

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND SOCIETAL FORCES

Implementing the Demands
of Modern Society

Six Lectures Held in Ulm, Berlin, and Stuttgart
May 26–December 30, 1919

TRANSLATED BY CATHERINE E. CREEGER

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THE THREEFOLD ASPECT
OF THE SOCIETAL AND CLASS QUESTION

ULM, MAY 26, 1919

HERE, as elsewhere in Württemberg and Switzerland, I will address the most incisive and important question of modern times in connection with the recently issued "Appeal to the German People and Culture." Most of you will have seen this appeal, which argued for a threefold subdivision of the body social. A complete exposition of its contents is available in my little book *Toward Social Renewal*,[†] but please allow me to fill in a few of the details for you tonight.

Since the shattering events of the recent catastrophic World War, societal issues that actually date back to the mid-1800s have appeared in a completely new guise. These issues should be obvious to all human souls who are alert to the signs of the times. If we compare this historical tidal wave with its previous manifestations, we realize that it has now assumed a completely new form that we cannot afford to ignore.

In the last four or five years, it was often said that this terrible, catastrophic World War was unprecedented in human history. In the ongoing crisis it heralded, however, we heard very little about the need for completely new impulses to transform the social order. Although the need to relearn everything and totally change our ways of thinking is quite obvious, we hear nothing about that. Old thoughts are what led humankind into this terrible catastrophe, and new impulses

will have to lead us out of it. Real in-depth observation of the societal demands resonating from increasing numbers of human hearts and minds will lead us to these impulses. These demands can be ignored only by those asleep to the times, who will continue to wait out events until the old edifice collapses into oblivion.

Today we often imagine societal issues to be obvious or even very simple, but if our judgment is based on truly extensive experience of vital present and future needs rather than on murky theories or individual personal demands, we must see these issues as the confluence of multiple forces that have emerged in the course of humanity's development. In a certain sense, these forces carry the seeds of their own destruction within them. To those with a real overview of the circumstances, societal issues present three faces: cultural or spiritual life, judicial or legal life, and economic life. During the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth, we came to attribute almost all issues and problems in our public life to economics. This lack of clear-sightedness was due to our belief that if we simply manage to get our bearings in the economic sector, everything else will fall into place by itself. Most people today, regardless of whether they lean politically to the right or to the left, fail to see cultural, intellectual, and spiritual activity as an essential aspect of the social order. Consequently, my initial observations tonight will be devoted to that aspect.

Current demands for changes in the social order originate in the rank-and-file of the working class. We will talk later about the three aspects of the trials and tribulations faced by working men and women in the times leading up to present conditions. As a consequence of industrialization, soul-destroying capitalism, and other trappings of modern civilization, the working class has been forced almost exclusively into economic activity. This activity naturally provides the context for working-class demands, which are therefore formulated in economic terms. The issues, however, are not purely economic. Simply by recognizing that old ways of thinking have failed to adequately address the facts, which speak loudly for themselves, we can also recognize that social movements are concerned about more than just economic and legal problems. In fact, the underlying issue is spiritual or cultural.

In large parts of the civilized world, we now confront an increasingly obvious failure of the status quo. Political parties of various persuasions have developed platforms and programs that are now proving inadequate to address the reality of our situation. It is no longer enough to perpetuate old party platforms. We must confront the facts directly, with all due seriousness and with a keen sense of reality.

First of all, let's take a look at the development of the human activity that led to this crisis. Above all, we must look at the deep, virtually unbridgeable cleft between the working and non-working classes. The civilization enjoyed by the latter has been highly praised as a sign of great progress in modern times. Commonplace technologies now quickly deliver people and thoughts around the globe in ways that would once have been derided as utopian visions. We never tire of glorifying this progress. But today we must also add another perspective: we must ask how this progress came about. It is based entirely on an underlying structure made up of broad masses of humanity, of countless individuals whose work makes possible the culture of the few. Now these masses have grown up; they have come to their senses and are demanding their rightful share. If we truly understand this age we live in, we must see the demands of the masses as the great, historical demands of our time itself. We must realize that the call for the socialization of economic life represents not simply the demands of one social class but the demands of humanity itself at this point in history.

The leading classes participating in our much-praised civilization have been conspicuous in their inability to rise to the occasion. They have failed to seize any recent opportunities to bridge the gap between themselves and a working class that is increasingly able to articulate its justified demands. More specifically, the ideas that would have needed to flow into our public life in order to bridge this gap have been lacking. An idiosyncrasy of our much-praised modern culture is that it has become increasingly estranged from real life. Individuals are aware only of the life in their immediate surroundings. Entire groups of people have been unable to derive any all-encompassing, inspiring ideas or ideals from our cultural institutions (specifically, from our education system).

