

# How to Read Capital

(Adapted from a leaflet by A. M. Simons, issued by Kerr and Co., Chicago. Now out of print)

In one respect at least Marx's "Capital" deserves comparison with the Christian Bible—it is the most talked about and the least read book among its followers. There are thousands of copies of the first volume of "Capital" among socialists, yet only occasionally is a person found who has really mastered it. The most common explanation of this is that it is extremely hard to understand. To a certain extent this is true. It is true of any great fundamental work. Yet I have seldom found a working man who, if he would take the time to study, could not grasp the Marxian philosophy.

I have found hundreds of readers of Marx, however, who never could get beyond that first chapter. It always seems to me unfortunate that the logical order of the work determined that this chapter should serve as an introduction. The technical discussion of commodities has proved the undoing of thousands of would-be Marxian students. Yet there are portions of this first volume of "Capital" (and I speak only of this volume at present) that are dramatic and absorbing, with flashes of humor and touches of eloquence that place them well up in the ranks of literature, apart from their argument.

Because of these facts it has been a hobby of mine that if the method of approach were changed it might be made much easier to understand Marx. I am the more led to suggest this idea because all the attempts to popularize "Capital" have been dismal failures. I think I have read nearly all these attempts and believe that the above opinion voices the conclusion of nearly every Marxian student (who has not written such an adaptation or popularization).

I do not claim that the order of reading which I am about to suggest is preferable as an orderly arrangement of the argument to that left by Marx, but simply that by selecting those portions which are most entertaining and most easily understood, and which are none the less fundamental, as a beginning, the portions which are ordinarily looked upon as extremely difficult of comprehension will have had many of their obscurities cleared away.

I would, therefore, suggest that the reader who is approaching Marx for the first time, begin with Chapter xv. of Part IV. (p 365 of English edition). This is the chapter on "Machinery and Modern Industry," and the factory workman at least will find himself at once in the midst of a world with which he is familiar. He will meet the words he uses in his daily work. He will find ideas which have always been within his reach presented to him in a form that will carry infinitely more meaning than they have ever done before, and this is largely the secret of what makes interesting reading. Here he can read the famous definition of a machine which has now become classical and has been accepted (or shall we say stolen, since credit is almost never given) by nearly all the orthodox political economists.

Note in the pages that immediately follow how the introduction of the various forms of motive power has brought corresponding social changes. The four pages following p. 379 (closing the first section of this chapter) are one of the fullest discussions by Marx of the relation of industrial to social changes; in other words of the materialist interpretation of history. Yet it is seldom referred to by writers on this subject. This whole chapter is illustrative of this method and this fact should be closely borne in mind by the reader. Here, too, we find Marx's discussion of just how machinery "saves labor" and how this saving redounds to the benefit of the capitalist. All this is told with a wealth of illustration that cannot but make it intelligible even to a careless reader.

When this chapter has been read, follow the well-known example of the novel reader and skip everything to the conclusion and see how the plot turns out. Part VIII. on the "So-called Primitive Ac-

cumulation' is the biography of the capitalist. The eight chapters of which this part is composed constitute a study in industrial history. Whenever an attempt is made to indict the present capitalist we are always told that he secured his capital by "honest" methods and that he should be compensated. No man can read these chapters and not forever realize that even from the point of view of the ethics of capitalism the present owners of the earth can claim no right to their possessions.

This portion of the book moves on majestically in its argument, its summing up of facts, its power of logic, until it culminates in chapter xxxii., "The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation." This chapter is one of the great classics of socialism. With the chapter which precedes it, it constitutes an epitome of socialist philosophy. It has a strength of style, a sweep of argument, a prophetic insight, which it would be hard to parallel elsewhere in the world of literature. It has been reproduced many times in socialist writings, but if the reader does not recall it, let him lay this down until he has read these two chapters. They will bear reading again and again and will grow greater and give new meaning each time.

Around these two chapters have been waged the fiercest battles of Marxists and "revisionists." It was against the chapter on "Historical Tendency" that Bernstein directed his heaviest batteries (in the days prior to his recantation of revisionism.) Read it in the light of the facts of industrial development and see how much wiser Marx was than those who wrote almost a generation after him, and were so much the nearer to the facts which he foresaw and to which they were still blind.

The reader who has proceeded thus far will have obtained a fairly good grasp of one phase of the Marxian philosophy—the materialist interpretation of history—especially if he has already read the "Communist Manifesto" and Engels' "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific." If he has not read these works he had better stop at this point and familiarize himself with them. Such a reader will have met with many phrases that he did not understand, but could skip them without materially interfering with the comprehension of the argument. He will now want to know more of the mechanism of this capitalism whose life history he has traced.

It is the analysis of this mechanism which constitutes Marxian economics. The chapters we have discussed show how capitalism came, and whither it is going. The remainder of the book tells how capitalism operates while it is here. For this reason they are much more difficult to understand. Almost any one can grasp the history of the growth and evolution of electricity as a mechanical force, but only the trained electrician can calculate the methods which a given electrical mechanism works.

