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EDITORIAL

## A STITCH IN TIME.

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**M**INDFUL of how important a piece of work the Socialist Labor Party performed for the clarification of the Movement in America when, now seven years ago, it quickly stamped out the bourgeois folly that the New Yorker Volkszeitung Corporation started to indulge in claiming, with the aid of comical statistics, that the Working Class paid the taxes, and that the tax upon the average family of the Working Class had been increased \$100 by the Spanish War;—mindful of the value of the stitch in time taken then, we shall now hasten to take another stitch in time in what may otherwise prove to be another serious rend, again attempted to be cut by the identical Corporation in the fabric of Working Class education.

The *New Yorker Worker*, the private property of the said New Yorker Volkszeitung Corporation, says in its issue of the 5th instant:

“It is not true that the capitalist system ‘filches from the working class four-fifths of all that class produces.’ This is a wild exaggeration, set afloat, we believe by the *Appeal to Reason* on the basis of an utterly false interpretation of Commissioner Wright’s ‘Hand and Machine Labor’—an exaggeration that has done much to discredit Socialism among thoughtful people.”

There is no exaggeration—wild or otherwise—in the statement; and if the *Appeal to Reason* contributed to give publicity to the fact, the act is one of the few bright spots in that publication—bright spots that consist in cribbing from Socialist Labor Party literature. It is substantially true that the capitalist system filches from the Working Class of America four-fifths of all that class produces.

If a coat, for the production of which the manufacturer pays the operative, say, \$2, is sold by the capitalist to the retailer for, say, \$10, it would be false reasoning to

say that that particular workingman receives only one-fifth of his product, and that that particular capitalist filches the other four-fifths. In examining the reason of the error, the correctness of the Socialist position in the premises will become apparent.

Taking the above illustration—a purely imaginary one, yet correct enough for the purpose of illustrating the error of the contention that in such a case the particular worker receives only one-fifth of his product—as a basis, we find:

First—That the other \$8 are not wholly that particular worker's product; or, to take the matter from another, and the supplemental, side, and which almost amounts to the same thing:

Second—That those \$8 do not all fall into that particular capitalist's pockets as his private profits.

In order to simplify the problem, we shall assume that the particular capitalist in question does not need to borrow money from some other capitalist, on which he would have to pay interest, nor hire land, on which he would have to pay rent. We shall assume him to be a fully equipped individual capitalist. Even then the \$8 do not go wholly into his pockets as his private property. A portion of those \$8 fall under categories that are outside of "profits." These categories fall under several heads. The following three are the principal ones:

First—Taxes and other Government dues;

Second—The wear and tear of his plant;

Third—The cost of his raw material.

As to the taxes, they can not, it is true, be properly lumped with his profits because, for one thing, he can not keep them; for another, they are necessary expenses towards capitalist production. But, while the taxes are not profits available by the capitalist personally, they are a requirement of his class, and, as a member of his class, the taxes benefit him. Moreover, whence do these taxes proceed? They proceed from the unpaid wages of his employee. As far as the item of taxes is concerned, it is part of that particular worker's product that he is filched of, although the particular capitalist who employs him does not get the lump sum, and benefits by it only indirectly as a member of his class.

As to the wear and tear of his plant, a careful inquiry will reveal that it partakes somewhat of the character of "taxes," enough to illustrate the final point

that we are aiming at. Wear and tear is predicated upon the amount expended by the capitalist in acquiring his plant. But from whom did he buy it? He bought from some other capitalist, who, in selling it, included in his price the unpaid wages, in other words, that part of the product of his workers that they were filched of. When the particular capitalist in question re-imburses himself for wear and tear, a part of that re-imburement consists of values filched, though not by himself, from other workers. Accordingly, “taxes” and “wear and tear” differ in this: that, while, with “taxes,” the plunder from the particular workingman falls to the benefit of the Capitalist Class at large, and not to the benefit of the particular capitalist, with “wear and tear”, the amount taken to cover it does not flow from the filchings practiced by himself upon the particular workingman in the illustration, the amount flows in part from the Working Class at large.

