cannot be increased by a diminution of quantity" (*ibid*, pp. 275–6).

In other words, what Ricardo is saying here is this: Wealth consists only of *use values*. He transforms bourgeois production into simple production for use value, which is a fine way of looking at a mode of production dominated by *exchange value*. He regards the specific form of bourgeois wealth as something merely formal, not affecting its content. Hence he also denies the contradictions of bourgeois production, which break out in crises. Hence his completely false conception of money. Hence too, in the process of production of capital, he is not at all concerned with the process of circulation, in so far as it embraces the metamorphosis of commodities, the necessity for the transformation of capital into money. But no one has demonstrated better and more distinctly than Ricardo himself that bourgeois production is not the production of wealth for

[1] Incidentally, value can also rise together with the "facility of production". Suppose that in a particular country the population increases from one million to six million people, and that the one million had worked a twelve-hour day. Suppose also that the six million develop the forces of production to such an extent that each one, working a six-hour day, produces twice as much as was previously produced in that time. Then wealth would be increased sixfold, and value would increase to three times its former level, according to Ricardo's own view.

the *producers* (as he repeatedly calls the workers)—that is, that the production of bourgeois wealth is something entirely different from the production of "abundance", of "necessaries and enjoyments" for the people who produce them. And yet this ought to be the case if production were merely a means of satisfying the requirements of the producers, if production were dominated by use value alone. But the same Ricardo also says:

> "If we lived in one of Mr. Owen's parallelograms, and enjoyed all our productions in common, then no one could suffer in consequence of abundance, but as long as society is constituted as it now is, abundance will often be injurious to producers and scarcity beneficial to them" (*On Protection to Agriculture*, 1822, Sraffa's edn., Vol. IV, p. 222).

Ricardo conceives of bourgeois production, or more exactly capitalist production, as the *absolute form* of production; thus its particular forms of production relations must never get involved in contradictions or fetter the aim of production, which is simply abundance. And this word includes both the mass of use values and their variety, which in their turn condition a rich development of man as producer and an all-round development of his productive abilities. Here Ricardo gets involved in a comical contradiction. When we are speaking about value and wealth, we should have in view only society as a whole. But in speaking of capital and labour, it goes without saying that "gross revenue" exists only in order to create "net revenue". In fact what Ricardo admires in bourgeois production is the fact that its particular forms, when compared with earlier forms, clear the way for an unrestrained development of the forces of production. When they cease to do this, or when the contradictions within which they do it come into prominence, he denies the contradictions, or, rather, expresses the contradictions themselves in a different form, by presenting *wealth as such*—the sum of use values—as something existing on its own, without any regard for the producers, as the *ultima Thule*.

Sismondi has a deeply-rooted presentiment that capitalist production is in contradiction with itself; that on the one hand

its forms, its relations of production, stimulate an unbridled development of the productive forces and of wealth; that on the other hand these relations of production are subject to certain conditions; that their contradictions—between use value and exchange value, commodity and money, purchase and sale, production and consumption, capital and wage labour, etc.—are increasingly accentuated with the development of the productive forces. In particular, he senses the basic contradiction: on the one hand, the unfettered development of the productive forces and the growth of wealth, which at the same time consists of commodities requiring to be turned into money; on the other hand, as the foundation of the system, the limitation of the mass of producers to the necessary means of subsistence. For this reason crises for him are not accidents, as they are for Ricardo, but essential outbreaks of the inherent contradictions, occurring on a large scale and at definite periods. He is constantly vacillating: should the *productive forces* be held in check by the State in order to bring them into correspondence with the relations of production, or should the *relations of production* be held in check in order to bring them into correspondence with the productive forces? Here he often escapes into the past; he becomes a *laudator temporis acti*, and wants to mitigate the contradictions by means of the establishment of a different relationship between revenue and capital, or between distribution and production. He does not understand that the relations of distribution are merely the relations of production *sub alia specie*. He forcefully *pronounces judgment upon* the contradictions of bourgeois production, but he does not *understand* them, and therefore he does not understand the process of their resolution either. What lies at the heart of his approach, however, is in fact his presentiment that to the productive forces developed in the womb of capitalist society, to the material and social conditions of the creation of wealth, there must correspond *new* forms of the appropriation of this wealth; that the bourgeois forms are merely transitory and full of contradictions, that they are forms in which wealth always maintains only a contradictory existence, appearing everywhere at the same time as its opposite. Wealth always presupposes poverty, and develops only by developing the latter.

We have now seen the wonderful manner in which Malthus appropriates Sismondi's views. Malthus's theory, in an exaggerated and even more nauseating form, is to be found in a work by Thomas Chalmers (Professor of Divinity):[1] "*On Political Economy, in connexion with the Moral State and Moral Prospects of Society*, 2nd edn., Glasgow, 1832. Here there come into greater prominence not only the parsonical element in the theory, but also, from the point of view of practice, the member of the State Church who defends "economically" its "bread and fishes" and the whole conglomeration of institutions by which this Church stands or falls.

