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THE PEASANTS QUESTION IN GERMAN AND FRANCE

by
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Forgotten Books

Frederick Engels 1894

The Peasant Question in France and Germany

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Engels' *The Peasant Question in France and Germany* was part of the current debate around agrarian issues. Engels wrote it as rebuttal to various French Socialists (like Vollmar) and the agrarian programme adopted in Marseilles in 1892 and supplemented in Nantes in 1894 (Frankfurt Congress of German Social-Democrats). In it, Engels discusses a policy of alliance between the working class and the working peasantry.

Preface

The bourgeois and reactionary parties greatly wonder why everywhere among Socialists the peasant question has now suddenly been placed upon the order of the day. What they should be wondering at, by rights, is that this has not been done long ago. From Ireland to Sicily, from Andalusia to Russia, and Bulgaria, the peasant is a very essential factor of the population, production and political power. Only two regions of Western Europe form an exception. In Great Britain proper, big, landed estates and large-scale agriculture have totally displaced the self-supporting peasant; in Prussia east of the Elbe, the same process has been going on for centuries; here, too, the peasant is being increasingly "turned out", or at least economically and politically forced into the background.

The peasant has so far largely manifested himself as a factor of political power only by his apathy, which has its roots in the isolation of rustic life. This apathy on the part of the great mass of the population is the strongest pillar not only of the parliamentary corruption in Paris and Rome but also Russian despotism. Yet it is by no means insuperable. Since the rise of the working-class movement in Western Europe, particularly in those parts where small peasant holdings predominate, it has not been particularly difficult for the bourgeoisie to render the socialist workers suspicious and odious in the minds of the peasants as *partageux*, as people who want to "divide up", as lazy, greedy, city dwellers who have an eye on the property of the peasants. The hazy socialist aspirations of the revolution of February 1848 were rapidly disposed of by the reactionary ballots of the French peasantry; the peasant, who wanted peace of mind, dug up from his treasured memories the legend of Napoleon, the emperor of the

peasants, and created the Second Empire. We all know what this one feat of the peasants cost the people of France; it is still suffering from its aftermath.

But much has changed since then. The development of the capitalist form of production has cut the life-strings of small production in agriculture; small production is irretrievably going to rack and ruin. Competitors in North and South America and in India have swamped the European market with their cheap grain, so cheap that no domestic producer can compete with it. The big landowners and small peasants alike can see ruin staring them in the face. And since they are both owners of land and country folk, the big landowners assume the role of champions of the interests of the small peasants, and the small peasants by and large accept them as such.

Meanwhile, a powerful socialist workers' party has sprung up and developed in the West. The obscure presentiments and feelings dating back to the February Revolution have become clarified and acquired the broader and deeper scope of a programme that meets all scientific requirements and contains definite tangible demands; and a steadily growing number of Socialist deputies fight for these demands in the German, French, and Belgian parliaments. The conquest of political power this party must first go from the towns to the country, must become a power in the countryside. This party, which has an advantage over all others in that it possesses a clear insight into the interconnections between economic causes and political effects and long ago descried the wolf in the sheep's clothing of the big landowner, that importunate friend of the peasant — may this party calmly leave the doomed peasant in the hands of his false protectors until he has been transformed from a passive into an active opponent of the industrial workers? This brings us right into the thick of the peasant question.

Part 1: France

The rural population in which we can address ourselves consists of quite different parts, which vary greatly with the various regions.

In the west of Germany, as in France and Belgium, there prevails the small-scale cultivations of small-holding peasants, the majority of whom own and the minority of whom rent their parcels of land.

In the northwest — in Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein — we have a preponderance of big and middle peasants who cannot do without male and female farm servants and even day labourers. The same is true of part of Bavaria.

In Prussia east of the Elbe, and in Mecklenburg, we have the regions of big landed estates and large-scale cultivation with hinds, cotters, and day laborers, and in between small and middle peasants in relatively unimportant and steadily decreasing proportion.

In central Germany, all of these forms of production and ownership are found mixed in various proportions, depending upon the locality, without the decided prevalence of any particular form over a large area.

Besides, there are localities varying in extent where the arable land owned or rented is insufficient to provide for the subsistence of the family, but can serve only as the basis for operating a domestic industry and enabling the latter to pay the otherwise incomprehensibly low wages that ensure the steady sale of its products despite all foreign competition.

Which of these subdivisions of the rural population can be won over by the Social-Democratic party? We, of course, investigate this question only in broad outline; we single out only clear-forms. We lack space to give consideration in intermediate stages and mixed rural populations.

Let us begin with the small peasant. Not only is he, of all peasants, the most important for Western Europe in general, but he is also the critical case that decides the entire question. Once we have clarified in our minds our attitude to the small peasant, we have all the data needed to determine our stand relative to the other constituent parts of the rural population.

