

Pacifism and Violence

A Study in Bourgeois Ethics

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THERE is not much left of importance in bourgeois ethics. Chastity, sobriety, salvation and cleanliness have ceased to be topics on which the bourgeois feels very deeply. There is, in fact, only one issue on which the bourgeois conscience is to-day warmed into activity. Pacifism, always latent in the bourgeois creed, has now crystallised out as almost the only emotionally-charged belief left in Protestant Christianity or in its analogue, bourgeois 'idealism'.

I call it a distinctively bourgeois doctrine, because I mean by pacifism, not the love of peace as a good to be secured by a definite form of action, but the belief that any form of social constraint of others or any violent action is in itself wrong, and that violence such as war must be passively resisted because to use violence to end violence would be logically self-contradictory. I oppose pacifism in this sense to the Communist belief that the only way to secure peace is by a revolutionary change in the social system, and that ruling classes resist revolution violently and must therefore be overthrown by force.

But modern war is also distinctively bourgeois. Struggles such as the last war arise from the unequal Imperialist development of the bourgeois powers, and earlier wars of bourgeois culture were also fought for aims characteristic of bourgeois economy or, like the wars of the infant Dutch republic, represented the struggles of the growing bourgeois class against feudal forces. In its last stage of Fascism, when capitalism, throwing off the democratic forms which no longer serve its purpose, rules with open violence, bourgeois culture is also seen as aggressively militant. Are we Marxists then simply using labels indiscriminately when we class as characteristically bourgeois, both militancy and pacifism, meekness and violence?

No, we are not doing so, if we can show that we call bourgeois not all war and not all pacifism but only certain types of violence, and only certain types of non-violence; and if, further, we can show how the one fundamental bourgeois position

generates both these apparently opposed viewpoints. We did the same thing when we showed that two philosophies which are apparently completely opposed – mechanical materialism and idealism – were both characteristically bourgeois, and both generated by the one bourgeois assumption.

Bourgeois pacifism is distinctive and should not be confused, for example, with Eastern pacifism, any more than modern European warfare should be confused with feudal warfare. It is not merely that the social manifestations of it are different – this would necessarily arise from the different social organs of the two cultures. But the content also is different. Anyone who supposes that bourgeois pacifism will, for example, take the form of a University Anti-War Group lying down on the rails ‘in front of a departing troop train like an Indian pacifist group, is to be ignorant of the nature of bourgeois pacifism and of whence it took its colour. The historic example of bourgeois pacifism is not Gandhi but Fox. The Society of Friends expresses the spirit of bourgeois pacifism. It is individual resistance.

To understand how bourgeois pacifism arises, we must understand how bourgeois violence arises. It arises, just as does feudal or despotic violence, from the characteristic economy of the system. As was first explained by Marx, the characteristics of bourgeois economy are that the bourgeois, held down and crippled productively by the feudal system, comes to see freedom and productive growth in lack of social organisation, in every man’s administering his own affairs for his own benefit to the best of his ability and desire, and this is expressed in the absolute character of bourgeois property together with its complete alienability. His struggle to achieve this right did secure his greater freedom and productive power as compared with his position in the feudal system. The circumstances of the struggle and its outcome gave rise to the bourgeois dream – freedom as the absolute elimination of social relations.

But such a programme, if carried into effect, would mean the end of society and the break-down of economic production. Each man would struggle for himself, and if he saw another man with something he wanted, he would seize it, for by assumption no such social relations as co-operation exist. The saving and foresight which makes economic production possible would cease to exist. Man would become a brute.

But in fact the bourgeois had no desire for such a world. He lived by merchandising and banking, by capital as opposed to the land which was the basis of feudal exploitation. Therefore he meant by the ‘absence of social restraints’, the absence of any restraint on his ownership, alienation, or acquisition at will of the capital by which he lived. Private property is a social ‘restraint’, for others not owning it are ‘restrained’ from helping themselves to it by force or cunning, as they could in a ‘state of nature’; but the bourgeois never included the ownership of capital as one of the social restraints that should be abolished, for the simple reason that it was not to him a restraint at all. It never therefore entered his head to regard it as such,

and he saw nothing inconsistent in calling for the abolition of privilege, monopoly, and so forth, while hanging on to his capital.

Moreover, he had a cogent argument which, when he became more self-conscious, he could use. A social restraint is a social relation, that is, a relation between men. The relation between master and slave is a social relation and therefore a restraint on the liberty of one man by the other. In the same way the relation between lord and serf is a relation between men and a restraint on human liberty; but the relation between a man and his property is a relation between man and a thing, and is therefore no restraint on the liberty of other men.