Malthus's statements concerning the workers, to which reference was made above, are the following:

"The consumption and demand occasioned by the workmen employed in productive labour can never *alone* furnish a motive to the accumulation and employment of capital" (*Principles*, 2nd edn., p. 315).

"No farmer will take the trouble of superintending the labour of ten additional men merely because his whole produce will then sell in the market at an advanced price just equal to what he had paid his additional labourers. There must be something in the previous state of the demand and supply of the commodity in question, or in its price, antecedent to and independent of the demand occasioned by the new labourers, in order to warrant the employment of an additional number of people in its production" (*ibid.*, p. 312).

"As a great increase of consumption among the working classes must greatly increase the cost of production, it must lower profits, and diminish or destroy the motive to accumulate, before agriculture, manufactures, and commerce have reached any considerable degree of prosperity" (*ibid.*, p. 405).

"It is the *want of necessaries*[2] which mainly stimulates the labouring classes to produce luxuries; and were this stimulus removed or greatly weakened, so that the necessaries of life could be obtained with very little labour, instead of more time being devoted to the production of conveniences, there

[1] In English in the text.—*Ed.*

[2] In Malthus's original, only the word "necessaries" is emphasised.—*Ed.*

is every reason to think that less time would be so devoted" (*ibid.*, p. 334).

Malthus is not interested in disguising the contradictions of bourgeois production; on the contrary, he is interested in emphasising them, on the one hand in order to demonstrate that the poverty of the working classes is necessary (it is necessary for this mode of production), and on the other hand in order to demonstrate to the capitalists that a well-fed tribe of Church-and-State servants is indispensable for the creation of an adequate demand for their commodities. Thus he also shows that neither increase of population, nor accumulation of capital (*ibid.*, pp. 319–20), nor fertility of the soil (*ibid.*, p. 399), nor "inventions to save labour", nor extension of the "foreign markets" (*ibid.*, pp. 352 and 359), are sufficient to ensure the "continued increase of wealth".[1]

> "Both labourers and capital may be redundant, compared with the means of employing them profitably" (*ibid.*, p. 414, footnote).

Thus Malthus, in opposition to the Ricardians, stresses the possibility of general overproduction. The main statements which he makes in this connection are the following:

> "Demand is always determined by *value*, and supply by *quantity*" (*ibid.*, p. 316, footnote).

On the same page, Malthus shows that commodities are exchanged not only for commodities but also for productive labour and personal services, and that in relation to these, as in relation to money, there can be a general glut of commodities (*loc. cit.*).[2]

[1] Marx's page references here are a little arbitrary. Malthus actually devotes a separate section to the consideration of each of the factors which Marx mentions.—*Ed.*

[2] The passage to which Marx is referring reads as follows: "It is by no means true, as a matter of fact, that commodities are always exchanged for commodities. An immense mass of commodities is exchanged directly, either for productive labour, or personal services: and it is quite obvious, that this mass of commodities, compared with the labour with which it is to be exchanged, may fall in value from a glut just as any one commodity falls in value from an excess of supply, compared either with labour or money."—*Ed.*

"Supply must always be proportioned to *quantity*, and demand to *value*" (*Definitions*, Cazenove's edn., p. 65, footnote).

"[James Mill] observes, 'It is evident that whatever a man has produced, and does not wish to keep for his own consumption, is a stock which he may give in exchange for other commodities. His will, therefore, to purchase, and his means of purchasing, in other words, his demand, is exactly equal to the amount of what he has produced, and does not mean to consume' . . . . It is quite obvious that his means of purchasing other commodities are not proportioned to the *quantity* of his own commodity which he has produced, and wishes to part with; but to its *value in exchange*; and unless the value of a commodity in exchange be proportioned to its quantity, it cannot be true that the demand and supply of every individual are always equal to one another" (*ibid.*, pp. 64–5; cf. *Definitions*, 1827 edn., pp. 47–9).

"If the demand of every individual were equal to his supply, in the correct sense of the expression, it would be a proof that he could always sell his commodity for the costs of production, including fair profits; and then even a *partial* glut would be impossible. The argument proves too much. . . . Supply must always be proportioned to *quantity*, and demand to *value*" (*Definitions*, 1827 edn., p. 48, footnote).

"[Torrens is wrong in saying that] 'increased supply is the one and only cause of increased effectual demand'. . . . If it were [true], how difficult would it be for a society to recover itself, under a temporary diminution of food and clothing! But . . . food and clothing thus diminished in quantity, will rise in value; and . . . the money-price of the remaining food and clothing will for a time rise in a greater degree than in proportion to the diminution of its quantity, while the money-price of labour may remain the same. The necessary consequence will be, the power of setting in motion a greater quantity of productive industry than before" (*ibid.*, pp. 59–60).

