

THE CRISIS AND WORKERS STANDARDS

by Jay Lovestone

This is the fifth article in the series "Social and Economic Consequences of the World Crisis" by Comrade Lovestone.—Editor.

* * *

This crisis will bring about a permanent lowering of living standards throughout the capitalist world. The economic base of the labor aristocracy will be much weakened, in different countries in varying degrees. Tho I believe, that the American labor aristocracy will still have higher standards of living than the labor aristocracies of other countries, say, Germany or England, yet the standards of the American labor aristocracy will be much lowered absolutely. The privileged section of the working class in the United States will use less automobiles, less gasoline, and, in general, will feel and behave less aristocratic towards other workers.

For some time after the crisis there will be a noticeable weakening of morale, social morale, working morale in industry. The continuous efforts of the employers to lower wages and worsen working conditions in order to increase their own competitive capacities in the world market will constantly tend to sap this morale. There is already sufficient evidence at hand of the devastating consequences for the masses in this undermining of their morale. A recent report of the Welfare Council (New York) based upon an investigation of a million homes shows the tragic psychological effects wrought by unemployment on the lives of families and individuals among the poor. This report says in part: (See *New York Times*, February 21, 1932.)

"Nearly every person must know that two years of unemployment have caused a great deal of hunger, that thousands of families have been evicted, that a great deal of physical and mental suffering has been caused. Few lay persons, however, are in a position to know what is happening to family life among the unemployed and to the personality of the individual unemployed man or woman."

"Discouragement, depression, desperation—often to the verge and sometimes to the point, of stealing, murder and suicide.

"Bewilderment and mental confusion.

"Loss of self-confidence, development of a sense of failure and inferiority.

"Loss of initiative and sense of responsibility.

"Passive submission and endurance, loss of courage to go on looking for work or to try anything new.

"Obsession with the necessity of finding work, inability to take an interest in other activities or to meet other obligations.

"Bitterness and disrespect for law and religion, moral and spiritual deterioration.

"Cynicism, resentment, antagonism, rebellion—against society, against the government, against things in general.

"Loss of pride and self-respect. Carelessness about personal appearance, sensitiveness and avoidance of social contacts.

"Restlessness, craving for excitement and distraction leading to drinking and gambling.

"Mental and nervous disturbances from irritability and excessive worry up to serious pathological conditions.

"Constant fear, even when again employed.

"As a result of the economic conditions of the past two years family affection has been sorely tried; conjugal and parental ties have been weakened; family groups have disintegrated; the source of income has shifted from the husband and father to the wife and children or to the public; parental authority has lost force; home discipline has suffered, personality difficulties and family problems have been precipitated; instability and insecurity have increased."

The full significance and implications of these social consequences of the economic crisis apparently are not grasped by the social reformists or by their sundry organizations but it is clear that society will be shaken to its foundations as a result of the conditions described by the Welfare Council:

"In general, families accustomed to living in the margin dropped below. Families who had never before been dependent were reduced to the level of the usual run of cases under the care of agencies. Some poor families who had by years of industry and effort raised themselves to a much better position were obliged to drop back to the level at which they had started in America or even lower.

"... With few exceptions those who had any basis for comparison say they saw so much more distress last winter, both in extent and in degree, than they had ever seen before and that standards of living had fallen noticeably in the last two or three years."

No one will challenge the conservative nature of the Welfare Council which made this survey. Marx's much-abused theory of increasing misery is here fully borne out.

At this point it is necessary to emphasize that the Marxian theory has always been viewed by the Marxists as a relative concept. A Marxist would never say that the workers today are living worse, in a physical sense, than workers did two hundred years ago. For instance, the average wage-worker today, when employed, rides to work in an electric car, autobus, or subway, some even in automobiles. Two hundred years ago kings didn't have such "luxuries." Increasing misery for the working masses must always be viewed in relation to the historical development of a particular country and in comparison to other countries. To understand the full significance and the why and wherefore of the correctness of the theory of increasing misery it is necessary to look into the formulation by Marx, himself, of his conclusions. In *Value, Price And Profit*, Marx pointed out:

"But there are some peculiar features which distinguish the value of the laboring power or the value of labor from the values of all other commodities. The value of the laboring power is formed by two elements—the one merely physical, the other historical or social.

"Besides this mere physical element the value of labor is in every country determined by a traditional standard of life. It is not merely physical life, but it is the satisfaction of certain wants springing from the social conditions in which people are placed and reared up.

"This historical or social element entering into the value of labor may be expanded or contracted or altogether extinguished so that nothing remains but the physical limit.

"The same law obtains in another form. With the development of the production powers of labor the accumulation of capital will be accelerated, even despite a relatively high rate of wages... but simultaneously with the progress of accumulation there takes place a progressive change in the composition of capital. That part of the aggregate capital which consists of fixed capital, machinery, raw materials, means of production in all possible forms, progressively increases as compared with the other part of capital, which is laid out in wages or in the purchase of labor.

"These few hints will suffice to show that the very development of modern industry must progressively turn the scale in favor of the capitalist against the working man and that, consequently, the general tendency of capitalistic production is not to raise but to sink the average standard of wages, or to push the value of labor more or less to its minimum limit.

Here is the economic basis of the picture of the gruesome misery painted for us by the Welfare Council in the most prosperous, in the strongest, capitalist country. Herein is the significance of the remark made by Mr. K. W. Jappe, President of the Brookmire Economic Service: "We will have to beat down our own costs and living standards to compete with Europe."

Precisely to the extent that rationalization of industry grows in the United States, just to the extent that Wall Street strikes out for conquests in the world market, will the proportional share of the working class, as a class, go downward, will the misery, historically speaking, of the toiling masses in capitalist America increase.

How Marlene's Baby "Plays"

Marlene Dietrich's little girl, Maria, goes roller skating. A nurse follows on foot. Trailing them both is the Dietrich chauffeur in his car. Needless to say, the chauffeur is armed. This is carefree play of childhood in Beverly Hills these days!

* * *

A "Drink More Wine" movement is to be launched in Bordeaux. Our heart goes out to the French patriot who's already doing his utmost.