Chapter Six

I

Such has been the course of our experience from the beginning, and such are the terms in which its stark uniformity has led us to think of the State. This uniformity also goes far to account for the development of a peculiar moral enervation [weakness] with regard to the State, exactly parallel to that which prevailed with regard to the Church in the Middle Ages.[1] The Church controlled the distribution of certain privileges and immunities, and if one approached it properly, one might get the benefit of them. It stood as something to be run to in any kind of emergency, temporal or spiritual; for the satisfaction of ambition and cupidity, as well as for the more tenuous assurances it held out against various forms of fear, doubt and sorrow. As long as this was so, the anomalies presented by its self-aggrandizement were more or less contentedly acquiesced in; and thus a chronic moral enervation, too negative to be called broadly cynical, was developed towards its interventions and exactions, and towards the vast overbuilding of its material structure.[2]

A like enervation pervades our society with respect to the State, and for like reasons. It affects especially those who take the State's pretensions at face value and regard it as a social institution whose policies of continuous intervention are wholesome and necessary; and it also affects the great majority who have no clear idea of the State, but merely accept it as something that exists, and never think about it except when some intervention bears unfavourably upon their interests. There is little need to dwell upon the amount of aid thus given to the State's progress in self-aggrandizement, or to show in detail or by illustration the courses by which this spiritlessness promotes the State's steady policy of intervention, exaction and overbuilding."[3]

Every intervention by the State enables another, and this in turn enabling yet another, and so on indefinitely; and the State stands ever ready and eager to make them, often on its own motion, often again wangling plausibility [obtaining credibility] for them through the specious [false] suggestion of interested persons. Sometimes, the matter at issue is in its nature simple, socially necessary, and devoid of any character that would bring it into the purview of politics.[4] However, for convenience, complications are erected on it; then presently someone sees that these complications are exploitable, and proceeds to exploit them; then another, and another, until the rivalries and collisions of interest thus generated issue in a more or less general disorder. When this takes place, the logical thing, obviously, is to recede, and let the disorder be settled in the slower and more troublesome way, but the only effective way, through the operation of natural laws. But in such circumstances, recession is never for a moment thought of; the suggestion would be put down as sheer lunacy. Instead, the interests unfavourably affected - little aware, perhaps, how much worse the cure is than the disease, or at any rate, little caring - immediately call on the State to cut in arbitrarily between cause and effect, and clear up the disorder out of hand.[5] The State then intervenes by imposing another set of complications upon the first; these in turn are found exploitable, another demand arises, another set of complications, still more intricate, is erected upon the first two;[6] and

the same sequence is gone through again and again until the recurrent disorder becomes acute enough to open the way for a sharking political adventurer to come forward and, always alleging "necessity, the tyrant's plea," to organize a *coup d'Etat* [rebellion].[7]

But more often, the basic matter at issue represents an original intervention of the State, an original allotment of the political means. Each of these allotments, as we have seen, is a charter of highwaymanry [highway robbery]; a license to appropriate the labour products of others without compensation. Therefore, it is in the nature of things that when such a license is issued, the State must follow it up with an indefinite series of interventions to systematize and "regulate" its use. The State's endless progressive encroachments that are recorded in the history of the tariff, their impudent and disgusting particularity, and the prodigious amount of apparatus necessary to give them effect, furnish a conspicuous case in point. Another is furnished by the history of our railway regulation. It is nowadays the fashion, even among those who ought to know better, to hold "rugged individualism" and *laissez - faire* [liberal tolerance] responsible for the riot of stock watering, rebates, rate-cutting, fraudulent bankruptcies, and the like, which prevailed in our railway practice after the Civil War, but they had no more to do with it than they have to do with the precession of the equinoxes. The fact is that our railways, with few exceptions, did not grow up in response to any actual economic demand. They were speculative enterprises enabled by State intervention, by allotment of the political means in the form of land grants and subsidies; and of all the evils alleged against our railway practice, there is not one but what is directly traceable to this primary intervention.[8]