"All the commodities of a nation can fall at the same time, as compared with money or labour. . . . Thus a general

glut is possible. . . . Their prices can all fall below their costs of production" (*ibid.*, pp. 64–7).[1]

Apart from this, there are only [a few ideas] of Malthus's concerning the process of circulation to be noted:

"If we reckon the value of the fixed capital employed as a part of the advances, we must reckon the remaining value of such capital at the end of the year as a part of the annual returns. . . . In reality [the] annual advances [of the capitalist] consist only of his circulating capital, the wear and tear of his fixed capital with the interest upon it, and the interest of that part of his circulating capital which consists of the money employed in making his annual payments as they are called for" (*Principles*, 2nd edn., p. 269).

The amortisation fund, that is, the fund for the replacement of the wear and tear of the fixed capital, is at the same time a fund for accumulation.

In his *Essay on Population*, Malthus, with his usual "profound philosophy", makes the following remark in opposition to a plan to provide cows for English cottagers:

"It has been observed that those cottagers who keep cows are more industrious and more regular in their conduct than those who do not. . . . Most of those who keep cows at present have purchased them with the fruits of their own industry. It is therefore more just to say that their industry has given them a cow, than that a cow has given them their industry" (*Essay on the Principle of Population*, 7th edn., 1872, p. 471).

And it is also just to say, then, that diligence in labour (together with the exploitation of the labour of others) has given cows to the parvenus among the bourgeoisie, while these cows give an inclination towards laziness to the sons of these parvenus. If one deprived the cows, not of the ability to give milk, but of the ability to command the unpaid labour of others, this would have a very healthy effect upon the diligence of the sons.

[1] These statements are paraphrases, rather than direct quotations.—*Ed.*

The same "profound philosopher" remarks in this chapter:

> "It is evident that all cannot be in the middle [classes]. Superior and inferior parts are in the nature of things absolutely necessary, and not only necessary but strikingly beneficial. If no man could hope to rise or fear to fall in society, if industry did not bring with it its reward and indolence its punishment, we could not expect to see that animated activity in bettering our condition which now forms the master-spring of public prosperity" (*ibid.*, pp. 473–4).

The inferior classes must exist so that the superior ones should fear to fall, and the superior classes must exist so that the inferior ones can hope to rise. So that indolence should bring with it its punishment, the worker must be poor, and the rentier and the landed proprietor so dear to Malthus's heart must be rich. But what does Malthus understand by "reward for labour"? That the worker must perform a portion of his labour without receiving any equivalent. A fine incentive—if this "reward" were really the incentive rather than hunger. The most that can be said about it is that a worker can hope that he too will one day exploit workers. "The greater the expansion of monopoly", says Rousseau, "the heavier do the chains become for the exploited." This is not the opinion of the "profound thinker" Malthus. His highest hope—which even he himself regards as more or less utopian—is that the middle class should grow in size and that the (working) proletariat should form a smaller and smaller proportion of the total population (even though it grows in absolute numbers). This is in fact the course which bourgeois society follows. Malthus says in the same place:

> "We might even venture to indulge a hope that at some future period the processes for abridging human labour, the progress of which has of late years been so rapid, might ultimately supply all the wants of the most wealthy society with less personal effort than at present; and if they did not diminish the severity of individual exertion[1] might at least

[1] The worker must continue to work just as hard as before, and proportionately more and more for others and less and less for himself. (Note by Marx, inserted in the quotation.)

diminish the number of those employed in severe toil" (*ibid.*, p. 474).

Malthus's book *On Population* was a tract against the French Revolution and the contemporary ideas of reform in England (Godwin, etc.). It was an apology for the poverty of the working classes. The *theory* was a plagiarism of Townsend, etc.

His *Essay on Rent* was a tract on behalf of the landlords against industrial capital. The *theory* was a plagiarism of Anderson.

His *Principles of Political Economy* was a tract in the interests of the capitalists against the workers and in the interests of the aristocracy, the Church, and the "tax-devourers" (*Steuerfresser*), etc., against the capitalists. The *theory* was a plagiarism of Adam Smith. Where it was Malthus's own invention, it was pitiably poor. The foundation for the further development of the theory was supplied by Sismondi.

Part Four

MARX AND ENGELS ON MALTHUS AND DARWINISM

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

WHEN Marx first read Darwin's *Origin of Species* at the end of 1860, he remarked in a letter to Engels that "although it is developed in the crude English style, this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view" (*Selected Correspondence*, English edn., p. 126). Both Marx and Engels always stressed the fundamental importance of Darwin's discovery that "the stock of organic products of nature surrounding us to-day, including mankind, is the result of a long process of evolution from a few original unicellular germs" (Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, Lawrence and Wishart edn., p. 56).

One aspect of Darwin's work, however, came in for early criticism from Marx. Darwin believed that the "struggle for existence" which he had demonstrated amongst organic beings was, in effect, "the doctrine of Malthus, applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms" (see above, p. 124). "It is remarkable", wrote Marx to Engels, "that Darwin recognises among brutes and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions' and Malthusian 'struggle for existence' " (item (i) below).