By small peasant we mean here the owners or tenant — particularly the former — of a patch of land no bigger, as a rule, than he and his family can till, and no smaller than can sustain the family. This small peasant, just like the small handicraftsman, is therefore a toiler who differs from the modern proletarian in that he still possesses his instruments of labor; hence, a survival of a past mode of production. There is a threefold difference between him and his ancestor, the serf, bondman, or, quite exceptionally, the free peasant liable to rent and feudal services. First, in that the French Revolution freed him from feudal services and dues that he owed to the landlord and, in the majority of cases, at least on the left bank of the Rhine, assigned his peasant farm to him as his own free property.

Secondly, in that he lost the protection of, and the right to participate in, the self-administering Mark community, and hence his share in the emoluments of the former common Mark. The common Mark was whisked away partly by the erstwhile feudal lord and partly by enlightened bureaucratic legislation patterned after Roman law. This deprives the small peasant of modern times

of the possibility of feeding his draft animals without buying fodder. Economically, however, the loss of the emoluments derived from the Mark by far outweighs the benefits accruing from the abolition of feudal services. The number of peasants unable to keep draft animals of their own is steadily increasing.

Thirdly, the peasant of today has lost half of his former productive activity. Formerly, he and his family produced, from raw material he had made himself, the greater part of the industrial products that he needed; the rest of what he required was supplied by village neighbors who plied a trade in addition to farming and were paid mostly in articles of exchange or in reciprocal services. The family, and still more the village, was self-sufficient, produced almost everything it needed. It was natural economy almost unalloyed; almost no money was necessary. Capitalist production put an end to this by its money economy and large-scale industry. But if the Mark emoluments represented one of the basic conditions of his existence, his industrial side line was another. And thus the peasant sinks ever lower. Taxes, crop failures, divisions of inheritance and litigations drive one peasant after another into the arms of the usurer; the indebtedness becomes more and more general and steadily increases in amount in each case — in brief, our small peasant, like every other survival of a past mode of production, is hopelessly doomed. He is a future proletarian.

As such, he ought to lend a ready ear in socialist propaganda. But he is prevented from doing so for the time being by his deep-rooted sense of property. The more difficult it is for him to defend his endangered patch of land, the more desperately he clings to it, the more he regards the Social-Democrats, who speak of transferring landed property to the whole of society, as just as dangerous a foe as the usurer and lawyer. How is Social-

Democracy to overcome this prejudice? What can is offer to the doomed small peasant without becoming untrue to itself?

Here we find a practical point of support in the agrarian programme of the French Socialists of the Marxian trend, a programme which is the more noteworthy as it comes from the classical land of small-peasant economy.

The Marseilles Congress of 1892 adopted the first agrarian programme of the Party. It demands for propertyless rural *workers* (that is to say, day laborers and hinds): minimum wages fixed by trade unions and community councils; rural trade courts consisting half of workers; prohibition of the sale of common lands; and the leasing of public domain lands to communities which are to rent all this land, whether owned by them or rented, to associations of propertyless families of farm laborers for common cultivation, on conditions that the employment of wage-workers be prohibited and that the communities exercise control; old-age and invalid pensions, to be defrayed by means of a special tax on big landed estates.

For the *small peasants*, with special consideration for tenant farmers, purchase of machinery by the community to be leased at cost price to the peasants; the formation of peasant co-operatives for the purchase of manure, drain-pipes, seed, etc., and for the sale of the produce; abolition of the real estate transfer tax if the value involved does not exceed 5,000 francs; arbitration commissions of the Irish pattern to reduce exorbitant rentals and compensate quitting tenant farmers and sharecroppers (me'tayers) for appreciation of the land due to them; repeal of article 2102 of the Civil Code which allows a landlord to on the distraint crop, and the abolition of the right of creditors to levy on growing crops; exemption from levy and distraint of a definite amount of farm

implements and of the crop, seed, manure, draft animals, in shirt, whatever is indispensable to the peasant for carrying on his business; revision of the general cadastre, which has long been out of date, and until such time a local revision in each community; lastly, free instruction in farming, and agricultural experimental stations.

As we see, the demands made in the interests of the peasants — those made in the interests of the workers do not concern us here, for the time being — are not very far-reaching. Part of them has already been realised elsewhere. The tenants' arbitration courts follow the Irish prototype by express mention. Peasant co-operatives already exist in the Rhine provinces. The revision of the cadastre has been a constant pious wish of all liberals, and even bureaucrats, throughout Western Europe. The other points, too, could be carried into effect without any substantial impairment of the existing capitalist order. So much simply in characterisation of the programme. No reproach is intended; quite the contrary.

