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Our Declining Standard of Living

A Pointer for Pre-Election Audiences

THE statement quoted below shows a progressive decline from 1896 to 1920 in the standard of living of the American wage-working class. Nevertheless, during that period society's productive capacity increased enormously, yet, both in relation to the 1896 standard and to the increasing productive capacity, less and less of the products of labor have gone to the working class as its recompense for toil.

And readers! During that period, the Capitalist politicians fed your imagination with sounding phrases and glorious promises!

But Capitalism is no "Land o' Dreams." Long ago, chronic industrial depression settled on our industrial system because it is too productive (an unprecedented war market providing the only break of consequence). The curtailment of production, the operation of industry short of its capacity, the part time idleness of men and the material equipment of production has become a necessity, a considered and habitual policy in industry—this, for the business-like purpose of obtaining profitable prices in the interest of the owners of industrial plants.

Industry is not operated to its full capacity, as it would be if the livelihood of the communities were the first consideration, because it is in the control of business men who have the market in view, and at whose command output is regulated. Profits are the first and last consideration in business, which is to

say, that industry is operated solely with a view to such prices on the market as will yield a surplus over and above production cost—the surplus goes to various capitalist interests in the form of rent, interest, and industrial and commercial profit.

The output of industry is produced, not to supply the consumption capacity of the communities, but to supply the demand of the market, the limit of which is its purchasing capacity; that is to say, production is for sale for profit, and not for use.

We do not know the limits of the consumption capacity of the communities. Neither do we know the limits of the productive capacity of modern industrial powers. As straight scientific engineering propositions, the problem of reaching the limits of one or the other capacity has never been considered, much less attempted. A profit system, needless to say, is no fit laboratory for such a social experiment.

But we do know the limits of the purchasing capacity of the market. For the market becomes glutted with commodities, and, in consequence, the productive capacity of the communities has to be curtailed that is to say, the well-being of the communities has to be sabotaged—all to serve the ends of good, safe and sound, and, since the 18th century, time-honored business principles.

The productive capacity of the communities has to be sabotaged by the business interests, because the purchasing capacity of the market does not keep

pace with the increasing productivity of modern industry. As the market capacity, with the passing of time, lags more and more behind productive capacity, more and more must the business interests practice sabotage on the communities, in the interest of profitable prices for themselves. Not for nothing are they called "the interests."

And so, the army of the unemployed whom industry can not absorb, grows larger. The standard of living (of the workers) has been declining since 1896, because there has been a permanently overstocked labor market. There is a permanently overstocked labor market because the market for commodities can not absorb all the commodities that industry is capable of turning out—a chain of economic facts inherent in the capitalist system of production for sale for profit. The standard of living declines, because modern industrial processes are too productive—what a paradox!

Competition between the sellers of the commodity labor-power on an overstocked labor-market, has operated like an over-riding law of nature to defeat all efforts to even maintain the level of 1896, not to speak of raising that level in keeping with the progress of the arts of production since that time. Even the intense activities of the organized labor movement during 1918 and 1919, with conditions abnor-

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The Great Illusion

IF one happens to suggest to the average "intelligence" that he is a slave he usually resents the soft impeachment—sometimes with great heat—and proceeds to disprove the assertion. Invariably his "disproofs" are more emphatic than convincing, and are subject to considerable modification. Where for the time we will leave him.

What constitutes "freedom?" What does it mean to be free? "Freedom" is to fulfil, in a normal manner, the necessities of natural life, to be able to comply with and satisfy rationally the laws of individual being. To be "free" is to be in the condition where the normal being can exercise fully and naturally the laws of constituted being and is therefore enabled to live a full, rounded and complete life. Whoever or whatever is prevented from functioning as the common, healthy and natural processes of constituted being demand, is not free.

Freedom has nothing to do with the special pleadings of self-interest, with the ideation derived from political necessity, fortified by political success, distorted and pale with political vicissitude. Such "freedom" is of secondary significance, implying class distinctions, and wherever class distinctions arise freedom declines. Class concepts of freedom are contradictions in terms, of relative bearing, necessarily indicating particular interest, and although conditionally social in character are by no means social in nature. For primarily, class involves sub-

jugation and individualism—the antithesis of social freedom. A full and complete life can be secured only on condition of full freedom, and freedom is the normal satisfaction of natural wants. What then are the "natural wants?" Of man, fundamentally, food and reproduction and from that basis development proceeds.

Man emerges from the darkness of the past in the likeness of the wild. Short and squat, deep-chested, girthed like a beast, with curved limbs and drooping arm, strong muscled and wide of jaw, flat-headed and feeble brained. Roving in bands through the gloomy forests, feeding, breeding, living and dying like the wild around him, yet throbbing, pantingly, fearfully, with the potentialities of humanity.

Physically weaker than the wild things around him, he was driven to cunning and resource for protection. By craft he maintained the struggle for existence, and craft favored him, lifted him to new advances, awarded him victory. He left his arboreal hut and became a cave dwelling plainsman, conquered the beasts of the field and flourished; invented fire and produced a new impulse of progress; acquired new food supplies, extended his habitat; increased his numbers; and for thousands upon thousands of years existed in the wild hunting packs of early savagery.

But growth and development urged him ceaselessly on. New discoveries were made, tools of stone

and bone carried his social organization to a higher plane, his thought to a wider comprehension, his conduct to a new unity. Misunderstanding the forces of nature, he began a tortuous direction to human development. He made gods in his own image and grovelled in fear at their feet. His curiosity and greed were the forerunners of science and trade; his patience and courage, the foundations of our highest culture. And each of such simple beginnings gave impetus and direction to further development and undreamed of consequence.

Yet, stern and crude as savage life and society was, here was freedom. Outside of natural calamities, man found satisfaction of his normal wants. Free, he knew nothing of civilization, its comparative culture, precarious amenities and doubtful protection. He could not exist apart from the tribe; he dared not set foot on the territory of another tribe; for the benefit of the commune (and himself) he had to conform to the will of the commune.

Nevertheless, to wander over the face of the earth is not freedom, nor is compliance with social welfare slavery. This man did not starve in the midst of plenty, nor did he go naked and shelterless in abundance. He was not broken with fruitless and incessant toil, his life was not held at the dictation of another. His society knew neither poverty nor wealth, theft nor prostitution, plunder nor

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