This question of the "Malthusian" element in Darwinism soon began to assume considerable importance. A number of bourgeois writers, notably F. A. Lange, attempted to subsume the whole of history under "a single great natural law"—the Darwinian "struggle for existence", which they interpreted largely in terms of the Malthusian theory of population. What had happened, in essence, as Engels pointed out in a letter to Lavrov (iii) and later almost in the same words in his *Dialectics of Nature* (v), was, first, that certain bourgeois theories such as the theory of competition and the Malthusian theory of population had been transferred from society to animate nature to form the Darwinian theory of the struggle for existence; and, second, that Lange and others had then transferred the same theories back again from organic nature to history and claimed that their validity as "eternal laws of human society" was thereby proved.

Marx and Engels objected strenuously to this "childish" procedure. With reference to the second stage of the process, Marx pointed out that what was actually required was a concrete analysis of the struggle for existence "as represented historically in varying and definite forms of society" (ii); and Engels laid stress upon an essential difference between humans and animals which made it impossible "simply to transfer the laws of animal societies to human societies" (iii, v). In addition, Engels cast doubt upon the "unqualified justification" of the first stage of the process. Even in the sphere of nature, he argued, "the one-sided and meagre phrase, 'struggle for existence', . . . can only be taken with a grain of salt" (iii); there may indeed be important cases in which the evolution of species may develop "*without any Malthusianism*" at all (v). Nevertheless, it was quite wrong to

suggest that the analogy drawn between bourgeois society and animate nature was completely fanciful. It was absurd to imply, as Duhring did, that the *origin* of Darwin's idea of the struggle for existence was to be found in Malthus rather than in the facts. "No Malthusian spectacles", said Engels, "are required in order to perceive the struggle for existence in Nature" (iv).

The sources of the items are as follows:

(i) Translated from the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. III, Bd. 3, pp. 77–8.
(ii) From Marx's *Letters to Kugelmann* (Lawrence and Wishart edn.), p. 111.
(iii) From the *Labour Monthly*, July, 1936, Vol. 18, No. 7. The translation and notes are by Dona Torr.
(iv) From Engels's *Anti-Duhring* (Lawrence and Wishart edn.), Part I, Chapter 7, pp. 77–82.
(v) From Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* (Lawrence and Wishart edn., 1940), pp. 18–20, 208–10, and 235–6.

(i) BOURGEOIS SOCIETY AND ANIMAL SOCIETY

(From Marx's letter to Engels of 18 June, 1862)

. . . As regards Darwin, whom I have looked at again, it amuses me that he says he applies the "Malthusian" theory *also* to plants and animals, as if Malthus's whole point did not consist in the fact that his theory is applied *not* to plants and animals, but only to human beings—in geometrical progression —as opposed to plants and animals. It is remarkable that Darwin recognises among brutes and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, "inventions" and Malthusian "struggle for existence". It is Hobbes's *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and it is reminiscent of Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, where bourgeois society figures as "spiritual animal kingdom", while with Darwin the animal kingdom figures as bourgeois society.

(ii) MALTHUSIANISM AND THE "STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE"

(From Marx's letter to Kugelmann of 27 June, 1870)

. . . HERR LANGE (*Ueber die Arbeiterfrage, etc.*, 2. Edition) sings my praises loudly, but with the object of making himself important. Herr Lange, you see, has made a great discovery. The whole of history can be brought under a single great natural law. This natural law is the *phrase* (in this application Darwin's expression becomes nothing but a phrase) "the struggle for existence", and the content of this phrase is the Malthusian law of population or, rather, overpopulation. So, instead of analysing the struggle for existence as represented historically in varying and definite forms of society, all that has to be done is to translate every concrete struggle into the phrase, "struggle for existence", and this phrase itself into the Malthusian population fantasy. One must admit that this is a very impressive method—for swaggering, sham-scientific, bombastic ignorance and intellectual laziness.

(iii) DARWINISM AND SOCIETY

(Engels's letter to Lavrov of 12 November, 1875)

MY DEAR MONSIEUR LAVROV,—Now that I have returned from a visit to Germany I have at last got to your article, which I have just read with much interest. Here are my observations upon it, written in German, as this enables me to be more concise.[1]

(1) Of the Darwinian theory I accept the *theory of evolution* but only take Darwin's method of proof (struggle for life, natural selection)[2] as the first, provisional, and incomplete expression of a newly-discovered fact. Before Darwin, the very people (Vogt, Buchner, Moleschott, etc.) who now see nothing but the *struggle* for existence everywhere were stressing precisely the *co-operation* in organic nature—how the vegetable kingdom supplies the animal kingdom with oxygen and foodstuffs while the animal kingdom in turn supplies the vegetable kingdom with carbonic acid and manures, as Liebig, in particular, had emphasised. Both conceptions have a certain justification within certain limits, but each is as one-sided and narrow as the other. The interaction of natural bodies—whether animate or inanimate—includes alike harmony and collision, struggle and co-operation. If, therefore, a so-called natural scientist permits himself to subsume the whole manifold wealth of historical development under the one-sided and meagre phrase, "struggle for existence", a phrase which even in the sphere of nature can only be taken with a grain of salt, such a proceeding is its own condemnation.