Let me tell you one typical story that could be repeated tens and even hundreds of times from varying perspectives:

I like to mention the example of Alfred Kolb, a senior civil servant who took his destiny in hand in a most remarkable and admirable way. I say this in all seriousness; I always try to avoid sarcastic comments, and there is clearly no need for them in this instance. At a certain point in his life, Kolb did something that very few civil servants do. Most of them retire and live off their pensions when they have had enough of civil service. Kolb, however, left his post and went to America, where he worked as an ordinary laborer, first in a brewery and then in a bicycle factory. He then wrote a book about his experiences.[†] In a remarkable passage in this book, Kolb says something like this: Formerly, when I passed an unemployed person on the street, I wondered, why isn't that scoundrel working? Now I know differently. I have changed my mind about many other things as well, and I know that even the worst treatment life deals out does not look so bad from the viewpoint of a comfortable study.

This confession is profoundly characteristic of the social circumstances of our time. A product of our culture, a man with many years of human destiny under his belt—at least, as many as it takes to become a senior civil servant—knows nothing about human work and therefore nothing about human life. To learn something about the life he is supposed to “serve” as a member of the leading classes, he has to take his destiny in hand and accept employment as a common laborer. As a result, he acquires a completely different perspective on life.

This example, which is only one among many, shows how estranged the culture of our upper classes has become from the life of the masses. The broad masses of people, needy in body and soul, see firsthand how the leading classes manage the economy and realize that something is wrong. They see that our leading classes are not “leading” the economy in the right spirit. And now the question is: What needs to change?

In many other respects, too, we can see that over the past few centuries, the leading classes have become estranged from everything that could have prevented catastrophe. In upper class circles, people talked very seriously and developed eminently worthy opinions about all sorts of nice subjects—about loving your neighbor and human fraternity and the need to be a good human being—but they had no connection to real life. At best, their deliberations lead to investigations. In the mid-1800s, for example, the English government investigated the management of coalmines; its findings are still pertinent today. People warmed themselves in front of coal fires while discussing human existence and human goodness, progressive morals and advanced culture. These people needed to learn that their coal was mined by poor children as young as nine, eleven, or thirteen—children who almost never saw daylight because they went down into the mines before sunrise and came up only after dark. Many similar examples could be cited. But did such findings motivate the leading classes of humanity to make real changes in the social order? Well, some people will say we have seen many changes for the better, but I would say that any improvement is due not to initiatives on the part of the leading classes, but to the bitter struggle of those who suffered under their leadership.

What must we look at today? We must look at what people who work from morning till night see—from the *outside* only—as they pass our high schools and universities. They know only what they experienced in primary school. They do not know how goals and standards for elementary education are imposed from above. They see only that their elementary schools are not producing today's economic leaders. This is the first face of the societal issue. In spite of all the praise we lavish on the cultural facet of our life (including our education system), it is no match for the tasks and challenges of our time.

Next, let's look at the economy. When workers first began to organize and demand their share, industry leaders often noted dismissively that if everything were divided equally, each person would get very little. After a while, they dropped this objection, because although it is quite true on the one hand, it is very stupid on the other. Recently, we have heard it again, with increasing frequency, but it actually

misses the point. If we understand the unique structure of our modern economy, we know that the actual underlying reasons for the physical and psychological hardships endured by the working class are quite different. The cultural aspect of our society has been inadequately developed, and as a consequence we do not understand how to channel the increasing domination of the economy by technology in ways that would permit each individual a humanly worthy existence.

To be sure, it has often been pointed out that the modern workers' movement emerged in reaction to modern technology, machinery, and soul-destroying capitalism. We have forgotten, however, that in our society the cultural domain has been incapable of controlling these factors as they appeared. Why is that the case? As machines, industrialization, and capitalism developed, humanity began to see state take-over of cultural affairs as a major, desirable step forward. Today, any objections to government control of cultural matters still meet with intense criticism. Culturally active people take pride in pointing out the great intellectual progress we have made since the Middle Ages, and it is certainly true that we do not wish to return to the Dark Ages. We need to move forward, not backward. Nonetheless, there is another question that must be raised here. It has been said that during the Middle Ages, intellectual activity in general and science in particular existed only to serve theology or the church. But what does our modern intellectual life serve? Here is another example, again one out of hundreds or thousands, and once again, I am speaking about an individual I admire greatly. In my opinion, this man was a very important scientist.[†] He was also the general secretary of a scholarly society at the vanguard of German intellectual life.[†] In his well-received speeches, he attempted to express what the esteemed members of the Prussian Academy of Sciences considered their greatest honor. (As a historical aside, it should be noted that the Berlin Academy has always been something that sought to express spiritually the impulse of the House of Hohenzollern.) In the eighteenth century, one of the Hohenzollerns had to appoint a president for the Academy—I am not making this up; this is historical fact—and did that institution the great honor of installing his court jester at its head.[†] Nonetheless, this great scholar of the late nineteenth century said that the scholarly

gentlemen of the Berlin Academy considered it their greatest honor to be the scientific bodyguards of the Hohenzollerns.[†]

Such statements must be seen as signs of the times. We must consider what intellectual activity has become through dependence on the power of the state and the related power of capitalism. If our actions are truly motivated by reality—that is, by life's necessities rather than by any preconceived notions—we will realize (contrary to all of the preconceptions of our time) that intellectual activity will come into its own as an independent power only when it is no longer subsumed by state activity, and is thus allowed to rely entirely on itself. Everything that makes up our intellectual life, especially the educational system, must be responsible for its own administration, from the highest offices of cultural affairs to the teachers of the lowest grades. Only the forces inherent in cultural or spiritual activity must be allowed to set the standards for administration of cultural and intellectual matters. Those actively and inwardly involved in this field must be responsible for developing its governing body. It must stand on its own feet.

