

CHAPTER XVIII.

From Primitive to Capitalistic Production.

Recalling our conversations about the fundamental confusion of capitalistic thought, Doctor, doesn't it seem to you by this time that we ought to emphasize the manifest distinction which capitalists and socialists alike are so prone to ignore? Don't you agree that if we wish to think clearly upon the subject of social service, we must distinguish the two sources of capitalistic power? Isn't it absolutely necessary to clarity of thought, that the power which springs out of capitalization of the artificial instruments of production produced by labor from and on the planet, be distinguished from the power which springs out of capitalization of the planet itself? Isn't it simple horse sense to distinguish the secondary from the primary class of productive instruments, the artificial from the natural, machinery from the land out of which machinery is continually produced and upon which it must be used if used at all? And is it any less important to make this distinction when these two different kinds of things are capitalized and interchangeable, than when they are not? Aye, aye! I thought you would say so. It is always important to make the distinction.

Well, we have already considered the matter of these two sources of capitalistic power, and have concluded that labor activities cannot be cut off from industrial access to *artificial* instruments directly, without express laws of exclusion. But if you have reflected on our last talk I think

you will also agree that labor interests can be cut off from them indirectly by being cut off from the great *natural* instrument. In other words, I think you will realize that machinery, no matter how gigantic, cannot be withheld from use by labor interests without direct and arbitrary prohibition, unless obstacles are placed in the way of the access of labor to land; but that monopoly of land will produce monopoly of machinery. Let us see if I cannot make this quite clear.

Before going any further, however, I must remind you that it really makes no essential difference to labor interests whether the natural instruments of production are monopolized by a personal class, such as landlords were under the system of feudal tenures of land, or by means of impersonal commercial interests, such as those of our present capitalistic system under which the natural and the artificial instruments of production are indiscriminately capitalized. In either case labor is exploited and plundered. Accidental or arbitrary differences there may be; but on the whole the *commands* of the landlord under feudalism were essentially the same as are the *demands* of the investor under capitalism.

Bear that in mind, Doctor, and then think for a moment of production in its most primitive forms. Don't be confused by the fact that the simple primitive forms have given way to complex capitalistic forms; but think upon them as a prelude to considering the capitalistic forms. Now, what are the most primitive forms of production?

A common example is a naked savage at the shore of the sea, digging clams with his fingers.

Analyze that example, and what do you find? I should say four things, wouldn't you? First, the naked savage digging clams: a man working for his living. Second, the seashore, in the sands

of which the clams are naturally deposited: a part of the planet. Third, the clams in their natural state in the sand: also part of the planet. Fourth, the clams picked out of the sand and pulled from their shells by the crude art of the savage: artificial products of that man's work from that natural storehouse of the planet.

Those four things really resolve themselves into three, for the clams lying naturally in the sand of the shore, and the shore itself, are identical in economic character. They are natural instruments or sources of satisfying human wants—in this case, of satisfying hunger.

So we have in that example one of the most primitive examples of production; a man applying his work to the planet to procure food. Using Karl Marx's terms, we could translate that analysis into something like this: "Labor" applied to "matter" to produce "use-values." But as I prefer the terms of the classical political economy, I should express the same idea by interpreting that example of primitive production as an instance in simplest form of the application of "labor" to "land" to produce "wealth." With either set of terms, the meaning is the same.

Pausing here for a moment, let us try to see how that process could be obstructed.

Given the hungry man and the natural clam deposit, would obstruction be possible except in one of two ways? Could anything obstruct that process except coercion of the man by direct application of force to his person, or through his acknowledgment of another's dominion over the clam bed? I think not. You could apply force directly to his person by enslaving the man's body, compelling him to dig clams for you, supporting him out of his own product, and then living yourself upon its surplus; or, recognizing his personal freedom, you could assume governmental

sovereignty over him as citizen or subject, and take a portion of his clams as a tax without his consent. Either way would be a direct application of force. But if you would avoid the use of force, you might in some way induce him to acknowledge your ownership of the sea shore where the clams were in their natural state, and then forbid his digging clams there except upon such terms of rent or purchase as would give you a share in the clams he dug. No matter which method you adopted, however, you would be getting service from him without giving service to him.

Now, what I want you to observe, Doctor, is that those obvious principles are not confined to primitive forms of production. They extend all the way up from the simplicity of that sea-shore example, through the epochs of paternal slavery, serfdom, and feudalism, into the complexities of the present era of capitalism.

In all production, no matter what the form, there are those three things, and only those three—the human worker, the natural instruments or sources, and the artificial products. And in all distribution or division there are but two ways of diverting any share of those products from the workers who produce them—by direct action upon the person of the worker, or by indirect action through monopoly of his natural instruments or sources.

