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# I

## Critique of the Declaration of the Rights of Man

1. The history of the freedoms accorded to man has, unto this day, been repeatedly confused with the history of the freedoms accorded by man to the economy.

- a) There are no grounds for anyone to be surprised, upset or made indignant because the freedoms bestowed on men should have been taken away from them, and, having been emptied of their meaning or negated through the use that is made of them, should everywhere have become inaccessible and illusory, even in the very principle of hope that nourishes them.
- b) The upsurge in the rights of man stems from the expansion of free trade. Their decline within democracies and their prohibition by despotic regimes complies with the defensive retreat of an economy whose dominant, time-honoured and static form is in danger of being supplanted by the emergence of a new and dynamic form that was subject to it. It is always thanks to such crises that a society most radically fights for its humanity and becomes most aware of the tutelary and repressive yoke that is the economy of exploitation.

2. The rights of man are no more than specific amplifications of a single right, which is the right to survive merely for the sake of working towards the survival of a totalitarian economy which was imposed untruthfully as the sole means of sustaining the human race.

- a) The rights of man are paid for through the duties determined by an immanent social contract. It compels every individual to settle the bill for his or her aleatory survival, in acceptance of a superior power to which he (or she) is bound by obedience and whose profits it is his task to increase.
- b) The rights of man sanction in a positive form the negation of the rights of the human being. Abstract man is nothing more

than the producer as a substitute for the individual who creates his or her own destiny by recreating the world.

It nonetheless has to be acknowledged that by proclaiming the need, over centuries of inhumane history, for everyone to enjoy some minimum level of subsistence, the rights of man, whether implicitly acknowledged or unequivocally demanded, have vouchsafed that instinct of survival without which no life is possible. Up until the day when it became clear that an inclination for survival would be converted into its opposite unless its outcome was a life led in accordance with humanity.

- c) As the economy of exploitation has spread its grip across the whole of the world, it has achieved a mode of autonomous survival which only requires the reproduction of speculative capital, and which suggests that ultimately men and women can be done without. The exaggerated abstraction of the system produced by man, which slips out of his hands in order to turn against him, casts a heavy threat of death upon the survival of the human race, and upon natural resources, as well as the planet and the economy, which, as a consequence, is doomed to implode.

3. The right to survival, granted to anyone who assumes it 'by the sweat of his brow', acts above all as stay of execution and appeal against the sentence of death pronounced by the economy over those who do not work to swell its might.

- a) Concern for profit was what decreed the first humanitarian law: setting prisoners of war to work, who in the past had been exterminated so as to save the trouble of feeding them and so as to offer up sacrifice to the Gods from whom the community asked for favours. As a replacement for execution, slavery perfectly conveys the truth of the system that promises survival to those who serve it.
- b) The organisation of production and of the distribution of merchandise has turned the producer and the consumer into the beneficiary of their progress and the victim of their confinements. The rights torn from the ruling power by social struggle have ultimately been allowed to man in the abstract by virtue of a constant rebalancing of the laws of profit, the sole fragile parapet against the chaotic torrent that always threatens the market's rationality.

- c) Whenever it protects itself against waste and mess, the market also protects manual workers against the arbitrary nature of the brain workers who rule them.

4 The humanisation of divine right expresses the withering away of the heavenly mandate which was contested by the power of men over their own kind under predominantly agrarian regimes. The setting up of the earthly mandate ratifies the power of the State. It gives a new awareness to the long and bloody march in the course of which the puny creature that was laid in the hands of the Gods gives way to a man, an abstract one of course, since he is torn from his living roots, yet is nonetheless enabled, by the name of citizen, to see himself as untouched by the grip of anything divine, and to invest with his own hopes a society delivered from the tyrannical institution of religions and from the power of any monarch.

- a) The legends of the Golden Age, as well as a good number of utopias, have been fuelled by the obscure memory of pre-agrarian civilisations, where the economy of the gatherer allowed women such a prominent role that it fostered a society in symbiosis with nature, and in which violence had no place other than through occasional recourse to the hunt. The very idea of the Golden Age runs counter to the prevalence of conquering, well-muscled virility in the Bronze and Iron Ages, which embarked upon the rape of women and the earth, and engendered the toiling, warrior race whose stunted remnants have set down, as the final chapter in their history, the infamy of concentration camps and the annihilation of natural resources.
- b) Under the aegis of mercantile logic, the commercial development of the Athenian republic gave rise to a model of democracy which, with all its corruption, racketeering, ostracisms, electoral lying and kowtowing to money, continues to represent the best undertaking in favour of man's enjoying the respect which is owed to merchandise.
- c) If we rule out certain peasant communities which seem originally to have practised some form of collectivist or clan democracy, the earliest charters of freedoms appear during the ferment of uprisings in the communes, from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, which opposed the entrenched

agrarian situation and its parasitical aristocracy with the redoubt of the towns then in full commercial expansion. The air of city freedoms inspired the pre-industrial bourgeoisie to establish a right of recourse against the arbitrariness of the feudal regime, whose predatory parasitism widely hindered the free circulation of merchandise.

When, on 15 June 1215, the great charter of English freedoms, the Magna Carta, proclaimed: 'No free man shall be taken or imprisoned or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we go upon him nor send upon him, except by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land', it confirmed an economic revolution which reckoned on a greater energy and profit from the free man selling his labour to the corporations than from the serf bound to the glebe and forced into wearisome corvées.

- d) The towns and the urban consciousness which arose from free trade remained for a long time under the thumb of the countryside and the rural mentality, moulding their customs to its narrow outlook, reactionary prejudices and religious archaisms. Made keener by the 'Enlightenment' of the cities and by proletarian consciousness, a hatred and contempt for peasant obscurantism and rustic timidity had taken over where the old emancipatory bourgeois consciousness left off.

The monstrous outgrowth of the cities has offered the industrialised business of food production the perfect opportunity to turn the decline of the old countryside to advantage, and to purge fields, meadows and forests on the pretext of feeding global populations. Inspired by the Sicilian Mafia, which came out of peasant divisions and rapacity in the nineteenth century, consortiums exhaust the stocks of the oceans by labour-intensive industrial fishing, just as multinational petrochemical and pharmaceutical businesses ravage nature with over-fertilisation and genetically modified organisms. While, in the grip of a parasitical capitalism, the cities regress into ghettos where fear and hatred of the other emit as acrid a stench as any left by the old rural mentality, in the countryside whatever vigorously lives on, engaged in promoting wholesome natural resources, becomes the guardian of the human consciousness that is bent on forging a non-violent pact with nature.