

The Working Class in production

Production under capitalism is inherently social-everything that is produced depends on a complex process of social production. This is unlike much peasant production, for example, in which each peasant household produces, independently from all others, more or less everything it needs.

But this social nature of production doesn't mean that production is to satisfy social need. The aim of production in capitalist society is to expand capital-to make profit-and this can only be done at the expense of the working class. So what is produced, why it is produced, the conditions under which people labour are all in the hands of the capitalist class. An exploited working class is the basis for the very existence of capitalism. The bourgeoisie, who at the time of the bourgeois revolution and the destruction of feudalism were progressive, and could with some justice claim to represent the interests of all oppressed groups in society, have now become totally reactionary, the barrier to the further development of the productive forces in the interests of the liberation of humankind.

The exploitation of the working class in the realm of production is further revealed in the area of distribution-the share-out between wages and profits, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, poverty, inadequate and differential provision of education, social services, etc. Reformists have always concentrated on the area of distribution alone-they have left untouched the area of production and exploitation. That is, they have tampered with the effects of capitalist production, not its basic structure, so not surprisingly have never been able to deal with even the social issues they have singled out as the ones parliamentary politics can solve.

Bourgeois democracy and the universal interest

Democratic systems claim to represent the general interest, the universal. In fact the political equality (we all have the vote) goes hand in hand with social and economic inequality, and perpetuates these inequalities. The state really represents a particular interest, and the "national interest", or whatever it is called, is really a particular, capitalist, interest. The working class can have no interest in perpetuating their exploitation, nor can there be a genuinely universal interest which is opposed to the majority of the population.

The working class, unlike the bourgeoisie, represents a genuinely universal interest-- the freedom and satisfaction of the needs of all humankind, on the basis of a free, democratic organisation of production to satisfy these needs.

Thus, because of their position in society, the working class as the necessary basis of production, but unable to satisfy their interests within a capitalist social system, represent the *negation* of capitalism. In the society but not of it, their organisation and pursuit of their interests represents a constant threat to the very existence of capitalist exploitation. Because the basis of existence of the working class is cooperative social production, not exploitation of some other class, the proletarian class struggle represents the potential liberation of all oppressed groups.

The problem of Organisation

The working class is the only social group capable, through its own self-activity of liberating society, of bringing about socialism. For this to be possible involves the development of a clear awareness of what the working class interest really is – the development of a socialist consciousness. How this can be realised involves questions of strategy, tactics, organisation, programmes, etc, and will be dealt with under the question of the party.

Working Class History

That it is possible in practice is shown by the whole of working class history and struggle. The potentiality of the working class is seen most clearly in the Paris Commune, and the October Revolution in Russia, and also for example the Spanish Civil War. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956, etc. British working class history shows a tremendous richness in workers' abilities to organise themselves in resistance to all kinds of capitalist attack.

Marx's view of history

The starting point for Marx is always real living people, as they produce their own means of subsistence. What he is concerned with is the double relationship of people to nature and people to people. That is people, through the labour process, transforms nature to satisfy their needs. They do so in certain relationships (of cooperation and /or conflict) with their fellow men and women. These activities make up the *forces of production and relations of production*, or what Marx called the *economic base* of any society.

- (a) Corresponding to this base, this form of social existence, are certain forms of consciousness (eg religious, political views, etc).
- (b) At a certain point in time the harmonious relationship between the forces and relations of production aiding the development of the productive forces becomes fetters on this development.
- (c) No social order ever perishes before the fullest development of the productive forces possible within it has occurred.
- (d) In broad outline the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and modern capitalist modes of production have been historically progressive epochs in the formation of society.
- (e) With the capitalist formation and its overthrow the prehistory of mankind comes to an end. "Men make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing." The aim of theory is to understand why not in circumstances of their own choosing, and linked to practice, to liquidate these limitations on peoples free activity. Under socialism, people will make their own history