

Land Tenure and Unemployment

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CHAPTER XI / Enclosures and the Industrial Revolution

1. Extent of enclosures in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reasons for fresh outburst

Although, as we have seen, enclosures did not cease after the great movement of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, yet after the first outburst it was more in the nature of a steady progress. Now in the eighteenth century the movement again intensifies, and continues with varying force up to the middle of the nineteenth century, accounting for the enclosure of over one-third of the area of the cultivated land of this country,[1] or, roughly speaking, for all land not previously enclosed and appropriated. It is computed that some 3,000,000 acres were enclosed in the eighteenth century and 6,000,000 acres in the first half of the nineteenth century, but even this enormous total is probably exceeded when account is taken of all non-parliamentary enclosure. [2]

The enclosures of these centuries had several contributory causes. Improvements in agriculture, introduced by such men as Tull and "Turnip" Townsend, which took the line of growing new root crops and artificial grasses; the introduction of the system of rotation of crops; improvements in the breeding of stock, such as the improvements in sheep-breeding by Bakewell, led to much enclosure of both arable and pasture, to conversion of arable,[3] and to the establishment of large-scale farms. The increase in prices due to the Napoleonic wars gave a great impetus to enclosures, especially of waste lands for corn-growing. There was also a great demand for land, especially in the latter half of the eighteenth century, by rich merchants and traders who had made fortunes during the commercial prosperity of the earlier part of the century. This class of people, and also many smaller folk, evinced quite a "craze"[4] for farming, and all this contributed to increase the demand for land. Lastly, there is the rapacity of the landowners to take into account, for enclosure and the demand for land increased their rents, as did also the conversion of arable to pasture - a movement to which the term "improvement"[5] was applied.

2. Great events of the period. Industrial Revolution. Large-scale farming. Widespread poverty and unemployment

In considering the enclosure movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and its results, it is important to bear in mind other great changes which were taking place in the country at this time. Commerce and industry flourished in the eighteenth century, especially in the first half, and foreign trade continued to grow rapidly.[6] Then came the series of great discoveries and inventions which were to give this country the lead in the world's manufactures. These inventions, and the use of steam power, brought about what has been called the Industrial Revolution, which extended from about 1770 well on into the nineteenth century. This great change in industry, coupled, as we shall see, with the enclosure movement, led to the supersession of the

"domestic system" of manufacture by the "factory system," and a consequent shifting of the centre of gravity of the population from the south and east of England to the north and west.

In agriculture the movement was towards large-scale farms and the elimination of the yeoman farmer and cottier. The latter mostly became landless paupers, while the average produce per acre was six or seven times what it was in the fourteenth century.

This period also saw the greatest war there had hitherto been, lasting from 1792 to 1815, and the greatest degradation, misery, and unemployment.

3. Enclosure affects all lands. Largely carried through by private Act of Parliament

Enclosures during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries affected all lands - the open arable field, the common pasture, and the waste. According to Dr. Slater,[7] from 1727 onward about one-third of the Enclosure Acts are for commonable waste and two-thirds for enclosing all the open and common arable and other lands of a parish.

The enclosures of this period were carried out to a large extent by private Acts of Parliament, and later by public General Enclosure Acts; but at the same time probably an almost equal area was enclosed without any parliamentary intervention. An Act of Parliament for this purpose was not a new idea, for in the reign of Charles II there had been an Act for the enclosing of Bedford Level.[8] When these Acts became regular in the eighteenth century, they at first took the place of the Chancery Decree, which had been used to confirm an agreement, but later they were used to effect enclosure, with little suggestion of previous agreement. Whatever the method of enclosure, however, we shall find that it was attended with great hardship and distress.

4. The early Acts usually confirmed an agreement

Some idea of enclosure by agreement, and the object of the movement can be obtained from *The Duty of a Steward to his Lord*,[9] written in 1727: "If the Free holders cannot all be persuaded to sell, yet at least an Agreement for Inclosing should be pushed forward, by the Steward, and a scheme laid, wherein it may appear that an exact and proportional share will be allotted to every proprietor, persuading them first, if possible, to sign a Form of Agreement, and then to chuse Commissioners on both sides.... If the Steward be a man of good sense, he will find a necessity of making use of it all, in rooting out superstition from amongst them, as what is so great a hindrance to all noble Improvements." [10] And in the same work we find the following advice: "The Steward should endeavour to lay all the small Farms, let to poor indigent People, to the great ones.... It is unwise to unite farms all at once, *because of the odium and increase of Poor-rates*." [11]

5. Method under the Private Act - Petition, Commissioners, and Award

After the middle of the century the private Act became the rule. The movement to enclose was usually started by petition, which necessitated some expenditure; and it was just this procedure which gave the large landowner the dominant voice in the whole arrangement.[12] A Commissioner or Commissioners were appointed, and the onus was put on the commoners to prove their rights of common. Of course, in a large number of cases they were unable to prove a legal right, and so were not entitled to compensation.[13] Part of the land was let or sold to defray the expenses of the enclosure, which were usually large, and after new roads were laid out, the Commissioners proceeded to redistribute and allot the holdings. The lord would receive the lion's share of the waste and common pasture, and those who had succeeded in proving rights of common would be given a small allotment, in many cases so small as to be useless.[14] Also if the occupier of the cottage were only a tenant, the allotment in lieu of common rights went to the *owner* of the cottage, the tenant getting nothing. All allotments had to be fenced by the allottees, and the expense of doing this, and the smallness of the allotment, frequently led the holder to sell to the large farmer, who was only too willing to

buy. In this way rights which the commoner should have handed down to posterity were lost for ever.[15]

By the General Act of 1801 the Commissioners were empowered to purchase the rights of small proprietors, and could give payment in cash up to £20. Between £20 and £200 the money was to be invested for them. This provision was, of course, useful in helping to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority for the enclosure, and there is little doubt that these small sums were soon frittered away.[16]

6. The three periods of parliamentary enclosure

Gonner divides parliamentary enclosure into three periods: "The first, which extends through the eighteenth century to the general Act of 1801,[17] by reason of the very uniformity and complexity of the provisions included on each occasion, a general Act was rendered not only feasible and useful, but essential. The second period is from 1801 to 1842-5, and includes the private Acts which were passed in accordance with the provisions of the general Act. After 1845 the powers hitherto exercised directly by Parliament, and through Commissioners specially appointed by Act, were delegated to different permanent bodies established by Act, and subject to parliamentary control, inasmuch as their decisions or orders had to remain on the table of the Houses before becoming operative." [18]

7. Advocates of enclosure testify to the oppression of the peasant. Commoners usually unable to prove a legal right

The advocates of enclosure themselves, at this time, were almost unanimous in saying that most of the enclosures were badly managed and very oppressive to the peasant. Stone, referred to by Gonner as "one of the most trustworthy writers on the subject in the latter part of the eighteenth century," said: "That inclosures have most generally been mismanaged may evidently be seen by their present condition." [19]

John Cowper,[20] writing in 1732, said: "When these commons come to be inclosed and converted into pasture, the Ruin of the Poor is a natural consequence, they being bought out by the lord of the Manor, or some other person of substance."

The Board of Agriculture General Report on Enclosures, published 1808, also shows that the peasants suffered great losses as a result of enclosure. Loss of fuel is stated to have been a great injury, and the benefit of enclosure to the poor "by no means unmixed." The Report adds: "In some cases many cows had been kept without a legal right, and nothing had been given for the practice. In other cases where allotments were assigned, the cottagers could not pay the expense of the measure, and were forced to sell their allotments. [21] In others they kept cows by right of hiring their cottages or common rights, and the land going, of course, to their proprietor, was added to the farms, and the poor sold their cows. This is a very common case." [22]

8. Investigation into working of Enclosure Acts - in most cases the poor lose heavily

An investigation[23] was held into the working of sixty-eight Enclosure Acts, for the most part in the eastern counties, and it was stated that in fifty-three cases out of the sixty-eight the poor were injured. Commenting on this inquiry, Dr. Slater says: "The general tenor of the statement in these cases is to the effect that the condition of the poor has become very much worse, that they have lost all their cows, and they no longer are able to buy milk for their children."