This argument was of course fallacious, for there can be no universal relations of this kind as the fabric of society, there can only be relations between men disguised as relations between things. The bourgeois defence of private property only applies if I go out into the woods and pick up a stick to walk with, or fashion an ornamental object for my adornment; it applies to the possession of socially unimportant trifles or things for immediate consumption. As soon as bourgeois possession extends to the capital of the community, consisting of the products of the community set aside to produce goods in the future (in early bourgeois civilisation, grain, clothes, seed and raw materials to supply the labourers of to-morrow, and in addition machinery and plant for the same purpose to-day), this relation to a thing becomes a relation among men, for it is now the labour of the community which the bourgeois controls. The bourgeois right of private property leads to this, that on the one hand the world and all that society has created in it belongs to the bourgeois, and on the other hand stands the naked labourer, who is forced by the needs of his body to sell his labour-power to the bourgeois in order to feed himself and his master. The bourgeois will only buy his labour-power, if he makes a profit from it. This social relation is only made possible by – it depends on – the bourgeois ownership of capital. Thus, just as in slave-owning or serf-owning civilisation there is a relation between men which is a relation between a dominating and a dominated class, or between exploiters and exploited; so there is in bourgeois culture, but whereas in earlier civilisations this relation between men is conscious and dear, in bourgeois culture it is disguised as a system free from obligatory dominating relations between men and containing only innocent relations between men and a thing.

Therefore, in throwing off all social restraint, the bourgeois seemed to himself justified in retaining this one restraint of private property, for it did not seem to him a restraint at all, but an inalienable right of man, the fundamental natural right. Unfortunately for this theory, there are no natural rights, only situations found in nature, and private property protected for one man by others is not one of them. Bourgeois private property could only be protected by coercion – the have-nots had to be coerced by the haves after all, just as in feudal society. Thus a dominating relation as violent as in slave-owning civilisations came into being, expressed in the

police, the laws, the standing army, and the legal apparatus of the bourgeois State. The whole bourgeois State revolves round the coercive protection of private property, alienable and acquirable by trading for private profit, and regarded as a natural right, but a right which, strangely enough, can only be protected by coercion, because it involves of its essence a right to dispose of and extract profit from the labour-power of others, and so administer their lives.

Thus, after all, the bourgeois dream of liberty cannot be realised. Social restraints must come into being to protect this one thing that makes him a bourgeois. This 'freedom' to own private property seems to him inexplicably to involve more and more social restraints, laws, tariffs, and factory acts; and this 'society' in which only relations to a thing are permitted becomes more and more a society in which relations between men are elaborate and cruel. The more he aims for bourgeois freedom, the more he gets bourgeois restraint, for bourgeois freedom is an illusion.

Thus, just as much as in slave-owning society, bourgeois society turns out to be a society built on violent coercion of men by men, the more violent in that while the master must feed and protect his slave, whether he works or not, the bourgeois employer owns no obligation to the free labourer, not even to find him work. The whole bourgeois dream explodes in practice, and the bourgeois state becomes a theatre of the violent and coercive subjection of man to man for the purposes of economic production.

For the purposes of economic production. Unlike the violence of the footpad, the violence of the bourgeois though similar in motive plays a social role. It is the relation whereby social production is secured in bourgeois society, just as the master-to-slave relation secures production in a slave-owning civilisation. It is for its epoch the best method of securing production, and it is better to be a slave than a beast of the jungle, better to be an exploited labourer than a slave, not because the bourgeois employer is 'nicer' than the slave-owner (he is often a good deal crueller), but because the wealth of society as a whole is more with the former relation than the latter.

But no system of relations is static, it develops and changes. Slave-owning relations develop into Empires and then reveal their internal contradictions. They collapse. The story of the collapse of the Roman Empire is the story of the constant decline of the taxable wealth of the Empire between Augustus and Justinian as a result of increasing exploitation until, a poverty-stricken shell, it crumbled before the assaults of the barbarian, up till then easily repelled. In the same way, feudal civilisation, exhausted in England by the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses, collapsed. But not this time, before an external enemy; it fell before an internal enemy, the rising bourgeois class.

Bourgeois relations, too, developed. In the famous bourgeois booms and slumps, they show the potential decay of the system. This decay was retarded by Imperialism, that is, by forcibly imposing on other countries the 'natural rights' of the bourgeois. In these backward countries the bourgeois right to trade profitably and to alienate and acquire any property was forcibly imposed. Here too the bourgeois, out of his dominating relation to a thing, secretly imposed his dominating relation over men, which can yet be disguised as democracy, for does not democracy declare that all men are equal and none may enslave the other? Does it not exclude all relations of domination – despotism, slave-owning, feudal privilege – except the 'innocent' domination of capitalist over 'free' labourer?