The Party did such a good business with this programme among the peasants in the most diverse parts of France that — since appetite comes with eating — one felt constrained to suit it still more to their taste. It was felt, however, that this would be treading on dangerous ground. How was the peasant to be helped — not the peasant as a future proletarian, but as a present propertied peasant — without violating the basic principles of the general socialist programme? In order to meet this objection, the new practical proposals were prefaced by a theoretical preamble, which seeks to prove that it is in keeping with the principles of socialism to protect small-peasant property from destruction by the capitalist mode of production, although one is perfectly aware that this destruction is inevitable. Let us now examine more closely

this preamble as well as the demands themselves, which were adopted by the Nantes Congress in September of this year.

The preamble begins as follows:

> Whereas according to the terms of the general programme of the Party producers can be free only in so far as they are in possession of the means of production;
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> Whereas in the sphere of industry these means of production have already reached such a degree of capitalist centralisation that they can be restored to the producers only in the collective or social form, but in the sphere of agriculture — at least in present-day France — this is by no means the case, the means of production, namely, the land, being in very many localities still in the hands of the individual producers themselves as their individuals possession;
>
> Whereas even if this state of affairs characterized by small-holding ownership is irretrievably doomed (est fatalement appete' a dispaitre), still it is not for socialism to hasten its doom, as its task does not consist in separating property from labor but, on the contrary, in uniting both of these factors of all production by placing them in the same hands, factors the separation of which entails the servitude and poverty of the workers reduced to proletarians;
>
> Whereas, on the one hand, it is the duty of socialism to put the agricultural proletarians again in possession — collective or social in form — of the great domains after expropriating their present idle ownership, it is, on the other hand, on less its imperative duty to maintain the peasants themselves tilling their patches of land in possession of the same as against the fisk, the usurer, and the encroachments of the newly-arisen big landowners;
>
> Whereas it is expedient to extend this protection also to the producers who as tenants or sharecroppers (me'tayers) cultivate the land owned by others and who, if they exploit day laborers, are to a certain extent compelled to do so because of the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected —
>
> Therefore the Workers' Party — which unlike the anarchists does not count on an increase and spread of poverty for the transformation of the social order but expects labor and society in general to be emancipated only by the organisation and concerted efforts of the workers of both country and town, by their taking possession of the government and legislation — has adopted the following agrarian programme in order thereby to bring together all the elements of rural production, all occupations which by

> virtue of various rights and titles utilise the national soil, to wage an identical struggle against the common for: the feudality of landownership.

Now, for a closer examination of these "whereases".

To being with, the statement in the French programme that freedom of the producers presupposes the possession of the means of production must be supplemented by those immediately following: either as individual possession, which form never and nowhere existed for the producers in general, and is daily being made more impossible by industrial progress; or as common possession, a form the material and intellectual preconditions of which have been established by the development of capitalist society itself; that therefore taking *collective* possession of the means of production must be fought for by all means at the disposal of the proletariat.

The common possession of the means of production is thus set forth here as the sole principal goal to be striven for. Not only in industry, where the ground has already been prepared, but in general, hence also in agriculture. According to the programme, individual possession never and nowhere obtained generally for all producers; for that very reason, and because industrial progress removes it anyhow, socialism is not interested in maintaining but rather in removing it; because where it exists and in so far as it exists it makes common possession impossible. Once we cite the programme in support of our contention, we must cite the entire programme, which considerably modifies the proposition quoted in Nantes; for it makes the general historical truth expressed in it dependent upon the conditions under which alone it can remain a truth today in Western Europe and North America.

Possession of the means of production by the individual producers nowadays no longer grants these producers real freedom.

Handicraft has already been ruined in the cities; in metropolises like London, it has already disappeared entirely, having been superseded by large-scale industry, the sweatshop system and miserable bunglers who thrive on bankruptcy. The self-supporting small peasant is neither in the safe possession of his tiny patch of land, nor is he free. He, as well as his house, his farmstead, and his new fields, belong to the usurer; his livelihood is more uncertain than that of the proletarian, who at least does have tranquil days now and then, which is never the case with the eternally tortured debt slave. Strike out Article 2102 of the Civil Code, provide by law that a definite amount of a peasant's farm implements, cattle, etc., shall be exempt from levy and distraint; yet you cannot ensure him against an emergency in which he is compelled to sell his cattle "voluntarily", in which he must sign himself away, body and soul, to the usurer and be glad to get a reprieve. Your attempt to protect the small peasant in his property does not protect his liberty but only the particular form of his servitude; it prolongs a situation in which he can neither live nor die. It is, therefore, entirely out of place here to cite the first paragraph of your programme as authority for your contention.

