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## The Unemployed Problem

WHEREVER the capitalist system of production prevails, in America or the industrialized regions of Europe, the community lives from hand to mouth in such a way that its livelihood depends on the effectual working of its industrial system from day to day. In such a case a serious disturbance and derangement of the process of production always brings immediate hardship to large sections of the community. Such a condition we have with us in the present world-wide industrial depression. The hardships of such a condition fall with greatest force upon the wage working class. Partial and complete stoppage of industries means a stoppage of income for the unemployed and a reduction for those who are part time and even fully employed, due in the latter case to a general decline in the rate of wages because of the competition of surplus laborers on the labor market. So that, for the workers, there is an increased precariousness of livelihood, and a reduction in its standards, which at best are never far above the subsistence line.

Industrial crises were first noted and commented upon, as of periodic occurrence, in 1825. The period between the crises decreased as time went on until some twenty years ago, when a chronic depression set in, which was only interrupted by the demands of the late war market. During that period the depression did not keep at one level, but had its occasional lapses to lower ones. On the other hand, there were occasional spurts of brisk business activity, though at no time was industry as a whole operating at capacity or anyway near absorbing the whole working population. Always there was an ever-increasing industrial reserve army, and unemployment and want haunted the working class like a spectre. This condition of depression in the industrial world is due to "over-production," which exists because the productive capacity of modern industry constantly, and progressively as its methods improve, over-reaches the purchasing capacity of the market.

The war market, which stimulated production to an unprecedented extent, is finished, and capitalism is back to normal again. After the hell of war, the horrors of peace. We are "re-established," and under the sacred banner of "business as usual," the exploitation of human lives goes on in the system of "hire and fire." Tools to be picked up or laid down as needed, or thrown aside on the human scrap heap in the slums as "unemployable," vast masses of the workers drift restlessly over the country from town to town, from one seasonal occupation to another. Such a life constitutes a high suppression of the normal instincts of man. For immense numbers, the fundamental sex, parental, and creative instincts have not normal expression, and it needs no psychology to tell us that the result is, to put it broadly, unhappiness. The following phrases express the environmental conditions which baulk their lives: "Monotonous work," "Dirty work," "Simplified work," "Mechanical work," the "Servile place of labor," "Insecure tenure of the job," "hire and fire," "winter unemployment," the ever-found union of the poor district with the crime district, and the "restricted district of prostitution," the "open shop," the "labor turnover," "sour bunk houses," "poverty," the "bread lines," the "scrap heap," "destitution," etc., etc.

You of the "comfortable classes," super-skilled aristocrats of labor, professional and business elements who are hostile or indifferent to the problems of the undiscriminate masses, ever this social abyss yawns for you or yours and daily from your ranks they come hurtling down like fallen angels. A New York department store employing 3,000 "respectables," reports a yearly labor turnover of 13,000. There is a moral for you in the great lexicographer's saying, upon his witnessing Tyburn Jack hauled to the gibbet, "There, but for the grace of God, goes Samuel Johnson." Should the humanism of Johnson be beyond your capacity of feeling and understanding, on the lower grounds, then, of selfish interest, the abolishing of the abyss might engage your energies!

The question of unemployment is only a secondary and derived problem of the greater problem presented by the nature of the social economy of the capitalist system of production, out of which unemployment issues as effect from its cause. Therefore it is necessary to look into this social economy.

Looked at in a certain way, there are two factors in the process of production, essential and common to all states of productivity in all ages; these are, on the one hand, the material equipment and on the other, the immaterial equipment or knowledge of ways and means of procuring a livelihood. In modern times, the material equipment is such as, natural resources, mills, mines, factories, railroads, etc., and the immaterial equipment, is a vast, complex body of knowledge incapable of being possessed as a whole by a single individual or a group, but is in the possession of society as a whole. This productive knowledge is a social product and is the outcome of the accumulated experiences of the human race in the arts of production through all the ages. For this knowledge to become effective in the production of those things necessary to satisfy human needs and desires, it must have access to the material equipment, or means of wealth production.

The satisfying of human needs is largely a question of so much food, clothing, shelter, education, recreation, etc., and the problem of supply is to give the working population, scientists, production engineers and managers, producers and laborers of all kinds, who possess knowledge of the arts of production, access to the material equipment of production. Stated so, the problem appears as a problem in engineering, a problem of accounting and organization, a scientifically "matter of fact" proposition. And it would be so were it not that in the capitalist system of production today this knowledge of the productive arts has become separated from, or at best, only on sufferance of the capitalist owners has it functional connection with the material equipment.

This factor of ownership is the crux of the social problem. The material equipment or means of production are the property of a class who do not toil, nor is it necessary that they have knowledge of the arts of production; on the other hand, that knowledge is in the possession of a class who toil but do not own the material equipment. Because the material equipment of production is privately owned, monopolized by the capitalist class, it can not be had access to and put to use except on terms of a profit being realized through the sale of the

products. In other words, into that engineering problem of bringing the essential factors of production together, is injected, like a Munkay wrench into the cogs of a machine, the "rights" of private ownership in society's means of life.

What is the "right" of ownership that plays such havoc with our engineering proposition? Consideration of it shows that it can not be stated in mechanical terms, in terms of stresses and strains or quantities with which an engineer could deal. The "right" of ownership to a thing is a matter of imputation, a "right" given by custom, old use and want, traditional habits of thought, in other words it is a right conferred by social sanction which, in modern times, is enacted in law enforced by the power of the State. Presumably, should the general consensus of opinion change to that effect, then the law conferring a "right" could be nullified. The statement that the law of "property rights" rests on the general consensus of opinion is a broad one however, and has an important reservation. For we are informed by a present day sociologist, Professor John R. Commons, that in actual practice, "Law is not the expression of the whole of society, but of its sovereign element or social class." Karl Marx also stated long before, that the bourgeois State is but the executive committee of the bourgeois property interests. And so, underneath the skin of civilized man with his theory of law, we behold the barbarian who takes hold by matter of fact physical prowess.

Private ownership of the material equipment of production conceivably might be in accordance with social well-being where that equipment is small-scale in character, as in handicraft production, and widely distributed, thus conferring economic independence upon large masses of the people. The small-scale character of such industrial equipment, moreover, determines that work for a livelihood is the basis of industry and profit.

We are now, however, as a result of economic development, in the age of large-scale machine production, and ownership has become limited to and centralized in the capitalist class. Industry is now operated primarily for profit. The masses of the people, being divorced from ownership of industrial equipment and so without economic independence, are now wage workers existing by the sale of their labor-power on the terms of a commodity market. The products which the workers produce are the property of the capitalist owners of the material equipment. Out of the entire mass of produce created by the working class, it receives back but a small share. With each advance in the productive arts, with every new invention and discovery, the mass of surplus products, over and above those obtained by labor as means of subsistence, grows larger, glutting the markets and necessitating curtailment of production in the interest of profit. In truth, society suffocates from its own superabundance even while, and because of it, the majority of its members are in the verge of destitution, and many absolutely destitute.

Concisely formulated, the functional factors essential for supplying community needs are:

Material equipment of production, i.e., natural resources, mills, mines, factories, railroads, etc.

Immaterial equipment of production, i.e., know-

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