Throughout production and distribution, then, those three elements—the human worker, the natural instruments or sources, and the product—must be separately recognized. Essentially different, they must be constantly distinguished. In other words, "labor," "land," and "wealth" differ in kind and must be scrupulously distinguished in reasoning about them. Yes; we might translate these terms into Marx's, and say, meaning the same thing, that "labor," "matter," and "use-

values" differ in kind and must be scrupulously distinguished.

Let us now advance a stage from that primitive clam digging, holding however to familiar illustrations. Borrowing one of these, let's suppose that the naked clam digger finds he can save his fingers and yet dig clams faster and eat them more comfortably if he digs them with a stick and breaks them open with stones.

Then he must get a suitable stick. And what does this mean? Does it mean that he must depend upon some stick-owner for permission to dig clams with a stick instead of digging them with his fingers? Not at all. He goes to another part of his natural instrument or source of production—goes back, that is, a little way from the shore,—and applies his work to that part of the planet to get himself a stick. When he gets it, it is an artificial instrument for clam production, isn't it? And in getting it hasn't he applied his "labor" to "land" to produce "capital" with which to get food? And hasn't he done the same to get the stones? And isn't he then a capitalist in the sense of being an owner of capital? And thereafter, in digging and opening clams, doesn't he use artificial instruments as well as natural instruments in securing artificial products—"capital" as well as "land" in securing "wealth"? And wouldn't it be the same in principle if one or two of the tribe gathered the sticks and stones and swapped this capital with the rest of the tribe for some of the clams they dig?

And what is the essential nature of that capital? Isn't it unfinished wealth? Aren't those sticks and those stones unfinished sea food, since they are procured as part of the process of making sea food—as part of the process of getting and making edible the clams found at the shore?

Can you possibly think, then, that anybody

could coerce that savage by merely taking away from him that stick and those stones? Not in a million years, provided he retained access to the natural sources of such sticks and such stones. So long as he and his fellow workers—the stick and stone gatherers, the “capital”-makers—so long as they had access to the natural instruments of his clam production (the sea shore with its natural clam deposits, and the upland with its natural deposits of stones and its natural growth of sticks), so long as he was free in that respect, the loss of those tools of his would not conquer him. It might put him to temporary inconvenience, of course; but it couldn't make him economically defenseless.

Yes, I rather think you are right about that famous water tank parable of Bellamy's, which our socialist friend is fond of quoting. I reckon it does fit in here. Let me see if I have Bellamy's book handy. Ah, here it is—“Equality.”

The parable occurs in chapter twenty-three. But it takes up the whole chapter and we won't stop to read it. You remember the point about it. According to the parable, there was an arid country in which men worked at nothing but getting water. Some of the crafty ones, capitalists, had gathered stores of water, from which they gave drink to the thirsty on condition that these become their servants, they and their children. So the capitalists organized the servants into working bands. Some dipped at the springs; others carried to the tank, where all the people came to drink; others sought out new springs. And the capitalists gave a penny for each bucket of water poured into the tank, and charged two for every bucket taken out. In time, however, so fruitful was the work of the servants, the tank overflowed; and then the capitalists said to the people, “Sit ye down and be patient, for ye

shall bring us no more water till the tank be empty." This made hard times, business depression, for when the servants got no more pennies they could buy no more water. And the people suffered and murmured, and the capitalists lost money and swore—or words to that effect. After a while the suffering of the people was such that they threatened to take the tank by force. But after another while the water in the tank had fallen low, and then the people were employed to fill it again. When these experiences had been many times repeated, and there had been much bad language and some incidental mob violence, the whole trouble was settled by dismissing the capitalists as bosses of the water-workers and making a collective organization in which the workers governed themselves and each took pay according to his work, with no rake-off "profit" for anybody.

Now, Doctor, I regard that as really a splendid social parable, all the way through—except as to its method of reform.

Right there Bellamy "falls down." No, it is not to the self-organization, and the dismissal of the capitalists, and the abolition of rake-off "profit" that I object. I put all those things in the meritorious part of the parable. What I regard as its weakness is the impotency of the method proposed for accomplishing those results. That is a weakness which is due to Bellamy's failure to appreciate the essential difference between natural springs and artificial tanks.

I realize, of course, that Bellamy used the tank as a simile for the market, as a symbol for Marx's idea of commodities as "exchange values," as a form of industrial organization, and not as a machine made of wood. What he evidently intended to point at as the power that dominates labor, was not capital in the sense of an artificial machine. His allusion was to business organization.

But for this purpose the tank as a symbol was unfortunate. To our friend down the street, you know, it really does stand for artificial instruments of production, for machinery. So considered, the parable is valueless, of course, in its constructive features. The question that at once arises is this: No matter if the tank owners did stop the use of the artificial tank, why did the workers suffer for want of water if the natural springs were still free to them? They knew how to dip, and they knew how to carry. Did the capitalists own the pails and the tank? Even so, there must still have been natural wood in that country; why didn't some of the workers make pails and a tank for the rest?