Finally, as to the cost of raw material, that is identical with the “wear and tear” item. In the price that the manufacturer in question pays for his raw material, the capitalists, from whom he bought the materials, also included the unpaid wages, in other words, those portions of the products of their respective workers that these were filched of. Accordingly, the amounts which the capitalist in question takes from the sale of the coat to cover his cost of raw material do not flow from the pilferings practices by himself upon his own workingman, the amount flows in part from the amount pilfered by the Capitalist Class at large, from the Working Class at large.

Summing up these items, making allowance for the pilferings on other workingmen than himself, and computing the direct pilferings upon himself, we would have the following approximate results:

First—The workingman, who made the coat that brings his master \$10 at wholesale, and who received for his work only \$2, was plundered out of \$2.

Second—The \$10 that his master receives contain \$2 plunder from him which go to his master, and at least \$2 more diffused over the shoulders of the Working Class at large, and that go to the Capitalist Class at large.

Third—The remaining \$4 represent his employer’s expenses for raw material, exclusive of that portion of the price that he paid for the raw material and which represented the unpaid wages of the workers employed by the sellers of the raw

material.

While the above figures do not claim to be accurate to the cent, the principle upon which they are ascertained is undeniable, and the relative percentage upon which they are figured, though not subject to equal accuracy of measurement, are for all practical purposes exact.

From this it would appear that while the particular worker in the coat factory is plundered of only one-half of his own product, the plunder of the working class at large, his own share of plunder included, as represented in the \$10-coat, is twice as large, to wit, \$4. In other words, that \$10-coat represents or contains a new value of the worth of \$6, in producing which the Working Class received only about \$3 (the particular coat-making workingman's own \$2 and the proportional share of his fellow-plundered wage slaves).

This would represent two-thirds plunder—not yet, it is true, a four-fifths pilfering, but only a two-fifteenths removed therefrom. Even if the inquiry were to stop here, the claim that, to say “the capitalist system filches from the Working Class four-fifths of all that class produces” is a “wild exaggeration”, which does much “to discredit Socialism among thoughtful people” comes perilously near being of a piece with the poisonous bourgeois language that sought to make it appear that the workers pay the taxes, and that furthermore sought, by the preposterous claim that the average workingman family's taxes had been increased \$100, to scare the workers into line to remove the high taxes for the membership of a Corporation in which usurious money-lenders, city pluck-me-storekeepers, and other such petit bourgeois vermin had put their heads together. We shall show that the present claim made by the *New Yorker Worker* is absolutely of a piece with the former one made by the same Corporation. Equally untenable.

Returning to the illustration of the coat-making worker, the conclusions drawn were based upon the wholesale prices at which the manufacturer sells his goods. The Working Class, however, has to buy at retail. Even under normal conditions, the Capitalist Class, as distributor, takes a solid chunk out of the workingman's wages. The profits raked by the retailing capitalist lowers the worker's share of his product and proportionately raises the percentage of capitalist plunder. To what extent are the two-fifteenths, left to be accounted for, affected? This may be difficult,

if at all possible, to determine with accuracy. Can there be much, if anything, left of the remaining fraction of two-fifths, even under normal conditions? Hardly. At the present aggravated stage of all-around exploitation that the American Working Class has reached; at this stage, when the cost of living (retail prices) has risen, according to the report of the commercial agencies, fully 46 per cent. above the lowest figures for 1896, to say nothing of rent; at this stage, when wage reductions are general and the rises in wages admittedly illusory; finally, at this stage, when Senator Heyburn himself admits that the adulteration of goods (an equivalent of still higher prices) has reached the point that “it is sapping the foundation of the constitution of our people”, and that “if we had to raise soldiers now as we did in 1861”, we could not throughout the country “find as large a percentage of young men fit for hard service as there were at that time”;—at such a stage, the declaration that four-fifths is a “wild exaggeration” of the amount that capitalism pilfers from the Working Class can proceed only, as it does in this instance, from bourgeois and labor-fakir sources—a “thoughtful people” among whom Socialism never was and never will be otherwise than “discredited.”

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