In the same Report a Mr. Forster, an Enclosure Commissioner for Norfolk, "lamented that he had been accessory to injuring 2,000 poor people at the rate of twenty families per parish. Numbers in the practice of feeding the commons cannot prove their right; and many, indeed most who have allotments, have not more than 1 acre, which being insufficient for the man's cow, both the cow and land are usually sold to opulent farmers. The right sold before the allotment produced much less than the allotment after it, but the money is

dissipated, doing them no good when they cannot vest it in stock." [24]

Another Commissioner, Mr. Ewen, "observed that in most of the enclosures he has known the poor man's allotment and cow are sold five times in six before the award is signed." Arthur Young himself, the great advocate of enclosures, wrote: "By nineteen Enclosure Acts out of twenty, the poor are injured, in some grossly injured.... The poor in these parishes may say, and with truth, Parliament may be tender of property, all I know is, I had a cow, and an Act of Parliament has taken it from me." [25]

Lord Lincoln (afterwards Duke of Newcastle), in introducing the Bill of 1845, compared it favourably with the private Act system. He said: "This I know, that in nineteen cases out of twenty Committees of this House on private Bills neglected the rights of the poor... Committees being permitted to remain in ignorance of the claims of the poor man because, by reason of his poverty, he is unable to come up to London, to fee counsel, to produce witnesses, and to urge his claims before the Committee." From such opinions expressed by advocates of enclosures it would be safe to conclude that the Enclosure Acts worked a great wrong on the small tenant and commoner and were responsible for untold misery. This becomes even more apparent when the dispossessed are followed from the country-side.

9. Much waste land enclosed. An enclosure in Oxfordshire

Many of those who opposed enclosure of common fields did not object to enclosure of wastes, on the grounds, presumably, that it would give more employment than it displaced. This point has already been dealt with in a previous chapter, [26] and, referring to such enclosures, Dr. Slater says: "Perhaps the greatest evil of Acts for the enclosure of waste in the past was that they prevented such gradual reclamation and enclosure by peasant cultivators." [27]

Dr. Slater gives an example of the enclosure of the parish of Ewelme (Oxfordshire): "This gives a typical instance of the effect of enclosure of commonable waste [28] on the poor. One of the commons enclosed was known as the 'Furze Common,' and it supplied the poor of the neighbourhood with their fuel, for every inhabitant had the right of cutting furze on it. After enclosure the Furze Common was allotted to one man, who allowed no trespass on it, and the owners of cottages were awarded allotments of land in consideration of rights which the cottagers had exercised. The lands so allotted became part of ordinary farms, and the poor simply lost their supply of fuel without any compensation whatever. This was done under the sanction, not of an Enclosure Act rushed through Parliament before 1845, but of the Enclosure Commissioners appointed expressly to prevent any injury to the class least able to guard its own interests, as well as to facilitate enclosure." [29]

Between 1702 and 1845 there were 1,385 Acts for enclosing common pasture and waste only, and Dr. Slater puts the total acreage at 1,765,711 acres (stated and estimated).

10. Cobbett on the enclosure of wastes. The fallacy of calling them unproductive

There is an illuminating passage in the *Political Register* [30] showing what Cobbett, an experienced farmer and a man who knew the country-side, thought of the enclosure of the wastes. He had refused to support a general Enclosure Bill introduced in 1813, and wrote: "Those who are so eager for new inclosure seem to argue as if the waste land in its present state produced nothing at all. But is this the fact? Can anyone point out a single inch of it which does not produce something and the produce of which is made use of? It goes to the feeding of sheep, of cows, of cattle of all descriptions, and, what is of great consequence in my view of the matter, it helps to rear, in health and vigour, numerous families of the children of labourers, which children, were it not for these wastes, must be crammed into the stinking suburbs of towns amidst filth of all sorts, and congregating together in the practice of every species of idleness and vice. A family reared by the side of a common or forest is clearly [31], distinguishable from a family bred on the pestiferous stench of the dark alley of a town."

11. Great cost of enclosures. An example from Brecknockshire. The "tai nos."

Mr. John Lloyd, a J.P. for the county of Brecon and a landowner, in giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire,[32] cites an example of enclosure of waste on a Crown manor between 1815 and 1819, and also draws attention to the fact that, although there were in this county many enclosures by private Acts, yet the Parliamentary Return of Enclosure Acts between 1760 and 1820 gave "nil" for Brecknockshire.

The 40,000 acres of waste referred to were grazed over by some 500 or more farms, and were used for sheep all the year and also for young cattle in the summer. "Down came the valuers, surveyors, and commissioners... and inspected and surveyed, and so on, and apart from the immense expense they put the people to, to prove all their titles and claims to common rights, and the lawsuits which they had to maintain in order to keep certain rights that they had... the cost of the Commission alone for dealing with this 40,000 acres of land was £16,000 of money in those days. To provide that money they sold 8,000 acres of the land, the best parts and the slopes of this great tract of land. That produced about £15,000 or £16,000 to pay for the work.... The Crown took 13,860 acres of the middle portion, and the best portion, and the commoners had some little more than that, viz. 17,000 acres of land, but a good deal of the worst of it, some of it being hardly worth anything at all... The effect is now visible upon the agriculture of that district."

There is also a reference in this Report to the interesting survival of "tai nos" or "hafod un nos" - "houses of a night" - a custom by which a holding of 5 or 6 acres was claimed from the waste if a hut with smoking chimney could be erected in one night. Only a small garden surrounding the hut was enclosed, and the custom seems to have been that this became freehold after sixty years. Dr. Slater[33] refers to these holdings, and quotes Mr. John Swain, a Commissioner, who said that the cottager not only grew sufficient produce for himself and his family, but obtained a money return of £35 15s. in addition. Enclosure Acts prevented the creation of any more of these holdings, and, although those over twenty-one years old were not interfered with, more than half the holdings fell into the hands of the lord of the manor.

12. Enclosure of common fields, etc., leads to large-scale farming and depopulation. Consolidation and conversion give higher rents, but smaller gross produce

Enclosure of the common fields was usually followed by consolidation of the small holdings into large farms, and in many cases the arable was converted into pasture for grazing. Dr. Cunningham[34] says: "Despite the reiterated allegation, it is impossible to believe that enclosing in the eighteenth century implied either more pasture farming or less employment for labour." There is, however, direct evidence that considerable areas were put down to pasture; and when we see the increased rent which pasture-land commanded, there was obviously every incentive for the laying of arable to grass.

Apart from the conversion of arable land, there was a considerable amount of new land ploughed up, especially during the period of the Napoleonic wars; but, as has been seen, such enclosure resulted in large-scale farms, with probably a net loss of employment. And taking the two movements together, there is no doubt that there was a net loss of employment in agriculture, to say nothing of other rural industries which were affected.

Dr. Slater, quoting from a tract[35] published in 1786, gives an account of an enclosure, probably in the Midlands: "Before enclosure it contained 82 houses, of which 20 were small farms and 42 were cottages with common rights. It had 1,800 acres of common field arable, 200 acres of rich common cow pasture, and 200 acres of meadow, commonable after hay harvest. The common pasture fed 200 milch cows and 60 dry ones till hay harvest, at which time they were turned into the meadows, and their place taken by about 100 horses; 1,200 sheep were fed on the stubbles." Before enclosure the gross produce amounted to £4,101 5s. "As a result of enclosure the 20 farms were consolidated into 4, the whole area devoted to grazing, 60 cottages were pulled down or otherwise disappeared, and the necessary work was done by 4 herds (one for each farm), at £25 a year each, board included, and 8 maidservants at £18 a year each, board included." After enclosure the gross produce was £2,660. "But while gross produce was thus reduced by about one-third, the gross rent was raised from £1,137 17s. to £1,801 12s. 2d.