The preamble states that in present-day France, the means of production — that is, the land — is in very many localities still in the hands of individual producers as their individual possession; that, however, it is not the task of socialism to separate property from labor, but, on the contrary, to unite these two factors of all production by placing them in the same hands. As has already been pointed out, the latter in this general form is by no means the task of socialism. Its task is, rather, only to transfer the means of production to the producers as their *common possession*. As soon as we lose sight of this, the above statement becomes directly misleading in that it implies that it is the mission of socialism to convert the present sham property of the small peasant in his fields

into real property — that is to say, to convert the small tenant into an owner and the indebted owner into a debtless owner. Undoubtedly, socialism is interested to see that the false semblance of peasant property should disappear, but not in this manner.

At any rate, we have now got so far that the preamble can straightforwardly declare it to be the duty of socialism, indeed, its imperative duty,

> "to maintain the peasants themselves tilling their patches of land in possession of the same as against the fisk, the usurer and the encroachments of the newly-arisen big landowners."

The preamble thus imposes upon socialism the imperative duty to carry out something which it had declared to be impossible in the preceding paragraph. It charges it to "maintain" the small-holding ownership of the peasants although it itself states that this form of ownership is "irretrievably doomed". What are the fisk, the usurer, and the newly-arisen big landowners if not the instruments by means of which capitalist production brings about this inevitable doom? What means "socialism" is to employ to protect the peasant against this trinity, we shall see below.

But not only the small peasant is to be protected in his property. It is likewise

> "expedient to extend this protection also to the producers who, as tenants or sharecroppers (Metayers), cultivate the land owned by others and who, if they exploit day laborers, are to a certain extent compelled to do so because of the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected".

Here, we are entering upon ground that is passing strange. Socialism is particularly opposed to the exploitation of wage labor. And here it is declared to be the imperative duty of socialism to

protect the French tenants when they "exploit day laborers", as the text literally states! And that because they are compelled to do so to a certain by "the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected"!

How easy and pleasant it is to keep on coasting once you are on the toboggan slide! When now the big and middle peasants of Germany come to ask the French Socialists to intercede with the German Party Executive to get the German Social-Democratic Party to protect them in the exploitation of their male and female farm servants, citing in support of the contention the "exploitation to which they themselves are subjected" by usurers, tax collectors, grain speculators and cattle dealers, what will they answer? What guarantee have they that our agrarian big landlords will not send them Count Kanitz (as he also submitted a proposal like theirs, providing for a state monopoly of grain importation) and likewise ask for socialist protection of their exploitation of the rural workers, citing in support "the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected" by stock-jobbers, money lender, and grain speculators?

Let us say here, at the outset, that the intentions of our French friends are not as bad as one would suppose. The above sentence, we are told, is intended to cover only a quite special case — namely, the following: In Northern France, just as in our sugar-beet districts, land is leased to the peasants subject to the obligation to cultivate beets, on conditions which are extremely onerous. They must deliver the beets to a state factory at a price fixed by it, must but definite seed, use a fixed quantity of prescribed fertilizer, and on delivery are badly cheated into t he bargain. We know all about this in Germany, as well. But,if this sort of peasant is to be taken under one's wing, this must be said openly and expressly. As the sentence reads now, in its unlimited

general form, it is a direct violation not only of the French programme, but also of the fundamental principle of socialism in general, and its authors will have no cause for complaint if this careless piece of editing is used against them in various quarters to their intention.

Also capable of such misconstruction are the concluding words of the preamble according to which it is the task of the Socialist Workers' Party

> "to bring together all the elements of rural production, all occupations which, by virtue of various rights and titles, utilize the national soil, to wage an identical struggle against the common foe: the feudality of landownership".

I flatly deny that the socialist workers' party of any country is charged with the task of taking into its fold, in addition to the rural proletarians and the small peasants, also the idle and big peasants and perhaps even the tenants of the big estates, the capitalist cattle breeders and other capitalist exploiters of the national soil. To all of them, the feudality of landownership may appear to be a common foe. On certain questions, we may make common cause with them and be able to fight side by side with them for definite aims. We can use in our Party individuals from every class of society, but have no use whatever for any groups representing capitalist, middle-bourgeois,or middle-peasant interests. Here, too, what they mean is not as bad as it looks. The authors evidently never even gave all this a thought. But unfortunately they allowed themselves to be carried away by their zeal for generalization and they must not be surprised if they are taken at their word.

After the preamble come the newly-adopted addenda to the programme itself. They betray the same cursory editing as the preamble.

The article providing that the communities must procure farming machinery and lease it at cost to the peasants is modified so as to provide that the communities are, in the first place, to receive state subsidies for this purpose and, secondly, that the machinery is to be placed at the disposal of the small peasants gratis. This further concession will not be of much avail to the small peasants, whose fields and mode of production permit of but little use of machinery.