So it is with shipping. There was no valid economic demand for adventure in the carrying trade; in fact, every sound economic consideration was dead against it. It was entered upon through State intervention, instigated by shipbuilders and their allied interests; and the mess engendered [brought about] by their manipulation of the political means is now the ground of demand for further and further coercive intervention. So it is with what, by an unconscionable stretch of language, goes by the name of farming.[9] There are very few troubles so far heard of as normally besetting this form of enterprise but what are directly traceable to the State's primary intervention in establishing a system of land-tenure which gives a monopoly-right over rental-values as well as over use-values; and as long as that system is in force, one coercive intervention after another is bound to take place in support of it.[10]

[1] Not long ago, Professor Laski commented on the prevalence of this enervation among our young people, especially among our student population. It has several contributing causes, but it is mainly to be accounted for, I think, by the unvarying uniformity of our experience. The State's pretensions have been so invariably extravagant, the disparity between them and its conduct so invariably manifest, that one could hardly expect anything else. Probably, the protest against our imperialism in the Pacific and the Caribbean, after the Spanish War, marked the last major effort of an impotent and moribund decency. Mr. Laski's comparisons with student bodies in England and Europe lose some of their force when it is remembered that the devices of a fixed term and an irresponsible executive render the American State peculiarly insensitive to protest and inaccessible to effective censure. As Mr. Jefferson said, the one resource of impeachment is "not even a scarecrow."

[2] As an example of this overbuilding, at the beginning of the sixteenth century one-fifth of the land of France was owned by the Church; it was held mainly by monastic establishments.

[3] It may be observed, however, that mere use-and-wont interferes with our seeing how egregiously the original structure of the American State, with its system of superimposed jurisdictions and reduplicated functions, was overbuilt. At the present time, a citizen lives under half-a-dozen or more

separate overlapping jurisdictions; federal, state, county, township, municipal, borough, school district, ward, federal district. Nearly all of these have power to tax him directly or indirectly, or both, and as we all know, the only limit to the exercise of this power is what can be safely got by it; and thus we arrive at the principle rather naively formulated by the late senator from Utah, and sometimes spoken of ironically as "Smoot's law of government" - the principle, as he put it, that the cost of government tends to increase from year to year, no matter which party is in power. It would be interesting to know the exact distribution of the burden of jobholders and mendicant [misleading] political retainers - for it must not be forgotten that the subsidized "unemployed" are now a permanent body of patronage - among income receiving citizens. Counting indirect taxes and voluntary contributions as well as direct taxes, it would probably be not far off the mark to say that every two citizens are carrying a third between them.

[4] For example, the basic processes of exchange are necessary, non-political, and as simple as any in the world. The humblest Yankee rustic who swaps eggs for bacon in the country store, or a day's labour for potatoes in a neighbour's field, understands them thoroughly, and manages them competently. Their formula is: goods or services in return for goods or services. There is not, never has been, and never will be, a single transaction anywhere in the realm of "business" - no matter what its magnitude or apparent complexity - that is not directly reducible to this formula. For convenience in facilitating exchange, however, money was introduced; and money is a complication, and so are the other evidences of debt, such as cheques, drafts, notes, bills, bonds, stock certificates, which were introduced for the same reason. These complications were found to be exploitable; and the consequent number and range of State interventions to "regulate" and "supervise" their exploitation appear to be without end.

[5] It is one of the most extraordinary things in the world, that the interests which abhor and dread collectivism [communism] are the ones which have most eagerly urged on the State to take each one of the successive single steps that lead directly to collectivism. Who urged it on to form the Federal Trade Commission; to expand the Department of Commerce; to form the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Federal Farm Board; to pass the Anti-trust Acts; to build highways, dig out waterways, provide airway services, subsidize shipping? If these steps do not tend straight to collectivism, just which way do they tend? Furthermore, when the interests which encouraged the State to take them are horrified by the apparition of communism and the Red menace, just what are their protestations worth?

[6] The text of the Senate's proposed banking law, published on the first of July, 1935, almost exactly filled four pages of the *Wall Street Journal*! Really now - now really - can any conceivable absurdity surpass that?

[7] As here in 1932, in Italy, Germany and Russia latterly, in France after the collapse of the Directory, in Rome after the death of Pertinax, and so on.

