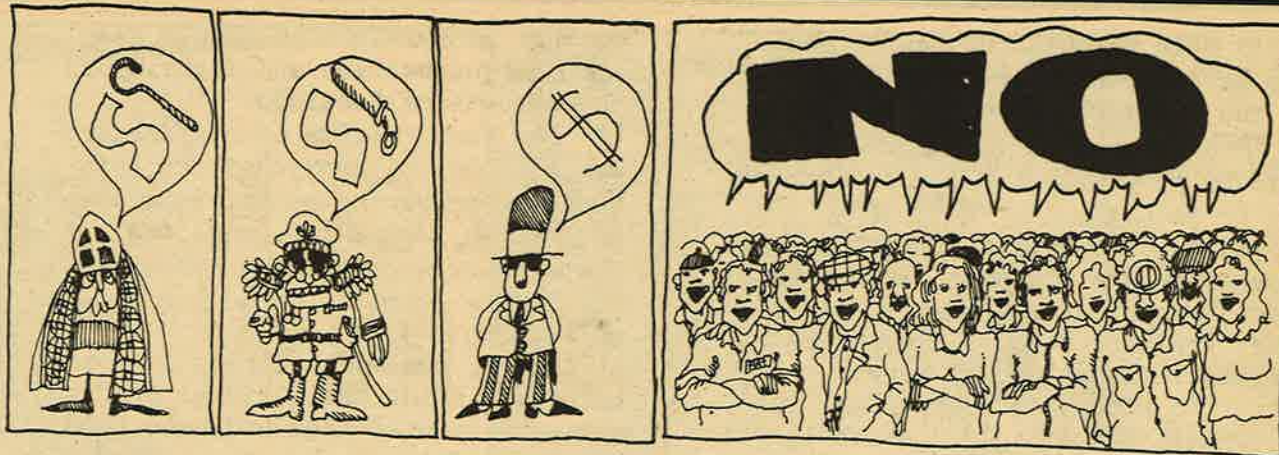


## Worker Unity viewpoint



# SOCIALISM: WORKING PEOPLE'S ECONOMY

Many of us see serious conflict within this society between the satisfaction of people's basic needs and the irrational, often inhumane, way society is run.

Milk is poured into the rivers of Wisconsin while children go hungry in West Virginia and the rest of the world. Wheat and corn lay rotting in fields while people starve. In St. Louis, millions are spent on a stainless steel arch while thousands of families fight off roaches and sickness in cold water flats.

Billions are spent for death and destruction in Southeast Asia while our schools and hospitals grow old, run-down and overcrowded.

Love and human affection, which cost nothing, seem sadly lacking, too. We look around and realize that the richest nation in the world has never yet provided really adequate living standards for many of its people.

A relatively few people are doing very well and they seem to be doing better all the time, or as the old saying goes, the rich get richer--the poor, poorer. We are beginning to see also, that if this is a democracy, it doesn't work the way we were always taught that it should work. The vast majority of people want Nixon out of office, and yet he remains, as when it was clear that most people wanted out of Viet Nam, we remained.

It seems that it is not the people that control the economy and the government, but the government that controls the people. Cities fall apart, mass transportation desperately needed doesn't get built, schools and hospitals decay. The reason is because the capitalist class who controls the facilities which could produce these things believe they can make more profit from other activities. So instead, all too often what they produce is that which is prettied up and packaged, of little use, or actually contributes to the destruction of our land. Nowhere do those who are at the controls of the society seem to take into full account the needs of the people or life on this planet.

Many would say that this sorry state of affairs is a result of the selfish, petty, greedy nature of the human race. Religious persons might simply say that man is sinful and evil. And those that choose to take a cynical view of human nature could find much in history and the present situation to support their cynicism. But anyone who has ever watched a group of children playing, only to be separated by their parents because their skins were of different colors, knows that race hatred is something that people are taught. All of us know through the love and caring we share with maybe only a few people, that people have good at their base.

The message is written clearly in the children's faces and in their innocence. Selfish, unkind and inhumane people aren't born, they are made. They are taught.

So we reject the theories of no hope and say let us look again and see what forces exist in the society that teach people to put their individual self-interest above the common good. We find that in every sphere of life we are competing with each other rather than cooperating. We compete for jobs, for friends, for all the necessities of life. We find that everyday we are struggling to live and that struggle is not against nature, for we have pretty much got that one licked, but against each other. Many in the white race try to keep the black race down, lest they should have to share the better jobs and houses and schools with them. Men often try to keep women in their place, lest the men lose some of the privileges they have enjoyed for so long.