13. Increased rents the incentive to enclose and convert. Enclosure results in decrease in wheat acreage

On this question of consolidation and conversion, John Wedge, the Board of Agriculture reporter for Warwickshire, in 1793 wrote:[36] "About forty years ago the southern and eastern parts of this county consisted mostly of open fields. There are still about 50,000 acres of open-field land, which in a few years will probably all be enclosed... "These lands being now grazed want much fewer hands to manage them than they did in the former open state. Upon all enclosures of open fields the farms have generally been made much larger. For these causes the hardy yeomanry of county villages have been driven for employment into Birmingham, Coventry, and other manufacturing towns."

Arthur Young speaks of a great enclosure of waste from 1744 to 1774 in the east and north, resulting in an increase of tillage, and of enclosure of arable fields and conversion to pasture in Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Huntingdonshire and Buckinghamshire.[37] This resulted in consolidation into large farms and the turning of the peasants into town labourers. Referring to Bedfordshire in 1768,[38] he says: "The open fields let at 7/- and 7/6 per acre, and the inclosed pastures about 17/-. Hence we find a profit of 10/- an acre by inclosing and laying to grass"; and he expressed surprise that many landlords did not in this county lay down their land to pasture.[39]

In the Board of Agriculture General Report,[40] previously mentioned, there are the results of an investigation into the increase and decrease of wheat acreage after the enclosure of all commonable lands under Acts between 1761 and 1799, excluding those Acts under which waste only was enclosed. Taking all counties, in 239 cases the wheat acreage was increased by 14,507 acres, and in 407 cases it was decreased by 30,894 acres. By far the greatest decrease was in the Midland counties, where in 262 cases the decrease was 22,036 acres, against an increase in 59 cases of 3,033 acres.[41]

14. Fallacy that enclosure and dispossession were necessary preliminaries to improvement

It was, of course, widely held that no agricultural improvements were possible while the open-field system of husbandry prevailed, and many opponents of enclosures seem to have agreed with this. Dr. Slater, however, refers to one or two survivals of the old system which have adopted improvements and are flourishing, and it certainly is not clear why an interchange and consolidation of strips, without enclosure and dispossession, would not have made it just as easy to effect improvements. One of these survivals is a parish in the Isle of Axholme: "To catch the spirit of the common-field system, to see that system no mere historical survival, but developing in harmony with modern needs, one must go to the Isle of Axholme.[42]

"Axholme may be described as a district of allotments, cultivated, and in great part owned, by a working peasantry.

"The Isle of Axholme has been singularly successful in preserving the spirit of the common-field system, social equality, mutual helpfulness, and an industrial aim directed rather towards the maximum gross produce of food than towards the maximum net profit; while at the same time it has discarded those features of the system which would have been obstacles to agricultural progress. The 'barbarous omission'[43] to enclose the open arable fields has been abundantly justified."

Another such example is the parish of Weston Zoyland, Somersetshire, which in 1830 was divided and allotted, but not enclosed. In this parish are 500 acres of fertile open fields, and all under tillage.

15. Urban population and total population increase rapidly. Allowance system causes recklessness and large families

When we speak of depopulation caused by enclosures, it must, of course, be understood that this refers to rural depopulation and not to a general depopulation of the whole country. On the contrary, during the period under review, the population of the country as a whole increased rapidly.[44] About 7,000,000 in the middle

of the eighteenth century, it had risen to 8,892,536 in 1801, to 12,000,236 in 1821, and by 1861 had reached 20,066,224. This was an increase almost solely in urban districts, and we have already seen how, in addition to the natural increase in the population, the towns were fed from the country-side. This was the period of the growth of the "wens," as Cobbett called London and the great manufacturing towns - not a healthy growth, but a growth in slums and in crowded tenements, a growth of paupers and so-called wage-slaves who were little better than paupers. Wages fell until they were far below the subsistence level, and the occupiers were rated in order that wages might be supplemented. "Early marriage was particularly encouraged by the change from the open-field condition to enclosure. After enclosure, the enriched farming class preferred to pay board wages, and the young labourer, with nothing to gain by waiting, with the assurance of Poor Law assistance if needed, naturally preferred to marry early." [45]

16. Enormous increase in poor rates. Allowance system and wholesale pauperism

Poor rates began to increase enormously towards the end of the eighteenth century. From £2,004,238 in 1785 they increased to £4,267,965 in 1802, and to £8,640,842 in 1813. [46] But the full increase in poor rates was not always apparent in the enclosed villages, for, "in judging the rise of poor rates, it must not be forgotten that where the rent rises at the same time as the nominal rate, the sum of money actually raised for Poor Law purposes is increased in a greater ratio than the nominal poor rate. If, for example, by enclosure, the rental of a parish is increased 50%, but the poor rate doubled, the yield of the poor rate is increased threefold. And if a considerable number of labourers are driven elsewhere, the amount of destitution produced by the change is far greater even than that indicated by a threefold increase in the amount of relief given." [47]

It was the "allowance system" of supplementing wages out of the rates that was responsible to a large extent for the huge increase in poor rates; and the result of this system was that none but those in receipt of poor relief could hope to obtain employment. Commenting on the position at this time, Thorold Rogers says: "For centuries the law and the Government interposed on the side of the employer in order to lessen the labourer's share. For a very long period - two centuries - the efforts of law and Government were unsuccessful. At last they gained their object and gradually reduced the labourer's share to a bare subsistence - so bare, that in order to get their necessary work from him, they supplemented his wages by a tax on the general public." [48] The allowance system was stopped and the poor law reformed in 1834, but we shall see that starvation and distress continued.

17. Landlords and farmers prosperous - labourers starving. Rents, wages and prices

The poverty and unemployment of the last years of the eighteenth century continued into the nineteenth, and even increased at the close of the Great War (1815), when disbanded soldiers were returning home. Rents were high, however, and the landlords and large farmers were flourishing. Young put the average rent of land at 10s. per acre, and referring to this Thorold Rogers says: "The payment therefore made for the occupation of land has risen twenty times. The average rise in the price of wheat is about six and a half times, and the average rise in the price of labour is almost exactly three and a half times... and it should be remembered that while the labourer in Young's time had his earnings of hay and harvest time included in the aggregate average, the labourer of the earlier period (Middle Ages) had his harvest earnings over and above." [49]

In 1795 the labourer procured about one-eighth of what he earned by the same labour in the fifteenth century, [50] and according to Eden's collection [51] from various counties of the actual wages received by agricultural labourers in 1795, they everywhere fell short by 1s. or more a week of their necessary expenditure on food, without taking any account of rent, fuel, clothes, or extras. It was in this year, too, that, owing to a poor harvest, wheat rose to 104s., and although many died of starvation, landlords and farmers were prosperous. [52] But when peace came and prices fell to some extent many farmers who had purchased their farms during the period of enhanced prices lost heavily. [53]

18. Cobbett's account of a rural pariah in 1826

We get a very interesting and informing description from Cobbett of the Valley of the Avon and the Parish of Milton, which he visited in August 1826. After commenting on the fact that in a length of thirty miles there were thirty large parish churches, and that there was a very fine supply of wheat, oats, barley, sheep and lambs, he says: "A very fine sight this was, and it could not meet the eye without making one look round (and in vain) to see the people who were to eat all this food, and without making one reflect on the horrible, the unnatural, the base and infamous state in which we must be, when projects are on foot, and are openly avowed, for transporting those who raise this food, because they want to eat enough of it to keep them alive; and when no project is on foot for transporting the idlers who live in luxury upon this same food." [54]