This is the first face of what we are calling the threefold structure of the healthy social organism. An independent field of cultural or spiritual activity will relate to life very differently than the antisocial cultural/spiritual activity we have gradually fallen into and seemingly feel no need to escape.

We need to hear from individuals with real experience in this field. For years, I taught at the Berlin Workers' School, founded by Liebknecht.[†] As a result, I know how to draw on sources of cultural and intellectual activity that are available to all instead of being luxuries reserved for the privileged classes. Once found, these sources allow us to speak to all individuals who aspire to a humanly worthy existence for both body and soul. From my practical experience, I know that my working-class students always understood me better when I spoke out of such sources. Because of my students' sense of cultural obligation, so to speak, there were also times when I had to accompany them to museums or other such establishments that did not represent a true folk culture but testified to a culture of the few. I realized then that the schism between classes was also a cultural

gap. My students could not really absorb or inwardly participate in outgrowths of the culture of the few. This is a mistake that is still often made today. We think that we are “educating the masses” when we throw them the crumbs of what our universities, high schools, and other institutions of higher learning have cultivated based on the social sensibilities of the few. We go to great lengths to educate adults with our public libraries, community colleges, people’s theaters, and so on, but we consistently err in believing that we can convey the culture of an exclusive minority to the masses. We cannot. Our time demands a cultural life that includes all social classes. The development of such a culture, however, requires unity between the producers of culture and its intended participants, along with all their sensibilities and social backgrounds. It is not enough to throw people crumbs. On the cultural level, the entire populace must work as a whole. To make this possible, however, cultural affairs must be freed from governmental and capitalist economic constraints. In one short lecture, I cannot go into great detail about the need to extricate cultural and intellectual institutions—especially the school system—from governmental and economic influences. I cannot even tell you everything that is included in my book *Toward Social Renewal*, but the first prerequisite for the development of a threefold social organism is a cultural and intellectual life that is allowed to develop on the basis of its own intrinsic values.

We need not be afraid of a culture of this sort. Even if we hold a low opinion of human beings in general, we need not fear a general reversion to illiteracy if parents are not legally required to send their children to school. To the contrary, the working class will become increasingly aware of the benefits of education. If working-class children are not obliged to go to school, they will not be kept at home; their parents will send them voluntarily. The proponents of comprehensive schools in particular have nothing to fear: comprehensive schools are the only possible outcome of fostering the independence of cultural institutions.†

That is enough for now about the separation of cultural affairs from the state and the economy. The second area of life that we must consider in studying modern social issues is the sphere of rights.

People have talked and written about civil rights from many different perspectives, but if our observations and perceptions about them are based on reality, scholarly definitions make as much sense as “defining” the colors blue and red, which are readily accessible to anyone with normal eyes. Similarly, the rights to which all individuals are entitled simply by virtue of being human are evident to any alert human mind, and the minds of the modern working class are increasingly alert.

In the domain of the law and civil rights, the modern leading classes find themselves in an unpleasant and contradictory situation. On the one hand, the old patriarchal system has become useless to them, and they cannot help but encourage a certain level of democracy. It is in their best interest as capitalists to hire skilled workers with certain mental abilities. Unfortunately for the capitalists, however, encouraging individual faculties of the human mind tends to make other abilities emerge all by themselves. Of course, the leading classes hoped to develop only those abilities that make for skillful factory workers. Concomitantly, however, working-class minds awoke to the circumstances of the old patriarchy and became aware of human rights. They then began to wonder whether the modern nation-state really provides a fertile ground for these rights. Instead of universal human rights, they saw privileged and underprivileged classes; and the result was what we call the class struggle of the working class. Underlying this struggle is nothing more or less than the great and justified demand for a humanly worthy existence for all people.

The rights issue is the second aspect of the class issue, but we cannot become fully aware of its significance without considering the third aspect, namely, the economy. The economy has subsumed two things that really do not belong to it—human labor and capital. Only the circulation of goods actually belongs to the economy.

