

The Proletariat

The Increase of the Proletariat— Mercantile and Educated Proletariat.

IT is not only through the extension of large production that the capitalist system causes the condition of the proletariat to become more and more that of the whole population. It brings this about also through the fact that the condition of the wage-earner engaged in large production strikes the keynote for the condition of the wage-earners in all other branches. The conditions under which the latter work and live are revolutionized; the advantages which they may have had over those engaged in capitalist industry are turned into so many disadvantages under the influence of the latter. To illustrate: Where, for example, the craftsman still boards and lives with his master, this arrangement becomes a means of forcing him to be content with even poorer board and lodging than those of the wage-earner who carries on his own household.

There is another and very extensive domain in which the capitalist system of large production tends to turn the population into proletarians—the domain of commerce. The large stores are already bearing heavily upon the smaller ones. The number of small stores does not, for that reason, diminish. On the contrary, it increases. The small store is the last refuge of the bankrupt small producer. Were the small stores actually crowded out, the ground would be wholly taken from under the feet of the small traders; they would then be thrust forthwith below the class of the proletariat—into the slums; they would be turned into beggars, vagabonds and candidates for the penitentiary—a wonderful social reform!

But it is not in the reduction of the number of small stores, it is in the debasement of their character that the influence of large production manifests itself in commerce. The small trader deals in ever worse and cheaper goods; his life becomes more precarious, more proletarian. In the large stores, on the contrary, there is constant increase in the number of employees—genuine proletarians without prospect of ever becoming independent. Child labor, the labor of women, with its accompaniment of prostitution, excessive work, lack of work, starvation wages—all the symptoms of large production—appear also in increasing quantity in the domain of commerce. Steadily the condition of the employees in this department approaches that of the proletarians in the department of production. The only difference perceptible between the two is that the former preserve the appearances of a better living, which require sacrifices unknown to the industrial proletarians.

There is still a third category of proletarians that has gone far on the road to its complete development—the educated proletarians. Education has become a special trade under our present system. The measure of knowledge has increased greatly and grows daily. Capitalist society and the capitalist state are increasingly in need of men of knowledge and ability to conduct their business, in

order to bring the forces of nature under their power. But not only the hard-working small farmer, mechanic or the proletarian in general have no time to devote themselves to science and art; the merchant, the manufacturer, the banker, the stock-jobber, the landlord—all are in the same situation. Their whole time is taken up with their business and their pleasures. In modern society it is not, as it used to be under previous social orders, the exploiters themselves, or at least a class of them, who foster the arts and sciences. The present exploiters, our ruling class, leave these pursuits to a special class whom they keep in hire. Under this system education becomes a merchandise.

A hundred years or so ago this commodity was rare. There were few schools; study was accompanied with considerable expense. So long as small production could support him, the worker stuck to it; only special gifts of nature or favorable circumstances would cause the sons of the workers to dedicate themselves to the arts and sciences. Though there was an increasing demand for teachers, artists and other professional men, the supply was definitely limited.

So long as this condition of things lasted, education commanded a high price. Its possession produced, at least for those who applied it to practical ends, very comfortable livings; not infrequently it brought honor and fame. The artist, the poet, the philosopher, were, in monarchical countries, the companions of royalty. The aristocracy of intellect felt itself superior to the aristocracy of birth or money. The only care of such was the development of their intellect. Hence it happened that people of culture could be, and often were, idealists. These aristocrats of education and culture stood above the other classes and their material aspirations and antagonisms. Education meant power, happiness, and worth. The conclusion seemed inevitable that in order to make all men happy and worthy, in order to banish all class antagonisms, all poverty, all wickedness and meanness out of the world, nothing else was needed than to spread education and culture.

Since those days, the development of higher education has made immense progress. The number of institutions of learning has increased wonderfully, and in a still larger degree, the number of pupils. In the meantime, the bottom has been knocked out of small production. The small property holder knows today no other way of keeping his sons from sinking into the proletariat than sending them to college; and he does this if his means will at all allow. But, furthermore, he must consider the future not only of his sons, but also of his daughters. The development in the division of labor is rapidly encroaching on the household; it is converting one household duty after another into a special industry, and steadily diminishing household work. Weaving, sewing, knitting, baking, and many other occupations that at one time filled up the round of household duties, have been either wholly