[8] Ignorance has no assignable limits; yet when one hears our railway companies cited as specimens of rugged individualism, one is put to it to say whether the speaker's sanity should be questioned, or his integrity. Our transcontinental companies, in particular, are hardly to be called railway companies, since transportation was purely incidental to their true business, which was that of land-jobbing and subsidy hunting. I remember seeing the statement a few years ago - I do not vouch for it, but it can not be far off the fact - that at the time of writing, the current cash value of the political means allotted to the Northern Pacific Company would enable it to build four transcontinental lines, and in addition, to build a fleet of ships and maintain it in around-the-world service. If this sort of thing represents rugged individualism, let future lexicographers make the most of it.

[9] A farmer, properly speaking, is a freeholder who directs his operations; first, towards making his family, as far as possible, an independent unit, economically self-contained. What he produces over and above this requirement lie converts into a cash crop. There is a second type of agriculturist, who is not a farmer, but a manufacturer, as much so as one who makes woolen or cotton textiles or leather shoes. He raises one crop only - milk, corn, wheat, cotton, or whatever it may be - which is wholly a cash crop; and if the market for his particular commodity goes down below cost of production, he is in the same bad luck as the motor-car maker or shoe-maker or pants-maker who turns out more of his special kind of goods than the market will bear. His family is not independent; he buys everything his household uses; his children can not live on cotton or milk or corn, any more than the shoe manufacturer's children can live on shoes. There is still to be distinguished a third type, who carries on agriculture as a sort of taxpaying subsidiary to speculation in agricultural land-values. It is the last two

classes who chiefly clamour for intervention, and they are often, indeed, in a bad way; but it is not farming that puts them there.

[10] The very limit of particularity in this course of coercive intervention seems to have been reached, according to press reports, in the state of Wisconsin. On 31 May [1935], the report is, Governor La Follette signed a bill requiring all public eating places to serve two thirds of an ounce of Wisconsin-made cheese and two thirds of an ounce of Wisconsin-made butter with every meal costing more than twenty-four cents. To match this for particularity one would pretty well have to go back to some of the British Trade Acts of the eighteenth century, and it would be hard to find an exact match, even there. If this passes muster under the "due process of law" clause - whether the restaurant pays for these supplies or passes their cost along to the consumer - one can see nothing to prevent the legislature of New York, say, from requiring each citizen to annually buy two hats made by Knox, and two suits made by Finchley.

II

Thus we see how ignorance and delusion, concerning the nature of the State, combine with extreme moral debility [weakness] and myopic [narrow-minded] self-interest - what Ernest Renan so well calls *la bassesse de l'homme interesse* - to enable the steadily accelerated conversion of social power into State power that has gone on from the beginning of our political independence. It is a curious anomaly. State power has an unbroken record of inability to do anything efficiently, economically, disinterestedly or honestly; yet, when the slightest dissatisfaction arises over any exercise of social power, the aid of the agent least qualified to give aid is immediately called for. Does social power mismanage banking-practice in this-or-that special instance - then let the State, which never has shown itself able to keep its own finances from sinking promptly into the slough [quagmire] of misfeasance, waste-fulness and corruption, intervene to "supervise" or "regulate" the whole body of banking practice, or even take it over entirely. Does social power, in this-or-that case, bungle the business of railway management - then let the State, which has bungled every business it has ever undertaken, intervene and put its hand to the business of "regulating" railway operations. Does social power now and then send out an unseaworthy ship to disaster - then let the State, which inspected and passed the *Morro Castle* [The *S.S. Morro Castle* caught fire off Asbury Park, New Jersey on September 8, 1934; 125 lives were lost], be given a freer swing at controlling the routine of the shipping trade. Does social power here and there exercise a grinding monopoly over the generation and distribution of electric current - then let the State, which allots and maintains monopoly, come in and intervene with a general scheme of price fixing which works more unforeseen hardships than it heals, or else let it go into direct competition; or, as the collectivists urge, let it take over the monopoly bodily. "Ever since society has existed," says Herbert Spencer, "disappointment has been preaching, 'Put not your trust in legislation'; and yet the trust in legislation seems hardly diminished."

