

THE WORKERS' DREADNOUGHT

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Published by the Workers' Socialist Federation.

Annual Subscription, post free—10s. 10d

Back Numbers, 4½d., post free.

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Vol VI. No. 36

Sat. Nov., 29th, 1919

IDEAS FOR A PROGRAMME

COMMUNISM: THE CLASSLESS SOCIETY OF FREE PEOPLE.

I.

Equality of Wages as a Step Towards the Abolition of the Wage System.

By what steps can we arrive at the classless society of free people and abolish the exploitation of labour? In what simple form can we set out a Communist Programme, in order that it may be understood at a glance by the most untutored person?

It is agreed that essential points in the Communist programme are:—

(1) *The overthrow of the capitalist system and the vesting in the Community as a whole of the land, the industries, and the means of production and exchange, with control by the workers therein.*

(2) *The abolition of Parliament and the substitution of Councils of delegates from the workers in industry and on the land, and from the soldiers and sailors.*

(3) *The dictatorship of the workers until the revolutionary period has passed and social classes have disappeared.*

(4) *Adherence to the Third or Communist International.*

Out of the cardinal point, the abolition of Capitalism, with its poverty and exploitation and its degrading system of social classes, very acute controversies develop even amongst those who profess to be Socialists. On the simple question of the remuneration of workers in the socialised industries, there is much anti-socialist confusion of thought. Yet it should hardly need to be stated that so long as the wage system remains, wages must be equal for all industries and all sections of industry; otherwise, we cannot have a classless society.

If the unskilled workers are to receive lower wages than the skilled workers, they will form a lower class. They and their children will live in poorer houses, eat less food, wear inferior clothing, and have less money for recreation and culture; if not in all these things, at least in some of them, the unskilled workers will lack what is given to the skilled, and this is not a state of affairs which is in keeping with the Communist ideal. If the managers and technical experts are to be paid at a still higher rate, they will form yet another social class. In short, if there are two, three, or more grades of payment for services to the community, there will be two, three, or more classes in society. Therefore, it is essential that wages, so long as wages obtain, should be the same for all.

Those who argue from premises based on the conditions of bourgeois society protest that we must give a higher remuneration for work which requires a longer or more expensive training, or a higher degree of natural ability, or entails a greater responsibility. The answers to these objections are perfectly obvious. Under Communism, all training will be given without charge and the student will be assured of maintenance. Therefore, the cost of the training need not be considered, and even in a bourgeois society surely those who are able to undertake an expensive training should rather be congratulated on their good fortune, than compensated for it; it is those who are denied an

education who should be compensated. If the apprenticeship be long, the student should require no other special reward than the proficiency he has attained. As for those who possess unusual natural ability, their gift, their treasure is not a thing for which they should be paid. Responsible work, too, should be regarded as a privilege—that, indeed, is the only real reward which can be given for hard work and patient study; more responsible work is almost always more interesting work, and, within reasonable limits, such work is always enjoyed by those who are fitted for it.

A parrot cry often heard is: "Why should a clever and industrious worker get no more than one who is slow and stupid?" Yet everyone knows that that is commonly the case to-day. There is no general graduation of wages according to merit and ability, and if it be true that in our competitive society, the feeble of mind and body tend to be pushed down to the lowest rung of the economic ladder, this is not a social virtue over which we should rejoice. The effect is simply that the children of the unfit are condemned to live in unwholesome surroundings, and an entire class of people, chronically poor in health and deficient in energy, is the result.

It is said that the possibility of earning higher wages by working harder is needed as an incentive to a fair average of production. Yet most of the work done under capitalism is paid for by a weekly flat rate. Human beings are so essentially working-beings that the overtired factory employees engage in all sorts of not strictly essential labour in their few spare hours, though they are really in need of sleep; whilst the rich women, whose servants do all the work of their houses, find themselves obliged to take refuge from idleness in social work.

But still another objection is made: Equal wages would be unjust, for our needs are unequal; some people have more expensive, more diverse needs than others! This is a comfortable theory for the rich employer who compares himself with the office porter, or the employer's wife, who gives odds and ends of left-off clothing to the char-woman; but no wage system can possibly be regulated according to the temperament of the individual wage earners. It is practically possible to measure wages according to the value of the work accomplished, the conditions under which it is carried on, the age of the worker, or the size of the family dependent on the wage earned; extra remuneration might also be given to those who require special comforts on account of ill-health. But certainly no wage system can give higher wages to persons possessing the artistic temperament, to the connoisseur, or to the gourmand.

At the present time, our needs are very strictly regularised by the size of our purses; the building contractor and the ready-made clothing and furniture manufacturer cater for us by the thousand.

If we would attempt to supply the people according to their temperamental needs, we must leave the wage system behind and proceed to a more advanced stage of Communism. But after the long experience of Capitalism, and with its protagonists fighting to defeat the rise of Communism, it would be difficult to abolish the wage system altogether, without first passing through the stage of equal wages.

True equality of wages, of course, must either increase the wage on account of children and others dependent on the wage-earner, or special allowances must be made from other sources on their account.

