

Chapter 27: The Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land

In England, serfdom had disappeared in practice by the last part of the fourteenth century. The immense majority of the population¹ consisted then, and to a still larger extent in the fifteenth century, of free peasant proprietors, however much the feudal trappings might disguise their absolute ownership. In the larger seigniorial domains, the old bailiff, himself a serf, was displaced by the free farmer. The wage-labourers of agriculture were partly peasants, who made use of their leisure time by working on the large estates, and partly an independent, special class of wage-labourer, relatively and absolutely few in numbers. The latter were also in practice peasants, farming independently for themselves, since, in addition to their wages, they were provided with arable land to the extent of four or more acres, together with their cottages. Moreover, like the other peasants, they enjoyed the right to exploit the common land, which gave pasture to their cattle, and furnished them with timber, fire-wood, turf, etc.² In all countries

1. 'The petty proprietors who cultivated their own fields with their own hands, and enjoyed a modest competence . . . then formed a much more important part of the nation than at present. If we may trust the best statistical writers of that age, not less than 160,000 proprietors who, with their families, must have made up more than a seventh of the whole population, derived their subsistence from little freehold estates. The average income of these small landlords . . . was estimated at between £60 and £70 a year. It was computed that the number of persons who tilled their own land was greater than the number of those who farmed the land of others' (Macaulay, *History of England*, 10th edn, London, 1854, Vol. 1, pp. 333, 334). Even in the last third of the seventeenth century, four-fifths of the English people were agriculturalists (loc. cit., p. 413). I quote Macaulay, because as a systematic falsifier of history he minimizes facts of this kind as much as possible.

2. We must never forget that even the serf was not only the owner of the piece of land attached to his house, although admittedly he was merely a tribute-paying owner, but also a co-proprietor of the common land. 'The peasant' (in Silesia) 'is a serf.' Nevertheless these serfs possess common lands. 'It has not yet been possible to persuade the Silesians to partition the common

of Europe, feudal production is characterized by division of the soil amongst the greatest possible number of sub-feudatories. The might of the feudal lord, like that of the sovereign, depended not on the length of his rent-roll, but on the number of his subjects, and the latter depended on the number of peasant proprietors.³ Thus although the soil of England, after the Norman conquest, was divided up into gigantic baronies, one of which often included some 900 of the old Anglo-Saxon lordships, it was strewn with small peasant properties, only interspersed here and there with great seigniorial domains. Such conditions, together with the urban prosperity so characteristic of the fifteenth century, permitted the development of that popular wealth Chancellor Fortescue depicted so eloquently in his *De laudibus legum Angliae*, but they ruled out wealth in the form of capital.

The prelude to the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production was played out in the last third of the fifteenth century and the first few decades of the sixteenth. A mass of 'free' and unattached proletarians was hurled onto the labour-market by the dissolution of the bands of feudal retainers, who, as Sir James Steuart correctly remarked, 'everywhere uselessly filled house and castle'.* Although the royal power, itself a product of bourgeois development, forcibly hastened the dissolution of these bands of retainers in its striving for absolute sovereignty, it was by no means the sole cause of it. It was rather that the great feudal lords, in their defiant opposition to the king and Parliament, created an incomparably larger proletariat by forcibly driving the peasantry from the land, to which the latter had the same feudal title as the lords themselves, and by usurpation of the common lands. The rapid expansion of wool manufacture in Flanders and the corresponding rise in the price of wool in

lands, whereas in the *Neumark* there is scarcely a village where this partition has not been implemented with very great success' (Mirabeau, *De la monarchie prussienne*, London, 1788, Vol. 2, pp. 125-6).

3. Japan, with its purely feudal organization of landed property and its developed small-scale agriculture, gives a much truer picture of the European Middle Ages than all our history books, dictated as these are, for the most part, by bourgeois prejudices. It is far too easy to be 'liberal' at the expense of the Middle Ages.

*James Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, Dublin, 1770, p. 52.

England provided the direct impulse for these evictions. The old nobility had been devoured by the great feudal wars. The new nobility was the child of its time, for which money was the power of all powers. Transformation of arable land into sheep-walks was therefore its slogan. Harrison, in his *Description of England, prefixed to Holinshed's Chronicles*, describes how the expropriation of small peasants is ruining the country. 'What care our great incroachers?' The dwellings of the peasants and the cottages of the labourers were razed to the ground or doomed to decay. 'If,' says Harrison, 'the old records of euerie manour be sought . . . it will soon appear that in some manour seventeene, eighteene, or twentie houses are shrunk . . . that England was neuer less furnished with people than at the present . . . Of cities and townes either utterly decayed or more than a quarter or half diminished, though some one be a little increased here or there; of townes pulled downe for sheepe-walks, and no more but the lordships now standing in them . . . I could saie somewhat.'* The complaints of these old chroniclers are always exaggerated, but they faithfully reflect the impression made on contemporaries by the revolution in the relations of production. A comparison between the writings of Chancellor Fortescue and Thomas More reveals the gulf between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. As Thornton rightly says, the English working class was precipitated without any transitional stages from its golden age to its iron age.†

Legislation shrunk back in the face of this immense change. It did not yet stand at that high level of civilization where the 'wealth of the nation' (i.e. the formation of capital and the reckless exploitation and impoverishment of the mass of the people) figures as the *ultima Thule*‡ of all statecraft. In his history of Henry VII Bacon says this: 'Inclosures at that time' (1489) 'began to be more frequent, whereby arable land, which could not be manured§ without people and families, was turned into pasture, which was easily rid by a few herdsmen; and tenancies for years, lives, and at will, whereupon much of the yeomanry lived, were turned into demesnes. This bred a decay of people, and, by consequence, a decay of towns, churches, tithes, and the like . . . In remedying of

*William Harrison, *Description of England*, Chapter 19, 'Of Parks and Warrens', ed. G. Edelen, Ithaca, N.Y., 1968, pp. 257-8.