But in this imperialising, a new situation arose – external war instead of internal violence and coercion. For now, in exploiting backward countries, or, it was called, 'civilising' them, one bourgeois State found itself competing with another, just as inside the State bourgeois competes with bourgeois.

But inside the State bourgeois competes with bourgeois peacefully, because it is the law – and this law was established for their own protection against the exploited. The laws forbidding one bourgeois to seize another's property by force arose as the result of the need to prevent the have-nots seizing property by force. It is an internal law, the law of the coercive State. If it had not been necessary for the existence of the whole bourgeois class for them to be protected against the seizing of their property by the exploited, the law against the forcible seizure of private property, coercively enforced and taught to the exploited as a 'necessary' law of society, would never have come into existence. For the individualistic, competitive nature of bourgeois trade (each 'getting the better' of the other) is such that no bourgeois sees anything wrong in impoverishing another bourgeois. If he is 'bust' or 'hammered' – well, it's the luck of the game. But all unite as a class against the exploited, for the existence of the class depends on this. If it is a case of a battle royal inside the bourgeois class, each bourgeois believes by nature and education that, given an equal chance, he will get the better of the other. This eternal optimism of the bourgeois is seen in the historic bourgeois appeals for 'fair-play', 'fair field and no favour', and all the other allied bourgeois slogans which express the ethics of the 'sporting' English gentleman.

It is quite different when the bourgeois States, through their coercive organisations, find themselves competing in the world arena for the backward lands. There is now no numerous exploited class menacing the existence of the class of bourgeois States as a whole. Inside the coercive State, if it came to a 'show-down', with street-fighting, bare hands, and man against man – the exploited would win. But in the Imperialistic arena the bourgeois States appear as highly developed organisms, for, thanks to the unification of the coercive State, they now dispose of all the resources of an advanced society, including the services, in the army, of the exploited class

itself. The backward nations still play inside the world arena the role of the exploited class inside the State, but they are not a danger to the class of bourgeois States as a whole, as is the exploited class to the class of bourgeois as a whole inside the State. They are just inanimate things, almost defenceless, so much dead undeveloped territory.

There is then no world danger threatening the class of bourgeois States as a whole, as, in a State, revolution threatens the class of bourgeois as a whole. There is only individual competition among bourgeois States, and, as we have seen, the bourgeois never minds this. All he asks for is 'fair field and no favour' and he is certain that he will come out on top. He feels no need for a law to restrain competition among bourgeois. Hence the sovereign bourgeois State comes into being and battles bloodily with other bourgeois States for the booty of the backward territory. This is the age of Imperialism, culminating in the Great War.

Needless to say, the bourgeois finds the bourgeois dream – 'a fair field and no favour' – when realised for the first time, far bloodier and more violent than he dreamed. War presently comes to seem to him 'unfair competition'. Like a price-cutting war, it alarms him and he feels someone from outside ought to stop it. He calls for aid; but there is no one 'outside'. For to whom, on heaven or earth, can he call, as a member of the class of independent sovereign States?

Still he has a dream. If the class of bourgeois in one country can have a State and police force enforcing order and non-violent competition, why not a State of States, a world-State, in which world peace is enforced?

This bourgeois hope perpetually recurs in the chaos of war, and the League of Nations is one form of it. But the one factor which secures internal law in the bourgeois State – the existence of a dangerous exploited class – does not exist in the world arena. No danger confronts the class of bourgeois States as a whole, and thus they can never unite to accept a coercive regulating law superior to their own wills. The danger only exists as among themselves and each, like a good bourgeois, believes that, by appropriate 'combination', treaty-making, and manoeuvring, he can best the others. The bourgeois dream of a peaceful Imperialism is unrealisable for want of a danger common to all bourgeois States to unite them. After a bitter experience of the unpleasantness of war, as after a bitter experience of the unpleasantness of price-cutting, they can unite in a voluntary cartel, the League of Nations, but like a cartel it lacks the cohesion and coercive power of the bourgeois State and therefore lacks also its efficiency in mediating between bourgeois. It is like a price agreement to which all voluntarily adhere for their own individual benefit. Since, 'in bourgeois production in general, and Imperialist exploitation in particular, an agreement cannot work always for the good of all, it is only a matter of time before the cartel is denounced by some and we see the have-not bourgeois States (Germany and Italy) are outside the cartel, and arrayed against the haves

(France and England), while that bourgeois State (America) whose interests do not lie in the same sphere of Imperialist exploitation, has never joined the cartel. Thus in spite of the bitterest lessons possible to a nation, proving the inefficiency of war as a palliative of slump, it is not possible for States whose forms coercively express bourgeois interests to acknowledge a superior co-ordinating force, which would produce in the international sphere legal machinery like that securing internal order in the State, for this internal machinery is directed against the dangerous exploited class, and in the international sphere there is no dangerous exploited class. Thus the peaceful World Federation of States, the League, becomes part of the bourgeois illusion, and the nations arm themselves still more heavily.

