

The "Skilled" Workers

It is not only the inland seas that are a field for extra-special exploitation under the present peculiarly favorable conditions, nor is it only (so-called) "unskilled labor" that is losing what few human rights or privileges had been gradually wrung from soulless corporations or individual profit seekers:—the shipping on and from the Coast, and the various mechanical trades directly or indirectly dependent on the whole marine industry, reveal sickening struggles and apparent acceptance of terms and systems which are in glaring contrast to those happy days of the "aristocracy of labor"—when the machinist, for example, was the indispensable factor, and indeed it was a punishable crime not to be working, at (comparatively) good wages!

Of course, the average worker had no conception of the opportunity then offered to challenge the whole system of wage-worry and war (and the "class-conscious" slaves were few indeed!) but certain bargains, small and sordid, were made, and some "concessions" granted,—all of which are rapidly de-materializing in the stress of "peace" time.

For instance: when a mechanic, after much patience and innumerable rebuffs, is allowed to "start" on a short job (there are no "steady" jobs today!) he is not quite sure what is the "standard rate" of his pay per hour, in the absence or confusion of union control or influence,—all he can know for certain is that the old 85c has dropped 10c at least,—or is it 15c or more? No more "double time" for overtime, not even time and a half for night shifts in some cases, no more "dirty-money," and no very strong resentment, as yet, to the return to the hideous old practice of only paying men for fractions of days.

But this is nothing,—merely the fortune of war, or a return to the "status quo." The really serious innovations are the passing of established customs and relations which were aforesaid considered elementary and indispensable.

The "owner" of a small plant or the boss of a department, no longer seems to contribute any or much material assistance to the job to be performed, beyond the issuing of bald instructions: nobody "answers back," and questions aren't encouraged.

If a machine has to be operated, it may be in passable running order or it may not,—it certainly wouldn't pass a Factory Inspector's test for safety—and if it has anything like a full equipment of handles and wrenches and tools and other parts, the operator considers it remarkably "lucky"—otherwise, he proceeds to supply these missing oddments from his own tool box, finding it quite useless to look around for them or to go to the store, as used

to be the understood practice, and if working on bench or floor, or "outside," he is in far worse plight.

The elaborate toolbox, with its expensive kit of tools, micrometers, etc., which so many of the younger machinists, for example, have become accustomed to carry around, and to which they have more or less cheerfully added wrenches and jigs and chisels and files,—thus actually reducing their own wages by supplying plant for the employer,—all this is inadequate on some class of jobs; heavier hammers are required, shifting-spanners and pipe-wrenches, etc., and it will soon be quite impossible for a man to carry on to the job the tools he requires even for a few days' work.

And still the slaves hang around the factory gates and fall over each other in the emulation of getting there first or providing the most tools; still the pace gets hotter, and the dirtier the work the less chance is there of cleaning-up for meals or the homeward journey: the self-respect of the wage-slaves at this game can be gauged by his laughter at the horror of a normal passenger in the street car seated next to some of the "black squad,"—he leaves it to the camp-worker or the "yellow peril" to kick against "conditions" or to howl for sanitary specialities. Meanwhile many highly-skilled "mechanics" are toting their tools around and, if permitted, will hang about the premises unpaid until told to "punch" a clock and start in at 50c per hour, work till finished, and depart "unwashed."

The present stage of subservience of the skilled obviates, too, the employment of a vast army of helpers with whom many mechanics were accompanied. Today the apprentice takes their place, and the heavy lifting and hauling and the fetching of tools and material, has to be got over somehow, without loss of time,—all in the day's work.

Somewhat of all this may be good training for that far-off good time, still coming, when the workers shall own the jobs and all the tools; we are reminded of the slogan raised by the engineering employers 25 years ago, during the 8-hour strike in the old country: "The machine is master." Obviously ownership of the necessary machinery implies possession of its produce.

Pessimism is easy, and perhaps not unnatural, but however bright our ultimate hopes, however strong our basic faith, we have to bravely endure the undeniable present, and teach ourselves to think. Only by understanding present causes can we prepare for future development, and only by working-class ownership can the present evil be permanently removed.

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FACTORS IN THE MATERIALIST INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

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is, so to speak, too internal and the other too external to bring about a profound intellectual development. But when the creation of a new mental attitude falls together with extensive material and economic changes, something significant happens . . .