Furthermore,

> "substitution of a single progressive tax on all incomes upward of 3,000 francs for all existing direct and indirect taxes".

A similar demand has been included for many years in almost every Social-Democratic programme. But that this demand is raised in the special interests of the small peasants is something new and shows only how little its real scope has been calculated. take Great Britain. There the state budget amounts to 90 million pounds sterling, of which 13.5 to 14 million are accounted for by the income tax. The smaller part of the remaining 76 million is contributed by taxing business (post and telegraph charges, stamp tax), but by far the greater part of it by imposts on articles of mass consumption, by the constantly repeated clipping of small, imperceptible amounts totalling many millions from the incomes of all members of the population, but particularly of tis poorer sections. In present-day society, it is scarcely possible to defray state expenditures in any other way. Suppose the whole 90 million are saddled in Great Britain on the incomes of 120 pounds sterling = 3,000 francs and in excess thereof by the imposition of a progressive direct tax. The average annual accumulation, the annual increase of the aggregate national wealth, amounted in 1865 to 1875, according to Giffen, to 240 million pounds sterling. Let us assume it now equals 200 million annually; a tax burden of 90 million would consume almost one-third of the aggregate

accumulation. In other words, no government except a Socialist one can undertake any such thing. When the Socialists are at the helm there will be things for them to carry into execution alongside of which that tax reform will figure as a mere, and quite insignificant, settlement for the moment while altogether different prospects open up before the small peasants.

One seems to realize that the peasant will have to wait rather long for this tax reform so that "in the meantime" (en attendant) the following prospect is held out to them:

> "Abolition of taxes on land for all peasants living by their own labor, and reduction of these taxes on all mortgaged plots."

The latter half of this demand can refer only to peasant farms *too big* to be operated by the family itself; hence, it is again a provision in favor of peasants who "exploit day laborers".

Again:

> "Hunting and fishing rights without restrictions other than such as may be necessary for the conservation of game and fish and the protection of growing crops."

This sounds very popular, but the concluding part of the sentence wipes out the introductory part. How many rabbits, partridges, pikes, and carps, are there even today per peasant family in all rural localities? Would you say more than would warrant giving each peasant jut *one* day a year for free hunting and fishing?

> "Lowering of the legal and conventional rate of interest" —

hence, renewed usury laws, a renewed attempt to introduce a police measure that has always filed everywhere for the last two thousand years. If a small peasant finds himself in a position where recourse to a usurer is the lesser evil to him, the usurer will always find ways and means of sucking him dry without falling foul of the usury laws. This measure could serve at most to soothe the small peasant, but he will derive no advantage from it; on the

contrary, it makes it more difficult for him to obtain credit precisely when he needs it most.

> "Medical service free of charge and medicines at cost price" —

this at any rate is not a measure for the special protection of the peasants. The German programme goes further and demands that medicine too should be free of charge.

"Compensation for families of reservists called up for military duty for the duration of their service" —

this already exists, though most inadequately, in Germany and Austria and is likewise no special peasant demand.

> "Lowering of the transport charges for fertilizer and farm machinery and products"

is on the whole in effect in Germany, and mainly in the interest — of the big landowners.

> "Immediate preparatory work for the elaboration of a plan of public works for the amelioration of the soil and the development of agricultural production" —

leaves everything in the realm of uncertitude and beautiful promises and is also above all in the interest of the big landed estates.

In brief, after the tremendous theoretical effort exhibited in the preamble, the practical proposals of the new agrarian programme are even more unrevealing as to the way in which the French Workers' Party expects to be able to maintain the small peasants in possession of their small holdings, which, on its own territory, are irretrievably doomed.

Part 2: Germany

In one point our French comrades are absolutely right: No lasting revolutionary transformation is possible in France *against* the will of the small peasant. Only, it seems to me, they have not got the right leverage if they mean to bring the peasant under their influence.

They are bent, it seems, to win over the small peasant forthwith, possibly even for the next general elections. This they can hope to achieve only by making very risky general assurances in defence of which they are compelled to set forth even much more risky theoretical considerations. Then, upon closer examination, it appears that the general assurances are self-contradictory (promise to maintain a state of affairs which, as one declares oneself, is irretrievably doomed) and that the various measures are either wholly without effect (usury laws), or are general workers' demands or demands which also benefit the big land-owners or finally are such as are of no great importance by any means in promoting the interests of the small peasants. In consequence, the directly practical part of the programme of itself corrects the erroneous initial part and reduces the apparently formidable grandiloquence of the preamble to actually innocent proportions.