This, then, is the analysis of bourgeois violence. It is not like something that descends from heaven for a time to madden the human race. It is implicit in the bourgeois illusion.

The whole bourgeois economy is built on the violent domination of men by men through the private possession of social capital. It is always there, waiting ready at any moment to flame out in a Peterloo or an Amritsar within the bourgeois State, or a Boer War or Great War outside it.

As long as the bourgeois economy remains a positive constructive force, that violence is hidden. Society does not contain a powerful internal pressure until productive forces have outgrown the system of productive relations. Until this revolutionary pressure develops, it is therefore for coercion to show itself bloodily or on a wide scale.

But when bourgeois economy is riven by its own contradictions, when private profit is seen to be public harm, when poverty and unemployment grow in the midst of the means of plenty, bourgeois violence becomes more open. These contradictions drive the bourgeois States to Imperialistic wars, in which violence reigns without a qualifying factor. Internally violence instead of 'reason' alone suffices to maintain the bourgeois system. Since the capitalistic system is openly proving its inefficiency, people are no longer content with a form of government, parliamentary democracy, in which economic production is run by the bourgeois class, leaving the people as a whole only the power to settle, within narrow limits, through Parliament, the apportionment of a merely administrative budget. They see this to be a sham, and see no reason to tolerate the sham. There is a growing demand for socialism, and the capitalist class where this grows pressing, resort to open violence. They use the revolt against ineffectual democracy to establish a dictatorship, and this dictatorship, which seizes power with the cry 'Down with Capitalism' in fact establishes capitalism still more violently, as in Fascist Italy and Germany. The brutal oppression and cynical violence of Fascism is the summit of bourgeois decline. The violence at the heart of the bourgeois illusion emerges inside as well as outside the State.

The justification of bourgeois violence is an important part of bourgeois ethics. The coercive control of social labour by a limited class is justified as a relation to a thing. Even as late as Hegel, this justification is given quite naively and simply. Just as I go out and break off a stick of wood from the primitive jungle and convert it to my purpose, so the bourgeois is supposed to convert the thing 'capital' to his use. Domination over men is wicked; domination over things is legitimate.

The nature of bourgeois economy made it possible for Hegel to believe this seriously. But when the true nature of bourgeois economy had been analysed by Marx, as a dominating relation over men through ownership of the means of social labour and individual livelihood, how could this naive bourgeois attitude persist? Only by vilifying Marx, by always attacking him violently without explaining his views, and by continuing to teach, preach and practise the old bourgeois theory. It was then that the bourgeois illusion became the bourgeois lie, a conscious deception festering at the heart of bourgeois culture.

Bourgeois ethics include the more difficult task of justification of the violence of bourgeois war. The Christian-bourgeois ethic has been equal even to this. Consonant to the bourgeois illusion, all interference with the liberty of another is wicked and immoral. If one is attacked in one's liberty, one is therefore compelled to defend outraged morality and attack in turn. All bourgeois wars are therefore justified by both parties as wars of defence. Bourgeois liberty includes the right to exercise all bourgeois occupations – alienating, trading, and acquiring for profit – and since these involve establishing dominating relations over others, it is not surprising that the bourgeois often finds himself attacked in his liberty. It is impossible for the bourgeois to exercise his full liberty without infringing the liberty of another. It is impossible therefore to be thoroughly bourgeois and not give occasion for 'just' wars.

Meanwhile bourgeois discomforts generate an opposition to bourgeois violence. At each stage of bourgeois development men could be found who were impregnated with the bourgeois illusion, that man is free and happy only when without social restraints, and who yet found in bourgeois economy multiplying coercions and restraints. We saw why these exist; the bourgeois economy requires coercion and restraint for its very life. The big bourgeois dominates the petit bourgeois, just as both dominate the proletariat. But these early bourgeois rebels could not see this. They demanded a return to the bourgeois dream – 'equal rights for all', 'freedom from social restraints', the 'natural rights' of men. They thought that this would free them from the big bourgeoisie, and give them equal competition once again.

Thus originated the cleavage between conservatives and liberals, between the big bourgeois in possession and the little bourgeois wishing to be in possession. The one sees that his position depends on maintaining things as they are; the other sees

his as depending on more bourgeois freedom, more votes for all, more freedom for private property to be alienated, acquired, and owned, more free competition, less privilege.