It seems to me that the events of recent years should have taught us that the workers themselves are the most important factor in the proletarian social movement. Given the current state of affairs, simply listening to lectures about the working class does not equip us to assess the real situation of the working class. We would need to have seen for ourselves how over the decades workers have spent many evening

hours, after days of hard work, coming together to learn about the modern economic movement and the significance of labor, capital, and the production and consumption of goods. We would need to have seen for ourselves how the working class hungered for education, while the upper classes went to the theater and devoted themselves to other amusements, perhaps casting a glance from on high at the miserable life of the working class. Meanwhile, the workers were growing and learning and developing a cultural life of their own.

It is a shame that the working-class issue is still being construed as simply a question of bread and hungry stomachs. It is a shame that we have taken so long to realize that all working-class struggles originate with the demand for a humanly worthy life that does not allow either the body or the mind to waste away. But while workers were reflecting on their collective situation and learning about the modern economy, they were also becoming conscious of their individual situations in a life controlled by the upper classes. They were told that history reflected a divine or moral world order, or at least an order based on ideas and ideals; but all they could see was that their work produced the profits that supported upper-class lifestyles. That is why the words of the *Communist Manifesto*[†] resonated so deeply with them and made them conscious of their situation.

In spite of all recent progress, workers are still condemned to let their labor be bought and sold in the market like a commodity. The basis of the working class's demand is the feeling—not always clearly expressed—that it is unworthy of human beings to allow part of themselves to be bought and sold. Entering into a wage relationship means selling one's labor, and the selling of labor belongs to older times. It is a remnant of serfdom. Workers have realized that goods belong in commerce but labor does not. If you take goods to the market, you can sell them and return home with the proceeds, but if you sell your labor, you cannot simply take your money and go home; you have to show up and work. Human beings are forced to follow their labor. That is what the working class experienced as an existence unworthy of human beings.

So now the big question is: what must happen so that labor is no longer a commodity? As a rule, members of the upper classes think

very little about labor. They simply open their wallets and pay with big bills. Do they ever think about how much worker's labor those bills represent? Whatever their thoughts on the subject, they are not powerful enough to influence the status quo.

The point here is that human labor cannot be priced like a commodity. Labor is something completely different, and it needs to be extricated from the economic process. The only way to do that is to see the economy as an independent member of the social body, separate and distinct from the legal, governmental, or political body. Here is an example to clarify what I mean. Economic activity is limited by natural resources. Although our technology may allow us to exploit the land and so on, we cannot do whatever we want with total disregard for natural limits. Just imagine a group of large landowners—capitalists in their own right—“deciding” that to maintain current returns, there will have to be one hundred days of rain each summer, interspersed with so and so many days of sunshine. Of course that would be absolute nonsense, but it does point out that we cannot decide how natural forces will affect this year's grain crop; nor can we alter the economy's base of natural resources in any other way. We must submit to the forces of nature; they exist alongside and independent of the economy.

Similarly, the economy must be limited by the sphere of rights. Natural forces do not depend on economic cycles in the marketplace, and human labor should be similarly independent. Human labor must be recognized as separate and independent from the economy, just as if it were a force of nature. If it is transferred to the sphere of rights, where it belongs, true equality among individuals will develop. Real civil rights can develop only when the true character of human labor is acknowledged. The extent, type, and time of work will be determined before workers enter the economic process. They will then relate as free individuals to their supervisors who will be cultural-spiritual co-workers rather than capitalists, as we will see shortly.

No matter how favorably we view labor contracts, so long as they establish wage relationships, workers will not be satisfied. A humanly worthy existence for all will result only when contractual agreements govern the joint output of supervisors and workers but not labor

itself. Then the worker-supervisor relationship will be one of voluntary partnership. This is what workers basically hope to accomplish, even though they may not yet be able to articulate it clearly. For the working class, the actual economic issue (and their actual economic demand) is to extricate labor from the circulation of goods in the economy and to establish it as a right within the second member of the social body, the legal or political system.

Capital must also assume a new form in the context of the political system, although how private property should be reorganized remains a puzzle to many. The basic principle seems least difficult to grasp with regard to spiritual property. In this regard our thinking is already somewhat socially responsible. We recognize that no matter how clever or talented individuals may be (and in spite of the fact that they bring their gifts and talents with them at birth, which is a different issue) they would not be able to produce socially valuable innovations—whether practical or cultural—in isolation from society. Although patent and copyright periods vary from place to place and individuals are allowed to benefit from their intellectual property, we recognize at least in principle that, in the cultural domain, individual benefit ceases a certain number of years after the innovator's death.[†] Intellectual property eventually enters the public domain; it cannot be passed down indefinitely to heirs who had nothing to do with its creation.

History demands similar treatment of capital in the future. Just try to explain this to people educated in the capitalist system and see how puzzled they look! Nonetheless, one of the most important challenges of our time is to change how capital is incorporated into social processes. In the future, it will be important for everyone to develop individual abilities that allow them to manage the means of production in their particular field of work. And the “means of production” are actually capital. It is in workers' best interests to have managers who are good intellectual leaders so that labor is put to the best possible use. We must understand that in this situation, the capitalist becomes an unnecessary fifth wheel. In the future, capital will still have to be raised to fund the means of production for any branch of the economy or any cultural purpose. As I described in my book

Toward Social Renewal, however, once the individual abilities of the person or groups who raised the capital no longer justify retaining the means of production as personal property, these means of production must be passed to others—not to heirs, but to completely different people, to those best able to manage the means of production for the public good.

