

Labor Trends through 1985

Capital: Stage Two Confronts Workers

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Mystique of Capital

Before people began to understand their natural environment, the forces of nature presented real, awesome and bewildering problems in the struggle for survival. Today the problems remain awesome and bewildering, not because of our failure to understand the forces of nature, but because of our ineptitude to cope with and transcend the perversity of a socioeconomic system which has usurped control over both people and nature.

Early people, not understanding the physical laws of nature, anthropomorphized them. They provided the forces of nature with human characteristics, while developing myths and folk tales to explain the unexplainable. Out of myth sprang religion, and out of religion sprang a social hierarchy of priests and leaders who acted as the interpreters of nature's forces for the common people. This elite class gradually grew to dominate whole civilizations, as in Egypt where the pharaoh was considered a direct offspring of the sun god Ra.

Today, the elite ruling classes of the world continue to assert control over the common people as interpreters of the forces of capital. People, not understanding capital and its physical laws, have anthropomorphized and deified it. They have relinquished their self-control over life and subjugated themselves to the social and economic rituals involved in sustaining themselves for wages and those above for profit.

In the era of its real domination, capital has run away, it has escaped. It is no longer controlled by human beings. It is no longer limited by nature. Marx defined labor as an activity which transforms nature or matter for one or another purpose, but the concept of nature can no longer be accepted as it is. In the period of domination of capital, the human being is no longer in contact with nature (especially during work). Between nature and the individual lies capital. Capital becomes nature.

– *The Wandering of Humanity* by Camatte, page 13

In the case of organized religion, control is based on the people's faith in an authoritarian institution which relegates them to the bottom of a mystical hierarchy, and which taxes their labor in exchange for a system of authoritarian ethics and protection from damnation.

The contemporary domination of capital over the individual is no different in form than in the above case. We have become subject to the monotheistic demands of capital. All labor is heavily taxed for the support of the non-laboring hierarchy in control, again only in exchange for a system of authoritarian, ethics and protection from capital's own forms of damnation, i.e., loss of any means of subsistence except for those inimical to the laws of capitalist production.

The parallel drawn here between organized religion and capitalist social economy is one of form, not of essence; and is pointed out here to show how all authoritarian institutions rely totally on the subjugation and exploitation of the individual for their sustenance.

The Movement of Capital

The extent of capital's growth when measured by governments and expressed in terms of financial value is like measuring the growth of the Church in the sixteenth century, in terms of Vatican gold. Such measures have quantitative but no qualitative human meaning. What does have meaning is the measure of -capital's expansion in terms of the human beings subject to its forces.

It is this form of qualitative measure that Marx used in his analysis of capital. However, the forces that Marx perceived and analyzed, though still in operation, have developed to a point on which Marx was only able to speculate. This is the runaway of capital as described by Camatte:

For Marx capital has a barrier because it despoils the working individual. We should keep in mind that he is arguing against apologists for capital and wants to show that the capitalist mode of production is not eternal and does not achieve human emancipation. Yet in the course of his analysis he points to the possibility for capital to escape from human conditions. We perceive that it is not the productive forces that become autonomous, but capital, since at a given moment the productive forces become 'a barrier which it strives to overpower.' This takes place as follows: The productive forces are no longer productive forces of human beings but of capital; they are for capital.

– *The Wandering of Humanity*, page 57

Projected Labor Trends

Bearing this in mind, I would like to present a few facts from the 1975 publication of the U.S. government's Bureau of Labor Statistics (*Structure of the U.S. Economy in 1980 and 1985*, pub. no. 1831), which provides from a statistical analysis of past labor trends a projection of trends up to 1985:

1. Within the total civilian economy, the historical and projected employment shares show a steady movement from agriculture to the nonagricultural sector of the economy. Within the non-agricultural sectors, employment shares are projected to continue the historical movement toward non-manufacturing from manufacturing.
2. Within the non-manufacturing sectors, projected employment as a percentage of total civilian employment reflects the continuation of historical declines in mining, construction and transportation, and increases in finance, insurance and real estate, and other services.
3. Within the civilian economy, the historical and projected employment shares show a steady movement to the government sector from the private sector.