Let us say it outright: in view of the prejudices arising out of their entire economic position, their uprising and their isolated mode of life, prejudices nurtured by the bourgeois press and the big land-owners, we can win the mass of the small peasants forthwith only if we can make them a promise which we ourselves know we shall not be able to keep. That is, we must promise them not only to protect their property in any event against all economic forces sweeping upon them, but also to relieve them of the burdens which

already now oppress them: to transform the tenant into a free owner and to pay the debts of the owner succumbing to the weight of his mortgage. If we could do this, we should again arrive at the point from which the present situation would necessarily develop anew. We shall not have emancipated the peasant but only given him a reprieve.

But it is not in our interests to win the peasant overnight, only to lose him again on the morrow if we cannot keep our promise. We have no more use for the peasant as a Party member, if he expects us to perpetuate his property in his small holding, than for the small handicraftsman who would fain be perpetuated as a master. These people belong to the anti-Semites. Let them go to the anti-Semites and obtain from the latter the promise to salvage their small enterprises. Once they learn there what these glittering phrases really amount to, and what melodies are fiddled down from the anti-Semitic heavens, they will realize in ever-increasing measure that we who promise less and look for salvation in entirely different quarters are after all more reliable people. If the French had the strident anti-Semitic demagogy we have, they would hardly have committed the Nantes mistake.

What, then, is our attitude towards the small peasantry? How shall we have to deal with it on the day of our accession to power?

To begin with, the French programme is absolutely correct in stating: that we foresee the inevitable doom of the small peasant, but that it is not our mission to hasten it by any interference on our part.

Secondly, it is just as evident that when we are in possession of state power, we shall not even think of forcibly expropriating the small peasants (regardless of whether with or without compensation), as we shall have to do in the case of the big

landowners. Our task relative to the small peasant consists, in the first place, in effecting a transition of his private enterprise and private possession to cooperative ones, not forcibly but by dint of example and the proffer of social assistance for this purpose. And then, of course, we shall have ample means of showing to the small peasant prospective advantages that must be obvious to him even today.

Almost 20 years ago, the Danish Socialists, who have only *one* real city in their country — Copenhagen — and therefore have to rely almost exclusively on peasant propaganda outside of it, were already drawing up such plans. The peasants of a village or parish — there are many big individual homesteads in Denmark — were to pool their land to form a single big farm i order to cultivate it for common account and distribute the yield in proportion to the land, money, and labor contributed. In Denmark, small landed property plays only a secondary role. But, if we apply this idea to a region of small holdings, we shall find that if these are pooled and the aggregate area cultivated on a large scale, part of the labor power employed hitherto is rendered superfluous. It is precisely this saving of labor that represents one of the main advantages of large-scale farming. Employment can be found for this labor in two ways. Either additional land taken from big estates in the neighborhood is placed at the disposal of the peasant co-operative, or the peasants in question are provided with the means and the opportunity of engaging in industry as an accessory calling, primarily and as far as possible for their own use. In either case, their economic position is improved and simultaneously the general social directing agency is assured the necessary influence to transform the peasant co-operative to a higher form, and to equalize the rights and duties of the co-operative as a whole as well as of its individual members with those of the other departments of the entire community. How this is to be carried out

in practice in each particular case will depend upon the circumstance of the case and the conditions under which we take possession of political power. We may, thus, possibly be in a position of offer these co-operatives yet further advantages: assumption of their entire mortgage indebtedness by the national bank with a simultaneous sharp reduction of the interest rate; advances from public funds for the establishment of large-scale production (to be made not necessarily or primarily in money but in the form of required products: machinery, artificial fertilizer, etc.), and other advantages.

The main point is, and will be, to make the peasants understand that we can save, preserve their houses and fields for them only by transforming them into co-operative property operated co-operatively. It is precisely the individual farming conditioned by individual ownership that drives the peasants to their doom. If they insist on individual operation, they will inevitably be driven from house and home and their antiquated mode of production superseded by capitalist large-scale production. That is how the matter stands. Now, we come along and offer the peasants the opportunity of introducing large-scale production themselves, not for account of the capitalists but for their own, common account. Should it really be impossible to make the peasants understand that this is in their own interest, that it is the sole means of their salvation?

