

Is Production Social?

BY A. G. McCALLUM

SOME time ago a question was raised in these columns regarding the use of the term Social Production, Social Average, Socially Necessary Labor and Necessary Social Labor as contained on pages 8, 9, 21, 30, 31, 32, 35, 37 of S. P. of C. Manifesto.

Up to the writing of this article, one comrade has ventured an opinion on the matter to the effect that the term Socially Necessary Labor is somewhat ambiguous and may be used in a sense much more comprehensive than that in which it is used in connection with the theory of value.

While the comrade's explanation may sound plausible and serve as a truce for the time being to those who fear the reflection that things are not what they appear to be, the writer again states—that when the various social phrases are viewed in the light of commodity production it is to find they are not ambiguous terms, but rather misnomers the application of which does not fit in with our everyday slave experience. If a condition of social production prevailed it would be consistent to speak of social labor, averages, etc., but when social production Does Not Exist, it is up to the Socialist to re-instate his case with words that will express Capitalist Production correctly.

It has been pointed out before that society is divided into two hostile camps, the capitalist class who own, but do not produce, and the working class who produce, but do not own. In this two-class nature of society, "where property is a differentiating Agent" there exists a threefold struggle between Capitalist and Capitalist, Worker and Worker, and Capitalists against Workers. Conflicts that arise between individuals of the same class are purely sectional conflicts and can be reconciled by substituting combination for competition. The merger, masters' associations and workers' organizations are manifestations of reconciled sectional interests. "Class interests" differ from sectional interests, and exhibit themselves in the form of a struggle between classes. Here the interests are fundamentally antagonistic to each other and cannot be reconciled under a system where things are produced for profit. "Where the Instruments of Production are Owned and Used by One Class to Enslave the Other."

The fact of workers and employers, trade unions and corporations, entering into certain definite relations over the buying and selling of labor-power does not make production social or the sale of labor-power a social transaction, but a "Class Transaction With Distinct Class Results." As Buyers and sellers they are classes apart, with nothing in common. The seller only becomes a buyer by becoming a possessor and passing into the propertied class. The buyer only becomes a seller by becoming dispossessed and by being precipitated into the propertyless class. Here we have two distinct classes with distinct class functions.

When a strike or a lockout arises over a question of wages it reflects the antagonism of interest existing between those who control and those who operate industry. How often has the gun and the club been used to demonstrate that the interest of masters and slaves are not identical. What greater evidence could be found than that furnished by the strike and the lockout to show who supplies the active factor "Labor Power" that makes commodity production possible? When the miners vacate or are ejected from the pits, coal remains at the bottom of the shaft until the Miners return. When the railway, trolley and steamship systems become affected, transportation comes to a standstill until the Transport Workers set the wheels in motion again.

If we accept the axiom that coal beds, mineral veins, timber limits, etc., have no value until the hand of labor is applied and converts them into things useful to man, it is then very obvious the sum total value of the world's commodities therefore, represents the sum total of labor expended in its pro-

duction. While it is all too apparent there can be no value without labor it does not imply that the labor applied to the natural resources is social labor, but "Wage Labor" performed by wage workers. Capitalists do not produce or acquire their wealth by plundering it from other capitalists, but by abstracting it from the workers at the point of production. Marx clearly shows how this is accomplished in his analysis of Commodity Labour Power, and which, briefly stated, is as follows: The workers having nothing tangible to sell like lumber, steel, rubber, etc., are forced into the labour market "Where all propertyless persons must go" to sell their labor power. In selling their mental and physical energy, the man-power to build up and tear down, the workers not only produce a value equivalent to their wages, but also produce a Surplus Value. If the workers only produced a value equal to the cost of their substance, wages, no profits could exist. In other words; the wealth the wage workers produce must, in order to satisfy the employers, exceed the amount of their wages, and, therefore, must exceed the amount they are able to buy back and consume. For no other reason are workers employed, and a review of statistics dealing with wealth production in all capitalist countries shows Marx's analysis to be correct.