This shift in employment trends is obviously not a reflection of workers shifting from dull or menial jobs to high-paying careers in glamorous fields, but rather a change in the direction of capital's movement toward autonomy and the integration of all human forces toward this end.

In a review article by Harold Wool (1975 *Monthly Labor Review*, Bulletin no. 1868) on a government task force review of *Work in America* (MIT Press 1973), a number of crucial-points are made giving credence to the above analysis.

Citing a variety of psychological studies and survey findings, the task force concludes that large numbers of American workers at all occupational levels are pervasively dissatisfied with the quality of their working lives...The principal sources of worker discontent as seen by the authors are to be found in the confines of the individual workplace itself. The central villains of-the piece are (1) the process of work breakdown and specialization associated with the pernicious influence of Frederick W Taylor and his industrial engineer disciples, and (2) the diminished opportunities for work autonomy, resulting from a shift of focus of jobs from self-employment or small enterprises to large impersonal corporate and-government bureaucracies.

What these findings reflect is the contemporary movement of the forces of capital, a movement directed not by human need or natural forces, but solely dictated by the forces intrinsic in the capitalist mode of production.

Demystification and Change

Marx's initial analysis of capitalism was based on a scientific analysis of its component parts. Wage labor, surplus value and commodity production, as the essential ingredients in any capitalistic enterprise, were finally shown to benefit only the elite owners or controllers of capital.

However, it has become increasingly apparent that the capitalist fat cat at the top of the ladder is more of an anachronism today than a reality. Capital itself continues to replace the cat with a large consortium of technocrats and highly paid technicians whose function it is to continue the system only for the sake of the system.

...in this movement of capital, the capitalist must disappear, giving way to the anonymous powers of credit on the one hand, and the hired managers on the other. 'On the one hand, the mere owner of capital, the money capitalist, has to face the functioning capitalist, while money capital itself assumes a social character with the advance of credit, being concentrated in banks and loaned out by them instead of its original owners, and since, on the other hand, the mere manager who has no title whatever to the capital, whether through borrowing it or otherwise, performs all the real functions pertaining to the functioning capitalist as such, only the functionary remains and the 'capitalist disappears as superfluous from the production process.' If he nevertheless seeks to maintain himself, he is increasingly relegated to sectors on their way to a slow death.

—*Lip and the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution* (Capital, III, p. 388)

Capital is now in essence a supra-human force.

Its movement analyzed by Marx a hundred years ago has today in actual process extended to control both people and nature without benefiting either. At this point a new struggle begins. The issue is not even radical anymore. It is imminent. In that the myth has totally integrated most of humanity into its bounds, we are faced with an enormous burden:

Earlier, revolution was possible as soon as the mystification was exposed; the revolutionary process was its destruction. Today the human being has been engulfed, not only in the determination of class, where he was trapped for centuries, but as a biological being. Demystification is no longer enough. The revolt of human beings threatened in the immediacy of their daily lives goes beyond demystification. The problem is to create other lives.

—Camatte, p. 24–25

Humanity is now but the housewife of capital, totally domesticated to the reproduction of dead products. The minds of millions scheme daily on beating the system while pining away at the alienating day-care centers of capital. No alternative appears viable because the system has already integrated most of the alternatives within itself. The process is itself debilitating, and "if this process is to concern individuals, capital has to be destroyed and the productive forces have to be for all human beings." (Camatte p. 60)

Shifting Gears

Marx's speculations, Camatte's theoretical analysis and the U.S. Government's projected labor trends all coincide to form a rather gloomy picture of what we are all faced with.

Due to its advanced technology, capital in the West can no longer absorb all of the labor force into its productive industries. But rather than encouraging and freeing the population to pursue private interests, it has shifted gears and begun to integrate surplus labor into the administration of its own interests.

Advertising, insurance, banking, real estate, government, military and law enforcement are the only large scale economic institutions significantly absorbing surplus labor; which means for you and me that either you operate under it, or it operates you.

Either of these choices is the same. The only real alternative is to begin re-organizing our lives beyond the fetters of capital. How this re-organization is to take place is dependent on the social and material requirements determined not by the government, but by various groups of people living and depending on one another. Capital does not provide our needs. People do.

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