†W. T. Thornton, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

‡'uttermost limit'.

§i.e. cultivated.

this inconvenience the king's wisdom was admirable, and the parliament's at that time . . . They took a course to take away depopulating inclosures, and depopulating pasturage.* An Act of Henry VII, 1489, c. 19, forbade the destruction of all 'houses of husbandry' possessing 20 acres of land. By another Act, 25 Henry VIII [c. 13], this law was renewed. It recites, among other things, that 'many farms and large flocks of cattle, especially of sheep, are concentrated in the hands of a few men, whereby the rent of land has much risen, and tillage has fallen off, churches and houses have been pulled down, and marvellous numbers of people have been deprived of the means wherewith to maintain themselves and their families.' The Act therefore ordains the rebuilding of the decayed farmsteads, and fixes a proportion between corn land and pasture land, etc. The same Act recites that some owners possess 24,000 sheep, and limits the number to be owned to 2,000.⁴ The cries of the people and the legislation directed, for 150 years after Henry VII, against the expropriation of the small farmers and peasants, were both equally fruitless. Bacon, without knowing it, reveals to us the secret of their lack of success. 'The device of King Henry VII,' says Bacon, in the twenty-ninth of his *Essays, Civil and Moral*, 'was profound and admirable, in making farms and houses of husbandry of a standard; that is, maintained with such a proportion of land unto them as may breed a subject to live in convenient plenty and no servile condition, and to keep the plough in the hands of the owners and not mere hirelings.'⁵ What the capitalist system demanded was

4. In his *Utopia*, Thomas More speaks of the curious land where 'sheep . . . swallow down the very men themselves' (*Utopia*, tr. Robinson, ed. Arber, London, 1869, p. 41).

5. Elsewhere, Bacon discusses the connection between a free, well-to-do peasantry, and good infantry. 'This did wonderfully concern the might and mannerhood of the kingdom to have farms as it were of a standard sufficient to maintain an able body out of penury, and did in effect amortise a great part of the lands of the kingdom unto the hold and occupation of the yeomanry or middle people, of a condition between gentlemen, and cottagers and peasants . . . For it hath been held by the general opinion of men of best judgment in the wars . . . that the principal strength of an army consisteth in the infantry or foot. And to make good infantry it requireth men bred, not in a servile or indigent fashion, but in some free and plentiful manner. Therefore, if a state run most to noblemen and gentlemen, and that the husbandmen and plough-

*F. Bacon, *The Reign of Henry VII, Verbatim Reprint from Kennet's 'England'*, ed. 1719, London, 1870, p. 307.

the reverse of this: a degraded and almost servile condition of the mass of the people, their transformation into mercenaries, and the transformation of their means of labour into capital. During this transitional period, legislation also strove to retain the four acres of land by the cottage of the agricultural wage-labourer, and forbade him to take lodgers into his cottage. In the reign of Charles I, in 1627, Roger Crocker of Fontmill was condemned for having built a cottage on the manor of Fontmill without four acres of land attached to the same in perpetuity. As late as 1638, in the same reign, a royal commission was appointed to enforce the implementation of the old laws, especially the law referring to the four acres of land. Even Cromwell forbade the building of a house within four miles of London unless it was endowed with four acres of land. As late as the first half of the eighteenth century, complaint is made if the cottage of the agricultural labourer does not possess an adjunct of one or two acres of land. Nowadays the labourer is lucky if it is furnished with a small garden, or if he may rent a few roods of land at a great distance from his cottage. 'Landlords and farmers,' says Dr Hunter, 'work here hand in hand. A few acres to the cottage would make the labourers too independent.'⁶

The process of forcible expropriation of the people received a new and terrible impulse in the sixteenth century from the Reformation, and the consequent colossal spoliation of church property. The Catholic church was, at the time of the Reformation, the feudal proprietor of a great part of the soil of England. The dissolution of the monasteries, etc., hurled their inmates into the proletariat. The estates of the church were to a large extent given away to rapacious royal favourites, or sold at a nominal price to speculating farmers and townsmen, who drove out the

men be but as their workfolks and labourers, or else mere cottagers (which are but hous'd beggars), you may have a good cavalry, but never good stable bands of foot . . . And this is to be seen in France, and Italy, and some other parts abroad, where in effect all is noblesse or peasantry . . . insomuch that they are inforced to employ mercenary bands of Switzers and the like, for their battalions of foot; whereby also it comes to pass that those nations have much people and few soldiers' (F. Bacon, op. cit., p. 308).