In the future, the means of production—that is, capital—will circulate freely in the social body just as blood circulates in the healthy human body. Blood must flow throughout the entire body and cannot be allowed to stagnate anywhere. Similarly, capital will not be allowed to accumulate in the form of private property. When it has served its purpose in one place, it must pass to those who will manage it best. It will thus be relieved of a function that has caused grave social damage.

Clever capitalists quite rightly say that all economic activity involves sacrificing current assets for the sake of future assets. True enough, but if the economy of the past sows the seeds of the economy of the future and ensures its survival, capital needs to share in the properties of goods in general. Again, such statements about future challenges are met with bewilderment. Real goods are consumed, used up. As they are used up, they go the way of living things. In our economy as it has been managed so far, capital has been exempt from this fate of other goods in the economic process. Long ago, Aristotle said that capital should not produce offspring.[†] At present, however, it is producing offspring that grow big and multiply. We can calculate how many years it takes for a capital investment to double if left to its own devices. Capital, however, should actually serve only as a placeholder for other goods, and all other goods eventually either wear out or become unusable if they are not consumed in a timely manner. Monetary investment must become subject to the fate of all other goods. Our current economy expects capital investment to double over a period of time. In a healthy economy, however, invested funds would vanish over that same time period, simply ceasing to exist. Today people are horrified by the suggestion that their monetary investment will not double in fifteen years but will simply vanish because it is consumed or depreciated along with the goods it is used

to purchase. Of course certain types of savings could be exempt from this rule.

Today, therefore, we face major economic changes, not just minor adjustments. If we do not summon the courage to trust these changes, the social order—or rather, social disorder or chaos—will overwhelm us. People today have no idea that they are dancing on a volcano. They find it easier to persist in old habits, but our time actually demands not only institutional changes but also re-learning our very ways of thinking.

When labor and capital are extricated from the economy—that is, when capital flows back to the public and labor is given back to free individuals as their right—the only remaining economic processes are the production, circulation, and consumption of goods. The economy then deals only with the values of goods. In the independent economic member of the healthy social body, we will not produce simply in order to go on producing; we will produce in order to consume. Consumers, producers, and professionals will form cooperatives and associations; corporate entities that will serve functions now left to chance in the marketplace. Today, production is governed by supply and demand, which are totally inaccessible to human thinking and human judgment. In the future, these new corporate bodies will decide which factors in commerce will determine price structures—that is, the value of goods. This is the only way that each individual's production will be exactly comparable in value to everything he or she needs until the next round of production. Economic activity will become equitable; the prices of certain goods will not be out of proportion to the prices of other types of goods. Today, when wages are still embedded in the economic process and production workers are not the independent partners of the intellectual workers who are their managers, the workers are always forced to fight for higher wages. But if higher wages close one hole, they open another: groceries become more expensive, and so on. This can happen only in an economy polluted with capital and wage relationships. By contrast, in an economy in which associations or cooperatives determine the value of goods on a rational basis rather than on the basis of supply and demand (which are subject to chance,) every individual will be

afforded a humanly worthy existence. Such an economy is truly what the working class is demanding.

This demand is clearer in certain specific areas—for example, in the case of works councils [joint employee-management committees with specific legal powers and responsibilities], which have been so mangled by recent legislation. If the works councils are to become what the working class is demanding, they cannot be set up to serve the state, as intellectual institutions were in the past. Their independent, socially responsible activity must be allowed to thrive in the context of the economy. For this to happen, however, the economy itself must be independent and self-governing. In addition to factory works councils, we will need transportation councils and other councils that develop as needed on the basis of purely economic activity and establish their own bylaws based on economic experience.

I know that a great many people today say that we lack the economic literacy needed to implement such changes. That, however, is how people talk about ideals when they prefer to avoid acting on real possibilities. When we realize that practical knowledge is infinitely more valuable than any knowledge imposed from above, we will recognize the need for works councils not only in individual factories but also as liaisons among very different businesses. They will need to join together in larger associations. As long as their foundations are purely economic, they will not exist simply for decoration but will become the actual human factor in shaping the economy. That is what must happen.

What I have dubbed the threefolding of the social organism is not the product of specious reasoning or murky theorizing. It is based on direct observation of what life demands of us now and will demand in the future. Our present culture provides no real basis for focusing on what reality demands, and as a result very few people are able to do so, which is a real shame. Today people malign truly practical ideas as “ideology” or “utopian.” What are the underlying reasons for this negativity? Some say we must socialize the means of production. So do I. But I also say that we need not only goals but also ways of achieving them and the courage to do so. People often tell me that what I say is hard to understand. Admittedly, looking at real life instead of

judging it on the basis of subjective demands requires more effort than we are accustomed to applying. It is imperative, however, that we summon the inner courage to think radically about certain things. That is what our time demands of any conscious individual.