The liberal is the active force. But so far from being revolutionary, as he thinks, he is evolutionary. In striving for bourgeois freedom and fair competition he produces by this very action an increase in the social restraints he hates. He builds up the big bourgeoisie in trying to support the little, although he may make himself a big bourgeois in the process. He increases unfairness by trying to secure fairness. Free trade gives birth to tariffs, Imperialism and monopoly, because it is hastening the development of bourgeois economy, and these things are the necessary end of bourgeois development. He calls into being the things he loathes because, as long as he is in the grip of the bourgeois illusion that freedom consists in absence of social planning, he must put himself, by loosening social ties, more powerfully in the grip of coercive social forces.

This 'revolutionary' liberal, this hater of coercion and violence, this lover of free competition, this friend of liberty and human rights, is therefore the very man damned by history not merely to be powerless to stop these things, but to be forced by his own efforts to produce coercion and violence and unfair competition and slavery. He does not merely refrain from opposing bourgeois violence, he generates it, by helping on the development of bourgeois economy.

To-day, as the bourgeois pacifist, he helps to generate the violence, war, and Fascist and Imperialist brutality he hates. In so far as he is a genuine pacifist and not merely a completely muddled man hesitating between the paths of revolution and non-co-operation, his thesis is this, 'I hate violence and war and social oppression, and all these things are due to social relations. I must therefore abstain from social relations. Belligerent and revolutionary alike are hateful to me.'

But to abstain from social relations, is to abstain from life. As long as he draws or earns an income, he participates in bourgeois economy, and upholds the violence which sustains it. He is in sleeping partnership with the big bourgeoisie, and that is the essence of bourgeois economy. If two other countries are at war, he is powerless to intervene and stop them, for that means social co-operation – social co-operation issuing in coercion, like a man separating quarrelling friends and that action is by his definition barred to him. If the big bourgeoisie of his own country decide to go to war and mobilise the coercive forces, physical and moral, of the State, he can do nothing real, for the only real answer is co-operation with the proletariat to resist the coercive action of the big bourgeoisie and oust them from power. If Fascism develops, he cannot suppress it in the bud before it has built up an army to intimidate the proletariat, for he believes in 'free speech'. He can only

watch the workers being bludgeoned and beheaded by the forces he allowed to develop.

His position rests firmly on the bourgeois fallacy. He thinks that man as an individual has power. He does not see that even in the unlikely event of everyone's taking his viewpoint and saying, 'I will passively resist,' his purpose will still not be achieved. For men cannot in fact cease to co-operate, because society's work must be carried on – grain must be reaped, clothes spun, electricity generated or man will perish from the earth. Only his position as a member of a parasitic class could have given him any other illusion. A worker sees that his very life depends on economic co-operation and that this co-operation of itself imposes social relations which in the bourgeois economy must be bourgeois, that is, must in greater or less measure give into the hands of the big bourgeoisie the violent issues of life and death. Passive resistance is not a real programme, but an apology for supporting the old programme. A man either participates in bourgeois economy, or he revolts and tries to establish another economy. Another apparent road is to break up society and return to the jungle, the solution of anarchy. But that is no solution at all. The only real alternative to bourgeois economy is proletarian economy, i.e. socialism, and therefore one either participates in bourgeois economy or is a proletarian revolutionary. The fact that one participates passively in bourgeois economy, that one does not oneself wield the bludgeon or fire the cannon, so far from being a defence really make one's position more disgusting, just as a fence is more unpleasant than a burglar, and a pimp than a prostitute. One lets others do the dirty work, and merely participates in the benefit. The bourgeois pacifist occupies perhaps the most ignoble place of a man in any civilisation. He is the Christian Protestant whose ethics have been made ridiculous by the development of the culture that evolved them; but this does not prevent his deriving complacency from observing them. He sits on the head of the worker and, while the big bourgeois kicks him, advises him to be quiet. When (as did some pacifists during the general strike) he 'maintains essential services' during the 'violent' struggles of the proletariat for freedom, he becomes a portent.

Pacifism, for all its specious moral aspect, is, like Protestant Christianity, the creed of ultra-individualism and selfishness, just as Roman Catholicism is the creed of monopoly and privileged domination. This selfishness is seen in all the defences the bourgeois pacifist makes of his creed.