6. Dr Hunter, op. cit., p. 134. 'The quantity of land assigned' (under the old laws) 'would now be judged too great for labourers, and rather as likely to convert them into small farmers' (George Roberts, *The Social History of the People of the Southern Counties of England in Past Centuries*, London, 1856, pp. 184-5).

old-established hereditary sub-tenants in great numbers, and threw their holdings together. The legally guaranteed property of the poorer folk in a part of the church's tithes was quietly confiscated.⁷ '*Pauper ubique jacet*'* cried Queen Elizabeth, after a journey through England. In the forty-third year of her reign it finally proved necessary to recognize pauperism officially by the introduction of the poor-rate. 'The authors of this law seem to have been ashamed to state the grounds of it, for' (contrary to traditional usage) 'it has no preamble whatever.'⁸ The poor-rate was declared perpetual by 16 Charles I, c. 4, and in fact only in 1834 did it take a new and severer form.⁹ These immediate results

7. 'The right of the poor to share in the tithe, is established by the tenour of ancient statutes' (Tuckett, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 804-5).

8. William Cobbett, *A History of the Protestant 'Reformation'*, para. 471.

9. The 'spirit' of Protestantism may be seen from the following, among other things. In the south of England certain landed proprietors and well-to-do farmers put their heads together and propounded ten questions as to the right interpretation of the Elizabethan Poor Law. These they laid before a celebrated jurist of that time, Sergeant Snigge (later a judge under James I), for his opinion. 'Question 9 - Some of the more wealthy farmers in the parish have devised a skilful mode by which all the trouble of executing this Act might be avoided. They have proposed that we shall erect a prison in the parish, and then give notice to the neighbourhood, that if any persons are disposed to farm the poor of this parish, they do give in sealed proposals, on a certain day, of the lowest price at which they will take them off our hands; and that they will be authorised to refuse to any one unless he be shut up in the afore-said prison. The proposers of this plan conceive that there will be found in the adjoining counties, persons, who, being unwilling to labour and not possessing substance or credit to take a farm or ship, so as to live without labour, may be induced to make a very advantageous offer to the parish. If any of the poor perish under the contractor's care, the sin will lie at his door, as the parish will have done its duty by them. We are, however, apprehensive that the present Act will not warrant a prudential measure of this kind; but you are to learn that the rest of the freeholders of the county, and of the adjoining county of B, will very readily join in instructing their members to propose an Act to enable the parish to contract with a person to lock up and work the poor; and to declare that if any person shall refuse to be so locked up and worked, he shall be entitled to no relief. This, it is hoped, will prevent persons in distress from wanting relief, and be the means of keeping down parishes' (R. Blakey, *The History of Political Literature from the Earliest Times*, London, 1855, Vol. 2, pp. 84-5). In Scotland, the abolition of serfdom took place some centuries later than in England. Fletcher of Saltoun declared as late as 1698, in the Scottish Parliament, 'The number of beggars in Scotland is reckoned at not less than 200,000. The only remedy that I, a republican on principle, can suggest, is to restore the old state of serfdom, to make slaves of all those

* 'The poor man is everywhere in subjection' (Ovid, *Fasti*, Bk I, verse 218).

of the Reformation were not its most lasting ones. The property of the church formed the religious bulwark of the old conditions of landed property. With its fall, these conditions could no longer maintain their existence.¹⁰

Even in the last few decades of the seventeenth century, the yeomanry, the class of independent peasants, were more numerous than the class of farmers. They had formed the backbone of Cromwell's strength, and, on the admission of Macaulay himself, stood in favourable contrast to the drunken squires and their servants, the country clergy, who had to marry their masters' cast-off mistresses. By about 1750 the yeomanry had disappeared,¹¹ and so, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, had the last trace of the common land of the agricultural labourer. We leave on one side here the purely economic driving forces behind the agricultural revolution. We deal only with the violent means employed.

After the restoration of the Stuarts, the landed proprietors carried out, by legal means, an act of usurpation which was effected everywhere on the Continent without any legal formality. They abolished the feudal tenure of land, i.e. they got rid of all its obligations to the state, 'indemnified' the state by imposing taxes on the peasantry and the rest of the people, established for

who are unable to provide for their own subsistence.' Eden (op. cit., Bk I, Ch. 1, pp. 60-61) says: 'The decrease of villeinage seems necessarily to have been the era of the origin of the poor. Manufactures and commerce are the two parents of our national poor.' Eden, like our Scottish republican on principle, is only wrong on this point: not the abolition of villeinage, but the abolition of the property of the agricultural labourer in the soil made him a proletarian, and eventually a pauper. In France, where the expropriation was effected in another way, the Ordinance of Moulins, 1571, and the Edict of 1656, correspond to the English Poor Laws.

10. Mr Rogers, although he was at the time Professor of Political Economy in the University of Oxford, the very centre of Protestant orthodoxy, emphasized the pauperization of the mass of the people by the Reformation in his preface to the *History of Agriculture*.

11. *A Letter to Sir T. C. Bunbury, Bart., on the High Price of Provisions. By a Suffolk Gentleman*, Ipswich, 1795, p. 4. Even that fanatical advocate of the system of large farms, the author of the *Inquiry into the Connection between the Present Price of Provisions, and the Size of Farms, etc.*, London, 1773 [J. Arbuthnot], says on p. 139: 'I most lament the loss of our yeomanry, that set of men who really kept up the independence of this nation; and sorry I am to see their lands now in the hands of monopolizing lords, tenanted out to small farmers, who hold their leases on such conditions as to be little better than vassals ready to attend a summons on every mischievous occasion.'

themselves the rights of modern private property in estates to which they had only a feudal title, and, finally, passed those laws of settlement which had the same effect on the English agricultural labourer, *mutatis mutandis*, as the edict of the Tartar Boris Godunov had on the Russian peasantry.*