But it may be asked where we are to go for relief from the misuses of social power, if not to the State. What other recourse have we? Admitting that under our existing mode of political organization we have none, it must still be pointed out that this question rests on the old inveterate misapprehension of the State's nature, presuming that the State is a social institution, whereas it is an anti-social institution; that is to say, the question rests on an absurdity.[11] It is certainly true that the business of *government*, in maintaining "freedom and security," and "to secure these

rights," is to make a recourse to justice costless, easy and informal; but *the State*, on the contrary, is primarily concerned with injustice, and its function is to maintain a regime of injustice; hence, as we see daily, its disposition is to put justice as far as possible out of reach, and to make the effort after justice as costly and difficult as it can. One may put it in a word that while government is, by its nature, concerned with the administration of justice, the State is, by its nature, concerned with the administration of law - law, which the State itself manufactures for the service of its own primary ends. Therefore, an appeal to the State, based on the ground of justice, is futile in any circumstances, [12] for whatever action the State might take in response to it would be conditioned by the State's own paramount interest, and would hence be bound to result, as we see such action invariably resulting, in as great injustice as that which it pretends to correct, or as a rule, greater. The question thus presumes, in short, that the State may, on occasion, be persuaded to act out of character; and this is levity.

But passing on from this special view of the question, and regarding it in a more general way, we see that what it actually amounts to is a plea for arbitrary interference with the order of nature, an arbitrary cutting-in to avert the penalty which nature lays on any and every form of error, whether willful or ignorant, voluntary or involuntary; and no attempt at this has ever yet failed to cost more than it came to. Any contravention of natural law, any tampering with the natural order of things, must have its consequences, and the only recourse for escaping them is such as entails worse consequences. Nature reeks nothing of intentions, good or bad; the one thing she will not tolerate is disorder, and she is very particular about getting her full pay for any attempt to create disorder. She gets it sometimes by very indirect methods, often by very roundabout and unforeseen ways, but she always gets it. "Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why, then, should we desire to be deceived?" It would seem that our civilization is greatly given to this infantile addiction greatly given to persuading itself that it can find some means which nature will tolerate, whereby we may eat our cake and have it; and it strongly resents the stubborn fact that there is no such means.[13]

It will be clear to anyone who takes the trouble to think the matter through, that under a regime of natural order, that is to say under *government*, which makes no positive interventions what-so-ever on the individual, but only negative interventions in behalf of simple justice - not law, but justice - misuses of social power would be effectively corrected; whereas we know by interminable experience that the State's positive interventions do not correct them. Under a regime of actual individualism, actually free competition, actual *laissez faire* - a regime which, as we have seen, can not possibly coexist with the State - a serious or continuous misuse of social power would be virtually impracticable.[14]

I shall not take up space with amplifying these statements because, in the first place, this has already been thoroughly done by Spencer in his essays entitled *The Man versus the State* [published by Prof. Herbert Spencer in London, 1884]; and, in the second place, because I wish, above all things, to avoid the appearance of suggesting that a regime, such as these statements contemplate, is practicable, or that I am ever so covertly encouraging anyone to dwell on the thought of such a regime. Perhaps, some eons hence, if the planet remains so long habitable, the benefits accruing to conquest and confiscation may be adjudged over-costly; the State may in consequence be superseded by government, the political means suppressed, and the fetishes which

give nationalism and patriotism their present execrable character may be broken down. But the remoteness and uncertainty of this prospect makes any thought of it fatuous, and any concern with it futile. Some rough measure of its remoteness may perhaps be gained by estimating the growing strength of the forces at work against it. Ignorance and error, which the State's prestige steadily deepens, are against it; *la bassesse de l'homme interesse*, steadily pushing its purposes to greater lengths of turpitude, is against it; moral enervation [weakening], steadily proceeding to the point of complete insensitiveness, is against it. What combination of influences more powerful than this can one imagine, and what can one imagine possible to be done in the face of such a combination?

