



The Universal Class

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Powerful as the world's rulers are, there is one force that can master them. Against the billionaires stand the billions of wage earners who make and circulate their profits. In daily resistance around the world, from strikes to uprisings, the power of the working class is revealed. Without our work not a cent goes into the bank accounts of the billionaires ? when we all act together the whole machinery of exploitation comes to a halt.

The working class produces everything and can produce it without the exploiters ? so long as we are united and conscious of what we want.

The capitalists try and stop us. They try to divide us and dull our consciousness. To do this they fill our heads with racial and religious prejudices. Their strongest weapons are to set the workers of one nation against another, to set men against women, to set white against black. That is why the slogan of Karl Marx in the Communist Manifesto has been taken up by generations of workers: ?Working People of All Countries Unite!?

The ruling class tries to convince the working class either that it does not exist as a class, or that it is in terminal decline. Both claims are false.

The industrial working class is growing globally, especially in developing countries like India, Brazil, Korea, Nigeria and China. Workers in core industries of capitalism ? transport, machinery, energy and automobiles ? have enormous power that can be coordinated in international struggle.

Academic charlatans claim that the ?middle class? is replacing the proletariat. Outside the USA and Europe this is demonstrably false ? huge numbers of former peasants and artisans have been sucked into the new working class. Industries like textiles move around the globe transforming rural workers into industrial workers in a matter of months.

But in the most advanced countries this is false too. While there has been a relative decline in the numbers of industrial workers as a proportion of the workforce in the USA and Europe, the great majority of the new ?white collar? and ?service? workers remain wage slaves. As old industries disappear, new ones arise. The working class is not disappearing ? it is changing with the technological base of capitalism itself.

To ?prove? that the working class is declining or disappearing, the bourgeois theorists wheel out a fantastical array of competing definitions of class. Whether you earn \$2 a day or \$50 dollars a day; whether you wear a collar or overalls; whether you work on a keyboard or a lathe; whether you perform manual or intellectual labour; whether or not you aspire to own a house and car ... each of these has been cited as key issues to ?prove? the decline of the working class. Each is based on a superficial sociological description rather than fundamental social relationships.

The working class is that part of humanity that lives by selling its power to work. The proletarian is not owned by the capitalist ? but neither does the proletarian own any means of production apart from this labour power. Though we are legally free when compared to the slaves and serfs of old, we are unfree because we are compelled to sell our labour time to the capitalist in return for a wage. If we do not, we starve.

In this fundamental respect, the working class exists, is bigger than ever before in human history, but still remains a class of wage-slaves.

The capitalists insist that the workers are not exploited, except perhaps by a few unscrupulous employers who go too

far. Most of us, they say, are paid a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. We have not been compelled to work for them ? we do so because we choose it. It is a fair deal ? they provide us with work and in return we are paid a wage.

But beneath the facade of this free and equal contract lies systematic exploitation. Our wages reflect only a fraction of the value of the total social product we have created. Wages are set at roughly the price of the goods and services we must buy to stay alive and get back to work the next day ? the cost of reproducing our labour power. Yet every worker creates more value than this in a day's work ? the capitalist appropriates the surplus. This takes the form of the capitalists' ownership of the mass of commodities. The capitalists share and circulate the profits among themselves through commerce, credit and rent.

Our servitude lies in the very system of wage slavery itself. This means we cannot free ourselves without freeing the whole of humanity from the tyranny of the market, capital and class division. In this sense we are the universal class ? our struggle will continue until social wealth is held in common and classes themselves are confined to the museum of history.

Communism, therefore, is not a utopian scheme for the reorganisation of society according to principles devised by this or that dreamer. It is the necessary outcome of the struggle of working people everywhere. The workers' struggle has objectively communist goals and can end only when the emancipation of all humanity has been secured.

The capitalists are engaged in a permanent ideological struggle to cause workers to forget that we are a class and to refrain from acting as a class. But their own system permanently reproduces and reinforces the conditions that oblige us to recognise ourselves as a class, organise ourselves as a class and struggle as a class. The capitalists need the working class for without us they could not exist. The workers do not need the capitalists because without them we shall all share the work and no classes will exist. This is the capitalists' unique historical tragedy. We will not shed a tear for them.

Class consciousness appears and reappears wherever there is struggle and organisation ? in trade unions, in parties, in popular committees and co-operatives. These organisations grow and decline, are destroyed and are reborn. They are transformed by capitalism's economic cycles, and by the victories and defeats of working class battles.

In itself, the struggle of workers against their employers for higher wages or better conditions of work need not challenge the essence of capital ? its exploitation of wage labour and appropriation of surplus value. The trade union struggle tends to aim for a better price for the workers' labour time within the system of exploitation. But only fools or cynics could believe that this renders it meaningless or irrelevant to the struggle against capitalism.

The higher meaning of every working class struggle is that it brings workers together in combination, brings into focus our common interests and ability to act, brings us into closer connection with militants in other branches of industry and society at large and provides us with a practical basis on which to compare the results and outcomes of our activity. It brings us into contact with the traditions and experiences of the entire working class movement, past and present, at home and abroad, and ? crucially ? it acquaints the most militant workers with the communist theory of Marxism, which is bound up indissolubly with the history of the workers' movement and which most clearly expresses its meaning and its goals.

The sharper the struggle and the higher the level of organisation achieved, the more readily workers take up these ideas, which lay bare the real basis of capitalist society and chart the way forward to social revolution. While the economic struggle of the workers against their employers does not spontaneously challenge the roots of exploitation, it increases the organisation and confidence of the workers, bringing nearer the day when the communist part of the working class can succeed in uniting the workers' movement in revolutionary political struggle against capital.

The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. But this self-emancipation can only be a conscious act, guided by an advanced theory, organised through a disciplined and professional class party, led by the most committed militants elected from the ranks of the workers' movement itself.