The 'glorious Revolution' brought into power, along with William of Orange,¹² the landed and capitalist profit-grubbers. They inaugurated the new era by practising on a colossal scale the thefts of state lands which had hitherto been managed more modestly. These estates were given away, sold at ridiculous prices, or even annexed to private estates by direct seizure.¹³ All this happened without the slightest observance of legal etiquette. The Crown lands thus fraudulently appropriated, together with the stolen Church estates, in so far as these were not lost again during the republican revolution, form the basis of the present princely domains of the English oligarchy.¹⁴ The bourgeois capita-

12. On the private morality of this bourgeois hero, among other things: 'The large grant of lands in Ireland to Lady Orkney, in 1695, is a public instance of the king's affection, and the lady's influence . . . Lady Orkney's endearing offices are supposed to have been – *foeda labiorum ministeria*.'* (In the Sloane Manuscript Collection, at the British Museum, No. 4224. The manuscript is entitled: *The Character and Behaviour of King William, Sunderland, etc., as Represented in Original Letters to the Duke of Shrewsbury from Somers, Halifax, Oxford, Secretary Vernon, etc.* It is full of *curiosa*.)

13. 'The illegal alienation of the Crown Estates, partly by sale and partly by gift, is a scandalous chapter in English history . . . a gigantic fraud on the nation' (F. W. Newman, *Lectures on Political Economy*, London, 1851, pp. 129–30). [Added by Engels to the fourth German edition:] For details as to how the present large landed proprietors of England came into their possessions, see *Our Old Nobility. By Noblesse Oblige* (N. H. Evans), London, 1879.

14. Read for example Edmund Burke's pamphlet† on the ducal house of Bedford, whose offshoot was Lord John Russell, the 'tomtit of liberalism'.‡

*'Base services performed with the lips'.

†This was the pamphlet produced by Burke in 1796, entitled *A Letter from the Right Honourable Edmund Burke to a Noble Lord, on the Attacks Made upon Him and His Pension, in the House of Lords, by the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale, Early in the Present Session of Parliament*. In it he turned on his former Whig allies, from whom he had parted over the question of the war with France, and demonstrated that the Russells had wrested from the English people a 'quite incredible' number of estates over the centuries.

‡Cobbett compared Lord John Russell with a tom-tit 'endeavouring to put all right with the old oak of the British Constitution by picking at a nest of

*This was the Edict of 1597, by which peasants who had fled from their lords could be pursued for five years and forcibly returned to them when caught.

lists favoured the operation, with the intention, among other things, of converting the land into a merely commercial commodity, extending the area of large-scale agricultural production, and increasing the supply of free and rightless proletarians driven from their land. Apart from this, the new landed aristocracy was the natural ally of the new bankocracy, of newly hatched high finance, and of the large manufacturers, at that time dependent on protective duties. The English bourgeoisie acted quite as wisely in its own interest as the Swedish burghers, who did the opposite: hand in hand with the bulwark of their economic strength, the peasantry, they helped the kings in their forcible resumption of crown lands from the oligarchy, in the years after 1604 and later on under Charles X and Charles XI.

Communal property – which is entirely distinct from the state property we have just been considering – was an old Teutonic institution which lived on under the cover of feudalism. We have seen how its forcible usurpation, generally accompanied by the turning of arable into pasture land, begins at the end of the fifteenth century and extends into the sixteenth. But at that time the process was carried on by means of individual acts of violence against which legislation, for a hundred and fifty years, fought in vain. The advance made by the eighteenth century shows itself in this, that the law itself now becomes the instrument by which the people's land is stolen, although the big farmers made use of their little independent methods as well.¹⁵ The Parliamentary form of the robbery is that of 'Bills for Inclosure of Commons', in other words decrees by which the landowners grant themselves the people's land as private property, decrees of expropriation of the people. Sir F. M. Eden refutes his own crafty special pleading, in which he tries to represent communal property as the private

15. 'The farmers forbid cottagers to keep any living creatures besides themselves and children, under the pretence that if they keep any beasts or poultry, they will steal from the farmers' barns for their support; they also say, keep the cottagers poor and you will keep them industrious, etc., but the real fact, I believe, is that the farmers may have the whole right of common to themselves' (*A Political Inquiry into the Consequences of Enclosing Waste Lands*, London, 1785, p. 75).

animalculae seated in the half-rotten bark of one of the meanest branches'. This apt characterization of Russell's efforts at parliamentary reform between 1813 and 1830 was adopted by Marx as the keynote for his article 'Lord John Russell' in the *New York Daily Tribune* of 28 August 1855.

property of the great landlords who have taken the place of the feudal lords, when he himself demands a 'general Act of Parliament for the enclosure of Commons' (thereby admitting that a parliamentary *coup d'état* is necessary for their transformation into private property), and moreover calls on the legislature to indemnify the expropriated poor.¹⁶

While the place of the independent yeoman was taken by tenants at will, small farmers on yearly leases, a servile rabble dependent on the arbitrary will of the landlords, the systematic theft of communal property was of great assistance, alongside the theft of the state domains, in swelling those large farms which were called in the eighteenth century capital farms,¹⁷ or merchant farms,¹⁸ and in 'setting free' the agricultural population as a proletariat for the needs of industry.

