

Defining Capitalism

Defining capitalism, or capitalist society, is something like defining the universe. It is easy and can be done in a few words if we make our definition broad and general enough. But when we get down to define it in all its details and particulars it is necessary to write volumes. In fact, it is safe to say that everything which has been seriously written about human society, in modern times, is an attempt to define some phase of capitalism.

For a simple and general definition we might say that capitalism is the sum total of all human activity at the present time; Or, the machine age of social development. But, while these definitions are correct in a general way they do not tell us very much about capitalism. We may also take the definition of society given by Professor Jenks in his "Short History of Politics," which says, "A society is a group or mass of people bound together by a common principle or object." This is a very good general definition of any form of communism, and in a limited way it also applies to capitalism, but it is incomplete inasmuch as it does not take cognizance of the conflict of classes in capitalist society, nor the economic conditions in which this conflict has its source.

It is true that even in capitalist society there is a desire common to all human beings which forces them to associate for the common purpose of more efficiently producing the necessaries of life, as well as for mutual aid in various ways. This desire or objective is to live and enjoy life. But, owing to the confusion resulting from the various conflicting economic interests it is crowded into the background.

Capitalism, as John D. Rockefeller has already pointed out, is based on the ownership by a small and parasitic class of all the natural resources of the earth as well as the machinery of wealth production; consequently, the remainder of society, the great majority of human beings, are practically vagrants and trespassers on property they do not own. Their only means of living is to sell the only thing they have for sale, their labor power, to those who own the means of life. Thus we see that the owners of wealth are masters and the workers are slaves. The slaves can only have access to the means of life on the conditions laid down by the owners and masters. And the owners will not agree to let the slaves work unless they do so on conditions that will produce a surplus over and above their own maintenance. This surplus, which is the difference between the value of the labor power of the workers and the value of their total product, is what is called surplus value, or profit, and is the main aim and end of capitalist production. It constitutes by far the greater portion of all the wealth produced by the workers.

If this was the worst of capitalism it would be bad enough, but it is only the beginning of the trouble. The surplus value produced by the workers is so great that the capitalists, or owners, cannot use or even waste it as quick as it is produced. It is necessary, therefore, to find a market in which to dispose of this surplus, if the machinery of wealth production is to be kept in operation. Now a market in this sense is not a place where things are bought and sold, or exchanged; it would solve no problem to take a million dollars' worth of goods over to China and bring back other goods equal in value. That would only be exchanging one kind of surplus for another, and we must remember that this surplus, for which a foreign market is necessary, is what is left after the home market has been supplied. The kind of a market that is necessary is a place where this surplus may be disposed of altogether, in other words it must be invested as new capital. This can only be done by developing the natural resources of countries that are not yet cap-

italized; such as, building railroads, opening up mines, oil wells, and timber tracts, as well as bringing fertile land under cultivation, mostly done by the introduction of the most advanced and efficient machinery, together with the transformation of thousands of comparatively free savages and barbarians into docile and obedient wage slaves, or killing them off, if they refuse to be transformed. This process is called civilizing and Christianizing the heathen.

But the countries that are not yet capitalized are limited in extent, and are diminishing year by year. And the countries that are highly capitalized, or partly capitalized, are all looking for a place to dispose of their surplus wealth, and require an ever increasing market; otherwise, the machinery of wealth production must stop, millions of workers are thrown out of employment, and we have what is called a crisis. Out of this condition of affairs there naturally arises a competition between the different capitalist nations, or groups of nations, for control of the lion's share of the undeveloped resources of the earth. This is the little joker that makes Mars, the old-fashioned god of war, wonder if he ever did know his business.

In the meantime the workers keep on working and producing the necessaries of life until everything is supplied except their own larders; and then, when they have to stop because the warehouses are all full and there is no room to pile up any more wealth, they sit down and howl—for more work, till their masters throw them a few doughnuts to keep them quiet until they can find some way to dispose of the surplus wealth. And the way found is generally war. The advantage of this method is that it kills three crows with one shot. It disposes of the surplus wealth. It disposes of a few million surplus wage slaves. And it decides the question as to which group of saviours shall have the delightful privilege of saving the immortal souls of the woolly-headed denizens of some part of darkest Africa, or some other corner of the earth's surface where the souls of the inhabitants have not yet been "lighted with wisdom from on high."

It does not matter, however, whether two or three of the most powerful capitalist nations, by force of arms, gobble all that is left of the markets or divide them up among the bunch. In either case the markets are doomed. They cannot even now absorb the vast amount of surplus value produced by the workers of the world, as fast as it is produced. And as each new country becomes capitalized it also requires a market for its surplus product. Consequently, it is only a question of time, and a comparatively short space of time, until the whole world will be highly capitalized; when the workers of every country will be producing surplus value in large quantities and there will be no markets left to fight about. What will happen then is a problem for bourgeois economists to solve.

Corresponding to this most remarkable and interesting method of economic production and distribution known as capitalism there is, of course, the capitalist state. The state came into existence with class society and will disappear when economic classes have been abolished. It is a result of the conflict of economic classes and changes in accordance with the change taking place in the economic basis of society, although not always in the same proportion. The state is a weapon of class domination, and is always used by and in the interests of the ruling class. It is composed of a number of institutions and departments which I will not attempt to explain just now.

A capitalist state has two functions. First, to maintain law and order among the workers at home; in other words, to guide them along the paths of virtue and righteousness, in the condition "in which it has pleased divine providence to place them." Second, to promote the spiritual welfare of the uncivilized inhabitants of foreign lands (as mentioned

above) in competition with other liberty loving and altruistic capitalist groups. This is sometimes called defending the rights of small nations.

It will be noticed that this definition of capitalism does not correspond very well with the general definition of society given by Professor Jenks, but I should worry about that. Furthermore, it may be pointed out that it is not even a decent definition of capitalism, and neither it is, but it is the best I could do. If not satisfactory, why, define the infernal thing to suit yourselves.

F. J. MC NEY.

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PLATFORM

Socialist Party of Canada

We, the Socialist Party of Canada affirm our allegiance to, and support of the principles and programme of the revolutionary working class.

Labor, applied to natural resources, produces all wealth. The present economic system is based upon capitalist ownership of the means of production, consequently, all the products of labor belong to the capitalist class. The capitalist is, therefore, master; the worker a slave.

So long as the capitalist class remains in possession of the reins of government, all the powers of the State will be used to protect and defend its property rights in the means of wealth production and its control of the product of labor.

The capitalist system gives to the capitalist an ever-swelling stream of profits, and to the worker, an ever-increasing measure of misery and degradation.

The interest of the working class lies in setting itself free from capitalist exploitation by the abolition of the wage system, under which this exploitation, at the point of production, is cloaked. To accomplish this necessitates the transformation of capitalist property in the means of wealth production into socially controlled economic forces.

The irrepressible conflict of interest between the capitalist and the worker necessarily expresses itself as a struggle for political supremacy. This is the Class Struggle.

Therefore we call upon all workers to organize under the banner of the Socialist Party of Canada, with the object of conquering the political powers for the purpose of setting up and enforcing the economic programme of the working class, as follows:

- 1—The transformation, as rapidly as possible, of capitalist property in the means of wealth production (natural resources, factories, mills, railroads, etc.) into collective means of production.
- 2—The organization and management of industry by the working class.
- 3—The establishment, as speedily as possible, of production for use instead of production for profit.

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