While it is not the intention of the writer to monopolize space on the contradiction arising out of the disposal of the "Surplus" which costs the capitalists nothing, and which finds the workers with no means to buy back, it may be mentioned here that while the workers collectively produce the world's wealth they have no voice in the conditions surrounding its sale or exchange. The utter lack of interest shown by them in what they have created leaves no doubt as to the question of its "Ownership" under the wage system.

In further urging the point that the production of commodities is the function of wage slaves, and that the ownership therefore is the function of their masters, we will now view the issue from another angle.

When the production of wealth was carried on with simple hand tools the share that was taken by the employer did not appear as surplus value plundered from the worker, but as wealth the master had co-operated in producing. At this stage, private property in the means of production was a surmountable barrier, consequently, the distinction between exploiters and exploited was not very noticeable. The branch was there nevertheless, and with the invention of the machine which has kept on growing in size and costliness, the breach between possessor and non-possessor has also widened, "kept pace with the machine," up until today where we now find that the crude tools which were at one time within reasonable reach of the craftsman has passed far beyond the reach of the individual capitalist.

Such is the significance of the trust and syndicate which tell us that property is now collective and international, just as is the process of production. As a class, the workers produce the world's wealth by their collective labor. As a class the capitalists own collectively the means of production and distribution and collectively exploit the workers of the wealth they produce. While the rise and development of the machine has had the effect of banishing individualism and private property, it has also had the effect of freeing the capitalists from the arena of production. The personal command, directive ability, that was at one time exhibited by them in the productive process has now given place to personal command over stocks and shares. Having been removed from the industrial process their position now is that of parasites living on the backs of the workers.

In summing up the foregoing, it is very evident the production of things essential to sustain life is not a social function, but a class function. The cap-

italist class do not contribute towards the labor process, therefore, it is the working class alone that give wealth its value. If in the course of our reasoning on general principles, we find that social production, average social labor or necessary social labor does not apply or prevail in the present economic arrangement of things, let us then confine ourselves to the use of terms that do express the mode of production and theory of value correctly.

Leon Trotsky's ill-health and retirement to a rest-cure in the Caucasus coincide with a bitter struggle in Russia against what the Soviet newspapers have come to call "Trotzkism." The dominant members of the Communist party executive and the Government of Russia have recently issued voluminous disquisitions against Trotsky's views as expressed in articles and in his latest book, "1917."

They call him opportunist and petty-bourgeois; they charge him with opposing the closer union of town workers and peasants; they say that he seeks to undermine "Leninism" and say his words serve the cause of Menshivism. To the world outside, however, unversed in the intricacies of Russian Communist exegetics, Trotsky has seemed quite as often to stand to the Left as to the Right of Bolshevik orthodoxy. It was not to be expected that the leadership of the Russian Communist party would work in easy harmony after Lenin's death. Trotsky is a difficult person; he makes mistakes with an almost triumphant gusto and vigor.

Coupled with, and often opposed by, Lenin's cool and flexible statesmanship, Trotsky's flashes of genius have produced amazing results, as in the creation of the Red Army—a tremendous feat of human engineering. With Lenin gone, he has doubtless become a problem. Too prone to seize personal power, too ready to play a lone hand, if necessary in opposition to his associates, he has become a person to be controlled if not suppressed. In official statements, republished in our International Relations Sections this week, the Communist leaders explain on doctrinal grounds their opposition to Leon Trotsky, though they deny absolutely any intention of adopting disciplinary measures against him. His ill-health may be as real as it is opportune, and undue significance should not be attached to any aspect of the controversy; internal opposition is probably a sign of political health rather than imminent decay. But a conflict of forces more human and concrete than the documents suggest is likely to lie at the bottom of the sea of dialectics in which the subject has been submerged by the Russian leaders.—The Nation (N.Y.)

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