The first defence is that it is wrong. It is a 'sin' to slay or resort to violence. Christ forbids it. The pacifist who resorts to violence imbrues his soul with heinous guilt. In this conception nothing appears as important but the pacifist's own soul. It is this precious soul of his that he is worrying about, like the good bourgeoisie about her honour which is such an important social asset. Society can go to the devil if his soul is intact. So imbued is he with bourgeois notions of sin, that it never occurs to him

that a preoccupation with one's own soul and one's own salvation is selfish. It may be that a man is right to save his own skin before all that the pacifist above all must prevent the contamination of his precious soul by the mortal sin of violence. But what is this but the translation into spiritual terms of the good old bourgeois rule of laissez-faire and bourgeoisdom – May the devil take the hindmost? It is a spiritual laissez-faire. It is a belief that the interests of society – God's purpose – are best served by not performing any action, however beneficial to others, if it would imperil one's own 'soul'. This is crystallised in the maxim, 'One may not do ill that good may come of it.'

Primitives have a more social conception of sin. Sin is reprehensible because it involves the whole tribe in danger. The sinner flees from the tribe because he has involved it in evil, not in order to save himself; he is damned by his sin. Going into the desert, he slays himself or is slain, thus lifting from the tribe, after it has performed appropriate purifications, the evil in which he has involved it. Both conceptions are bound in error, but this savage conception is nobler and more altruistic than the bourgeois conception in which each man is responsible solely for his own sins, and purifies them by a private resort to the blood of Christ. The pacifist has remembered the saying of Cain: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

This tribal conception of salvation was partly retained in feudal society by the Church, which kept clearly in mind the unity of the Church Militant, the Church Suffering, and the Church Triumphant, each of which, by its prayers, could communicate with or help the others. The feudal Christian prayed for the Holy Souls suffering in Purgatory, expected those living to pray for him when dead, and continually called on the departed members of the tribe, the Triumphant Souls of the Saints in heaven, to help him, to such an extent that, in this strong social grouping, God was almost forgotten. The social unity alone emerges, and individual sin becomes pardoned by the mere act of socialisation, in the confessional.

Thus Catholicism symbolised the social nature of feudalism; the 'tribe' was all Christendom. Its typical act was the Crusade, the violent assault of Christendom on paganism.

Protestantism, the religion of the bourgeoisie, necessarily revolted against tribal Catholicism. As a religion, it 'reformed' all the social elements in Catholicism. It became Catholicism minus the social elements and plus individualism. Authority was abandoned; the priest, the repository of the magic and conscience of the tribe was shorn of his power; the prayers for the dead and to the saints were unindividualistic, therefore purgatory did not exist and the saints were helpless. Each man was to be his own judge, bear his own sin, and work out his own salvation. The notion of individual guilt, as in Bunyan and the Puritans, reached a pitch it had never achieved in Catholic countries. Hence too the new phenomena of 'conversion', in which this intolerable self-induced burden of guilt is thrown into the

bosom of Christ. For man cannot in fact live alone. This conversion was evidence of it; that the individualism of bourgeoisdom is only a facade, and that at the very moment he proclaims it, the individual needs some fictitious entity or Divine Scapegoat on whom he can fling, in a final act of selfishness, the responsibility he never completely bore.

Thus Pacifism, as a method of avoiding the moral guilt of violence, is selfish. The pacifist claims, as a primary duty, the right of saving his own skin. We are not concerned with whether it is ethically right for man to consider himself first. To the bourgeois philosophy, properly expressed, it is so. To another system of social relations it cannot be right. To a third – communism, it is neither right nor wrong, it is impossible, for all individual actions affect others in society. This fact makes the bourgeois inconsistent, and at one moment want to give his life for others and at the next to sacrifice their lives to preserve his soul.

Some pacifists, however, make a different defence. They are not concerned with their own souls. They are only thinking of others. Pacifism is the only way to stop violence and oppression. Violence breeds violence; oppression breeds oppression. How far is this argument well grounded, and not merely a rationalisation of the bourgeois illusion?

No pacifist has yet explained the causal chain by which non-resistance ends violence. It is true that it does so in this obvious way, that if no resistance is made to violent commands, no violence is necessary to enforce them. Thus if A does everything B asks him, it will not be necessary for B to use violence. But a dominating relation of this kind is in essence violent, although violence is not overtly shown. Subjection is subjection, and rapacity rapacity, even if the weakness of the victim, or the fear inspired by the victor, makes the process non-forcible. Non-resistance will not prevent it, any more than the lack of claws on the part of prey prevents carnivores battenning on them. On the contrary, the carnivore selects as his victim animals of the kind. The remedy is the elimination of carnivores, that is, the extinction of classes that live by preying on others.

Another assumption is that man, being what he is, the sight of his defenceless victims will arouse his pity. Now this assumption is not in itself ridiculous, but it needs examination. Is it a historical fact that the defencelessness of his victims has ever aroused man's pity? History records millions of opposite cases, of Tamburlane and his atrocities, Attila and his Huns (checked only by violence), Mohammedan incursions, primitive slayings, the Danes and their monastic massacres. Can anyone in good faith advance the proposition that non-resistance defeats violence? How could slave-owning states exist, if peaceful submission touched the hearts of the conquerors? How could man bear to slaughter perpetually the dumb unresisting races of sheep, swine, and oxen?