I must say that in the past four or five years, I have met people who understood things I did not. They arrived from certain places claiming to understand things they kept in nice frames so they could look at them all the time—things that came from central headquarters and the like. They understood, however, because they were ordered to understand. The understanding that comes from inner courage, however, can never be commanded. Now the time has come when people must no longer permit themselves to be commanded to understand. Instead, we must learn to base our assessment of what is needed on our life experience and in an unbiased way, before it is too late.

In general, I am reluctant to recount personal incidents, but life today is dominated by personal events, and individual experiences can be both strange and representative. In April of 1914, I was obliged to comment on the sociopolitical situation in Europe at a small gathering in Vienna.[†] (Note the time and place; as you know, the catastrophic World War started in Austria.) I said something to this effect: Anyone who looks at the social conditions that have gradually developed must feel great concern for our civilization, because our society has developed a cancer that will soon reach the crisis stage. And in fact the World War broke out a short time later.

At that time I had to point out that international capitalism was driving us into a crisis. Like anyone else making such statements, I was denounced as an impractical idealist or a utopian ideologist, of course. At that time, “practical people” were speaking very differently about the world situation, with no mention of the prospect of a social cancer. Consider, for example, what the German Foreign Minister[†] said to the enlightened members of the German *Reichstag*—we must assume they were enlightened, since they were appointed to their posts—in the spring of 1914. He said: We are heading for peaceful times. We have seen gratifying progress toward a general relaxation of tension. We have a very positive relationship with Russia, and the Cabinet in Petersburg is not listening to the press-hounds. Promising negotiations

with England are likely to conclude soon, to the benefit of world peace. Relations between the two governments are continuing to deepen.

These were the words of a “practical” individual who was not derided as an idealist. The “general relaxation of tension” progressed so well that it soon resulted in the crisis we all suffered through. Under the circumstances, it was not entirely comfortable to hear speakers at the recent League of Nations conference[†] reiterating old, habitual thinking on all sorts of subjects. They failed to say anything relevant about the modern social movement, which is the only thing capable of founding a true league of nations.

These old, habitual ways of thinking often lead to very strange answers coming from very intelligent people. (I certainly don’t want to underestimate people’s intelligence.) In Bern, one such intelligent gentleman recently told me that he could not imagine that three-folding would accomplish much, since ultimately it all has to come together in a unity; civil rights cannot be limited to the political sphere, and so on.

But my point is that the sphere of rights must develop on its own terms if we are to have “rights” in the economy and in cultural affairs. People say that I am attempting to chop the body social into pieces, but that is not what I am talking about! The point is to give the social organism three strong legs to stand on: a healthy rights sphere, a healthy economy, and healthy cultural institutions. When these exist, the overriding unity will develop of its own accord, and it will be the centralized state we idolize but have to abandon if we want socialism.

For more than a century, people have talked about equality, liberty, and fraternity as the three great social ideals or impulses for humankind. The highly intelligent people of the nineteenth century, who proved that these ideals could not possibly be achieved had been hypnotized by the idea of the centralized state, and therefore saw these ideals as contradictory. But now it is time to implement these ideals and to take up these three social impulses, which can only be done in the context of the threefold social organism. In a self-determining domain of cultural and intellectual affairs, individual capacities must develop on the basis of *freedom*. In the sphere of rights, which includes employer-employee relationships, the prevailing principle must be the

inherent *equality* of all human individuals. And the economy must be governed by the true *sister-and-brotherliness* that can flourish only in cooperative associations, whether of consumers or producers.

Liberty, equality, and fraternity will each be able to prevail in one of the members of the threefold body social. Liberty will thrive in cultural and intellectual affairs, equality in a democratic sphere of rights, and fraternity in economic activity.

Today I have been able to present only a few of the most important perspectives on what we must consider in these serious times if we truly want to escape from chaos and confusion instead of falling deeper into them. Rather than thinking only of small changes, we must summon the courage to admit that a day of great reckoning is upon us. Alert minds see what is coming and realize that we do not have much time to debate what to do. Therefore, let us set out on the path that presents itself to us today: the path to a threefold social order that lies before us. Is this a path of impractical idealism? It seems so only to those who prefer to perpetuate the “practicality” that brought us the catastrophe of a World War.

To heal the body social, we must fundamentally abandon any superstitious idolization of so-called practicality that is nothing more than brute human egotism. We must subscribe to an idealism that is not one-sided but based on real, practical life experience. If we are seriously concerned about our time, we must inquire about ways of healing the grievous injuries that are being inflicted on our society. We can only hope that more and more people will ask this question and find this path before it is too late. It could indeed be too late very soon.