(2) Of the three convinced Darwinists cited, Hellwald alone seems to be worth mentioning. Seidlitz is only a lesser light at best, and Robert Byr is a novelist, whose novel *Three Times* is appearing at the moment in *By Land and Sea*—just the right place for his whole rodomontade too.

[1] The first and last paragraphs of the letter are written in French; the rest is in German, excepting the two quotations from Lavrov's article, and a few phrases, which are in Russian.

[2] This parenthesis is written in English.

(3) Without disputing the merits of your method of attack, which I might call a psychological one, I should myself have chosen a different method. Each of us is more or less influenced by the intellectual medium in which he chiefly moves. For Russia, where you know your public better than I do, and for a propagandist journal appealing to the bond of sentiment, to moral feeling, your method is probably the better one. For Germany, where false sentimentality has done and is still doing such enormous harm, it would be unsuitable, and would be misunderstood and distorted sentimentally. What we need is hate rather than love—to begin with, at any rate—and, above all, to get rid of the last remnants of German idealism and install material facts in their historic rights. I should, therefore, attack these bourgeois Darwinists something after this fashion (and shall perhaps do so in time):

The whole Darwinian theory of the struggle for existence is simply the transference from society to animate nature of Hobbes's theory of the war of every man against every man and the bourgeois economic theory of competition, along with the Malthusian theory of population. This feat having been accomplished—(as indicated under (1) I dispute its unqualified justification, especially where the Malthusian theory is concerned)—the same theories are next transferred back again from organic nature to history and their validity as eternal laws of human society declared to have been proved. The childishness of this procedure is obvious, it is not worth wasting words over. But if I wanted to go into it further I should do it in such a way that I exposed them in the first place as bad *economists* and only in the second place as bad natural scientists and philosophers.

(4) The essential difference between human and animal society is that animals are at most *gatherers* whilst men are *producers*. This single but cardinal distinction alone makes it impossible simply to transfer the laws of animal societies to human societies. It makes it possible that, as you justly remark, "Man waged a struggle not only for existence but for enjoyment and for the increase of his enjoyments . . . he was ready to renounce the lower enjoyments for the sake of the higher." Without contesting your further deductions from this, the

further conclusions I should draw from my premises would be the following: At a certain stage, therefore, human production reaches a level where not only essential necessities but also luxuries are produced, even if, for the time being, they are only produced for a minority. Hence the struggle for existence—if we allow this category as valid here for a moment—transforms itself into a struggle for enjoyments, a struggle no longer for the mere means of *existence* but for the means of *development, socially produced* means of development, and at this stage the categories of the animal kingdom are no longer applicable. But if, as has now come about, production in its capitalist form produces a far greater abundance of the means of existence and development than capitalist society can consume, because capitalist society keeps the great mass of the real producers artificially removed from the means of existence and development; if this society is forced, by the law of its own existence, continually to increase production already too great for it, and, therefore, periodically every ten years, reaches a point where it itself destroys a mass not only of products but of productive forces, what sense is there still left in the talk about the "struggle for existence"? The struggle for existence can then only consist in the producing class taking away the control of production and distribution from the class hitherto entrusted with it but now no longer capable of it; that, however, is the Socialist revolution.

Incidentally it is to be noted that the mere consideration of past history as a series of class struggles is enough to reveal all the superficiality of the conception of that same history as a slightly varied version of the "struggle for existence". I should therefore never make that concession to these spurious natural scientists.

(5) For the same reason I should have given a different formulation to your statement, which is substantially quite correct, "that the idea of solidarity, as a means of lightening the struggle, could ultimately expand to a point at which it embraces all humanity, counterposing it as a solidarised society of brothers to the rest of the world of minerals, vegetables and animals."

(6) On the other hand I cannot agree with you that the war

of every man against every man was the first phase of human development. In my opinion the social instinct was one of the most essential levers in the development of man from the ape. The first men must have lived gregariously and so far back as we can see we find that this was the case.

17th November. I have been interrupted afresh and take up these lines again to-day in order to send them to you. You will see that my remarks apply rather to the form, the method, of your attack than to its basis. I hope you will find them clear enough; I have written them hurriedly and on re-reading them should like to change many words, but I am afraid of making the manuscript too illegible.