Let us then turn back to the first chapter. Here we are learning the language which will be used throughout this portion of the book. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that we master this first chapter. There are only 55 pages of it and it is well to read it half a dozen times before going on. When we are sure that we know what is meant by a "Commodity," by "Use Value," "Surplus Value," and "Labor Power," we shall find that many of the difficulties that have always confronted us in a study of Marx will have disappeared.

Then read straight on through the book, including chapters already read, which will fall naturally into their relation with the whole, and not forgetting at the end of each part, to turn back and read those first 55 pages again, to brush up the "vocabulary," as the student of a language would say.

It may be said that this is hard work. Certainly it is. But a mastery of Marx's "Capital" will go far towards supplying a good education in economics and the philosophy of history. You can not expect to get such an education by a few hours' easy reading. Moreover, much of the difficulty of Marx comes from the fact that we have learned to think in terms of capitalist ideology, while Marx

demands, as a preliminary to his comprehension, an understanding of proletarian psychology. This explains why he is even more difficult for the college student than for the manual worker, and is practically incomprehensible to the bourgeois reformer.

I have said nothing about the other volumes of Marx, because the person who has mastered Volume one will scarcely need any suggestions on the best method of reading the others.—("The Plebs." A. M. SIMONS.

## ECONOMIC CAUSES OF WAR.

This is what "The Plebs" has to say about the Economic Causes of War:—"Imperialist interests are centred on the control of raw materials—coal, iron, oil, etc. All three were vital matters for France, Germany and Great Britain. Germany's control of the greater portion of iron ore in Europe and her Bagdad Railway scheme, having for its objects (1) the bringing of all Central and S. E. Europe, and Near East, into one big trade bloc, dominated by her; (2) control of Eastern oil supplies; (3) control of the Dardanelles trade route to the Black Sea and Russian supplies; (4) the breaking of Great Britain's eastern empire monopoly in trade exploitation, etc.—these were the elements of menace.

France wanted the iron ore of Lorraine, and was short of coal, hence annexation of the Saar Valley. Great Britain—world trade and empire, both threatened by Germany. Italy—control of the Adriatic coast, ports, etc. Russia (pre-Revolution, Bosphorus, Dardanelles) and access to the Mediterranean. For the smaller belligerents the need to be in favor with the victorious Great Powers as a condition of being allowed to live, and, in addition, in the Balkans, the necessity for the long overdue "national" settlement of lands once held by the Turks; and in Austria-Hungary, by the Hapsburgs. These are a few of the vital economic issues at stake in the Great War." To follow this investigation read P. T. Leckie's "Economic Causes of War." Post paid, 25 cents per copy.

## THE MINER'S WAGES.

SOUTH WALES			
Grade	Present Wage	Proposed Wage	Reduction
Colliers (day)	85 9	50 7	35 2
Hauliers (day)	80 8	45 9	35 0
Assistant timbermen, ostlers, Laborers, pumpmen	73 11	38 11	35 0
NORTH WALES			
(Other reductions from 40 to 50 per cent.)			
Colliers	81 8	51 8	30 0
DURHAM			
Bankmen (day)	60 10	44 1	16 9
Roll'ymen (day)	71 1	44 4	26 9
Laborers, etc.	65 8	41 5	27 3
NOTTINGHAM			
Rippers (1st chargemen)	93 9	82 6	11 3
Filers	73 2 1/2	55 1	18 1 1/2
Laborers	72 3/8	54 3	18 5/8
NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE			
Colliers	82 3 1/2	62 8 1/2	19 7
Loaders	78 7 1/2	57 11	20 8 1/2
Horsekeepers	71 4 1/2	48 2 1/2	21 1 1/2
LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE			
Collier (day)	90 5	73 9	16 6
Odult drawer	78 9	59 1	19 8
Daywageman	72 10	51 8	21 2
FOREST OF DEAN			
Colliers	74 3	43 4	31 11
Timbermen	63 9	40 10	22 11
Laborers	64 2	30 5	33 9
CUMBERLAND			
Hewers (day)	80 0	40 10	39 1
Laborers	71 4	33 4	38 0
WARWICKSHIRE			
Getters	81 8	68 9	12 11
Loaders	73 4	57 6	15 10
Banksmen	61 8	39 3	22 6
SOMERSET			
Colliers	70 0 1/2	46 8	23 1/2
Hauliers	67 11	40 5	27 6
Laborers	67 11	40 5	27 6
SCOTLAND			
Colliers	85 0	64 2	20 10
Firemen	90 0	69 2	20 10

The above figures appeared in the "Labor Leader," April 7th, 1921. The average wage reduction as proposed by the mine owners amounts to over 30 per cent. All grades of labor employed in and around the mines received 14 days' notice of dismissal unless they accepted the proposed terms. This included pumpmen, ostlers and stokers. If the mine owners succeed in enforcing these wage reductions then, by all reports, the real wages of the miners—that is, the commodities they can buy—will be below the pre-war level. The figures are startling, and they indicate what the present lock-out of the miners means to British labor in general if the miners fail.

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