

## The Newest "Substitute" For Communism

# TECHNOCRACY AND THE WORKING CLASS

(Concluded from the last issue)

### Technocracy And The Price System

The technocrats do not like to call the present system under which we live a capitalist system. They call it a price system. No mere choice of words is responsible for this. As we have seen, there is method in their madness. The substitution of "price" system for capitalist system has three distinct aims: (1) to deny the exploitative character of present-day society and its division into economic classes, (2) to repudiate the Marxian conception of the mechanics of capitalism and (3) to deny the distinction between the Soviet Union, as a transition to socialism, and capitalist society. Again we see the decisive anti-proletarian direction of these ideas. Let us examine briefly these three points.

1. Capitalist society is not only irrational, as the technocrats agree, it is also exploitative. Capitalist society is divided into classes: an exploiting class, owning the means of production and the products, and a working class, owning nothing, except power to labor, producing everything and getting back in the form of wages only a fraction of what it produces. This is the basis upon which capitalist society operates, upon which the superstructure rests. The mechanics of capitalism are the concrete expression of this class relationship. The role of the capitalist, the owner of the means of production, is primarily that of the exploiter. To the technocrat, the same capitalist appears only as a factor in the technological process. The capitalist is a parasite, living on the product of the worker's toil, oppressing him, exploiting him. To the technocrat he simply is out of tune which engineering principles, he is "violating the laws of physics." Technocracy is applied at results of the capitalist mode of production but it refuses to see the vast suffering, misery and poverty of the toilers even in "normal" times. It shows great concern for the "suffering" of the capitalists, however. Listen to Howard Scott bewailing the fate of the bankers:

A recent ninety-day loan was made in New York at one-half of one percent! Can there be imagined a more pathetic spectacle than the bank book which shows no interest entry or the banker who disconsolately walks thru a

by Herbert Zam

vault filled with currency with which he can do nothing?"

The working class can solve its problems only by depriving the owners of the means of production, socializing them and operating them on a planned, non-exploitative basis. The technocrats are not interested in the question of the ownership of the means of production. Do they think it will be possible to have a planned economy without disturbing present property relations?

2. According to the Marxian theory, wealth in capitalist society consists of an accumulation of commodities. Commodities are products of labor, produced for exchange (sale), whose value in exchange is determined by the amount of socially necessary labor required to produce them. In the last analysis, this labor is measured by time (labor-time, or man-hours, as the engineers like to call it). Gold is itself a commodity and therefore can act as a medium of exchange. Other commodities can be and have been used as money (tobacco, cotton, cattle, wampum, furs, etc.) Value (and with it price) fluctuates with labor-time. More man-hours, greater value; less man-hours, smaller value.

Labor-power, being a commodity in capitalist society, is subject to the laws governing commodity exchange. But labor-power has

this peculiarity, of all commodities, of not only reproducing itself in value, but also producing additional value. The worker, however, receives only the original value of his labor-power in the form of wages (more or less) while the additional value created remains in the hands of the owners of the means of production. This Marx called surplus-value. This entire conception is challenged by technocracy. The technocrats maintain that, since labor has become a negligible factor in production and energy has become the primary factor, energy must be substituted for money as the measure of price (they make no distinction between value and price). "A dollar may be worth, in buying power," explains Scott, "so much today and more or less tomorrow but a unit of work or heat is the same in 1900, 1929, 1923 or 2000." This is simply silly confusion of the physical characteristics of energy with the economic characteristics of other commodities. As a physical thing a gold or silver dollar is precisely as constant as a ton of coal, a calorie of heat or an erg of work. On the other hand, a kilowatt hour, a kilogram calorie, or any other unit of energy of work, when used as a commodity, as a medium of exchange, follows exactly the same laws as a pair of shoes or a dollar, and would be just as fluctuating. The value of the energy unit is determined in precisely the same manner as the value of the dollar, ton of coal or pair of shoes, by the amount of socially necessary labor necessary to produce it, and its value will change in direct proportion with the changes in labor. Thus, the substitution of an erg for a dollar, while maintaining the property relations, will not and cannot eliminate exploitation.