With cordial greetings,

F. ENGELS.

(iv) DÜHRING ON MALTHUS AND DARWIN

(From Engels's *Anti-Dühring* (1878))

NATURAL PHILOSOPHY. THE ORGANIC WORLD

"A SINGLE and uniform ladder of intermediate steps leads from the mechanics of pressure and impact to the linking together of sensations and ideas." With this assurance Herr Dühring saves himself the trouble of saying anything further about the origin of life, although it might reasonably have been expected that a thinker who had traced the evolution of the world back to its identical state, and is so much at home on other celestial bodies, would have had exact information also on this point. For the rest, however, the assurance he gives us is only half true, unless it is completed by the Hegelian nodal line of measure-relations which has already been mentioned. In spite of all intermediate steps, the transition from one form of motion to another always remains a leap, a decisive change. This is true of the transition from the mechanics of celestial bodies to that of smaller masses on a particular celestial body; it is equally true of the transition from the mechanics of masses to the mechanics of molecules—including the forms of motion investigated in physics proper: heat, light, electricity, magnetism. In the same way, the transition from the physics of molecules to the physics of atoms—chemistry—in turn involves a definite leap; and this is even more clearly the case in the transition from ordinary chemical action to the chemistry of albumen which we call life. Then within the sphere of life the leaps become ever more infrequent and imperceptible.—Once again, therefore, it is Hegel who has to correct Herr Dühring.

The idea of purpose provides Herr Dühring with his conceptual transition to the organic world. Once again, this is borrowed from Hegel, who in his *Logic—the Science of the Idea*—makes the transition from chemistry to life by means of teleology or the science of purpose. Wherever we look in Herr Dühring we stumble up against a Hegelian "crudity" which he quite

unblushingly hands out to us as his own deep-rooted science. It would take us too far to examine here to what extent it is legitimate and appropriate to apply the ideas of end and means to the organic world. In any case the utilisation of the Hegelian "inner purpose"—i.e. a purpose which is not imported into Nature by some third party acting purposively, such as the wisdom of providence, but lies in the necessity of the thing itself—constantly leads, with people who are not well versed in philosophy, to the unthinking interpolation of conscious and purposive activity. That same Herr Duhring who is filled with boundless moral indignation at the slightest "spiritistic" tendency in other people assures us "with certainty that the instincts were primarily created for the sake of the sense of pleasure which is associated with their activity". He tells us that poor Nature "is obliged incessantly to maintain order in the objective world", and moreover in doing so she has to solve more than one problem "which requires on the part of Nature more subtlety than is usually credited to her". But Nature not only *knows* why she does one thing and another; she has not only to perform the duties of a housemaid, she not only possesses subtlety, in itself a very pretty accomplishment in subjective conscious thought; she has also a will. For what the instincts do in addition, fulfilling real natural functions such as nutrition, propagation, etc., "we should not regard as directly, but only indirectly, *willed*". So we have arrived at a consciously thinking and acting Nature, and are thus already standing on the "bridge"—not indeed from the static to the dynamic, but from pantheism to deism. Or is Herr Dühring perhaps just for once indulging in a little "natural-philosophical semi-poetry"?

It is impossible. All that our philosopher of reality can tell us of organic Nature is restricted to the fight against this natural-philosophical semi-poetry, against "charlatanism with its frivolous superficialities and pseudo-scientific mystifications", against the "poetising features" of *Darwinism.*

The main reproach levelled against Darwin is that he transferred the Malthusian population theory from economics into natural science, that he never got beyond the ideas of an animal breeder, and that in his theory of the struggle for existence he

pursued unscientific semi-poetry, and that the whole of Darwinism, after deducting what had been borrowed from Lamarck, is a piece of brutality directed against humanity.

Darwin brought back from his scientific travels the view that plant and animal species are not constant but subject to variation. In order to follow up these ideas after his return home there was no better field available than that of the breeding of animals and plants. It is precisely in this field that England is the classical country; the achievements of other countries, for example Germany, fall far short of what England has achieved in this connection. Moreover, most of these successes have been won during the last hundred years, so that there is very little difficulty in establishing the facts. Darwin found that this breeding has produced artificially, among animals and plants of the same species, differences greater than those found in what are generally recognised as different species. Thus was established on the one hand the variability of species up to a certain point, and on the other, the possibility of a common ancestry for organisms with different specific characteristics. Darwin then investigated whether there were not possibly causes to be found in Nature which—without conscious purpose on the part of the breeder—would nevertheless in the long run produce in living organisms changes similar to those produced by artificial breeding. He discovered these causes in the disproportion between the immense number of germs created by Nature and the insignificant number of organisms which actually attain maturity. But as each germ strives to develop, there necessarily arises a struggle for existence which manifests itself not merely as direct bodily combat or devouring, but also as a struggle for space and light, even in the case of plants. And it is evident that in this struggle those individual organisms which have some particular characteristic, however insignificant, which gives them an advantage in the struggle for existence will have the best prospect of reaching maturity and propagating themselves. These individual characteristics have furthermore the tendency to be inherited, and when they occur among many individuals of the same species, to increase through accumulated heredity in the direction once taken; while those individual organisms which do not possess these characteristics

succumb more easily in the struggle for existence and gradually disappear. In this way a species is altered through natural selection, through the survival of the fittest.