And then, referring to Milton, he writes: "The parish of Milton does, as we have seen, produce food, drink, clothing, and all other things, enough for 502 families, or 2,510 persons upon my allowance, which is a great deal more than three times the present allowance, because the present allowance includes clothing, fuel, tools and everything. Now, then, according to the 'Population Return' laid before Parliament, this parish contains 500 persons, or according to my division, 100 families. So that here are about one hundred families to raise food and drink enough, and to raise wool and other things to pay for all other necessaries, for five hundred and two families! Aye, and five hundred and two families fed and lodged, too, on my liberal scale. Fed and lodged according to the present scale, this one hundred families raise enough to supply more, and many more, than fifteen hundred families, or seven thousand five hundred persons! And yet those who do the work are half starved! "And taking the twenty-nine rural parishes, he says: "Here are 9,116 persons raising food and raiment sufficient for 45,580 persons, fed and lodged according to my scale; and sufficient for 136,740 persons according to the scale on which the unhappy labourers of this fine valley are now fed and lodged! And yet there is an 'emigration committee' sitting to devise the means of getting rid... of these working people, who are grudged even the miserable morsel that they get!" [55]

19. "Domestic System" killed by enclosures. The "Factory System" flourishes on its ruins, and much labour is unemployed. Workers blame machinery

As we have already seen, the eighteenth century witnessed the inauguration of the Factory System, which took the place of the old Domestic System of manufacture. This latter was a system under which manufacturing and agriculture went hand in hand, the former frequently being a part-time occupation and subsidiary to the farm-work. In this way, production was carried on in the farm-houses, cottages, and in small workshops scattered among the various country towns; capital was diffused and held in small quantities, and markets were on the whole steady.

Into this system came the revolutionary enclosure movement, driving the yeomen and cottagers in large numbers to the towns, and at the same time, of course, putting an end to many industries which had been carried on by them in the country districts. While this process of dispossessing the peasant, putting an end to cottage manufacture, and increasing the competition for work in the towns, was in progress, there came the great inventions destined to revolutionize industry. Machines began to do the work of many men, and these machines were collected into large factories, where cheap labour was required to tend them. And the cheap labour was there ready, provided by a system which had for generations and centuries been gradually restricting the area of land available for the labourer. No Acts of Parliament or assessments of justices were necessary to limit the wages of the factory workers, for they were driven by hunger and the lack of alternative employment to offer themselves, and even their small children, for a pittance which scarcely enabled them to live. [56]

Nor was there work for all, for the machines were "labour-saving," and in too many cases the labour saved became or remained unemployed, and labour which was still exerted on the hand machine began to find it difficult to compete with the power factory and had to close down, thereby anticipating, probably only by a brief period, a result which the enclosure of the village would bring more thoroughly. With such a state of affairs it is little to be wondered at that many hand-workers regarded the power machine as the cause of all their misery and unemployment.

20. The domestic system dependent on access to land. Machinery increases productive power of all labour, but the advantage is lost when the competition is all on the side of labour for work

But the real cause of the misery and unemployment among the hand-workers would seem to have been the fact that they had lost their footing on the land,[57] that enclosure had deprived them of alternative and supplementary occupation. The domestic system, the cottage and farm industries, depended on the workers having access to land, and when this was denied, their power of resistance had gone, their fate was sealed. If there had been no enclosures, and if the opportunities for workers on the land had exceeded the supply of labour, power machinery would have caused no unemployment. There is nothing inherent in labour-saving machinery to cause unemployment. Its nature is to save labour, in the sense that a man can, with its assistance, produce the same wealth with less labour than before, or more wealth with the same labour, and the man who acquires these goods by exchange will get them with a smaller expenditure of labour than he previously did. In this way the worker will have saved labour in acquiring the machine-made goods, which labour he will be free to exercise in other ways, and the advantages of the machine will be diffused among all the workers by exchange. Thus labour becomes more productive, and wages should rise.

We have said that the worker would be able to exercise the "saved labour" in other ways; but suppose there are no other openings for this labour - suppose, in fact, that men are fiercely competing for jobs that are too few to go round, and that those who succeed in getting work must take the bare subsistence offered - what, we may ask, will be the effect on these men of the advent of a new labour-saving machine? Will it not be that some will be put out of employment altogether, and that the wages of the others will tend to be reduced by competition to the extent of the advantage which would, under other conditions, accrue to each individual?

21. Access to land essential. Landlords and capitalists share benefits of labour's increased productive powers. Depression in industry followed by unemployment

Thus it seems plain that labour-saving machinery does not do away with the need for access to land, but does, in fact, enable labour to produce more from the land. And it seems safe to say that if labour had had a firm hold on the land at the time of the Industrial Revolution, the new system would have grown up very differently. There would have been no starving crowds ready to work in factories for a low wage, and the probability is that work on the new machines would have been frequently combined with agriculture.

The capitalist was blamed for the low wages and the bad conditions in the factories, but it was the power of the new land monopoly that was providing him with his cheap labour, and was sharing with him the benefits of the new machinery. And the new industry proved unstable, for it depended to a large extent on foreign orders. When these fell off, workers were turned adrift, and wholesale unemployment resulted, for now there was no plot of ground to work, no alternative occupation.

In 1840 and several succeeding years there was terrible distress in the manufacturing towns. In Nottingham, [58] in 1841, nearly one-fifth of the people were on poor relief; in Coventry one-third of the population was unemployed; and in Spitalfields 24,000 persons were in receipt of poor relief. Lancashire was in a terrible condition, and it was calculated that the receipts of 2,000 families in Wigan were only sufficient, if all spent on bread, to buy each person 22oz. of bread a day. At Hinckley[59] one-third of the inhabitants were paupers and more than one-fifth of the houses were empty, and in Leeds the Guardians offered the paupers 6s. per week for doing nothing rather than 7s.6d. per week for breaking stones.

Under such conditions it is little wonder that the labourers became reckless, that drunkenness was prevalent and population increased rapidly.

22. The rising of 1830 - harsh repression

During the latter part of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries there was much rioting and rick-burning, for enclosures and the resulting misery were not taken lying down. But against combination there was the most severe repression, and ringleaders and others were often hanged or transported as felons to Australia.[60] The same fate usually befell those who, to satisfy their hunger or to supplement a low wage, helped themselves to preserved game.

In the winter of 1830 broke out what may be said to be the last active revolt of the agricultural workers. Conditions were bad and the labourers starving, men and women in many parts living on roots and sorrel. The rising was almost spontaneous in the eastern and south-eastern counties. Better wages were demanded, and only when these were refused did the men proceed to rick- and farm-burning. Revolt was, however, useless. A special commission of judges was sent to the affected parts, and there were hangings and transportations for life for many trifling offences.

23. Result of the last enclosure movement - land monopoly

As a result, then, of the great enclosure movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - a revolution in tenure - we find depopulation^[61] of the country-side and a vast increase in town populations, widespread poverty and unemployment. The "commons" of England had disappeared, their place being taken by the so-called "lower classes." By far the greater part of the land of this country was monopolized and enclosed; farms were concentrated into fewer hands, and vast tracts of what had hitherto been waste and often inaccessible land had been reduced into the ownership of comparatively few people. Capital also was becoming more and more concentrated, and the town labourers had no alternative but to sell their labour to the capitalist for what he would give.