The influence of those factors, by weakening and destroying the old prepossessions, prepared the psychological attitude for the new point of view of science and philosophy, but it required, he points out, positive changes in the habits and purposes of life to produce and develop the new method of knowing.

"New-found wealth, the gold from the Americas and new articles of consumption and enjoyment tended to wean men from pre-occupation with the metaphysical and theological . . . New material resources and new markets in America and India undermined the old dependence upon household and manual production for a limited market, and generated quantitative, large scale production by means of steam for foreign and expanding markets. Capitalism, rapid transit, and production for exchange against money and for profit, instead of against goods and for consumption followed . . ."

So, typical of the matter of fact habit of mind of this new mechanistic age which moves to reject the metaphysical system of "rights" that is the ideo-

logical foundation of present society organized on a property basis, he further says

"The modern mine, factory, railway, steamship, telegraph, all of the appliances and equipment of production, and transportation, express scientific knowledge. They would continue unimpaired even if the ordinary Pecuniary (i.e., Profit, etc.—C.S.) accompaniments of economic activity were radically altered. In short, through the intermediary of invention, Bacon's watchword that knowledge is power and his dream of continuous empire over natural forces by means of natural science have been actualized. . . ." ("Reconstruction in Philosophy."—Henry Holt, N. Y.)

A view of history from the standpoint of the economic is perfectly justifiable and necessary if we are to grasp the full effects of factors which are dominant in society. Nevertheless, as when we discuss the economic causes of war, we do not forget that when the call to war goes forth that the call goes to people with different national psychologies already affected by historical and natural influences. It approximates to the call of herd leaders to the herd. Such a standpoint is itself a materialistic conception, but there are other material factors. These come within the broad sweep of the Materialistic Interpretation proper, which includes the economic. The relative efficiency of any factor or group of factors in influencing history will, in the long run, depend

on their respective powers to enforce habits of life whose unremitting discipline on the mind results in corresponding habits of thought. In that respect the economic is the most influential. As Marx says "The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." (Extract from preface to the "Critique of Political Economy.")

CONCERNING VALUE

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clothes-pegs. For every 100 dollars invested he expends 90 dollars in raw materials, wear and tear, etc., and pays out 10 dollars in wages. This expenditure, let us say, results in the production of 100 gross of pegs. Now, this manufacturer, who has invested 100 dollars in this business, will expect and will get, on the average, the average rate of profit on his investment. That is to say, 20 per cent. profit. The price of production, and hence, the selling price of pegs at the factory, will be 120 dollars for 100 gross, that is, one dollar and 20 cents per gross.

Let us look at this in terms of labor-time. For every 100 gross of clothes-pegs there are 90 hours represented by raw material, etc., plus 10 hours necessary labor, plus 10 hours surplus labor, making a total of 110 hours social labor-time which at one dollar per hour will be 110 dollars. The value of 100 gross of pegs is therefore 110 dollars. The price of production and consequently the selling price exceeds the value by 10 dollars. The "necessary" labor-time, of course, is that necessary for the replacement of wages.

We shall now consider a capital of low composition. This capitalist is a cap-maker and employs a capital having the proportion of 70 constant to 30 variable. For every 100 dollars invested he expends 70 dollars in materials, wear and tear of machinery, etc., and pays out 30 dollars in wages. This expenditure results in the production of 100 caps. Now this manufacturer can only expect and will not get any more than the ordinary rate of profit on his capital, that is, 20 per cent. The price of production and, consequently, the selling price at the factory of 100 caps will therefore be 120 dollars, or \$1.20 each.

In terms of labor-time, however, we have this result. For every 100 caps there are expended: 70 hours represented by raw materials, etc., plus 30 hours necessary labor, plus 30 hours surplus labor, making a total of 130 hours social labor-time, which at one dollar per hour, is 130 dollars. The value of 100 caps will therefore be 130 dollars which exceeds the price of production by 10 dollars.

The above figures, of course, are quite arbitrary. They serve, however, to illustrate what happens in actual practice, namely, that it is practically impossible that commodities could be exchanged at their values under competitive capitalism. In spite of this, as we shall see later, there is no contradiction of the law of value. It is also important to note that, while a general rise or fall in wages does not affect the value of commodities it will immediately affect their price of production and bring about a rise or fall in prices. This is one reason for the present agitation for a reduction of wages with a view to a reduction in prices. /

This ought to be enough for once.

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