Against this Darwinian theory, however, Herr Duhring says that the origin of the idea of the struggle for existence, as, he claims, Darwin himself admitted, has to be sought in a generalisation of the views of the economic theorist of population, Malthus, and the idea is therefore marked by all the defects peculiar to the parsonical views of Malthus on the pressure of population.—Now Darwin would not dream of saying that the *origin* of the idea of the struggle for existence is to be found in Malthus. He only says that his theory of the struggle for existence is the theory of Malthus applied to the animal and plant world as a whole. However great the blunder made by Darwin in accepting so naively and without reflection the Malthusian theory, nevertheless anyone can see at the first glance that no Malthusian spectacles are required in order to perceive the struggle for existence in Nature—the contradiction between the countless host of germs which Nature so lavishly produces and the small number of those which ever reach maturity; a contradiction which in fact for the most part finds its solution in a struggle for existence which is often of extreme cruelty. And just as the law of wages has maintained its validity even after the Malthusian arguments on which Ricardo based it have long been exploded, so likewise the struggle for existence can take place in Nature, even without any Malthusian interpretation. For that matter, the organisms of Nature also have their laws of population, which have been left almost entirely uninvestigated, although their formulation would be of decisive importance for the theory of the evolution of species. But who was it that gave the most definite impulse to work in this direction? No other than Darwin.

Herr Dühring carefully avoids an examination of this positive side of the question. Instead, he does nothing but make repeated attacks on the struggle for existence. It is obvious, according to him, that there can be no talk of a struggle for existence among unconscious plants and good-natured plant-eaters: "In the precise and definite sense the struggle for existence is found only in the realm of brutality, in so far as animals

get their nourishment by seizing prey by force and devouring it." And after he has reduced the idea of the struggle for existence to these narrow limits he can give full play to his indignation at the brutality of this idea, which he himself has restricted to brutality. But this moral indignation applies only to Herr Dühring himself, who is indeed the only author of the struggle for existence in this limited conception and is therefore also solely responsible for it. It is consequently not Darwin who "sought the laws and understanding of all Nature's actions in the kingdom of the brutes"—Darwin had in fact expressly included the whole of organic nature in the struggle—but an imaginary bugbear dressed up by Herr Dühring himself. The *name*: the struggle for existence, can for the matter be willingly handed over to Herr Dühring's exceedingly moral indignation. That the *fact* exists also among plants can be demonstrated to him by every meadow, every corn-field, every wood; and the question at issue is not what it is to be called, whether "struggle for existence" or "lack of conditions for existence and mechanical effects", but how this fact influences the fixity or variation of species. On this point Herr Duhring maintains an obstinate and "identical" silence. Therefore for the time being in regard to natural selection it will certainly continue to be applied.

But Darwinism "produces its transformations and differences out of nothing". It is true that Darwin, when considering natural selection, leaves out of account the *causes* which have produced the variations in separate individuals, and deals in the first place with the way in which such individual variations gradually become the characteristics of a race, variety or species. To Darwin it was of less immediate importance to discover these causes—which up to the present are in part absolutely unknown, and in part can only be stated in quite general terms—than to establish a rational form according to which their effects are preserved and acquire permanent significance. It is true that in doing this Darwin attributed to his discovery too wide a field of action, made it the sole agent in the alteration of species and neglected the causes of the repeated individual variations, concentrating rather on the form in which these variations become general; but this is a mistake which

he shares in common with most other people who make any real advance. Moreover, if Darwin produces his individual variations out of nothing, and in so doing applies exclusively "the wisdom of the breeder", the breeder also must produce *out of nothing* his changes in animal and plant forms which are not merely imaginary but occur in reality. But once again, the man who gave the impetus to science to investigate how exactly these variations and differences arise is no other than Darwin.

(v) DARWINISM—A SUMMARY VIEW

(From Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* (written 1872–82))

(*a*)

WITH men we enter *history*. Animals also have a history, that of their derivation and gradual evolution to their present position. This history, however, is made for them, and in so far as they themselves take part in it, this occurs without their knowledge or desire. On the other hand, the more that human beings become removed from animals in the narrower sense of the word, the more they make their own history consciously, the less becomes the influence of unforeseen effects and uncontrolled forces on this history, and the more accurately does the historical result correspond to the aim laid down in advance. If, however, we apply this measure to human history, to that of even the most developed peoples of the present day, we find that there still exists here a colossal disproportion between the proposed aims and the results arrived at, that unforeseen effects predominate, and that the uncontrolled forces are far more powerful than those set into motion according to plan. And this cannot be otherwise as long as the most essential historical activity of men, the one which has raised them from bestiality to humanity and which forms the material foundation of all their other activities, namely the production of their requirements of life, that is to-day social production, is above all subject to the interplay of unintended effects from uncontrolled forces and achieves its desired end only by way of exception and, much more frequently, the exact opposite. In the most advanced industrial countries we have subdued the forces of nature and pressed them into the service of mankind; we have thereby infinitely multiplied production, so that a child now produces more than a hundred adults previously did. And what is the result? Increasing overwork and increasing misery of the masses, and every ten years a great collapse. Darwin did not know what a bitter satire he wrote on mankind, and especially on his countrymen, when he showed that free

competition, the struggle for existence, which the economists celebrate as the highest historical achievement, is the normal state of the *animal kingdom*. Only conscious organisation of social production, in which production and distribution are carried on in a planned way, can lift mankind above the rest of the animal world as regards the social aspect, in the same way that production in general has done this for men in their aspect as species. Historical evolution makes such an organisation daily more indispensable, but also with every day more possible. From it will date a new epoch of history, in which mankind itself, and with mankind all branches of its activity, and especially natural science, will experience an advance that will put everything preceding it in the deepest shade.