Comparing the open and enclosed village, Slater says: "In the open field village the entirely landless labourer was scarcely to be found.... If he had no holding, he still might have a common right; if no acknowledged common right, he might enjoy the advantage of one in a greater or less degree.... From the poorest labourer to the richest farmer, there was, in the typical open field village, a gradation of rank.... It was easy for the efficient or fortunate man to rise on such a social ladder.... After enclosure the comparatively few surviving farmers - enriched, elevated intellectually as well as socially by the successful struggle with a new environment - faced, across a deep social gulf, the labourers who had now only their labour to depend on."^[62]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See First Report of Royal Comm. on Agric. (1867), issued 1896.
2. See Slater and Gonner.
3. Gonner: "After 1750 the Midland inclosures increased rapidly. Without doubt the increased demand for animal products and the improvements in breeding and feeding combine to associate inclosure from 1750 to 1780 with frequent conversions to pasture. This tendency decreases after 1780.
4. Thorold Rogers.
5. Cf. the term "improvement."
6. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce*.
7. *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields*.
8. 15 Charles II, cap.17, revoked by 1 James II, cap.21.
9. E. Laurence, Art. XIV, p.35 (quoted by Dr. Slater).
10. I.e. increases of rent.
11. The italics are ours.
12. Gonner: "Still it is no doubt true that in the first two-thirds, and to a considerable extent throughout the whole eighteenth century, the real stuff in determining on inclosure and in devising the particular form and detail of the petition lay with the few and not with the many" (p.74).
13. See par.7
14. See Gonner and Slater.
15. Sir R. Peel, P.M., speaking in the House in 1844: "As to the actual rights, the House must be cautious how they deal lightly with those rights.... The rights of common connected them (the peasantry) with the soil. The right of tunding a goose on a common made a man feel interested in the tenure of land. It might be more beneficial to him to accept two or three pounds, but recollect that you are not dealing with the rights of the individuals, but with those of his successors." (*Hansard*, vol. lxxiii, p.976).
16. See Slater, p.264.
17. There had been an abortive Bill in the Lords in 1666 "for confirming of inclosures made by decrees in Courts of

- Equity," and a similarly abortive Bill in the Commons in 1664 "to inclose and improve commons and waste lands."
18. Pp.59-60.
 19. Suggestions, etc., p.81.
 20. "Inclosing Commons and Common Field lands is contrary to the interest of the Nation."
 21. According to Board of Agriculture calculation, average number of acres in each Act was 1,162, and average expense of each Act was £1,650.
 22. Pp. 12-13
 23. Board of Agriculture General Report on Enclosures, published 1808.
 24. P.157.
 25. Enquiry into the Propriety of Applying Wastes to the Better Support and Maintenance of the Poor, p.42.
 26. See Chapter X, par.16.
 27. The English Peasantry, etc, p.262.
 28. The italics in this paragraph are ours.
 29. The English Peasantry, etc., p.51.
 30. Selections from Cobbett's Political Register, 1813, vol.iv.
 31. Selections from Cobbett's Political Register, 1813, vol.iv.
 32. 1896, Cd.8221.
 33. The English Peasantry, etc., p.119.
 34. The Growth of English Industry, etc., vol.ii, p.384.
 35. Thoughts on Inclosures, by a County Farmer.
 36. Warwickshire, p.40.
 37. Political Arithmetic, published 1774.
 38. Tour through the North of England, 1768.
 39. John Mortimer, The Whole Art of Husbandry: "I shall only propose two things that are matters of fact, that I think, are sufficient to prove the advantages of inclosures; which is first, the great quantities of ground daily inclosed, and, secondly, the increase of rent that is everywhere made by those that do inclose their lands." (p.1).
 40. Pp.39 and 232 (quoted by Slater).
 41. Slater points out that "in estimating the significance of these figures it must be borne in mind that the figures for acreage in wheat after enclosure were collected at a time of famine prices for wheat."
 42. P.5
 43. Arthur Young. 2
 44. William Cobbett, Rural Rides, vol.ii.: "Is it not something rather damnable... to talk of transporting Englishmen, on account of the excess of their numbers, when the fact is notorious that their labour produces five or ten times as much food and raiment as they and their families consume." - p.55 (1826).
 45. Slater, p.264.
 46. Thorold Rogers, p.410.
 47. Slater, p.102.
 48. P.491.
 49. P.479.
 50. Thorold Rogers.
 51. Id., p.487.
 52. Id.
 53. Writing of the period 1776-1815, Dr. Cunningham says: "The pressure of poverty was felt not merely among those who were unemployed, but also among those who were over-worked" (p.443).
 54. William Cobbett, Rural Rides, vol.ii, p.41.
 55. Rural Rides, vol.ii, p.46.
 56. Most eighteenth-century writers agreed that poverty was due to idleness and improvidence. (See Cunningham, p.381.)
 57. See Massie, A Plan for the Establishment of Charity Houses: "To small portions of land, right of commoning, and cottages, England is much indebted for the mighty achievements in war which are recorded in the annals of the English nation."
 58. For particulars of Nottingham, Coventry, Spitalfields, Lancashire and Wigan, see Dunkley, The Charter of the Nations, 1854.
 59. For Hinkley and Leeds, see Martineau, iv, p.157.
 60. Rural Rides, vol.ii.: "This is, I verily believe it, the worst used labouring people upon the face of the earth. Dogs and hogs and horses are treated with more civility; and as to food and lodging, how gladly would the labourers change with them!" (p.55).
 61. Professor Nicholson, History of the English Corn Laws: "Between 1821 and 1831 there was an absolute decrease in the number of families in agriculture, in spite of an increase of about 19 per cent, in the aggregate number of families in Great Britain.... Again... if we compare 1831 with 1811, with an absolute increase in population of over two millions, there was an absolute decrease in the number of adult males employed in agriculture" (p.119).

62. Slater, p.130.

[Chapter I](#) * [Chapter XVI](#)

Land Tenure and Unemployment

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CHAPTER XVI / Its Cause and the Remedy

1. The limits of the inquiry

Our inquiry is finished, but before we sum up our conclusions let us review briefly the nature of the problem we set out to solve. In Chapter I we limited our investigations to the relation between unemployment and the tenure of land, because it seemed clear that unemployment must be caused, if there were sufficient land, by the inability of labour to get to that land; and also because, if it were established that Nature's opportunities for employment existed in abundance, unemployment could not exist so long as these were accessible to labour.

2. Real aim of the inquiry

The terrible phenomenon of unemployment means, then, that the sellers of labour are numerous as compared with those able to buy; that only comparatively few have the means of employing labour. But as each seller of labour, now unemployed, would have the means of employing his own and someone else's labour if he had access to land, our inquiry has been directed to seeing whether he has that access, and if not, what is preventing it. In other words, we have investigated the problem in order to ascertain why only comparatively few have the means of employing labour, when really each worker himself has the supply of the active factor in production (labour), which, with the help of land, could satisfy his demand for wealth; why it is that if a worker cannot find someone who has the means of employing his labour he should not be able to employ his own labour by producing to satisfy his needs directly from Nature.

In the course of this inquiry, in addition to arriving at a definite positive conclusion as to the cause of unemployment, we have at the same time been able to see that many other so-called explanations of the phenomenon really fail to explain anything except that labour is robbed of a proportion of its just reward. They do not explain why labour must remain unemployed unless an employer "furnishes" employment.

3. Results of inquiry - Saxon and early Norman England, no unemployment

Our inquiry has disclosed the origin and progress of unemployment. In Saxon and early Norman times we saw that there was no unemployment, for the very good reason that the alternative to not being able to find a man with the means of employing one's labour was not unemployment, but employing oneself directly on the

land. Nature's opportunities for employment were in abundance, and land was freely at the disposal of him who wished to till it. Land required for cultivation was neither held out of use nor under-used.

4. Black Death and after - enclosures and unemployment

Soon after the Norman Conquest the lords began to enclose waste and common land, which, although frequently for colonizing purposes, resulted in a curtailing of common rights and a restriction of the number of opportunities of employment to which there was free access. The number of such opportunities still, however, exceeded the supply of labour capable of using them, and there was no unemployment.