The eighteenth century, however, did not yet recognize as fully as the nineteenth the identity between the wealth of the nation and the poverty of the people. Hence the very vigorous polemic, in the economic literature of that time, on the 'enclosure of commons'. From the mass of material that lies before me, I give a few extracts chosen for the strong light they throw on the circumstances of the time. 'In several parishes of Hertfordshire,' writes one indignant person, 'twenty-four farms, numbering on the average 50 to 150 acres, have been melted up into three farms.'¹⁹ 'In Northamptonshire and Leicestershire the enclosure of common lands has taken place on a very large scale, and most of the new lordships, resulting from the enclosure, have been turned into pasturage, in consequence of which many lordships have not now 50 acres ploughed yearly, in which 1,500 were ploughed formerly. The ruins of former dwelling-houses, barns, stables, etc.' are the sole traces of the former inhabitants. 'An hundred houses and families have in some open field villages . . . dwindled to eight or ten . . . The landholders in most parishes that have been enclosed only fifteen or twenty years, are very few in comparison of the

16. Eden, op. cit., Preface [pp. xvii, xix].

17. *Two Letters on the Flour Trade, and the Dearness of Corn. By a Person in Business*, London, 1767, pp. 19–20.

18. *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Present High Price of Provisions*, London, 1767, p. 111, note. This good book, published anonymously, was written by the Rev. Nathaniel Forster.

19. Thomas Wright, *A Short Address to the Public on the Monopoly of Large Farms*, 1779, pp. 2, 3.

numbers who occupied them in their open-field state. It is no uncommon thing for four or five wealthy graziers to engross a large enclosed lordship which was before in the hands of twenty or thirty farmers, and as many smaller tenants and proprietors. All these are hereby thrown out of their livings with their families and many other families who were chiefly employed and supported by them.²⁰ It was not only land that lay waste, but often also land that was still under cultivation, being cultivated either in common or held under a definite rent paid to the community, that was annexed by the neighbouring landowners under pretext of enclosure. 'I have here in view enclosures of open fields and lands already improved. It is acknowledged by even the writers in defence of enclosures that these diminished villages increase the monopolies of farms, raise the prices of provisions, and produce depopulation . . . and even the enclosure of waste lands (as now carried on) bears hard on the poor, by depriving them of a part of their subsistence, and only goes towards increasing farms already too large.'²¹ 'When,' says Dr Price, 'this land gets into the hands of a few great farmers, the consequence must be that the little farmers' (previously described by him as 'a multitude of little proprietors and tenants, who maintain themselves and families by the produce of the ground they occupy by sheep kept on a common, by poultry, hogs, etc., and who therefore have little occasion to purchase any of the means of subsistence') 'will be converted into a body of men who earn their subsistence by working for others, and who will be under a necessity of going to market for all they want . . . There will, perhaps, be more labour, because there will be more compulsion to it . . . Towns and manufactures will increase, because more will be driven to them in quest of places and employment. This is the way in which the engrossing of farms actually operates. And this is the way in which, for many years, it has been actually operating in this kingdom.'²² He sums up the effect of the enclosures in this way: 'Upon the whole, the circumstances of the lower ranks of men

20. Rev. Addington, *Inquiry into the Reasons for or against Inclosing Open Fields*, London, 1772, pp. 37-43 passim.

21. Dr R. Price, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 155-6. Forster, Addington, Kent, Price and James Anderson should be read and compared with the miserable prattle of the sycophantic MacCulloch, in his catalogue *The Literature of Political Economy*, London, 1845.

22. Price, op. cit., p. 147.

are altered in almost every respect for the worse. From little occupiers of land, they are reduced to the state of day-labourers and hirelings; and, at the same time, their subsistence in that state has become more difficult.²³ In fact, the usurpation of the common lands and the accompanying revolution in agriculture had such an acute effect on the agricultural labourers that, even according to Eden, their wages began to fall below the minimum between 1765 and 1780, and to be supplemented by official Poor Law relief. Their wages, he says, 'were not more than enough for the absolute necessaries of life'.

Let us hear for a moment a defender of enclosures and an opponent of Dr Price. 'Nor is it a consequence that there must be depopulation, because men are not seen wasting their labour in the open field . . . If, by converting the little farmers into a body of men who must work for others, more labour is produced, it is an advantage which the nation' (to which, of course, the people who have been 'converted' do not belong) 'should wish for . . . the produce being greater when their joint labours are employed on one farm, there will be a surplus for manufactures, and by this means

23. Price, *op. cit.*, p. 159. We are reminded of ancient Rome. 'The rich had got possession of the greater part of the undivided land. They were confident that, in the conditions of the time, these possessions would never be taken back again from them, and they therefore bought some of the pieces of land lying near theirs, and belonging to the poor, with the acquiescence of the latter, and the rest they took by force, so that now they were cultivating widely extended domains, instead of isolated fields. Then they employed slaves in agriculture and cattle-breeding, because the free men had been taken away from labour to do military service. The possession of slaves brought great gains to them, in that the slaves, on account of their exemption from military service, could multiply without risk and therefore had great numbers of children. Thus the powerful men drew all wealth to themselves, and the whole land swarmed with slaves. The Italians, on the other hand, were always decreasing in number, worn down as they were by poverty, taxation, and military service. Even in times of peace, they were doomed to complete inactivity, because the rich were in possession of the soil, and used slaves instead of free men to cultivate it' (Appian, *The Roman Civil Wars*, Bk I, Ch. 7). This passage refers to the time before the Licinian Law.* Military service, which hastened to so great an extent the ruin of the Roman plebeians, was also the chief means by which, as in a forcing-house, Charlemagne brought about the transformation of free German peasants into serfs and bondsmen.