(*b*)

The Struggle for Existence.—Until Darwin, what was stressed by his present adherents was precisely the harmonious co-operative working of organic nature, how the plant kingdom supplies animals with nourishment and oxygen, and animals supply plants with manure, ammonia, and carbonic acid. Hardly was Darwin recognised before these same people saw everywhere nothing but *struggle*. Both views are justified within narrow limits, but both are equally one-sided and prejudiced. The interaction of dead natural bodies includes both harmony and collisions, that of living bodies conscious and unconscious co-operation equally with conscious and unconscious struggle. Hence, even in regard to nature, it is not permissible one-sidedly to inscribe only "struggle" on one's banners. But it is absolutely childish to desire to sum up the whole manifold wealth of historical evolution and complexity in the meagre and one-sided phrase "struggle for existence". That says less than nothing.

The whole Darwinian theory of the struggle for existence is simply the transference from society to organic nature of Hobbes's theory of *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and of the bourgeois economic theory of competition, as well as the Malthusian theory of population. When once this feat has been accomplished (the unconditional justification for which, especially as regards the Malthusian theory, is still very questionable), it is very easy to transfer these theories back again from natural history to

the history of society, and altogether too naïve to maintain that thereby these assertions have been proved as eternal natural laws of society.

Let us accept for a moment the phrase "struggle for existence" for argument's sake. The most that the animal can achieve is to *collect*; man *produces*, he prepares the means of life in the widest sense of the words, which, without him, nature would not have produced. This makes impossible any immediate transference of the laws of life in animal societies to human ones. Production soon brings it about that the so-called struggle for existence no longer turns on pure means of existence, but on means for enjoyment and development. Here—where the means of development are socially produced—the categories taken from the animal kingdom are already totally inapplicable. Finally, under the capitalist mode of production, production reaches such a height that society can no longer consume the means of life, enjoyment, and development that have been produced, because for the great mass of producers access to these means is artificially and forcibly barred; and therefore every ten years a crisis restores the equilibrium by destroying not only the means of life, enjoyment, and development that have been produced, but also a great part of the productive forces themselves. Hence the so-called struggle for existence assumes the form: to *protect* the products and productive forces produced by bourgeois capitalist society against the destructive, ravaging effect of this capitalist social order, by taking control of social production and distribution out of the hands of the ruling capitalist class, which has become incapable of this function, and transferring it to the producing masses—and that is the socialist revolution.

Even by itself the conception of history as a series of class struggles is much richer in content and deeper than merely reducing it to weakly distinguished phases of the struggle for existence.

(*c*)

Darwin. The Struggle for Existence.—Above all this must be strictly limited to the struggles resulting from plant and animal *over-population*, which do in fact occur at definite stages of plant

and lower animal life. But one must keep sharply distinct from it the conditions in which species alter, old ones die out and newly evolved ones take their place, *without* this over-population: e.g. on the migration of animals and plants into new regions where new conditions of climate, soil, etc., are responsible for the alteration. If *there* the individuals which become adapted survive and develop into a new species by continually increasing adaptation, while the other more stable individuals die away and finally die out, and with them the imperfect intermediate stages, then this can and does proceed *without any Malthusianism*, and if the latter should occur at all it makes no change to the process, at most it can accelerate it.

Similarly, with the gradual alteration of the geographical, climatic, etc., conditions in a given region (desiccation of central Asia for instance) whether the members of the animal or plant population there exert pressure on one another is a matter of indifference; the process of evolution of the organisms that is determined by it proceeds all the same. It is the same for sexual selection, in which case too Malthusianism is quite unconcerned.

Hence Haeckel's "adaptation and heredity" also can determine the whole process of evolution, without need for selection and Malthusianism.

Darwin's mistake lies precisely in lumping together in "natural selection" or the "survival of the fittest" two absolutely separate things:

(1) Selection by the pressure of over-population, where perhaps the strongest survive in the first place, but where the weakest in many respects can also do so.

(2) Selection by greater capacity of adaptation to altered circumstances, where the survivors are better suited to these *circumstances*, but where this adaptation as a whole can mean regress just as well as progress (for instance adaptation to parasitic life is *always* regress).

The main thing: that each advance in organic evolution is at the same time a regression, fixing *one-sided* evolution and excluding evolution along many other directions.

This, however, *a basic law*.

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