To be sure, the parable assumes a country in which all artificial products consist of water carried to a tank. But if you lay your emphasis there, then the pails and the tank must have symbolized some kind of natural instruments of production, like the springs; and in that case the power of the capitalists resided in a monopoly of *natural* instruments, and not in a monopoly of *artificial* instruments or capital—in a monopoly of land and not in a monopoly of machinery.

As an illustration of the economic power of the monopoly of artificial instruments of production, Bellamy's parable is without value. As an illustration of the power of the economic monopoly of natural instruments, it would be excellent but for the defective symbolism which makes it appear to be an illustration of the power of monopoly of artificial instruments. While land-capitalism is deadly to labor interests, whether alone or as an element in capital-capitalism, the latter is quite innocuous without the former. All the evil of capitalism is traceable to land capitalism.

Returning for further simple exemplification of this to our clam digger, with sticks and stones for

his capital, we can see that he is independent as long as he has access to the natural sources of supply of sticks and stones and clams. But what is true of the clam digger in those primitive circumstances, Doctor, is true of industry as a whole in the most advanced stages of the industrial arts and the most complex conditions of commercialism.

If all workers, with their vast diversity of knowledge and skill, are unobstructed, as workers, in access to all the appropriate natural instruments of production, they can laugh at the capitalists who threaten to coerce them by monopolizing the existing artificial instruments. But if diversified labor be obstructed in its access to the natural instruments of production, then mere laborers are indeed helpless and capitalists all powerful.

The coercion of labor has always been accomplished in that way. Except as bodily slavery in some form, or some of its equivalents, such as taxation of industry—except as something of this kind has played a part, the labor of the world has been coerced only by monopolization of the planet, which constitutes the one all-comprehensive natural instrument of production.

In the feudal regime, and in regimes of kindred character—that is to say, in eras in which landlordism was a distinct and visible institution,—the coercion of labor by obstructing its use of the planet was what the street boy would call “raw.” Landlords, claiming divine right of ownership of the planet, “made no bones” about plundering workers. Owning the earth, they owned the landless who lived and worked upon it, and they didn’t hesitate to say so. The condition was really one of human slavery. The master had become a landlord, the slave a tenant or serf.

But with the development of capitalism to the point of sweeping the planet itself into the cate-

gory of market commodities, land-*capitalism* took the place of land-*lordism*. Consequently, a sort of rude, unbalanced, unfair personal reciprocity gave way to the impersonal wage-slave condition we now see. The social service market, through its phenomena of value measurements, has developed two great—interests, I was about to say, Doctor, as I have said heretofore, but “interests” has so many connotations that it may confuse my meaning; so I will fall back on a good old word, and say “weal.” Two great weals, then, have been developed in the social service market by capitalism, in place of the two great personal classes of feudalism—weal in production, and weal in the natural instruments of production.

Weal in production includes all the diversified interests in labor and its fruits, whether these fruits, as some modern economists would call them, be “consumption goods” or “production goods”; or, as the old economists would have said, whether they be “capital” or “wealth”; or, as I should say, whether they be “artificial instruments of production” or “final products.”

On the other hand, weal in the natural instruments of production includes all the diversified proprietary titles to the planet.

And just as the weal of landlord class and the weal of vassal class under feudalism were essentially hostile, no matter how tender the personal relationships, so the weal in production and the weal in *natural* instruments of production under capitalism are essentially hostile, no matter how cordial the personal relationships, or even how completely these hostile weals may be merged in the same proprietary titles or in the same individual owners. What either weal gains, the other must lose, regardless of its personal distribution.

Farmer Doe, for example, has a weal in the capitalization of his farm site, another in the cap-

italization of his farm improvements and machinery and stock, and a third in the condition of himself as a laborer. Doe's weal as a laborer is precisely that of old Joshua, his hired man, who hasn't a dollar in the world except his monthly wages. Doe's weal in his machinery and stock is of the same kind, for he has either made it or bought it with what he did make; it is in the nature of wages, or would be if he hadn't a cinch in other ways. But his weal in the capitalization of his farm site is precisely the same as old man Sampson's weal in those valuable building lots from which he gets ground rents—a "rake-off" weal.

In those circumstances the economic conflict is between weals or interests which ramify personal classes, instead of being, as under feudalism, a conflict between personal classes. To be sure, you are quite right, slavery does give us the only perfect exemplification of hostile class interests in the personal sense—master class, slave class, and the nondescript masterless class. Under feudalism, ramifying impersonal interests as distinguished from class interests creep in slightly, and under capitalism survivals of distinct class interests are observable; but characteristically, feudalism involved a conflict of personal classes, whereas capitalism involves a conflict of impersonal interests.