

Labor Power as a Commodity.

Wealth being a social product the individual produces nothing but only fractions of things. The collective labor of the workers is necessary to produce wealth. The individual is a mere cog in the social machine of production. Being thus unable to produce things for himself he can procure them only by buying them, unless he begs or steals them. To buy them he must first sell something. In other words, in order to procure the things we need we must give something in exchange for them.

The capitalists can very well do this because to them belongs all the wealth that is produced, by virtue of their ownership of the means of production. The workers, however, have no property in the means of production and therefore own none of that wealth. The vast majority of them have absolutely nothing to give in exchange for their necessities. That is nothing tangible. They have, however, the power to labor. In order to procure food, clothing and shelter they must then, sell their labor power. This is what working for wages amounts to. The worker is not paid for what he does, he is paid for so much labor power, just as he in turn pays the grocer for so much flour and potatoes. He is paid, not for the wealth he produces, but merely for the exertion of producing it. To the wealth he produces, therefore, he has not a vestige of right or title. It belongs by right to those who bought his labor power, by means of which it was produced. Movements, therefore, that aim at "a greater share of the product for the producers" are illogical in the extreme, because when a man sells his labor power he is entitled only to the price of that labor power, and by no means to any share of the wealth produced by the exertion of that labor power. The labor power is not his for he has sold it. It belongs to whosoever bought it, to whom also belongs all the wealth thus produced. To admit to the capitalists' claim to the ownership of the means of production is to admit their right to the whole of the product of labor.

Labor Power as a Commodity.

Labor power, being bought and sold, ranks, therefore, as a commodity, and is subject to the law governing the exchange of commodities.

The law governing the exchange of commodities is that they shall exchange, on the average, at their cost of production, as has been shown. The cost of production of any commodity is the social labor necessary for its production. Labor power is the physical energy of the individual. The labor necessary to produce this is the labor that is involved in producing the individual's living, according to the prevalent standard of living. The