Concluding Remarks

After a discussion largely dominated by party and union functionaries, Rudolf Steiner rose to speak again:

I am afraid the discussion would have been more fruitful if the speakers had actually gone into the issues I raised. Since that did not happen, I will only be able to draw your attention to a few individual points in the time remaining.

Several speakers said that I did not present anything new. However, I am very familiar with the development of the socialist movement, and what I presented today is based on an actual experience of how the recent international crisis reorganized our society. Anyone who claims that what I said is essentially nothing new needs to be made aware that this claim is fundamentally untrue. The reality of the situation is quite different. The speakers failed to hear the new element in what I presented. They heard only a few obvious and well-deserved criticisms of the existing social order, slogans they have been accustomed to hearing for many years. That is all they heard. They heard absolutely nothing of everything in between, nothing of what I said about the threefolding of the body social or the real socialization it could achieve. Presumably, they failed to mention any of this in their contributions to the discussion because they did not hear it. I understand that. I also understand, however, that this state of affairs cannot lead to a fruitful discussion.

For example, one speaker, who seemed not to have lived through the last five or six years, expounded on the same old theories that had been dealt with so many times before this catastrophe began. He conscientiously restated all the theories of surplus value[†] and so on, which are certainly quite true, but have already been presented countless times before. The only thing he forgot to consider is that we are now living in quite different times. He forgot, for example, what a highly respected Socialist leader said a few months before the German capitulation: namely, that when this catastrophic World War is over, the German government will have to relate very differently to the working class and involve it in all government actions and legislation. Socialists also said that the Socialist parties would have to be taken into account.

Well, that has not happened. The wielders of power sank into the abyss, and your parties watched it happen. These parties now face a completely different international situation, one that requires us to learn to listen to the most urgent current needs. We must not simply ignore new ideas or choose to hear only the

voices of long-standing parties within the socialist movement. If we do, we are in grave danger—a danger that was actually always present in the old international order, which paved the way for reactionaries. How? By dismissing any effort to perceive the reality of the situation and base actions on this reality. Instead, actions were derived from mere ideologies and philosophies having nothing to do with reality. The worst thing that could happen now would be for the Socialist Party to succumb to some sort of reactionary paralysis that would prevent it from actively dealing with the facts, which speak so loudly for themselves.

That is where we stand today. After making the acquaintance of a number of Marxists, Karl Marx himself said: As for myself, I am no Marxist.† (Real innovators often have similar experiences.) Marx always showed that he was able to learn from events—in particular, the events of 1870/71†—and to adapt to changing times. Today, no doubt, he would admit the possibility that threefolding the body social represents a solution to the social and class problem. Whenever innovators suggest new ways of thinking and acting that require real courage, people say they offer goals but no way of achieving them. Has anyone else introduced the idea of a self-liquidating government? That is truly an unusual idea. Old governments and even the socialist government have no intentions beyond being conscientious extensions of what government used to be. What we need, however, is for government to retain the initiative only in the center—that is, to retain oversight of security services, public hygiene, and the like, while leaving the economy and the domain of cultural affairs to manage themselves.

This is not a theory and not a philosophy. It is an indication of what needs to be done, and the first step in implementing it is to understand that it is necessary. In turn, that understanding requires a willingness to relinquish old habits, and to stop hearing only what we want to hear while ignoring everything unfamiliar.

When speakers get entangled in practical contradictions without noticing it, they demonstrate the impossibility of finding

practical ways forward. One speaker, having said first that real political power rests on economic underpinnings, then went on to say (after a number of other remarks, so the juxtaposition was not obvious) that we must seize political power in order to seize economic power. On the one hand, therefore, he is saying that whoever has economic power also has political power. But a few sentences later he says that we must have political power first, and then we will also have economic power. It is impossible to develop practical approaches with people who talk like that. The ability to think clearly, without confused trains of thought, is a prerequisite to any truly practical approach.

We will get no further by clinging to objections such as: Given people's predisposition to comfort and convenience, they will have to be *forced* to send their children to comprehensive schools. That was the reasoning of the former wielders of power. The members of government were truly no more intelligent than their constituents, but they were always convinced that people would do nothing voluntarily and would have to be forced to act.

It is strange to see this sort of reasoning now appearing among socialists, when the reality of the situation demands receptivity to actual needs rather than clinging to entrenched theories and the like. Anyone who says, "We must seize power!" is speaking in vague, theoretical terms. Seizing power without knowing what to do with it results in no progress at all. Go ahead and seize power. Power is for the birds if you have no inkling of what to do once you have it. *Before* coming to power, it is essential to be quite clear about what you intend to use it for.