But after the Black Death, when lords of manors were unable to obtain sufficient labour to carry on the cultivation of the land which had been formerly tilled, an enclosure movement began on a very large scale - began because wages had increased at the expense of rent, and continued because grass farming was seen to be profitable owing to an increase in the price of wool.

For a time, at any rate, opportunities for employment would still appear to have exceeded the supply of labour, with consequent full employment; but as the population recovered in numbers and the enclosure movement continued, about the middle of the fifteenth century, for the first time in English history, opportunities for employment began to fall short as compared with the supply of labour, and a surplus of unemployed labour appeared. This surplus was unable to obtain access to Nature's opportunities to satisfy its own demand for subsistence, etc.

The beggars came to town, but they were beggars who possessed in their own labour, if they had had access to land, the means of satisfying their own and their families' wants. They had been cleared directly off the land, and arguments about over-population or insufficiency of opportunities would not have appealed to those who had been robbed of their opportunities, and who saw a fence put round other opportunities on which they might have employed their labour.

5. The coming of the surplus of unemployed - a double loss to the community

This was the beginning of unemployment, pauperism, and the drain from the country-side to the towns, which by a one-sided competition pulled down wages to the subsistence level. Then for the first time the supply of labour appeared to exceed the demand, the sellers of labour to exceed the buyers; but what had really happened was that for the first time the supply of labour was prevented from satisfying demand because it was denied that access to land which it formerly had.

Not being able to produce wealth for themselves, this surplus of unemployed either had to beg or steal, until the State imposed rates on those in work to provide for their maintenance. In this way the unemployed were a double burden on the community, for they caused loss to the artisans who formerly produced goods for them, which they were now unable to purchase, and they also had to be maintained out of the wealth produced by the rest of the community without being able to add anything to that wealth themselves.

6. Land Monopoly spreads until it covers the whole country - results

The enclosure movement continued throughout the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and unemployment increased as opportunities became more and more restricted; but all through this period there were still opportunities for employment unmonopolized, but which, on account of inaccessibility and distance from centres of population, were as good as non-existent.

In the middle of the eighteenth century began the last and greatest period of enclosures, which by the middle of the nineteenth century had accounted for practically all the land in the kingdom. This period saw the wholesale depopulation and devastation of the country-side; the rise of the slums of the great industrial cities,

in which the dispossessed had to take refuge; the pauperization of a large proportion of the population of Great Britain; and the growth of that terrible one-sided competition among the surplus of unemployed for the jobs which appeared to be too few to go round.

We have seen how hundreds of thousands of these who now formed the unemployed surplus were directly deprived of their right to produce for themselves from the land, and that, once evicted, they had no means of employing themselves, no alternative employment if they were unable to find anyone who could buy their labour.

7. Ample opportunities for all, but labour is fenced off

This private enclosure of the land has continued, until, at the present day, a strong monopoly holds the land of Great Britain in thrall, and a few thousand owners have the power, which they use, to deny access to the land, or to permit it only on terms which make industry difficult or impossible.

The opportunities for employment provided by the land of Great Britain are, as we have seen, more than ample to enable the supply of labour to satisfy its wants directly and to employ itself; but the land monopoly, which has grown until its tentacles reach to the farthest corners of the country, has artificially restricted these opportunities for employment, so that they are out of reach of labour. And so throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the surplus of unemployed has grown and persisted. It fluctuates in size, but the tendency seems to be for the minimum to increase as speculation in land increases, and the barrier round the land becomes more impenetrable, as we have seen it has done since the Great War.

8. Gradual confiscation of communal rights

While tracing the connection between the gradual restriction of the opportunities for employment and the growth of unemployment, we have been unable to shut our eyes to the fact that in so appropriating and monopolizing the land the landlords were, in fact, robbing the community of its rights over the land - rights which originally it clearly possessed, and which should have been handed down from generation to generation.

We have seen, too, how, from the Norman Conquest and the Statute of Merton, these rights were not lost without a struggle, and how the Commons of England frequently rose in armed revolt down to the nineteenth century, until the country-side was so drained that there were few left to rise. In Scotland this wholesale confiscation of the rights of the community took place within comparatively recent times, and has turned fertile valleys into desolate wastes and depopulated the whole country-side.

9. The confiscation a continuing one

In considering this aspect of the question it is important to bear in mind that this confiscation of the land did not, as a wrong, cease with the generation in existence when it was committed; but inasmuch as the land is now wholly monopolized the community is still being deprived of its right of access - the confiscation is a continuing one.

The significance of this can be seen very clearly when we recall how Professor Gomer was at pains to show that enclosure of the wastes did not result in depopulation if the enclosure was to arable. As we pointed out when considering that statement, although it may not have caused depopulation at the time, the private appropriation had given the landlords power to turn the land to grass, or even to hold it out of use entirely, at any time, because the appropriation affected all succeeding generations. We have already seen that this process has gone on all through the nineteenth century, and is even continuing at the present day. Land is - in theory, of course - still the property of the King, but his tenants have long ceased to pay rent, and it will be

evident from our inquiry that fact and theory are now unrelated.

10. Land monopoly accompanied by insecurity of tenure

It has also been proved that, until the coming of unemployment and the beginning of land appropriation on a large scale, the Commons had security of tenure, even for those who held purely "at will," and that as enclosure proceeded and unemployment grew, so tenure became less and less secure, starting with tenants "at will," who then could show no legal right to security, and including copyholders, who, despite the fact that they had legal security of tenure, were frequently evicted or deprived of their copies. This insecurity of tenure has continued to the present day, and is exemplified in the system of yearly tenancies.

11. Conclusions as to cause of unemployment do not depend on any theory of origin of rights

But although we hold it clearly established that the land of Great Britain originally belonged to the community, and that communal rights were gradually filched away, yet our conclusions do not depend for their validity on the accuracy of any particular theory as to the origin of rights of the peasants over the soil in Saxon and Norman times. Apart altogether from the question of the rights of the community or of the landlords at that time, our conclusions are based on the fact that when access to land was free to labour and opportunities were available for all, there was no unemployment, and that as the land became monopolized, as opportunities were artificially restricted, unemployment increased. Now at the present time, when all Nature's opportunities are monopolized and access to land is denied, there is always a large surplus of unemployed, with its complement a mass of underpaid labour.

12. Land monopoly an unnatural barrier - land provides opportunities in plenty

The system of absolute private ownership of land, which we have called land monopoly, acts as a barrier around all Nature's opportunities for employment. It was this barrier which seemed so unnatural to the Diggers of Wellingborrow when they said: "We find that no creature that ever God made was ever deprived of the benefit of the Earth but Mankind."^[1]

If labour ceased to be deprived of the "benefit of the earth," our inquiry has demonstrated clearly that the opportunities afforded by the land of Great Britain would be ample in number. We have seen that there are millions of acres unused or very much under-used, and millions of acres of so-called cultivated land covered with poor grass and almost destitute of men. We have compared the agricultural production of some other countries, and have made it clear that the opportunities in agriculture and forestry alone in this country are enormous, and offer a field for the production of great wealth. Would labour be idle if it could get to these opportunities?

13. Great opportunities afforded by mineral resources

Reference to the mineral resources of Great Britain was necessarily brief, but we saw enough to be able to demonstrate that here again there are vast opportunities for employment where Nature offers the things so many men lack. But again the Chinese wall of monopoly hinders the access of labour to these various mineral resources. The opportunities provided by the stock of minerals in Great Britain - the clays, building stones, and slates, in addition to the metallic ores and coal - are enormous in extent, but although many want these things, yet labour is denied access, or is only allowed in on terms which make production so dear that industry is restricted by those who call themselves owners. Land monopoly has fenced off the active factor in production.