*The Licinian Law, passed in 367 B.C., was an attempt to remedy these inequalities. Appian says it provided that 'nobody should hold more than 500 *jugera* of public land, or pasture on it more than 100 cattle or 500 sheep' (*The Roman Civil Wars*, Bk. I, Ch. 8).

manufactures, one of the mines of the nation, will increase, in proportion to the quantity of corn produced.'²⁴

The stoical peace of mind with which the political economist regards the most shameless violation of the 'sacred rights of property' and the grossest acts of violence against persons, as soon as they are necessary in order to lay the foundations of the capitalist mode of production, is shown by Sir F. M. Eden, who is, moreover, Tory and 'philanthropic' in his political colouring. The whole series of thefts, outrages and popular misery that accompanied the forcible expropriation of the people, from the last third of the fifteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, leads him merely to this 'comfortable' concluding reflection: 'The due proportion between arable land and pasture had to be established. During the whole of the fourteenth and the greater part of the fifteenth century, there was 1 acre of pasture to 2, 3, and even 4 of arable land. About the middle of the sixteenth century the proportion was changed to 2 acres of pasture to 2, later on, to 2 acres of pasture to 1 of arable, until at last the just proportion of 3 acres of pasture to 1 of arable land was attained.'

By the nineteenth century, the very memory of the connection between the agricultural labourer and communal property had, of course, vanished. To say nothing of more recent times – have the agricultural population received a farthing's compensation for the 3,511,770 acres of common land which between 1801 and 1831 were stolen from them and presented to the landlords by the landlords, through the agency of Parliament?

The last great process of expropriation of the agricultural population from the soil is, finally, the so-called 'clearing of estates', i.e. the sweeping of human beings off them. All the English methods hitherto considered culminated in 'clearing'. As we saw in the description of modern conditions given in a previous chapter, when there are no more independent peasants to get rid of, the 'clearing' of cottages begins; so that the agricultural labourers no longer find on the soil they cultivate even

24. [J. Arbuthnot,] *An Inquiry into the Connection between the Present Price of Provisions, etc.*, pp. 124, 129. Here is a similar argument, but with an opposite tendency: 'Working-men are driven from their cottages and forced into the towns to seek for employment; but then a larger surplus is obtained, and thus capital is augmented' ([R. B. Seeley,] *The Perils of the Nation*, 2nd edn, London, 1843, p. xiv.)

the necessary space for their own housing. But what 'clearing of estates' really and properly signifies, we learn only in the Highlands of Scotland, the promised land of modern romantic novels. There the process is distinguished by its systematic character, by the magnitude of the scale on which it is carried out at one blow (in Ireland landlords have gone as far as sweeping away several villages at once; but in the Highlands areas as large as German principalities are dealt with), and finally by the peculiar form of property under which the embezzled lands were held.

The Highland Celts were organized in clans, each of which was the owner of the land on which it was settled. The representative of the clan, its chief or 'great man', was only the titular owner of this property, just as the Queen of England is the titular owner of all the national soil. When the English government succeeded in suppressing the intestine wars of these 'great men', and their constant incursions into the Lowland plains, the chiefs of the clans by no means gave up their time-honoured trade as robbers; they merely changed its form. On their own authority, they transformed their nominal right to the land into a right of private property, and as this came up against resistance on the part of their clansmen, they resolved to drive them out openly and by force. 'A king of England might as well claim to drive his subjects into the sea,' says Professor Newman.²⁵ This revolution, which began in Scotland after the last rising of the followers of the Pretender,* can be followed through its first phases in the writings of Sir James Steuart²⁶ and James Anderson.²⁷ In the eighteenth century the Gaels were both driven from the land and forbidden to emigrate, with a view to driving them forcibly to

25. F. W. Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

26. Steuart says: 'If you compare the rent of these lands' (he erroneously includes in this economic category the tribute paid by the taksmen* to the chief of the clan) 'with the extent, it appears very small. If you compare it with the numbers fed upon the farm, you will find that an estate in the Highlands maintains, perhaps, ten times as many people as another of the same value in a good and fertile province' (*op. cit.*, Vol. 1, Ch. 16, p. 104).

27. James Anderson, *Observations on the Means of Exciting a Spirit of National Industry, etc.*, Edinburgh, 1777.

*The taksmen were the immediate subordinates of the laird, or chief, of the clan. They were the actual holders of the land, the 'tak', and paid a nominal sum to the laird in recognition of his suzerainty.

*The rising of 1745-6 in favour of the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart.

Glasgow and other manufacturing towns.²⁸ As an example of the method used in the nineteenth century,²⁹ the 'clearings' made by the Duchess of Sutherland will suffice here. This person, who had been well instructed in economics, resolved, when she succeeded to the headship of the clan, to undertake a radical economic cure, and to turn the whole county of Sutherland, the population of which had already been reduced to 15,000 by similar processes, into a sheep-walk. Between 1814 and 1820 these 15,000 inhabitants, about 3,000 families, were systematically hunted and rooted out. All their villages were destroyed and burnt, all their fields turned into pasturage. British soldiers enforced this mass of evictions, and came to blows with the inhabitants. One old woman was burnt to death in the flames of the hut she refused to leave. It was in this manner that this fine lady appropriated 794,000 acres of land which had belonged to the clan from time immemorial. She assigned to the expelled inhabitants some 6,000 acres on the sea-shore – 2 acres per family. The 6,000 acres had until this time lain waste, and brought in no income to their owners. The Duchess, in the nobility of her heart,

28. In 1860 some of the people who had been expropriated by force were exported to Canada under false pretences. Others fled to the mountains and neighbouring islands. They were followed by the police, came to blows with them and escaped.