3. Society cannot make a single leap from capitalism to socialism. Between the two there is a transition—the proletarian dictatorship. It is just as impossible to get from capitalism to socialism as it is to get from one side of a river to the other without crossing it. The denial of the need for a transition is therefore really a rejection of socialism as the future society and its replacement by an unattainable utopia. The transition period is characterized by features of socialism and features of capitalism. Among the latter is the temporary

retention of phases of the price system and the payment of wages. Technocracy refuses to make any distinctions. "Russia," says Scott, "mistook the name-tag of one phase of the price system for that system's entirety; it abandoned the tag, but retained the essential mechanics."

The term "price system" which technocracy employs in place of "capitalism" thus has political significance, as before—this time in the denial of any differences between the Soviet Union and capitalist countries, in particular, and of the need of a transition stage in general.

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### Technocracy And Crises

Technocracy lays the present crisis to the fact that society is not attuned to machine production on the present high technical level, is not in harmony with the "high energy level" of society. This explanation, in direct contradiction to the Marxian conception of crises, overlooks the fact that there have been crises since capitalism was born, developing in extent, intensity and duration with the development of capitalism itself. Approximately up to the war, these crises repeated themselves on the rising curve of capitalism; now they are repeating themselves on the declining curve of capitalism, which, on a world scale, has already seen its best days. There were crises long before the present "high energy level" was reached. These crises are caused by overproduction, resulting from exploitation—the fact that the producers do not receive enough to consume what they produce. In the last analysis, crises are caused by prosperity (when the tremendous overproduction takes place); unemployment is caused by employment; poverty is caused by superabundance. All this is denied by technocracy. The crisis is caused by machines, which displace the workers, they declaim. When the worker is unemployed, he cannot buy, resulting in overproduction. We see, according to technocratic reasoning, overproduction is the result of the crisis, not its cause; it appears in the midst of the crisis, and does not precede it. The sole responsibility lies in the maladjustment between workers and machines. This is reminiscent of earlier days of "machine-wrecking". It is not the machine which causes crises, but the class monopoly of the machine and the diversion of its social utility to private gain. If there were not a single

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## TECHNOCRACY AND THE WORKERS

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new invention or machine for a hundred years, crises would still appear at regular intervals; if society had remained at the "energy level" of 1848, crises would repeat themselves just as inexorably. In the Communist Manifesto, written in 1847, Marx and Engels were not only able to trace the periodicity of crises since the rise of capitalism but were able to predict their continuation.

But the false explanation of the crisis is not the worst feature of the technocratic views on this question. What is a thousand times more dangerous is the conclusion that nothing can be done, short of establishing a technocratic system, to improve the conditions of the workers before the present system is overthrown. Shorter hours are not permitted by the "laws of physics"! "Technology has now advanced to a point where it has substituted energy for man-hours on an equal basis and where the distribution

of human labor becomes impossible" (Howard Scott).

Can there be a more brazen justification for the refusal of the capitalists to reduce the hours of labor. Blame it on "technology"! How technocracy can promise an 8-hour week, if society were operated on the basis of technology, and at the same time declare that technology makes reduction of the hours of labor impossible, is something which will require some new technocratic theories to explain. Similarly, the technocrats see no possibility in the workers fighting to increase their wages. "Thru increased investment in machines—made necessary by the increasing rate at which they go out of date—the manufacturer is forced to reduce the portion of his costs which go to labor. This again inexorably works against the increase of wages and the distribution of time" (Howard Scott).

How nicely everything dovetails in and comes back to technology, exonerating the capitalists on the way. Thus, technocracy sounds the doom of the working class: it cannot demand shorter hours, it cannot struggle for higher wages. What is left? Dream of a push-button utopia in the future!

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