Moreover, the argument makes the usual bourgeois error of eternalising its categories, the belief that there is a kind of abstract Robinson Crusoe man of whose actions definite predictions can be made. But how can one seriously subsume under one category Tamburlane, Socrates, a Chinese mandarin, a modern Londoner, an Aztec priest, a Paleolithic hunter, and a Roman galley-slave? There is no abstract man, but men in different networks of social relations, with similar heredities but moulded into different proclivities by education and the constant pressure of social being.

To-day, it is man in bourgeois social relations with whom we are concerned. Of what effect would it be if we no longer resisted violence, if England, for example, at the beginning of the Great War, had Passively permitted Germany to occupy Belgium, and accept without resistance all that Germany wished to do?

There is this much truth in the pacifist argument that a country in a state of bourgeois social relations cannot act like a nomad horde. Bourgeoisdom has discovered that Tamburlane exploitation does not pay so well as bourgeois exploitation. It is of no use to a bourgeois to sweep over a country, to lift all the wine and fair women and gold thereof and sweep out again. The fair women grow old and ugly, the wine is drunk, and the gold avails for nothing but ornaments. That would be Dead Sea fruit in the mouth of bourgeois culture, which lives on an endless diet of profit and a perpetual domination.

Bourgeois culture has discovered that what pays is bourgeois violence. This is more subtle and less overt than Tamburlane violence. Roman violence, which consisted in bringing home not only fair women and gold, but slaves also, and making them work in the household, farms, and mines, occupied a mid-position. Bourgeois culture has discovered that those social relations are most profitable to the bourgeois which do not include rapine and personal slavery, but on the contrary forbid it. Therefore the bourgeois, wherever he has conquered non-bourgeois territory, such as Australia, America, Africa, or India, has imposed bourgeois, not Tamburlane, social relations. In the name of liberty, self-determination, and democracy, or sometimes without these names, they enforce the bourgeois essence, private property, and the ownership of the means of production for profit, and its necessary prerequisite, the free labourer forced to dispose of his labour, for a wage, in the market. This priceless bourgeois discovery has produced material wealth beyond the dreams of a Tamburlane or a Croesus.

Consequently England need have no fear that a victorious Germany would have raped all Englishwomen and beheaded all Englishmen and transported the Elgin marbles to Berlin. Bourgeois States do not do such things. It would have confined itself to taking England's Imperial possessions and completing the profitable task of converting them to full bourgeois social relations. It would also have attempted to

cripple England as a trade competitor by a heavy indemnity. In other words, resist or not, it would, if victorious, have done to England what victorious England did to Germany.

Thus, even if the pacifist dream was realised, bourgeois violence would go on. But in fact it would not be realised. How could a bourgeois coercive State submit to having its source of profits violently taken away by another bourgeois State, and not use all the sources of violence at its disposal to stop it? Would it not rather disrupt the whole internal fabric of its State than permit such a thing? Is bourgeoisdom not now disrupting violently the whole fabric of society, rather than forgo its private profits and give up the system of economy on which it is based? Fascism and Nazism, bloodily treading the road to bankruptcy, are evidence of this. Bourgeois economy, because it is unplanned, will cut its own throat rather than reform, and pacifism is only the expression of this last-ditch stand of bourgeois culture, which will at the best rather do nothing than do the thing that will end the social relations on which it is based.

Have we the courage to realise forcibly our views? What guarantee have we of their truth? The only real guarantee is action. We have the courage to enforce our beliefs upon physical matter, to build up the material substratum of society in houses, roads, bridges, and ships, despite the risk to human life, because our theories, generated by action, are tested in action. Let the bridge fall, the ship sink, the house collapse if we are wrong. We have investigated the causality of nature; let it be proved upon ourselves if we are wrong.

Exactly the same applies to social relations. Bridges have collapsed before now, cultures have mouldered in decay, vast civilisations have foundered, but they did not decay uselessly. From each mistake we have learned something, and the Tamburlane society, the slave-owning society, the feudal society, proved upon the test of action have failed. Yet it has only been partial failure; with each we learned a little more, just as the most recent bridge embodies lessons learned from the collapse of the first. Always the lesson was the same, it was the violence, the dominating relation between master and slave, lord and serf, bourgeois and proletarian, which was the weakness in the bridge.