29. 'In the Highlands of Scotland,' says Buchanan, in his commentary on Adam Smith, published in 1814, 'the ancient state of property is daily subverted . . . The landlord, without regard to the hereditary tenant' (this too is a wrongly applied category in this case) 'now offers his land to the highest bidder, who, if he is an improver, instantly adopts a new system of cultivation. The land, formerly overspread with small tenants or labourers, was peopled in proportion to its produce, but under the new system of improved cultivation and increased rents, the largest possible produce is obtained at the least possible expense; and the useless hands being, with this view, removed, the population is reduced, not to what the land will maintain, but to what it will employ . . . The dispossessed tenants . . . seek a subsistence in the neighbouring towns, etc.' (David Buchanan, *Observations on, etc., A. Smith's Wealth of Nations*, Edinburgh, 1814, Vol. 4, p. 144). 'The Scotch grandees dispossessed families as they would grub up coppice-wood, and they treated villages and their people as Indians harassed with wild beasts do, in their vengeance, a jungle with tigers . . . Man is bartered for a fleece or a carcase of mutton, nay, held cheaper . . . Why, how much worse is it than the intention of the Moguls, who, when they had broken into the northern provinces of China, proposed in council to exterminate the inhabitants, and convert the land into pasture. This proposal many Highland proprietors have effected in their own country against their own countrymen' (George Ensor, *An Inquiry Concerning the Population of Nations*, London, 1818, pp. 215–16).

actually went so far as to let these waste lands at an average rent of 2s. 6d. per acre to the clansmen, who for centuries had shed their blood for her family. She divided the whole of the stolen land of the clan into twenty-nine huge sheep farms, each inhabited by a single family, for the most part imported English farm-servants. By 1825 the 15,000 Gaels had already been replaced by 131,000 sheep. The remnant of the original inhabitants, who had been flung onto the sea-shore, tried to live by catching fish. They became amphibious, and lived, as an English writer says, half on land and half on water, and withal only half on both.³⁰

But the splendid Gaels had now to suffer still more bitterly for their romantic mountain idolization of the 'great men' of the clan. The smell of their fish rose to the noses of the great men. They scented some profit in it, and let the sea-shore to the big London fishmongers. For the second time the Gaels were driven out.³¹

Finally, however, part of the sheep-walks were turned into deer preserves. Everyone knows that there are no true forests in England. The deer in the parks of the great are demure domestic cattle, as fat as London aldermen. Scotland is therefore the last refuge of the 'noble passion'. 'In the Highlands,' reports Somers in 1848, 'new forests are springing up like mushrooms. Here, on one side of Gaick, you have the new forest of Glenfeshie; and there on the other you have the new forest of Ardverikie. In the same line you have the Black Mount, an immense waste also recently erected. From east to west – from the neighbourhood of

30. When the present Duchess of Sutherland entertained Mrs Beecher Stowe, authoress of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with great magnificence in London to show her sympathy for the Negro slaves of the American republic – a sympathy she prudently forgot, along with her fellow-aristocrats, during the Civil War, when every 'noble' English heart beat for the slave-owners – I gave the facts about the Sutherland slaves in the *New York Tribune*.* (Some extracts from this were printed by Carey in *The Slave Trade*, Philadelphia, 1853, pp. 202–3.) My article was reprinted in a Scottish newspaper, and it called forth a nice polemic between that newspaper and the sycophants of the Sutherlands.

31. Interesting details on this fish trade will be found in Mr David Urquhart's *Portfolio, New Series*. Nassau W. Senior, in his posthumous work, already quoted, describes 'the proceedings in Sutherlandshire' as 'one of the most beneficent clearings since the memory of man' (op. cit., p. 282).

*'The Duchess of Sutherland and Slavery', *New York Daily Tribune*, 9 February 1853. This article was published in almost identical form on 12 March 1853 in the Chartist *People's Paper*, from where it is reprinted in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Articles on Britain*, Moscow, 1971, pp. 143–9.

Aberdeen to the crags of Oban – you have now a continuous line of forests; while in other parts of the Highlands there are the new forests of Loch Archaig, Glengarry, Glenmoriston, etc. Sheep were introduced into glens which had been the seats of communities of small farmers; and the latter were driven to seek subsistence on coarser and more sterile tracts of soil. Now deer are supplanting sheep; and these are once more dispossessing the small tenants, who will necessarily be driven down upon still coarser land and to more grinding penury. Deer-forests³² and the people cannot co-exist. One or other of the two must yield. Let the forests be increased in number and extent during the next quarter of a century, as they have been in the last, and the Gaels will perish from their native soil . . . This movement among the Highland proprietors is with some a matter of ambition . . . with some love of sport . . . while others, of a more practical cast, follow the trade in deer with an eye solely to profit. For it is a fact, that a mountain range laid out in forest is, in many cases, more profitable to the proprietor than when let as a sheep-walk . . . The huntsman who wants a deer-forest limits his offers by no other calculation than the extent of his purse . . . Sufferings have been inflicted in the Highlands scarcely less severe than those occasioned by the policy of the Norman kings. Deer have received extended ranges, while men have been hunted within a narrower and still narrower circle . . . One after one the liberties of the people have been cloven down . . . And the oppressions are daily on the increase . . . The clearance and dispersion of the people is pursued by the proprietors as a settled principle, as an agricultural necessity, just as trees and brushwood are cleared from the wastes of America or Australia; and the operation goes on in a quiet, business-like way, etc.’³³

32. The deer-forests of Scotland do not contain a single tree. The sheep are driven from, and then the deer driven to, the naked hills, and this is then called a deer-forest. Not even timber-planting and real forest culture.