We look back into history and see that there once was a time when this state of affairs may have made sense. Throughout most of human history there simply was not enough to go around, so it was always a question of survival, maybe not of the fittest, but always, of the few.

Now we live in the 20th century and thanks to technology and human industry there is plenty to go around in this country, though there is starvation and want in much of the world. Yet, most of us still compete for what always seems too little while the rest is destroyed in wars and garbage. If we can understand why this happens, we can understand what is in need of change.

Throughout history there have been many people who were so disturbed by this human misery that they dedicated their life's energies to change. They had various ideas as to the causes of this suffering and its solution. Many saw nothing basically wrong with the way society was organized except that it was in need of some reforms. These people often did good work and improved the human condition, but did not seek to change the society at its core and so the same old ills kept coming back. Like the doctor who gives aspirin to relieve cancer's pain, they treated the symptoms and not the disease. Others took a more radical view of the situation and said that if you wish to change a thing, you must change it at the root, and they worked for a revolutionary reorganization of society.

One man's thinking and writings on this subject of change were so outstanding that he had an impact on human history with which few can compare. He was a German scholar by the name of Karl Marx and even though his ideas are a century old, they remain among the most controversial and

thought-provoking today. Marx attempted to look at human society scientifically. He saw that much of life was determined by how a living organism met its basic physical needs. Just as with an animal, how it gathers food and its requirements for warmth and shelter will determine where it lives and how, so it is with the human species. Marx said that the most important consideration in how people lived was how they worked together, how they organized production, to meet their basic human needs. He concentrated most of this work and thinking on the system under which he lived, and we still live today, the capitalist system.

The capitalist mode of production, or the "free enterprise system" as the capitalists like to call it, has been the way most industrial societies have been organized. In its early day, it too could be considered revolutionary, for it allowed the development of industry and the wealth, or capital, that industry needed, and it represented an advance over the more primitive ways feudal agricultural society was organized.

But capitalism has an irrational side to its character too. In the capitalist system it is those that have the wealth that control the society. The capitalists, because they own the factories, the banks, the land, etc., are able to exploit and control those of us who own little or nothing. They have a lot of control over our lives because they can decide how they want to run their factories, and so decide what our jobs will be like or whether we even have jobs. They decide what to produce and so what we can buy. And as Watergate has made clear, they spend a lot of money seeing that the government works for them.

The capitalists use their wealth and power to make more money. Their decisions are not determined by what is best for the greatest number of people. Their main concern is not feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, or healing the sick, but only making a profit. Capitalism is a system of competition rather than cooperation. The capitalists compete among themselves as each tries to get a bigger share of the take. In this way, the history of capitalism has been the history of small enterprises being gobbled up into monopolies. And monopolies of one nation come into competition with monopolies of others, as each bids to dominate the world economy. This has meant wars in which, unfortunately, working people rather than capitalists have fought and died.

Marx also recognized that under capitalism, two great classes come into



being with opposing needs and interests. First is the working class, which lives by its labor and which actually creates society's wealth through its efforts. Second is the capitalist class, which, because it owns the factories and land where everything is produced, lives off the fruits of working people's labor.

Marx realized that these two classes must always be in basic conflict--capitalists trying to retain control of society, workers fighting to improve their living conditions and wrest power from the capitalists.

Marx's ideas went one step further. He saw that in reality, industries are run in a cooperative and efficient manner at the workplace--work is socialized, with each person cooperating with fellow workers to put out products in the most economical and rational manner. But ownership of the products--and the industries in which they are produced--remains private rather than socialized. And this is the heart of what is irrational in capitalism. The logic of private ownership leads to monopoly, depressions and wars due to production for profit rather than socialized production for the common good.

Marx concluded that the irrationalities and conflicts in capitalism could only be finally resolved when industry and society are run by the working class. The ownership of industry and the uses to which it is put must become socialized and made rational just as in earlier centuries the capitalist class socialized and made rational the process of production in individual workplaces.

THAT IS THE BASIS of a socialist economy--factories and large land-holdings are not owned by individuals, but become social property run by the working class.

The wealth created by the joint efforts of working people would not go to a few individuals but would be plowed back into the society to create a better life for all of us.

Working people themselves would decide the nation's priorities. As capitalism has as its keystones competition and exploitation, socialism is based on cooperation and collectivity.

Needless to say, when a capitalist reads Marxist writings or hears about socialism, he doesn't immediately agree that it sounds like a better idea and turn his factory over to the workers. A society without bosses isn't exactly what he's interested in.

In fact, since capitalists control the large newspapers, publishing companies, TV and radio networks and have a large hand in the educational system, they have done their best to give socialism and communism a bad name. They play up every bad thing that has happened in socialist countries, and make up a few things on their own besides.