Neither now, nor at any time in the future, can we promise the small-holding peasants to preserve their individual property and individual enterprise against the overwhelming power of capitalist production. We can only promise then that we shall not interfere in their property relations by force, against their will. Moreover, we can advocate that the struggle of the capitalists and big landlords against the small peasants should be waged from now on with a

minimum of unfair means and that direct robbery and cheating, which are practiced only too often, be as far as possible prevented. In this we shall succeed only in exceptional cases. Under the developed capitalist mode of production, nobody can tell where honesty ends and cheating begins. But always it will make a considerable difference whether public authority is on the side of the cheater or the cheated. We, of course, are decidedly on the side of the small peasant; we shall do everything at all permissible to make his lot more bearable, to facilitate his transition to the co-operative should he decide to do so, and even to make it possible for him to remain on his small holding for a protracted length of time to think the matter over, should he still be unable to bring himself to this decision. We do this not only because we consider the small peasant living by his own labor as virtually belonging to us, but also in the direct interest of the Party. The greater the number of peasants whom we can save from being actually hurled down into the proletariat, whom we can win to our side while they are still peasants, the more quickly and easily the social transformation will be accomplished. It will serve us nought to wait with this transformation until capitalist production has developed everywhere to its utmost consequences, until the last small handicraftsman and the last small peasant have fallen victim to capitalist large-scale production. The material sacrifice to be made for this purpose in the interest of the peasants and to be defrayed out of public funds can, from the point of view of capitalist economy, be viewed only as money thrown away, but it is nevertheless an excellent investment because it will effect a perhaps tenfold saving in the cost of the social reorganization in general. In this sense, we can, therefore, afford to deal very liberally with the peasants. This is not the place to go into details, to make concrete proposals to that end; here we can deal only with general principles.

Accordingly, we can do no greater disservice to the Party as well as to the small peasants than to make promises that even only create the impression that we intend to preserve the small holdings permanently. It would mean directly to block the way of the peasants to their emancipation and to degrade the Party to the level of rowdy anti-Semitism. On the contrary, it is the duty of our Party to make clear to the peasants again and again that their position is absolutely hopeless as long as capitalism holds sway, that it is absolutely impossible to preserve their small holdings for them as such, that capitalist large-scale production is absolutely sure to run over their impotent antiquated system of small production as a train runs over a pushcart. If we do this, we shall act in conformity with the inevitable trend of economic development, and this development will not fail to bring our words home to the small peasants.

Incidentally, I cannot leave this subject without expressing my conviction that the authors of the Nantes programme are also essentially of my opinion. Their insight is much too great for them not to know that areas now divided into small holdings are also bound to become common property. They themselves admit that small-holding ownership is destined to disappear. The report of the National Council drawn up by Lafargue and delivered at the Congress of Nantes likewise fully corroborates this view. It has been published in German in the Berlin *Sozialdemokrat* of October 18 of this year. The contradictory nature of the expressions used in the Nantes programme itself betrays the fact what the authors actually say is not what they want to say. If they are not understood and their statements misused, as has already happened, that is of course their own fault. At any rate, they will have to elucidate their programme and the next French congress revise it thoroughly.

We now come to the bigger peasants. Here as a result of the division of inheritance as well as indebtedness and forced sales of land we find a variegated pattern of intermediate stages, from small-holding peasant to big peasant proprietor, who has retained his old patrimony intact or even added to it. Where the middle peasant lives among small-holding peasants, his interests and views will not differ greatly from theirs; he knows, from his own experience, how many of his kind have already sunk to the level of small peasants. But where middle and big peasants predominate and the operation of the farms requires, generally, the help of male and female servants, it is quite a different matter. Of course a workers' party has to fight, in the first place, on behalf of the wage-workers — that is, for the male and female servantry and the day laborers. It is unquestionably forbidden to make any promises to the peasants which include the continuance of the wage slavery of the workers. But, as long as the big and middle peasants continue to exist, as such they cannot manage without wage-workers. If it would, therefore, be downright folly on our part to hold out prospects to the small-holding peasants of continuing permanently to be such, it would border on treason were we to promise the same to the big and middle peasants.

We have here again the parallel case of the handicraftsmen in the cities. True, they are more ruined than the peasants, but there still are some who employ journeymen in addition to apprentices, or for whom apprentices do the work of journeymen. Let those of these master craftsmen who want to perpetuate their existence as such cast in their lot with the anti-Semites until they have convinced themselves that they get no help in that quarter either. The rest, who have realized that their mode of production is inevitably doomed, are coming over to us and, moreover, are ready in future to share the lot that is in store for all other workers. The same applies to the big and middle peasants. It goes without

saying that we are more interested in their male and female servants and day laborers than in them themselves. If these peasants want to be guaranteed the continued existence of their enterprises, we are in no position whatever to assure them of that. They must then take their place among the anti-Semites, peasant leaguers, and similar parties who derive pleasure from promising everything and keeping nothing. We are economically certain that the big and middle peasants must likewise inevitably succumb to the competition of capitalist production, and the cheap overseas corn, as is proved by the growing indebtedness and the everywhere evident decay of these peasants as well. We can do nothing against this decay except recommend here too the pooling of farms to form co-operative enterprises, in which the exploitation of wage labor will be eliminated more and more, and their gradual transformation into branches of the great national producers' co-operative with each branch enjoying equal rights and duties can be instituted. If these peasants realize the inevitability of the doom of their present mode of production and draw the necessary conclusions they will come to us and it will be incumbent upon us to facilitate, to the best of our ability, also their transition to the changed mode of production. Otherwise, we shall have to abandon them to their fate and address ourselves to their wage-workers, among whom we shall not fail to find sympathy. Most likely, we shall be able to abstain here as well from resorting to forcible expropriation, and as for the rest to count on future economic developments making also these harder pates amenable to reason.