To the sum of these, which may be called spiritual influences, may be added the overweening physical strength of the State, which is ready to be called into action at once against any affront to the State's prestige. Few realize how enormously and how rapidly in recent years the State has everywhere built up its apparatus of armies and police forces. The State has thoroughly learned the lesson laid down by Septimius Severus on his death bed. "Stick together," he said to his successors, "pay the soldiers, and don't worry about anything else." It is now known to every intelligent person that there can be no such thing as a revolution as long as this advice is followed; in fact, there has been no revolution in the modern world since 1848 - every so-called revolution has been merely a *coup d'Etat*.[15]

All talk of the possibility of a revolution in America is in part perhaps ignorant, but mostly dishonest; it is merely "the interested clamours and sophistry" of persons who have some sort of ax to grind. Even Lenin acknowledged that a revolution is impossible anywhere until the military and police forces become disaffected; and the last place to look for that, probably, is here. We have all seen demonstrations of a disarmed populace, and local riots carried on with primitive weapons, and we have also seen how they ended, as in Homestead, Chicago, and the mining districts of West Virginia, for instance. Coxey's Army marched on Washington - and it kept off the grass.

Taking the sum of the State's physical strength, with the force of powerful spiritual influences behind it, one asks again, what can be done against the State's progress in self-aggrandizement? Simply nothing. So far from encouraging any hopeful contemplation of the unattainable, the student of civilized man will offer no conclusion but that nothing can be done. He can regard the course of our civilization only as he would regard the course of a man in a row-boat on the lower reaches of the Niagara - as an instance of Nature's unconquerable intolerance of disorder, and in the end, an example of the penalty which she puts upon any attempt at interference with order. Our civilization may, at the outset, have taken its chances with the current of statism [the concentration of economic controls and planning in the hands of a highly centralized government] either ignorantly or deliberately; it makes no difference. Nature cares nothing whatever about motive or intention; she cares only for order, and looks to see only that her repugnance to disorder shall be vindicated, and that her concern with the regular orderly sequences of things and actions shall be upheld in the outcome. Emerson, in one of his great moments of inspiration, personified cause and effect as "the chancellors of God"; and invariable experience testifies that the attempt to nullify or divert or in any wise break in upon their sequences must have its own reward.

"Such," says Professor Ortega y Gasset, "was the lamentable fate of ancient civilization." A dozen empires have already finished the course that ours began three

centuries ago. The lion and the lizard keep the vestiges that attest their passage upon earth, vestiges of cities which in their day were as proud and powerful as ours - Tadmor, Persepolis, Luxor, Baalbek - some of them indeed forgotten for thousands of years and brought to memory again only by the excavator, like those of the Mayas, and those buried in the sands of the Gobi. The sites which now bear Narbonne and Marseilles have borne the habitat of four successive civilizations, each of them, as St. James says, even as a vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. The course of all these civilizations was the same. Conquest, confiscation, the erection of the State; then the sequences which we have traced in the course of our own civilization; then the shock of some irruption which the social structure was too far weakened to resist, and from which it was left too disorganized to recover; and then the end.

Our pride resents the thought that the great highways of New England will one day lie deep under layers of encroaching vegetation, as the more substantial Roman roads of Old England have lain for generations; and that only a group of heavily overgrown hillocks will be left to attract the archaeologist's eye to the hidden debris of our collapsed skyscrapers. Yet it is to just this, we know, that our civilization will come; and we know it because we know that there never has been, never is, and never will be, any disorder in nature - because we know that things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be.

But there is no need to dwell lugubriously [somberly] upon the probable circumstances of a future so far distant. What we and our more nearly immediate descendants shall see is a steady progress in collectivism running off into a military despotism of a severe type. Closer centralization; a steadily growing bureaucracy; State power and faith in State power increasing, social power and faith in social power diminishing; the State absorbing a continually larger proportion of the national income; production languishing, the State in consequence taking over one "essential industry" after another, managing them with ever-increasing corruption, inefficiency and prodigality, and finally resorting to a system of forced labour. Then, at some point in this progress, a collision of State interests, at least as general and as violent as that which occurred in 1914, will result in an industrial and financial dislocation too severe for the asthenic [weak] social structure to bear; and from this the State will be left to "the rusty death of machinery," and the casual anonymous forces of dissolution will be supreme.

[11] Admitting that the lamb, in the fable, had no other recourse than the wolf, one may none-the-less see that its appeal to the wolf was a waste of breath.

[12] This is now so well understood that no one goes to a court for justice; he goes for gain or revenge. It is interesting to observe that some philosophers of law now say that law has no relation to justice, and is not meant to have any such relation. In their view, law represents only a progressive registration of the ways in which experience leads us to believe that society can best get along. One might hesitate a long time about accepting their notion of what law is, but one must appreciate their candid affirmation of what it is not.