In short, socialism can't exist until capitalist domination is ended. The capitalists have to be kicked out, and working people--united and organized as a class--will have the ability to do it.

Worker Unity is a socialist organization. By this we mean that we are dedicated to assist people in any way we can in their struggles against the bosses and for a better way of life.

In this way, we hope to contribute to the building of a movement in which millions of people become convinced of the necessity for socialism--and convinced of their ability to win it.

# THE PIECERATE SCREW

Almost every production worker in the last few years has been faced with speedup. In their ever increasing desire for bigger profits, companies have gone on productivity drives. Getting more out of us for every minute we spend inside the door of the plant is the big thing now. In some plants the management is even going so far as to install cameras to watch every movement workers make at their machines so they can add new tasks to fill up any second not devoted to "producing." Not only has this speedup increased the pace of work and therefore the strain on the people doing that work, but the real take home pay per unit produced by those same people has decreased steadily every year. So we're working harder but getting less for it all the time.

One especially sneaky version of this speedup is the now familiar piece rate or incentive system. The more you produce for the company, the more you get for yourself. At least that's what the company would have us believe.

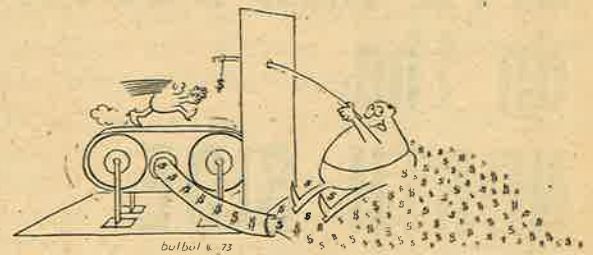
## RUNNING IN HIGH GEAR

Companies on piece rate usually have a fairly low base pay. This is supposed to encourage people to produce more, sort of like an insurance salesman on commission. Also the minimum that people must produce is high enough that you have to be in high gear all the time if you want to make over your rate. The result of these two things is that people are forced to work their asses off just to make a decent living for themselves.

On some really high rated piecework jobs, especially in smaller plants, people work so hard their systems get so messed up that they're forced to take nerve pills to slow their bodies back down to normal again. Now there is nothing really wrong with working hard if it gets you somewhere but on piece rate you have to keep up that same pace hour after hour, day after day forever just to make a *decent* wage. Many places on piece rate have no real system of advancement so working hard just gets you more of the same. It's not at all like other jobs where as you show that you can do something well you are rewarded by getting something more satisfying, less physically demanding, or something with more responsibility.

## QUANTITY OVER QUALITY

Another thing just as bad and encouraged by the same forces is that piecework demands quantity rather than quality. If you have to get out numbers, in the end you don't have time to care. This makes the job even less satisfying to the people doing it because they know they're turning out junk. Not only does this influence people right on the job, but all the consumers who buy the stuff are getting screwed too, not because of the workers but because of the ridiculous pace the company demands.



## DIVIDES WORKERS

Piece rate also divides people at a plant because it puts so much emphasis on each person for themselves. It's easy to become greedy and let it destroy friendships. Some people get so paranoid that they suspect anyone who speaks to them is after their job, especially if they have a slightly better job. It all becomes a race to outdo the person next to you rather than seeing what you both can do to make the job better. This too, is pushed by the company by claiming that a failure to make rate is the individual's fault for being too slow or too dumb rather than that the rate was too high or too fast to begin with. This is especially irritating when you know that the rates are *arbitrarily* set by some guy with a clip board calculating what the ideal situation would be minus a little bit for fatigue or breakdowns.

## COMPANY GETS THE CREAM

One final way the company saves on piece rate is that they get more stuff produced without having to pay the extra workers it would have taken to produce it. For instance, one common method of figuring incentive pay is to give an hour extra pay for every hour worth over your rate you produce. If your rate is 50/hr. and you produce 100/hr. you get paid 2 hours pay for that one hour you worked. It's a lot cheaper for the company to do that than to hire another worker to produce that extra 50/hr. or than it is to pay you time and a half for staying overtime another hour to produce it.

## SET OUR OWN RATE

Doing something about the piecerate screw is another thing. Companies are going to fight tooth and nail to retain it, but some things can possibly be done. At the bare minimum we should fight to get rates lowered and base pay raised so at least by the end of the day we have more than frazzled nerves and dead tired bodies to show for our efforts. Even group incentive would be better than individual if the group had a say in setting the rate.

Whatever solution is arrived at, it is going to have to be those of us who really do the jobs that should figure it out. It's time that experts stopped setting our standards and we started setting our own.