But the pacifist, like all bourgeois theoreticians, is obsessed with the lazy lust of the absolute. 'Give me,' they all cry, 'absolute truth, absolute justice, some rule-of-thumb standard by which I can evade the strenuous task of finding the features of reality by intimate contact with it in action. Give me some logical talisman, some philosopher's stone, by which I can test all acts in theory and say, this is right. Give me some principle such as, Violence is wrong, so that I can simply refrain from all violent action and know that I am right.' But the only absolute they find is the standard of bourgeois economy. 'Abstain from social action.' Standards are made, not found.

Man cannot live without acting. Even to cease to act, to let things go their own way, is a form of acting, as when I drop a stone that perhaps starts an avalanche. And since man is always acting, he is always exerting force, always altering or maintaining the position of things, always revolutionary or conservative. Existence is the exercise of force on the physical environment and on other men. The web of physical and social relations that binds men into one universe ensures that nothing we do is without its effect on others, whether we vote or cease to vote, whether we help the police or let them go their way, whether we let two combatants fight or separate them forcibly or assist one against the other, whether we let a man starve to death or move heaven and earth to assist him. Man can never rest on the absolute; all acts involve consequences, and it is man's task to find out these consequences, and act accordingly. He can never choose between action and inaction, he can only choose between life and death. He can never absolve himself with the ancient plea, 'My intentions were good', or 'I meant it for the best', or 'I have broken no commandment'. Even savages have a more vital conception than this, with whom an act is judged by its consequences, even as a bridge is judged by its stability. Therefore it is man's task to find out the consequences of acts: which means discovering the laws of social relations, the impulses, causes and effects of history.

Thus it is beside the point to ask the pacifist whether he would have defended Greece from the Persian or his sister from a would-be ravisher. Modern society imposes a different and more concrete issue. Under which banner of violence will he impose himself? The violence of bourgeois relations, or the violence not only to resist them but to end them? Bourgeois social relations are revealing, more and more insistently, the violence of exploitation and dispossession on which they are founded; more and more they harrow man with brutality and oppression. By abstaining from action the pacifist enrolls himself under this banner, the banner of things as they are and getting worse, the banner of the increasing violence and coercion exerted by the haves on the have-nots. He calls increasingly into being the violences of poverty, deprivation, artificial slumps, artistic and scientific decay, fascism, and war.

Or he can enroll himself under the revolutionary banner, of things as they will be. In doing so he accepts the stern necessity that he who is to replace a truth or an institution or a system of social relations, must substitute a better, that he who is to pull down a bridge, however inefficient, must put instead a better bridge. Bourgeois social relations were better perhaps than slave-owning, what can the revolutionary find better than them? And, having found them, how is he to bring them about? For one must not only plan the bridge, one must see how it is to be built, by violence, by force, by blasting the living rock and tugging and sweating at the stones that make it.

Thus, for the negativism of pacifism, which shores up the decaying world and tolerates man's increasing misery, the revolutionary must substitute the positivism of communism. He must forge a new economy adequate to take over bourgeois social relations and purge them of the coercive violence at their heart. But this violence grew from a class relation, the domination of an exploited by an exploiting class. To end this violence means building the classless State. Hating the violence of the bourgeois State, either in peace or war, the revolutionary must produce a society which needs neither violence in peace nor in war. Since it is material reality with which he is dealing, he must see the only path by which bourgeois social relations of violence can be turned into peaceful communist social relations. It is the path of revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, followed by the withering away of the State. If he does not clearly see – as an architect sees the building of foundations, and the transportation of material – this mode of transformation of bourgeois violence into communist peace, his socialism remains an empty dream, he is still at heart a pacifist, a partisan of things as they are, you will still find him in fact, for all his theoretical protestations, enrolled beneath the banner of bourgeois violence, strike-breaking or giving Fascism 'free speech'.

To expropriate the expropriators, to oppose their coercion by that of the workers, to destroy all the instruments of class coercion and exploitation crystallised in the bourgeois State, is the first task. Who can lead the struggle but the exploited, and not only all the exploited but those whose very exploitation has organised them, massed them together, and made them co-operate socially, the proletariat. Since a dispossessed class will fight to the last ditch, while there is hope, how can the transition be affected other than violently, substituting the dictatorship of the proletariat and its necessary forms for the former dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and its characteristic forms?

But whereas the dictatorship of the bourgeois minority perpetuated itself, because the dispossessed class was also the exploited class, the dictatorship of the proletarian majority does not perpetuate itself, for it does not exploit the dispossessed class, but is itself both owner and worker of the means of production. Thus, as the dispossessed class disappears, the dictatorship of the proletariat in all its forms withers away. The pacifist's dream is realised. Violence departs from the world of men. Man at last becomes free.

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