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The Machine

THERE is no sentiment about a machine; nothing but the mechanical "reason" of necessary motion. It speeds up, and speeds up, furious, tireless, insatiate, careless whether it consumes man or material.

Mechanically, man controls the machine. He goes before the protean monster and it obeys his slightest behest; performs its prodigies unquestioningly. But behind the man is the master, the political arbiter of both, who sees to it that their combined energy shall minister in their completeness to his interest. And behind the political dominance of the master is the economic of capital, the final dictator of all social activity. The movements of all three are interconnected in all ways; interblended in all relationships. They pull, or strain, or equalize in all directions with varying intensities, as ever differing interests determine, and the composite complexity of their movements and effects is to be disentangled only by disentangling the social relationships which occasion them and shape the destinies of man.

Capitalist industry is the industry of labor saving machinery—not at all labor saving industry. Commodity production is competitive production, and involves cheap production. Cost of production is the pole star of bourgeois "success," and in the monopolies of the greater industry it is figured out, like logarithmic tables; because relative cheapness, of relative quality, controls the market, and the armies of labor, the owners of industry, and its incentive of profit. As necessary labor is the prime factor in productive costs, the elimination of labor to the minimum is essential to the well-being of commodity production on the one hand, and on the other the maximum of effort and efficiency of actual labor. Thus systematically, the inherent economic of the capitalist machine conserves almost automatically the interests of its owners, creating an increasing reserve army of cheapening labor and drawing out the last ounce of effort from the temporarily employed. Thus, constantly the scope of the machine is widened; continually its speed increased, progressively limiting labor, yet augmenting the volume of commodities and steadily diminishes the value of the labor force which alone reproduces itself in its own industry and produces and reproduces both the machine and the products. That is why wages always lag on a rising market, and slump on a falling one; and why the standard of living is constantly tending to a lower relative level.

The development of the capitalist market developed the machine industry. Now, the machine industry, glutting the market, negatives itself, obstructs the progress of the society whose expression it is. Like the Dodder, it stifles its unfortunate host. The machine has grown mighty and commanding. It has become the dictator of human activity. It has taken the land from the yeoman, the tool from the craftsman, possession from the individual, and turned them all into capitalist accumulation; directed their forces into the service of privilege. It has brought forth the proletariat, and cut him off even from all opportunity of labor. It has replaced the captain of industry by the lord of finance, and practically abolished competitive production for monopoly control. It has developed and organized natural resource as never before and created potentials of power and progress which cannot unfold and flower

in grime and restriction of profit production. Steel, oil, coal, cotton, wheat—these are the fruits of the machine industry. They hold the world in interdependence, they are the determinants of life and its concepts; they are the powers of the earth and their owners are the lords thereof. The story of their development is the bleak, lean years of machine production, and their achieved monopoly involves the destruction of the society of which they are the chosen ones. To tolerate and recurrent famine; to the artificial poverty of commercial crises; to preconceived slaughter; to studied prostitution; to scientific lying; to Imperialist propaganda; to the most pitiless slavery of all time—to such a pass has the politically administered machine brought us.

Yet, as hinted above, the machine is not at fault. It is but the impassive agent of its owner. The proprietary right in Capitalist property gives movement to the machine; title to the product, and term to the worker. Only by vesting ownership in society can class and its politics be ended. But class and politics are not to be ended by any flamboyant heroics, or by any reactionary emotion of simple enthusiasm, nor even by the most mathematical exposition of historic materialism, but by the ever widening power and influence of the restricted forces of production, striving for fuller expansion, facing, mordantly keen, the exclusive interest of ancient property. Socialism is a product of understanding and understanding is a product of economic development. Not at all a result of fine reasoning or forensic skill, social necessity, taken alone, by its individualism and tradition, by its capitalist minded misunderstanding, is apt to turn us aside from the one issue that matters and the sole remedy of our trouble, the substitution of social administration for class law. By the nature of society itself, by the process of capitalist commerce, by the immediate needs of the moment and its resourceful re-grouping of fluctuating interests, we cannot take that road until development has divorced us from the side issues of expediency and proven the reconstruction of dwindling interests impossible: until it has forced upon our consciousness the clear concept of class antagonism and its one cause, capitalist private property in the means of life. Politics is the expression of economic interest, and so long as we have, apparently separate and immediate interests to save, we shall strive to conserve them. When conditions shall have developed in us the recognition of capitalist property as the cause of our poverty and miseries we shall, at the same time, recognise our common interest—economic freedom—and act accordingly.

Modern politics is not the interests of a numerous, interdependent community of individuals, but the international interests of a small and well organized monopolist class, controlling, virtually, all social activities. The great industry expropriates all but large capital; it destroys the primitive organization of individual progress; shatters its original concepts of individual right; transforms its tradition of freedom into a gibbering mockery of effort; and lays bare to a struggling and suffering society the inner processes of exploitation. And on the other hand, it can only modify its inherent antagonisms of production by the monopoly regulation of production to the effective market, i.e., by closing down on its own activities. Thus it intensifies the antagonism between the machine and the

market; between necessity and profit; between society and class; and brings into the clearest relief the fundamental antagonism between the social production of and class ownership in, the common means of life. And, concurrently, it destroys its own vaunted virtues of thrift, industry, incentive and opportunity. For, obviously, society cannot be industrious if monopoly will not permit, nor thrifty on enforced idleness. There is no incentive on the breadline, and no opportunity in doles.

Thus society is brought face to face with the cause of its misadventures—Capitalist property. Through poverty to misery, increasing and hopeless, it will perceive the class struggle; through conflict and disaster it will recognise the power of privilege opposed to itself, through long continued and unlifting depression it will win the understanding that the stoppage of the industrial machine is no unfortunate accident, but the unavoidable sequence of commodity production. And it will be compelled, with gathering unanimity, to the final conclusion: that production can never be carried on smoothly on the basis of capital and labor, and can never be adequate for social well being till society itself turns the switch. Society, thus sharply divided between the vast majority of technical but dispossessed producers, and the political minority of economically dependent owners; divorced from illusionary interests; harried by grateful necessity; debarred from means of existence and hindered from further advancement will be in the position of the individual in like circumstances. It will see privilege grinding the face of need; reaction, politically entrenched, setting bounds to progress. It will hear the crying voice in the industrial wilderness, making the path straight. And it will listen—and understand. It will feel the urge of the forces of progress, lusty with growth, girt for fresh triumphs, thrusting aside the law of trade for the law of life; abrogating the tinsel glory of a tarnished civilization for the fathomless majesty of creative mind. It will take control of the one machine that dominates all others—the political organization, and in this act of supremacy it will free labor, from unnecessary toil, thought from the captivity of profit. And in so doing it opens out the ways of life to the dominance of intelligence. It turns the slavery of the machine into the freedom of social property, and transforms its insensate velocity into the poetry of human happiness.

R.

Manitoba Provincial Election, 1922

Local (Winnipeg) No. 109, S. P. of C. has nominated Comrades George Armstrong and Sidney J. Rose as candidates. Contributions are needed to meet deposit (Provincial Govt.) fees. These may be sent to the secretary of Winnipeg Local:—

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