14. Land Monopoly in urban districts

An investigation of the question of land tenure in urban districts revealed the same state of affairs: everywhere land is held out of use or under-used. In all our great cities and towns a large proportion of their areas is rated as agricultural land, most of which for all practical purposes may usually be regarded as unused, and in all these districts land is urgently wanted for new houses, for roads, improvements, and for the reconstruction of slum areas. But again we have found that, although in every instance the opportunities for the necessary improvements exist in abundance, yet land monopoly in case after case prevents access, or allows it only at a price which mortgages the increase of wealth resulting from the improvement for years ahead, and causes much loss in other directions.

Thus in every case we see that the opportunities for employment are clearly greatly in excess of the supply of labour in this country. All through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by reason of the growth of population, and improvements, discoveries and inventions in manufacturing industries, the opportunities of producing wealth afforded by the land have increased enormously, but labour, except to a very limited extent, has been unable to avail itself of these advantages. Were only some of these opportunities accessible to labour, there is no reason why labour should not employ itself, produce the wealth direct from the land and exchange the surplus, so creating a real demand for other goods, and relieving industry of the burden of supporting the unemployed.

15. Land necessary to all forms of labour - man a land animal

It will be advisable once again to emphasize how essential land is to all forms of industry, and how neither wealth nor services can be produced unless labour has access to it. It may not be clear to the clerk working in the top story of a London office how his employment depends on access to land, but this was brought home to many such workers during the Coal Strike of 1921, when they found themselves without work because some men who produced wealth directly from the land had ceased work; and this same clerk is also vitally interested in land tenure and access to land as regards his housing accommodation, the means of conveyance and transport he uses, and everything he buys.

Man produces wealth by adapting and combining, with the aid of the physical forces of Nature, natural products obtained from the land, by utilizing the reproductive forces of Nature in agriculture and farming, and by trading and exchanging. For each of these methods land is needed in varying quantities. It is not only required by the man directly engaged in producing wealth from the land, but for those who work on and manufacture the natural products, and by those who transport them or display them for the convenience of purchasers in retail shops. It is obvious that not only workers such as these are directly concerned with the question of access to land, but all clerical workers necessary to these forms of production, and also all producers of services - as, for example, doctors, lawyers, singers, etc. - who can only be paid in wealth produced in one of these ways. Truly has it been said that man is a land animal.

16. Capitalism and unemployment

The growth of land monopoly, as we have already shown, brought many attendant evils in its train, and most of these have at various times been seized on as the cause of poverty and unemployment. Let us refer to one or two of these alleged causes.

Capital, the capitalist, or capitalism are each frequently denounced as the arch-enemy of labour, the oppressor of industry, the cause of unemployment and poverty. In this connection it is interesting to note what the great apostle of this theory, Karl Marx, had to say as to the origin of capitalism. He wrote: "The starting-point of the development that gave rise to the wage-labourer as well as to the capitalist was the servitude of the labourer.... The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the

whole process."^[2]

Marx here seems to get a glimpse of the truth, for, as we have seen in this inquiry, "capitalism," or the control of large aggregates of capital by a few, began and grew when and as land was enclosed; and people driven from the countryside to the towns without any alternative employment there engaged in a one-sided competition for the jobs that were too few to go round. Such a situation provided an opportunity for the capitalist producer, and he took advantage of the cheap labour provided by the growth of land monopoly. This process was much intensified in the eighteenth century at the time of the Industrial Revolution. The workers were driven off the land by wholesale methods of enclosure into the arms of the industrialist, who was enabled thereby to produce cheaply and on a large scale, for, having no alternative employment, they had to accept his terms or starve. These workers were frequently worse off than slaves, for the capitalist had no need to take any thought of their physical welfare, for, for every one who fell by the way, there were several clamouring for admission at the factory gates, and so he ground the last ounce out of them.

17. Capitalist has no power to oppress in absence of land monopoly

But just as one millstone cannot crush the grain without another stone to crush it against, so the capitalist could not have crushed the worker until he had been driven off the land and denied access to Nature's opportunities for employment by land monopoly - this was the other millstone. Unless, therefore, there was this other millstone, the capitalist would be powerless to oppress.

While the worker still had access to land, and so an alternative occupation, he would not have worked for the capitalist for less than he could make when employing himself; and the capitalist would have been, and would still be, powerless to oppress labour if there was no crowd of unemployed clamouring at the gate for the work which the capitalist is supposed to be good enough to "furnish." It is not in the nature of capital to oppress. Capital, the instruments of production, that part of wealth which is used to produce more wealth, is the creation of labour, and should be its servant, not its oppressor; but when capitalism appears as an oppressor of labour it is because of the monopoly power it derives from land monopoly, the mother of all monopolies. Karl Marx seems to have appreciated this, but afterwards mistook the result for the cause; and most of his present-day followers do the same, and ignore, or do not know, what he said as to the origin of capitalism. If expropriation of the people from the soil, or land monopoly, gave the capitalist the power to oppress, the thing to remove would surely seem to be land monopoly, the millstone without which the capitalist could not grind labour.

18. Over-population and unemployment

There are also many supporters of the theory that overpopulation is the cause of unemployment. It will be remembered that the question of over-population was first mentioned in the sixteenth century, when the beggars were crowding into the towns; and Harrison, writing in the reign of Elizabeth, referred to those who said there were too many people. In 1607^[3] there was the "Consideration" of the House of Lords, which stated that the country was over-populated, and that the surplus should be shipped off to the Colonies.

Throughout this period, when over-population was supposed to be the cause of poverty and unemployment, we have seen that opportunities for employment existed in abundance for those who were supposed to be surplus, but access was denied to them. The over-population argument would not have appealed to the English cotter or the Scotch crofter who saw his holding, from which he had been making a living, given over to sheep or deer.

This theory again flourished in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the great enclosure movement was in full swing and the towns were becoming over-crowded at the expense of the country-side. But at that time again, as we know, there were more than enough opportunities for employment for all the population. We have also shown clearly that opportunities exist in abundance at the present time, and this being the case, it seems to us to follow from the principles of the co-operation of labour that the greater the population, the greater should be the production of wealth per unit of population.

But although the country as a whole is not over-populated, it is clear, nevertheless, that the towns are over-populated as compared with the country-side; and certainly to one of the unemployed at the factory gates it must seem that if there were fewer people he might stand more chance. But while there are opportunities in plenty from which labour is barred there cannot be over-population. If this country contained two men only, and one of them owned all the land and had no need of the labour of the other, and refused even to give him permission to use the land, the country would be over-populated.

19. Land monopoly and speed of increase of the population

It would, however, appear to be the case that land monopoly has been the cause of population increasing faster than it would have done under conditions where labour had easy access to land. Population seems to increase slowly where wealth is more widely distributed, as it was in England between Saxon times and the Black Death. After the Plague, when a greater population was required to ensure the maximum of well-being, population increased for a time very rapidly. The more rapid increase from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and the very rapid increase during the latter part of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, coincided with the reduction of an ever-increasing proportion of the "commons" to paupers and under-paid workers. A large body of men was coming into existence that had little hope of rising in the social scale or of achieving any form of independence.

Driven from the land, these men crowded into insanitary hovels, where disease took a heavy toll of infant lives, and their whole life was one weary struggle for subsistence, with no opportunity of rising. When man is thus kept down in a condition resembling that of the lower animals, with no opportunity of developing those gifts which the animals do not possess, and with no opportunity of raising his standard of living, he, like the animals, multiplies quickly. If wealth were more equally distributed, as it would be if all had access to land, a class such as we have described would not exist, and it seems clear that the economic check of a rising standard of life would bring about a much slower increase of population.