It would probably be simplest to pay an equal flat rate for all forms of social service; the same rate to the woman as to the man, to the unmarried as to the married; and to provide that if an individual chooses to enter also a second occupation, the service given in the second occupation must be voluntary. For each child there would be a special allowance. To the mother who stays at home caring for her children, and to people too old to work, payments would be made equal to the wage earners' flat rate. The wage would continue at the full rate during illness and holidays.

Unemployment under Communism would be of rare and brief occurrence; it would not be the chronic factor that it is in the capitalist state. The unemployed should receive the payments equal to their wages when at work. It is objected that in that case, there would be much unemployment. We do not think so. A new point of view will be created by the knowledge that the worker is serving a community in which he has an equal share, not a private employer, whose business it is to get as much work as possible out of him for the lowest possible wage. It must be admitted that, on the whole, and just because work is a human necessity, the workers give astonishingly good service even under Capitalism. Moreover, the desire to do nothing, so commonly expressed, so seldom practised to-day, is the outcome of fatigue. It is a desire which disappears when mind and body are rested and health is restored. When the master and mistress are tired of work, they take a day in bed or a few days in the country; when the servant and the factory employee are in the same condition they go on working, but they work with reduced efficiency. Under proper conditions the illness called "laziness" will not be a thing to worry about, but if, in the earliest stages of Communism, pay at the full working flat rate should cause any serious difficulty, the situation must be dealt with as experience dictates, and according to the will of the workers' delegates.

The introduction of equal wages for all, and the bringing of every class in society into the ranks of the wage earners, would work tremendous changes in society; the millionaire and the beggar would both disappear. The "Society" people who depend helplessly on their maids and their valets, and weary themselves with a round of social engagements, the gamblers on the Stock Exchange, the anxious lower-middle-class always trying to keep up appearances on an inadequate income, the masses of working-class families ever struggling to ward off actual hunger; all these would be emancipated.

But the era of equal wages is not the goal; it is but a step to the abolition of the wage system.

THE ABOLITION OF WAGES.

Under the rationing systems, necessitated by war scarcity, the coupons have been as necessary for procuring the rationed articles as money itself. The money might be dispensed with altogether; the ration coupons, given without charge, and in equal measure to every individual, might become sufficient in themselves to procure the articles desired. The wage system may gradually be largely superseded by a free equal rationing of the main essentials of food and clothing, with such means of relaxation as that provided by the Russian House Committees, which give permission for the clothing ration to be exceeded by those who show that they are really needing new clothes.

But a system of universal rationing is still far from complete Communism; only when we can each of us have freely what we require shall we have reached that stage.

We shall be able to abolish wages when we have attained to the classless society; when the counter-revolutionary impulse has disappeared, and when production has been efficiently organised from the standpoint of the people's needs. We shall have abolished then the wasted labour entailed by the competitive capitalist system, the great business of advertising, the elaborate ramifications of wholesale and retail buying and selling, and the operations of the numerous middlemen, the making of inferior goods that last only a short time, the labour expended upon them being largely thrown away.

The idle non-productive class will have disappeared with the unemployed and the masses of people prematurely incapable of working, or only able to give inferior and intermittent service owing to bad social conditions.

The energies now concentrated on building up private fortunes will be devoted to the common good. We shall have an abundant production.

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which will provide amply for all our needs. There will then be no scarcity to supply a reason why we should be rationed, and greediness in consumption will disappear with scarcity, because it is want that gives rise to it. Only the man who believes that he may be unable to obtain a meal when he wants one continues eating after his appetite is spent.

The distribution of commodities without money payments presents no social difficulties of organisation. Such common necessities of daily life as milk and bread, of which a household usually requires the same quantities every day, would be delivered regularly, just as the municipal dustman arrives at stated intervals to collect the refuse without payment, and the baker and the milkman call on the middle-class households to-day. Other common necessities for instance, vegetables, might be brought to our doors in order that we might take what we chose from the stock brought round, or they might be delivered to our order; or again, we might get them from the various distributing centres, shopping for ourselves, just as we do to-day, but without giving any coins in exchange for the goods we choose.

We should not have, as now, competing shops opened because someone has capital to invest and thinks he can place it profitably in the grocery or drapery business, because a woman has lost her husband and must earn a living without leaving her home, because a man has lost a leg and wants light work to do. Nevertheless, distribution could be organised much as at present, till human ingenuity modified by the communist environment and experience devises other methods.

Our Russian Communist Comrades tell us that they confidently expect the time when money will be unnecessary; when people will take freely what they desire, and when it will be generally recognised that an injury to the Community is committed not in taking freely all that one needs, but in wasting the time which should be devoted to doing ones share of productive work.

Internationally, also, money will disappear: at first commodities will be exchanged for commodities; then each nation will give its surplus products to the nations which require them, without measuring whether their precise value is returned in other commodities.

We must inscribe on our programme for the revolution: *The Abolition of the Wage System* and as steps thereto:--

Equal Wages for All Grades in all Industries and Professions so long as the wage system continues.

Equal Pay for Men and Women.

The Same Pay for the Mother at Home.

Full Wages to continue during Sickness and Unemployment.

Old Age Pensions to be equal to the general rate of wages.

Allowances for the Children.

E. SYLVIA PANKHURST.

(To be continued.)