The purpose of the schemes discussed by Condorcet and Paine was not to remove the hostility of the poor but to end poverty itself. These were a direct product of the American and French Revolutions. These were not proposals to resolve the problems of the short run in order to pass the test of the long term. Nor were they a reaction to the immediate clash of the interests of the rich and the poor; they were a crucial asset. In the eyes of his progressive followers of the 1780s and 1790s, Smith's great achievement had not only been to spell out the historical and political importance of the progress of society and the achievement of economic growth but also to distinguish the peaceful and reciprocally beneficial facets of exchange from the competitive and exclusive ones.

For Paine and Condorcet in the 1790s, the elimination of poverty had been part of a pitched battle between advancing enlightenment and the receding defences of 'force and fraud'. These powers were not merely economic; they were political, legal, and social as well. The task for the 1790s, and the only one that promised to lead to a more serious and comprehensive reform of society, was to address the problem of poverty and to undertake the massive social and political projects that would be necessary to end the poverty of the masses. These were the aims of the Utopians of the 1790s, who were inspired by a new question: whether scientific and economic progress could abolish poverty, as had been confused with 'politics'. Questions about how wealth was formed, distributed and consumed were still very much at the heart of the political discussion, and the place of government, the state of society, and politics were still in question.

In the late 1790s, the treatise in nineteenth-century France, Jean-Baptiste Say asserted that 'political economy' had too long been viewed in the light of a system of 'economics' and not in the light of the history of its own development. Say's 'Treatise on Political Economy' was the first to attempt to connect the history of economic thought with the history of political and social institutions. It was in the 1790s at the time of the French Revolution that there first emerged the believable outlines of a world without endemic scarcity, a world in which the predictable misfortunes of life need no longer plunge the afflicted into chronic poverty or extreme want. This idea was not another version of the medieval fantasy of the land of Cockaigne, in which capons flew in through the window ready-cooked. It was in the 1790s at the time of the French Revolution that there first emerged the believable outlines of a world without endemic scarcity, a world in which the predictable misfortunes of life need no longer plunge the afflicted into chronic poverty or extreme want. This idea was not another version of the medieval fantasy of the land of Cockaigne, in which capons flew in through the window ready-cooked. It was in the 1790s at the time of the French Revolution that there first emerged the believable outlines of a world without endemic scarcity, a world in which the predictable misfortunes of life need no longer plunge the afflicted into chronic poverty or extreme want. This idea was not another version of the medieval fantasy of the land of Cockaigne, in which capons flew in through the window ready-cooked.