20. Currency manipulation and unemployment

Another alleged cause of unemployment frequently put forward is currency manipulation, but with this, as with other ills from which the inhabitants of this country may suffer from time to time, it is difficult to see how it could cause unemployment as long as labour had free access to land. It seems to us that the exponents of these various so-called causes of unemployment all err with regard to the same vital point, namely, in entirely disregarding how wealth is really produced and what are the factors necessary for its production. Labour may be robbed in many ways, but as long as access to land with security of tenure is unrestricted there need be no unemployment.

21. Machinery and unemployment

Again, labour-saving machinery is sometimes blamed for causing unemployment, and we can see that this may be so for a time if the labour "saved" has no opportunity of obtaining any alternative occupation. The saving of labour effected by such machinery should, of course, benefit every worker by enabling him to obtain more wealth with the same labour or the same wealth with less labour than before; but with a surplus of unemployed and under-employed this advantage tends to be lost through the one-sided competition for work and the denial of access to land. It is because labour is denied access to land that the average worker is distrustful when he hears of new labour-saving machinery; he has come to think that the unemployed surplus must be always with us, and he regards work as of more importance than the results of labour.

22. The Trade Cycle

The phenomenon known as the Trade Cycle, that recurrence of industrial depression and a maximum of unemployment at intervals of about ten years, is regarded by some as natural, and necessarily resulting in unemployment, as, in fact, the cause of unemployment. The proposals of those who support this theory all centre on schemes for making the best of an unfortunate but inevitable state of affairs, by insurance and State regulation of industry and the labour supply. An acceptance of the Trade Cycle explanation of unemployment is an acceptance of the theory that prosperity continued for a time results in poverty and unemployment. The Trade Cycle undoubtedly exists, and the supporters of this theory of unemployment accurately describe one side of the picture, but fail to disclose any causal connection between the various phases of the cycle. They do not explain how a manufacturer of boots, for example, can have produced too many boots when thousands of people need another pair and are able and willing to work. Again, looking at it from the other side, they do not explain why, when human wants are insatiable, demand should apparently diminish as long as men have their labour and there is access to the raw materials of Nature to enable them to satisfy their wants.

One side of the picture is, however, omitted in descriptions of the Trade Cycle. During the period of prosperity which precedes collapse and stagnation, there is enormous speculation in land, in the source of the raw material of all wealth. Men buy and hold for a rise in confident expectation that they will, in the near future, make a handsome profit. It is this very process of land speculation during a period of good trade which gradually strangles production by making it harder and harder for labour and capital to get access to land. The price which labour and capital have to pay is forced higher and higher, until the limit is reached, and further production is impossible. This cessation of production at some points means a lessening of purchasing power. The effect of this is felt throughout the industrial world, leading to collapse and subsequent depression until a lowering of rents and a fall in land values makes production again possible.

23. The remedy

Now that we have ascertained the cause of unemployment the remedy is clear. The land monopoly must be broken down, and labour must be afforded free and equal access to all land, so that it may be possible for a man to supply his own demands for goods by producing directly from the land, by linking his labour with the opportunities which the land provides. This might be brought about by a gradual resumption by the community of the rights over the land which undoubtedly they formerly possessed, and a change in the basis of taxation and rating, so that instead of industry being penalized, as we have seen it now is, and a premium put on the withholding of land from use or keeping it in an under-used state, industry would be freed from penalizing taxation, and the penalty fall on him who withholds land from labour. Such an adjustment would make it unprofitable for anyone to withhold land from use or to keep it in an under-used state.

Just as a high protective tariff acts as a wall round a country to keep out a large proportion of foreign goods that in the normal course of trade and exchange would come in, so the land monopoly acts as a tariff protecting the interests of the owners, the monopolists, and keeping out labour. The monopoly must be broken up, the tariff wall demolished, and labour given the access which it is now denied.

24. Results of the destruction of land monopoly

The forcing of land into use and the relief of industry from the burdens that now oppress it would have the effect of very rapidly absorbing the surplus of unemployed. It would not, of course, be necessary that all, or even nearly all, should go on the land as farmers, for the breaking down of the barriers which now shut off labour from the land would not only stimulate the industries which extract wealth directly from the land, but also village industries and all forms of manufacturing, transport, and exchange. Production in the building and allied trades would be directly stimulated by rendering sites easily available and also by cheapening the production of all building materials; and by giving labour access to all minerals, production would be stimulated in industries requiring those minerals. There would also be the greatly increased demand for manufactures set up by those who would now be working directly on the land.

But there is little doubt that a large and increasing number would become small holders. If, for example, 500,000 men took small holdings, this would account for some 2,000,000 souls and only 5,000,000 acres of

land if each holder took 10 acres; and there is little doubt that less than this would be needed if the land were farmed co-operatively in village groups. In fact, with small holdings on any considerable scale, farmed on the co-operative system, it would probably be found that something in the nature of the open-field system would prove far more economical and productive.

These 500,000, then, would not only be supplying their own demands for commodities, but would also have a considerable surplus to exchange. This surplus would in turn set up a demand in the industries supplying the goods they required, and thereby increase employment in those industries. It would be exactly the same as if a new country had been discovered, with a population of 2,000,000, all with a real demand for the products of our industries.

25. State ownership of capital unnecessary. Industry after the breakdown of land monopoly

It is misleading in the extreme to say that some unemployment is necessary in order to carry on the modern capitalist system of industry. Some unemployment is, of course, necessary if the capitalist is to continue to oppress labour by taking advantage of labour's extremity, but there is no reason why industry should not be carried on quite well without the capitalist having this power, which he would not have but for land monopoly and the surplus of unemployed. It is not necessary for the State to take over capital in order to deprive him of this power.

It is probable, however, that under the social system which would arise out of the break up of land monopoly industry would tend to become more and more decentralized as the balance between agriculture and the manufacturing industries became redressed. The industrial village would become once more a feature of the country-side, and the villages of Great Britain would be more cheerful and comfortable places to live in than many of them now are.

26. Development of the "home market." Human wants unlimited in number

This breakdown of the land monopoly and the opening up of natural opportunities to labour would develop the "home market" in the only way practicable by giving all the opportunity to work and produce wealth, which would stimulate to an enormous extent home industries to meet the increased real and effective demand at home. With the relief of industry from the crushing burden of taxation, and the removal of the dead hand of landlordism, production would increase by leaps and bounds to meet the steadily increasing home demand.

Although each individual want is satiable, wants are unlimited in number, for as soon as one want is satisfied another arises. As soon as quantity is satisfied, a desire for quality arises, and so on. Man is the only unsatisfied animal. Human wants do not increase and then diminish or cease altogether, and if every man has the opportunity to satisfy his wants, demand must remain steady. At the present day, should foreign demand for a British product fall off, unemployment may result, but with alternative opportunities of employment provided by the throwing open of natural resources, and the competition among employers of labour, there would be no need for this. Moreover, the home demand would be greatly increased by reason of the fact that many previously unemployed would now have an effective demand for the products of other industries.

27. The end of one-sided competition. The opportunity of employment for all

This opening up of the land to labour would then have the result of putting an end to the one-sided competition under which workers compete for jobs but employers seldom compete for workers. This form of competition is so prevalent that it has come to be regarded as typical of competition in general - of real competition. But with Nature's opportunities for employment thrown open to all, the number of potential employers would be greatly increased, and the greatest of all competitors for labour, *the demand of labour* itself, would have come into the market. Then for the first time for nearly 500 years there would be free competition - a competition which would give to each the full product of his labour, neither more nor less.

Under such a system, where every man had access to land with security of tenure and no one had the power to levy a toll on him before he could employ his labour, no man need ever be unemployed. It is only by the abolition of land monopoly and the relief of industry from taxation that this result can be brought about, while at the same time preserving individual freedom.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Chapter X, par.12.
2. Karl Marx, Capital, p.739.
3. Chapter X, par.8.

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