or partially withdrawn from the sphere of housekeeping. As a result of all this, marriage in which the wife is to be the housekeeper only, is becoming more and more a matter of luxury. But it so happens that the small property holder and producer is at the same time sinking steadily, and steadily becoming poorer; more and more he loses the means to indulge in luxury. In consequence of this the number of unmarried women increases, and ever larger is the number of those families in which mother and daughter must become wage-earners. Accordingly the number of women wage-earners increases, not only in large and small production and commerce, but in government offices, in the telegraph and telephone service, in railroads and banks, in the arts and sciences. However loudly personal interests and prejudices may rebel against it, the labor of women presses itself forward more and more into the various professional pursuits. It is not vanity, nor forwardness nor arrogance, but the force of economic development that drives women to labor in these as well as in other fields of human activity. If men have succeeded in preventing the competition of women in certain branches of intellectual labor which are still organized on craft lines, women workers tend to crowd all the more into the pursuits not so organized, for example, authorship, painting, music.

The result of this whole development is that the number of educated people has increased enormously. Nevertheless, the beneficent results which the idealists expected from an increase of education have not followed. So long as education is a merchandise, its extension is equivalent to an increase in the quantity of that merchandise, consequently to the falling in its price and the decline in the condition of those who possess it. The number of educated people has grown to such an extent that it more than suffices for the wants of the capitalists and the capitalist state. The labor market of educated labor is today as overstocked as the market of manual labor. It is no longer the manual workers alone who have their reserve army of the unemployed and are afflicted with lack of work; the educated workers also have their reserve army of idle, and among them also lack of work has taken up its permanent quarters. The seekers for public office find that avenue of employment crowded. Those who seek openings elsewhere experience the extremes of idleness and excessive work just as do the manual workers, and like them are the victims of wage-slavery.

The condition of the educated workers deteriorates visibly; formerly people spoke of the "aristocracy of intellect," today we speak of the "intellectual" or "educated" proletariat.

The time is near when the bulk of these proletarians will be distinguished from the others only by their pretensions. Most of them still imagine that they are something better than proletarians. They fancy they belong to the bourgeoisie, just as the lackey identifies himself with the class of his master. They have ceased to be the leaders of the capitalist class and have become rather their defenders. Place-hunting takes more and more of their energies. Their first care is, not the development of their in-

tellect, but the sale of it. The prostitution of their individuality has become their chief means of advancement. Like the small producers, they are dazzled by the few brilliant prizes in the lottery of life; they shut their eyes to the numberless blanks in the wheel and barter away soul and body for the merest chance of drawing such a prize. The barter and sale of one's convictions and the marriage for money are, in the eyes of most of our educated proletarians, two means, as natural as they are necessary, to "make one's fortune."

Still, the supply of this class grows so rapidly that there is little to be made out of education, even though one throws his individuality into the bargain. The decline of the mass of educated people into the class of the proletariat can no longer be checked.

Whether this development will result in a movement of the educated people to join the battling proletariat in mass and not, as hitherto, singly, is still uncertain. This however, is certain: The fact that the educated people are being forced into the proletariat has closed to the proletarians the only gate through which its members could, by dint of their own unaided efforts, escape into the class above.

The possibility of the wage-earner becoming a capitalist is, in the ordinary run of events, out of the question. Sensible people do not consider the chance of winning a prize in a lottery or of falling heir to the wealth of some unknown relative when they deal with the condition of the working-class. Under certain particularly favorable conditions it has sometimes happened that a workman succeeded, through great privations, in saving up enough to start a little retail shop, or to give his son a chance to study and become something "better" than his father. But it was always ridiculous to hold out such possibilities to the workman as a means of improving his condition. In the ordinary course of events the working-man may thank his stars if he is at all able, even during good times, to lay by enough not to remain empty-handed when work becomes slack. Today, however, to hold out such hopes to working-men is more ridiculous than ever. The economic development makes saving not only more difficult, but it renders it impossible for a working-man, even if he succeeds in saving something, to pull himself and his children out of the class of the proletariat. To invest his little savings in some small independent industry were for him to fall from the frying pan into the fire; ten to one he will be thrown back to his previous condition, with the bitter experience that the small producer can no longer keep his head above water—an experience which he will have purchased with the loss of his hard-earned savings.

Today, whichever way the proletarian may turn, he finds awaiting him the same proletarian conditions of life. These conditions pervade society more and more. In all countries the mass of the population has sunk to the level of the proletariat. To the individual proletarian the prospect has vanished of ever being able, by his own efforts to pull himself out of the quagmire into which the present system of production has

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