

Workers' Dreadnought

VOL. VII.—No 4.

SATURDAY, APRIL 17th, 1920.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

THE BASIS OF COMMUNISM.

By HERMAN GORTER.

I. CAPITAL AND LABOUR.

The world-war and the revolution that resulted from it, have clearly demonstrated that only one trend in the labour movement leads the workers to Communism.

The right track has been found only by the extreme left wing of the Social-Democratic Parties, the Marxians.

The principles of these latter are given here.

The first duty of the revolutionary worker is that of learning to understand capitalist society. Until he does that, he can not be truly revolutionary.

The Communist Party, in order to render the entire working class revolutionary in feeling, in thought, in will, and in deed, strives to give the clearest possible image of capitalist society as a whole.

Capital constitutes the nature, the marrow of our community. We cannot understand anything about our community if we do not understand capital.

What is capital, where does capital come from, how does it come to exist?

Capital is the accumulated sum total of wares or values, that is to say, of the raw materials, products, implements, etc., in the hands of the owning classes—which sum-total has the faculty of constantly increasing, of accumulating in the hands of those owning classes.

How does capital originate? What causes its constant increase?

It comes from the workers. Its accumulation is a result of labour.

Every day an exchange takes place between the worker and the capitalist. The worker gives his working-capacity to the capitalist, for the day, to make use of; the capitalist gives the worker a day's wage. From that exchange capital results.

For that exchange is unequal. What the worker produces in a day exceeds by far the wage he gets. If the worker works from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., at noontime he may already have produced a value equalling his wage. The rest of his labour he gives to the capitalist, without remuneration. There is a surplus, therefore, on the side of the capitalist. There is, there arises, there comes capital out of the willing hands of the worker into the hands of the capitalist. Capital is unpaid labour.

Though every worker feels this to be true, we will point out yet more clearly.

This matter, which may not be absolutely clear in the case of one worker, working one day, is rendered perfectly obvious if we take the entire working class of an entire country or of a continent, or of the world, during a full year.

Let us assume that the rectangular figure below represents production of the workers of an entire country, or of the world, for the capitalist class.

A
B
C

For a while the workers have these products in their hands. In the factory and the mine, on the railway and the ship, and in the field they produce them with their hands, and with the tools of their hands.

This possession lasts only a moment. As soon as the product is finished and shipped, they must deliver it up to the owners of the means

of production, the capitalists. It is on account of the private ownership of the means of production that the workers cannot retain the product for a second beyond the time they spend in making it. After that, the capitalists are the absolute masters of the product.

How do the capitalists dispose of it?

Money is the means of exchange that renders possible the circulation of wares in capitalist society. Money, like coal or wheat, is a labour-product (gold, silver, copper, etc.) used for the special purpose of facilitating the exchange. Here, again, of all the gold and silver the workers produce, no more than a small portion



THE SEAL OF HONOUR.

"We already have our Percentage."

They divide it, largely speaking, into three parts.

To indicate these, we draw two lines in such a way as to get the pieces A B C.

Piece A, the capitalist class, gives back to the workers; of all the fuel, food, clothing, housing and furniture the working class brings forth for the benefit of all, for the capitalists, as well as for themselves, only this small portion comes back to them. They get but little of all the coal they produce, of all the iron, and a miserable share of all the wheat. This is part A, representing the working-wage. For, needless to point out, the workers do not get their wage in coal or food directly, but in the shape of money, for which they can buy food or coal.

comes back to them, which is likewise included, therefore, in piece A.

From piece B, the capitalist class lives. That portion of the products which the workers produce for it in a year represents furniture, housing, food, clothing, fuel, and luxury. Needless to say, the capitalists live off this portion on a larger and ampler scale than the proletarians do off the portion which is left to them. Piece B is doubtless immense, and, as compared to the number of people that must have a share in it, it far surpasses piece A of the proletarians. For not only the capitalists, the employers of the working hands, must live off piece C, but their entire gang of followers also. The bankers, merchants, shipowners, landowners, the railway

magnates, the manufacturers, all those, in short, live off that piece who employ workers of any kind, whether those workers be clerks or dockers, sailors or miners, and with them the many whom the employers needs in order to maintain capitalist society.

Off the bits of piece B, as thrown to them by the capitalists, live the princes, the judges, the officers, the ministers, the professors. The entire army, the fleet, the bureaucracy, the church, etc., etc.

The State, therefore, lives to a large extent off piece B, and partly also off a considerable portion of piece A, which is wrung from the workers. It is a well-known fact that the capitalist class does not content itself with giving the workers a small wage, but that it even robs them of part of that wage by means of the taxes, which, in the capitalist countries, are heavily imposed on the labouring classes, especially as indirect taxes.

And the third piece, C; what does the capitalist class do with it?

The capitalists are too wise to use up their entire produce. Just as the landowners and the farmers every year do not sell all their wheat for consumption, but retain part of it as seed for the coming year, the capitalist reserves a portion which he does not consume, but which serves to enlarge his business, his mill, the next year. The reserves accumulated by all the enterprises of capitalism make C a huge piece, and it increases every year. That lump of capital, which had issued from the hands of the workers, represents the new railways, the new steamers, the new machines, the new mines, the newly cultivated land, the new houses, and so on. Only a small portion of the total amount is consumed by workers and capitalists. Another, even greater portion, remains to serve in the following year for a new, increased production, on a higher scale.