[13] This resentment is very remarkable. In spite of our failure with one conspicuously ambitious experiment in State intervention, I dare say there would still be great resentment against Professor Sumner's ill-famed remark that when people talked tearfully about "the poor drunkard lying in the gutter," it seemed never to occur to them that the gutter might be quite the right place for him to lie; or against the bishop of Peterborough's declaration that he would rather see England free than sober. Yet both these remarks merely recognize the great truth which experience forces on our notice every day, that

attempts to interfere with the natural order of things are bound, in one way or another, to turn out for the worse.

[14] The horrors of England's industrial life in the last century furnish a standing brief for addicts of positive intervention. Child-labour and woman-labour in the mills and mines; Coketown and Mr. Bounderby; starvation wages; killing hours; vile and hazardous conditions of labour; coffin ships officered by ruffians - all these are glibly charged off by reformers and publicists to a regime of rugged individualism, unrestrained competition, and laissez-faire. This is an absurdity on its face, for no such regime ever existed in England. They were due to the State's primary intervention whereby the population of England was expropriated from the land; due to the State's removal of the land from competition with industry for labour. Nor did the factory system and the "industrial revolution" have the least thing to do with creating those hordes of miserable beings. When the factory system carne in, those hordes were already there, expropriated, and they went into the mills for whatever Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Plugson of Undershot would give them, because they had no choice but to beg, steal or starve. Their misery and degradation did not lie at the door of individualism; they lay nowhere but at the door of the State. Adam Smith's economics are not the economics of individualism; they are the economics of landowners and mill-owners. Our zealots of positive intervention would do well to read the history of the Enclosures Acts and the work of the Hammonds, and see what they can make of them.

[15] When Sir Robert Peel proposed to organize the police force of London, Englishmen said openly that half a dozen throats cut in Whitechapel every year would be a cheap price to pay for keeping such an instrument of potential tyranny out of the State's hands. We are all beginning to realize now that there is a great deal to be said for that view of the matter.

III

But it may quite properly be asked, if we in common with the rest of the Western world are so far gone in statism as to make this outcome inevitable, what is the use of a book which merely shows that it is inevitable? By its own hypothesis the book is useless. Upon the very evidence it offers, no one's political opinions are likely to be changed by it, no one's practical attitude towards the State will be modified by it; and if they were, according to the book's own premises, what good could it do?

Assuredly I do not expect this book to change anyone's political opinions, for it is not meant to do that. One or two, perhaps, here and there, may be moved to look a little into the subject-matter on their own account, and thus perhaps their opinions would undergo some slight loosening - or some constriction - but this is the very most that would happen. In general, too, I would be the first to acknowledge that no results of the kind which we agree to call practical could accrue to the credit of a book of this order, were it a hundred times as cogent as this one - no results, that is, that would in the least retard the State's progress in self-aggrandizement and thus modify the consequences of the State's course. There are two reasons, however, one general and one special, why the publication of such a book is admissible.

The general reason is that when in any department of thought a person has, or thinks he has, a view of the plain intelligible order of things, it is proper that he should record that view publicly, with no thought whatever of the practical consequences, or lack of consequences, likely to ensue upon his so doing. He might indeed be thought bound to do this as a matter of abstract duty; not to crusade or propagandize for his view or seek to impose it upon anyone - far from that! - not to concern himself at all with either its acceptance or its disallowance; but merely to record it. This, I say, might be thought his duty to the natural truth of things, but it is at all events his right; it is admissible.

The special reason has to do with the fact that in every civilization, however generally prosaic, however addicted to the short-time point of view on human affairs, there are always certain alien spirits who, while outwardly conforming to the requirements of the civilization around them, still keep a disinterested regard for the plain intelligible law of things, irrespective of any practical end. They have an intellectual curiosity, sometimes touched with emotion, concerning the august [imposing] order of nature; they are impressed by the contemplation of it, and like to know as much about it as they can, even in circumstances where its operation is ever so manifestly unfavourable to their best hopes and wishes. For these, a work like this, however in the current sense impractical, is not quite useless; and those of them it reaches will be aware that for such as themselves, and such only, it was written.

THE END