33. Robert Somers, *Letters from the Highlands; or the Famine of 1847*, London, 1848, pp. 12–28 passim. These letters originally appeared in *The Times*. The English economists of course explained the famine of the Gaels in 1847 by referring to – over-population. At all events, they were ‘pressing’ on their food supply. The ‘clearing of estates’, or as it is called in German, ‘*Bauernlegen*’, made its influence felt in Germany especially after the Thirty Years’ War, and, as late as 1790, led to peasant revolts in Electoral Saxony. *Bauernlegen* was particularly prevalent in the eastern part of Germany. In most of the Prussian provinces, Frederick II for the first time secured property rights for the peasants. After the conquest of Silesia, he forced the landowners

to rebuild huts, barns, etc. and to provide the peasants with cattle and implements. He wanted soldiers for his army, and taxpayers for his treasury. For the rest, the pleasant life led by the peasant under Frederick's financial system and his governmental hotch-potch of despotism, bureaucracy and feudalism may be seen from the following quotation from his admirer Mirabeau: 'Flax represents one of the greatest sources of wealth for the peasant of North Germany. Unfortunately for the human race, this is only a resource against misery and not a means towards well-being. Direct taxes, forced labour services, obligations of all kinds, crush the German peasant, especially as he still has to pay indirect taxes on everything he buys . . . and to complete his ruin he dare not sell his produce where and as he wishes; he dare not buy what he needs from the merchants who could sell it to him at a cheaper price. He is slowly ruined by all these factors, and when the direct taxes fall due, he would find himself incapable of paying them without his spinning-wheel; it offers him a last resort, while providing useful occupation for his wife, his children, his maids, his farm-hands, and himself; but what a painful life he leads, even with this extra resource! In summer, he works like a convict with the plough and at harvest; he goes to bed at nine o'clock and rises at two to get through all his work; in winter he ought to be recovering his strength by sleeping longer; but he would run short of corn for his bread and next year's sowing if he got rid of the products that he needs to sell in order to pay the taxes. He therefore has to spin to fill up this gap . . . and indeed he must do so most assiduously. Thus the peasant goes to bed at midnight or one o'clock in winter, and gets up at five or six; or he goes to bed at nine and gets up at two, and this he does every day of his life except Sundays. These excessively short hours of sleep and long hours of work consume a person's strength, and hence it happens that men and women age much more in the country than in the towns' (Mirabeau, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, pp. 212 ff.). In March 1866, eighteen years after the publication of the work of Robert Somers quoted above, Professor Leone Levi gave a lecture before the Society of Arts on the transformation of sheep-walks into deer-forests, in which he depicted the further progress in the devastation of the Scottish Highlands. He says, among other things: 'Depopulation and transformation into sheep-walks were the most convenient means for getting an income without expenditure . . . A deer-forest in place of a sheep-walk was a common change in the Highlands. The landowners turned out the sheep as they once turned out the men from their estates, and welcomed the new tenants - the wild beasts and the feathered birds . . . One can walk from the Earl of Dalhousie's estates in Forfarshire to John o' Groats, without ever leaving forest land . . . In many of these woods the fox, the wild cat, the marten, the pole-cat, the weasel and the Alpine hare are common; whilst the rabbit, the squirrel and the rat have lately made their way into the country. Immense tracts of land, much of which is described in the statistical account of Scotland as having a pasturage in richness and extent of very superior description, are thus shut out from all cultivation and improvement, and are solely devoted to the sport of a few persons for a very brief period of the year.' The London *Economist* of 2 June 1866 says, 'Amongst the items of news in a Scotch paper of last week, we read . . . "One of the finest sheep farms in Sutherlandshire, for which a rent of £1,200 a year was recently offered, on the expiry of the existing lease this year, is to be converted into a deer-forest."' Here we see the modern instincts of feudalism . . . operating

The spoliation of the Church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the theft of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of ruthless terrorism, all these things were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, incorporated the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians.

pretty much as they did when the Norman Conqueror . . . destroyed thirty-six villages to create the New Forest . . . Two millions of acres . . . totally laid waste, embracing within their area some of the most fertile lands of Scotland. The natural grass of Glen Tilt was among the most nutritive in the county of Perth. The deer-forest of Ben Alder was by far the best grazing ground in the wide district of Badenoch; a part of the Black Mount forest was the best pasture for black-faced sheep in Scotland. Some idea of the ground laid waste for purely sporting purposes in Scotland may be formed from the fact that it embraced an area larger than the whole county of Perth. The resources of the forest of Ben Alder might give some idea of the loss sustained from the forced desolations. The ground would pasture 15,000 sheep, and as it was not more than one-thirtieth part of the whole forest ground in Scotland . . . (the amount of pasture lost can be imagined). All that forest land is totally unproductive . . . It might just as well have been submerged under the waters of the North Sea . . . Such extemporized wildernesses or deserts ought to be put down by the decided interference of the Legislature.'