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## Conditioning the Job

FOR long and weary years the working class has struggled for the modification of its working conditions. Age-long it has centred its activities on the terms on which it would yield its labor-power; on the very intimate questions of hours and wages, time and overtime, health and safety. Yet for all the years of its struggles, it has but little to show in class comfort, class security, class welfare, and still it is braving the same old adamant questions. Why the failure? How find success?

These questions are the two aspects of the same thing—social relationships. The same answer explains both. Fundamentally, a job is access to the means of life; and the terms of the job are the terms of social production. The conditions of the job, therefore, are the conditions of social organization. What are those conditions? The relationships of capital. The relationships of a society, where the means of life are the private property of one class, a class which operates them solely for private advantage to the exclusion of social needs and interests. So private advantage dictates the terms of labor, and under this class dictation labor toils, not for itself, but for class privilege; not for society, but for private property. Out of this deal the laboring class acquires the bread of subsistence; the owning class secures all that is left over. Whether this surplus is much or little does not concern us. That is a side issue. Poverty and wealth, luxury and degradation, are the sordid accompaniments of a slave society, the consideration of which is valueless if it fails to find the common cause. What does matter is that the laboring class, in reproducing its own subsistence, accomplishes, at least, a like service for the owning class. Technical progress is but a mere heightening of the advantages accruing to private ownership. When the working class reaches the point of asking why it does this, why it works one-third for itself and two-thirds for the master class, it will take the final step to controlling the conditions of the job.

Wherefore, then, the why? Why does capital command labor? Why is labor compelled to produce profit—surplus—in order to reproduce its own sustenance? And why can no reform obviate its necessity of so doing? Because capitalist property right in the means of life is the basis of our social organization. Because that is the explicit constitution of the society of "law and order." Because society is directly and specifically organized for exploitation; for the production of the social necessities of life, through the machinery of profit. The owning class, owning the means of wealth production, own of necessity the wealth of production and so control and direct all social activities, while labor, owning no share in the material means of life but requiring access to them must, perforce, work on the terms specified by capital, i.e., while reproducing its own keep, must produce profit. And there is no possibility of reformation in the matter. For, since the capitalist class is organized in the capitalist state there can be no reform inaugurated which does not redound to the interest of the capitalist class. And for the same reason there can be no "step at a time" journeying to the Socialist commonwealth. Master class interests and working class interests are antitheses: the opposite poles of the social sphere. Like magnetic currents they interglow, each in its own

channel, in the adverse necessities of profit production; they cannot intermingle in the harmony of social tranquility. When they meet, they conflict, and when the opposing forces are strong enough, they produce the irruption, termed in social affairs revolution.

It is true, the living standards of today are different—are higher, if you will, potentially at least—from the living standards of yesterday; that nominal wages have risen, and hours of labor fallen, and that the life conditions of certain sections of the workers are far in advance of 100 years ago. But it is also true that modern life is ruled by more imperious necessity; that the workers' existence is more precarious than it has ever been; and that the life standards of the working class as a whole have fallen, and are steadily slipping on the steepening slopes of our industrial avernus. If sanitary conditions have been vastly improved it has been, chiefly, because the lax and haphazard methods of rural communities, threatened with plague and disease the growing populations of the rising industrial towns, i.e., the capitalists and their means of wealth; commodity transportation paved the roads and charted the seas; efficiency lighted the factories and pumped air into the mines. Property protection renovated the dark places, electrified the streets, brought in water systems, conjured the glittering city, to ravish it. And the rivalry of competition burned out the unforgettable haunts of young enterprise, to re-garb them in the diaphanous creations of the great industry. If safety devices are installed in industrial plants they are there, mainly, not to protect the life and limb of the slave, but to safeguard the pocket of the master. The big topsails of the wind-jammer were not split in two lest the struggling shellback be lured overboard in a gale, but because the laboring ship could be quickly double-reefed,—and rendered safe.

The same force which put the patent coupler on the American railroads retained the hand system in the British Isles—cheap production, not the security of the laborer. Only as an incidental does the labor class benefit, and at that, partially. If industrial insurance and benefit schemes find a place on the statute books, they are there,—if operative at all,—because monopoly saw in them a means to crush small competition. And even so, monopoly throws the onus of the scheme on the whole community, as an added item in the cost of production, and makes additional profit thereon.

If labor agitation can effect adjustments and conciliations, why is it so impotent against the mass of unemployment today? If it has reduced working hours, why do working hours continually fluctuate the world over? If craft unions were powerful enough to accomplish reforms, why did labor lose everything during the war? Why are they so abject and servile in the grim stagnation of the moment? Why does their vaunted conciliation fail of its desire? If reform is anything but a mirage of the steel age, why is the grip of the oligarchy tightening on every hand; famishing all peoples; disrupting every home; prostituting every mortal bond and human ideal? Why? Because labor reform is a labor myth; because capitalist conciliation is capitalist exploitation; because capitalist labor is slave labor, and the fearful anguish of the modern world

is the inevitable fruit of evolved law and order, and based on the individual right of property in the means of life. Labor fights capital in the struggle for existence, as nature struggles in evolution, blindly, without concept, whither it is tending, without knowledge of its slave status in society. Unions struggle—as they must—in the mills of hours and wages, as they struggle in the mills of profit,—as commodity sellers. As commodity sellers they are bounded by the horizon of trade interest, and in trade interest there is but one freedom—gain. The reform they clamor for comes only as a climax to individual development, and receives its crown solely from the interested hands of the ruling class.

Commodity struggles may be necessary struggles, but they are not struggles for economic freedom. They may be the necessity of a trade struggle but they are never the terms of a class struggle. In the class struggle they spell, not power, but confusion; not hope, but prejudice; not class concept, but self-interest. They are advents of progress; the adventitious progeny of fictitious advantage; but they must be subordinated to the understanding of social concepts of social organization. They exist, they are material, they are necessary. Yet, are illusions; productive of no reality; melting away with the unsubstantial job. Like the flicker of sunlight on water they flash between cause and effect, enriching experience only by eliminating the results of that experience. True, they are the derived fruits of capitalist development, landmarks on the road to freedom. But they are also the tumuli of aborted hopes, containing, like the cairns of ancient folks, the mouldering relics of cherished delusions. They are not the means through which capital is to be abolished, and they are not the key to the class-conscious knowledge which alone can replace the illusory interests of reform with the unwavering concepts of revolution.

Capitalist progress is capitalist accumulation. With that accumulation comes the great monopoly closing the doors of opportunity, deepening social destitution and making further social progress an impossibility. Capitalist private property and social production are antagonisms, and no reform can effect any ameliorating influence on both sides. Property can be secured only at the expense of society; profit can be obtained only through the degradation of labor; hours can be shortened only by heightened efficiency in production; and wages maintained (relatively) only by closing out everything but technical skill from production. Obviously that is impossible. That is why, in all cases, the final results of reformist efforts are a progressive increase of power to the owning class, and an equally progressive deterioration of the life standards of the working class.

To control the conditions of the job is to own the job. To own the job is to own the means of wealth production. To own the means of wealth production is to hold the powers of the State. Always does power vest in ownership; always is control in the hands of possession. There is no side-stepping on the matter. Forward we must go, be the path as it may. The full task is the necessary prelude to the full plate. And as clearly, the last issue is not reform but revolution: not craft union but class consciousness; not conciliation but understanding.

R.