Only the big landed estates present a perfectly simple case. Here, we are dealing with undisguised capitalist production and no scruples of any sort need restrain us. Here, we are confronted by rural proletarians in masses and our task is clear. As soon as out Party is in possession of political power, it has simply to

expropriate the big landed proprietors, just like the manufacturers in industry. Whether this expropriation is to be compensated for or not will, to a great extent, depend not upon us but the circumstances under which we obtain power, and particularly upon the attitude adopted by these gentry, the big landowners, themselves. We by no mens consider compensation as impermissible in any event; Marx told me (and how many times!) that, in his opinion, we would get off cheapest if we could buy out the whole lot of them. But, this does not concern us here. The big estates, thus restored to the community, are to be turned over by us to the rural workers who are already cultivating them and are to be organized into co-operatives. They are to be assigned to them for their use and benefit under the control of the community. Nothing can as yet be stated as to the terms of their tenure. At any rate, the transformation of the capitalist enterprise into a social enterprise is here fully prepared for and can be carried into execution overnight, precisely as in Mr. Krupp's or Mr. von Stumm's factory. And the example of these agricultural co-operatives would convince also the last of the still resistant small-holding peasants, and surely also many big peasants, of the advantages of co-operative, large-scale production.

Thus, we can open up prospects here before the rural proletarians as splendid as those facing the industrial workers, and it can be only a question of time, and of only a very short time, before we win over to our side the rural workers of Prussia east of the Elbe. But once we have the East-Elbe rural workers, a different wind will blow at once all over Germany. The actual semi-servitude of the East-Elbe rural workers is the main basis of the domination of Prussian Junkerdom and thus of Prussia's specific overlordship in Germany. It is the Junkers east of the Elbe who have created and preserved the specifically Prussian character of the bureaucracy as well as of the body of army officers — the Junkers, who are being

reduced more and more to ruin by their indebtedness, impoverishment, and parasitism, at state and private cost and for that very reason cling the more desperately to the dominion which they exercise; the Junkers, whose haughtiness, bigotry, and arrogance, have brought the German Reich of the Prussian nation [3] within the country into such hatred — even when every allowance is made for the fact that at present this Reich is inevitable as the sole form in which national unity can now be attained — and abroad so little respect despite its brilliant victories. The power of these Junkers is grounded on the fact that within the compact territory of the seven old Prussian provinces — that is, approximately one-third of the entire territory of the Reich — they have at their disposal the landed property, which here brings with it both social and political power. And not only the landed property but, through their beet-sugar refineries and liquor distilleries, also the most important industries of this area. Neither the big landowners of the rest of Germany nor the big industrialists are in a similarly favorable positions. Neither of them have a compact kingdom at their disposal. Both are scattered over a wide stretch of territory and complete among themselves and with other social elements and compete among themselves and with other social elements surrounding them for economic and political predominance. But, the economic foundation of this domination of the Prussian Junkers is steadily deteriorating. Here, too, indebtedness and impoverishment are spreading irresistibly, despite all state assistance (and since Frederick II, this item is included in every regular Junker budget). Only the actual semi-serfdom sanctioned by law and custom and the resulting possibility of the unlimited exploitation of the rural workers, still barely keep the drowning Junkers above water. Sow the seed of Social-Democracy among these workers, give them the courage and cohesion to insist upon their rights, and the glory of the Junkers will be put to an end. The great reactionary power, which

to Germany represents the same barbarous, predatory element as Russian tsardom does to the whole of Europe, will collapse like a pricked bubble. The "picked regiments" of the Prussian army will become Social-Democratic, which will result in a shift of power that is pregnant with an entire upheaval. But, for this reason, it is of vastly greater importance to win the rural proletariat east of the Elbe than the small peasants of Western Germany, or yet the middle peasants of Southern Germany. It is here, in East-Elbe Prussia, that the decisive battle of our cause will have to be fought and for this very reason both government and Junkerdom will do their utmost to prevent our gaining access here. And should, as we are threatened, new violent measures be resorted to to impede the spread of our Party, their primary purpose will be to protect the East-Elbe rural proletariat from our propaganda. It's all the same to us. We shall win it nevertheless.