This is a clear and true image of our society. The class of the wage-earners bringing forth out of the earth the entire wealth. The capitalist class appropriating that produce, living on it, on a grand scale, multiplying its capital to an extent that we will yet examine further on, and in exchange for years of toil, giving to the working class only a small share in its enormous produce.

In exchange, did we say?

Is it an exchange? Can we call it an exchange?

Closely considered, it proves to be not even that.

That which the working class receives is part of what it actually produces, and for what the workers receive they must give even more in labour. The weekly wage the workers receive, the fuel, the food, and so on, which they get for the week, have just been given by them to the capitalists, and the workers get the wage back on Saturday night, only that they may be able to go back to work the next week, again to produce for the capitalist class more than they will get on the following Saturday.

If I give to some person a shilling, and from my own shilling he gives me back sixpence, this cannot be called an exchange, especially if that sixpence must serve only to enable me to earn another shilling, or even more, next day, to be given also to the same person who took the first shilling from me.

This is the basis of society as it is to-day, this so-called exchange; it is a basis so glaringly unjust, so outrageous, that no God or heaven can justify it.

Each day all the workers give to their capitalists more than they receive, each day all the capitalists take away from their workers more than they return to them. Every year the capitalists retain a large share of this profit made out of the workers, which portion they add to their old capital. Having thus obtained ever more capital, ever more raw material and means of production, they force the non-propertied workers, under ever increasing compulsion, to sell themselves to capital, to do whatever capital requires of them.

That all this should be allowed to go on as it does is due to private property, which came into existence centuries ago, and to this day is still extant. We can abstain from demonstrating how it came to be developed out of the common property, or what changes it underwent. This

has been done with full clearness elsewhere. We need only mention it here. The main fact is evident for whosoever chooses to reflect. The capitalists could never compel the workers to the sham exchange, the workers would never submit to it, if the capitalists did not own the soil and the means of production, and if the workers were not devoid of all possessions. The man who owns no land or capital, must eat nevertheless; he needs clothes, and a roof over his head. He wants a wife and children. He owns nothing but his labour-power. So he sells that, his only possession. And the capitalist, taking advantage of the fact that the worker can produce in a day more than he actually needs, lets him work for twelve hours, and appropriates all the produce that is not needed to keep the worker alive. It may, therefore, be taken for granted that the cause of this inequality, this injustice, this poverty on the one hand, and opulence on the other, lies in the private ownership of the means of production. All this can only disappear if the cause be abolished likewise.

We must point out here that the inequality is steadily increasing, that the class antitheses are intensified each day.

At the time, as yet, when the implements were imperfectly developed, the worker was not able to produce much more than was needed to keep himself and his family alive. Considerably less clothing, food and fuel is produced with the manual tools than with the machine, the electric loom, the steam-plough, the sewing-machine and the electric drill. In the days of manual labour, therefore, the surplus for the capitalist was far smaller than it is to-day. Consequently, also, the inequality between the capitalist and the worker was smaller.

As the power of the machines increased, however, the worker's daily output began more and more to exceed his own needs. The value of the day's produce has come ever more to surpass the value of the daily wage. Ever more wealth has accumulated in the hands of the capitalists. In the 14th, 15th, and even 16th century, the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist was still such that the latter often lived in hardly better circumstances than his working-hands, whilst in most cases he was himself obliged to work just as hard as they. In the 16th century, and still more in the 17th century, the power of the means of production increased; the workshops were gradually fitted out with better tools, and more workers were added. A division of labour led to a saving of time and produce. In England in the 18th century, a mill-owner was for the first time seen driving his own private carriage, a luxury which, up to that time, had been exclusively enjoyed by the land-owners, the gentry, the princes and the clergy. The 19th century, with its steam and electricity, witnessed a decrease in the hours needed by the worker to provide for his own needs, whereas the time during which he worked without payment increased at the same terrific rate as did the power of the tools.

The capital-power of our modern capitalists is enormous. The amount of unpaid labour they appropriate can be judged to some extent from the increase of the so-called national wealth in every capitalist country.

The income tax records testify to the same. The well-known American financier Vanderlip says, that the capital invested in industrial enterprises (limited companies) in the United States, in the course of six years, before the war, increased by 23 thousand millions.

The inequality, therefore, is continually growing. New inventions and improvements in machinery are constantly being introduced. Less and less time is needed for the production of the worker's clothes, the worker's food, the worker's furniture, and the worker's fuel. Part A of our figure, therefore, is produced in an ever smaller period of time, whilst ever more time remains for the production of B and C. No wonder that the so-called national wealth increases! No wonder that the millionaires of old have become milliardaires. At the same rate, however, the antithesis between proletarian destitution and capitalistic wealth increases.

Thus the existence of the class struggle can be seen and grasped at once, from our diagram.

(To be continued.)