The revolution of November 9 is over;† whether successfully or not is a question of perspective. The international community sees the revolution as bogus because those who seized power do not know what to do next, other than issue calls for unity in accordance with old party platforms. But there is only one way of inspiring unity, namely, to see where the actual damage lies. This is how the threefolding impulse is trying to bring about unity. Objectively speaking, it is simply a slander to say that a new party or a new sect should be founded. That is nonsense. Even if the

resolution was passed by numerous assemblies, I am quite certain that it would never be implemented, because doing so would soon unseat those presently in power. There is no reason to fear any threat to unity. But there is one way of effectively destroying unity—just insist on your own principles. Say, “If you do not agree with me, there is no unity.” That is what many people today really mean when they preach unity.

As I said before, I regret not being able to go into detail because not one of the speakers who contributed to the discussion really touched on anything I actually presented in my lecture. In the end, they even accused me of philosophizing. These speakers would starve as philosophers, and it is highly debatable whether the last speaker’s philosophizing would help us discover anything that might really be helpful in the current situation.

The impulse of threefolding society was first presented in the context of foreign policy during the recent catastrophic war, when I believed the time was right.[†] That was long before the monstrosity of the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk.[†] At that time, on the basis of this threefolding impulse, it seemed right to me to seek some kind of equitable balance with the East, rather than what actually happened. No one understood this, and the well-known consequences of the Brest-Litovsk accord followed. Today it is essential to find people who will act differently than those to whom I initially presented the threefolding idea.

A brochure about responsibility for the war, which will appear in the next few days, will tell the world about how the great crisis broke out and about what was actually going on in Germany in late July and early August of 1914.[†] It will also show that people did not think for themselves, but were content to let the authorities think for them. This apathy, far from producing a rational foreign policy, led to the nadir of German foreign policy on July 26.[†] The world needs to be aware of events within Germany in July and August of 1914, which are soon to be brought to light through the memoirs of the individual most involved in those events. We will see what opportunities we missed because the authorities persisted in their usual ways

of thinking while everyone else basically allowed themselves to be told what to believe.

But enough about this; we've heard it often before. The war-profiteers were followed by revolution-profiteers; and the warmongers were followed by the revolution-monger; and in both cases their relationship to the profiteers was roughly the same. It is time to move beyond inciting violence and upheaval. We must also move beyond accepting the political leadership of any authorities whatsoever, whether socialists or others. We must become capable of judging for ourselves, but this will not happen if we dismiss all proposals based on the actual requirements of our time.

I will not go into the contributions that distorted and misrepresented the spirit in which my observations were intended. It is objectively inaccurate and derogatory to claim that I attempt to bridge differences with goodwill. I did not talk about bridging differences with goodwill. I talked about organizational changes that need to happen. Making our cultural, economic, and political affairs and their institutions independent of each other has nothing to do with goodwill, but everything to do with objective descriptions of what needs to be done.

I fully agree with anyone who says that we must first have power, but I am not at all clear that wielders of power will know what to do with it. If we simply intend to barge ahead, leaving the unenlightened masses behind, we will find ourselves in much worse circumstances than before.

In contrast to the philosophizing of others, you may feel terribly practical if you say, "The French are completely impoverished and can't give us any bread; England has also been broken by the war and can't give us any bread; America is too expensive for us, but we can get bread from Russia!" Well, in spite of reports to the contrary, it is safe to assume for the moment that the English have much more bread than the Russians. Expecting bread from the Russians has no basis in fact.

The essential point now is to grasp the reality of our situation and to acknowledge that we need new ways of thinking. Our

old intellectual institutions were incapable of creating an equitable society. For that we need a new spiritual life, which can be accomplished only by freeing cultural and intellectual/spiritual affairs from political constraints. Similarly, labor needs to be extricated from economic conflicts and protected by an independent constitutional state. We also need equitable pricing, which can happen only in the context of self-regulating economic activity. These are all things we can actually work toward, not mere revolutionary phrases. If we have the courage to introduce them, they will truly change the world. I believe this will become apparent if you apply enough thought to the threefolding of the society. These changes could be introduced in a relatively short time. Once a healthy threefold organism exists, it will revolutionize our circumstances. If it is adopted internationally, we will no longer need to trumpet world revolution, because the revolution will happen as a matter of course. Demanding revolution will not make it happen. It will happen only if we identify seminal ideas that will grow and bear fruit for all.

We do not need to waste much time talking about this, but we do need to understand what must happen. Threefolding society has nothing to do with ideologies, utopias, or philosophies. It is an action plan, a working plan, not a description of some future state. Every house needs a working plan or a blueprint, and so does the reorganization of society. This reorganization will not be implemented by anyone who holds back, whether socialists or others, but only by those who really intend to move forward. I am afraid those of you who heard only “old ideas” and “nothing new” here today would lead us into chaos, not out of it.

For once, let us be seriously receptive to ideas that are unaccustomed and new; ideas that out of complacent habits of thought, we are inclined to ignore completely, editing out all but our own pet phrases. We need to change our thinking. Before it is too late, humankind must appeal to new thinking habits, new mindsets, and new schools of thought. And once again, I tell you, if we do not find the inner courage to do this, it could soon be too late.