

Employment and Unemployment

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The most difficult problem of the capitalist regime, in its present phase, is to achieve full employment of all forces fit for work.

It is evident that a society that fails to provide work for ever larger strata of the population - strata that, finding themselves unable to provide for the elementary needs of existence, are forced to live on handouts, expedients or impossible subsidies - exposes the entire established order to the danger of serious social disruption. In addition to the difficulties inherent in the political necessity of taking account of these social stratifications, there is the problem of obtaining in any way a redistribution of income according to this state of affairs.

The situation then imposes the creation of useless activities, usually known as public works, which tend to absorb the labour exuberant on the market, but which, by their character and the way they are conducted, serve only to occupy and destroy capital, rather than to create new capital.

Now, the rarefaction of capital existing or periodically created by productive activity is an element that aggravates the situation, prolongs the general conditions of uncertainty, and prevents the natural solution of the problem which consists in the development of production and general consumption.

The labour situation is furthermore made difficult by the reduced mutual competition in the capital market...

But it is precisely the impossibility of expanding consumption that slows down the increase in production and with it the capacity to reabsorb the labour force made redundant by the progress of technology, the perfecting of industrial plants, and the process of capital accumulation.

Society develops unproductive activities, and in the proportion between the labour applied to useful and productive activities and that devoted to useless or unproductive activities, there is a continuous increase in the share of the latter and with it the general parasitism, which only burdens the former. Thus the number of people who must ultimately maintain the entire social organisation becomes smaller and smaller, while the number of people maintained grows.

Among the strata that live off those engaged in truly productive activities, even strata of the proletariat join in. This gives rise to a situation of collective

corporatism, of defence to the bitter end of established positions, which at a certain point translates into alliances between worker and capitalist strata.

This alliance is expressed politically in the thesis dear to the opportunists that factory work, full employment, general activity must be defended, competition must be fought, and so on.

The problem of maximum worker employment is never practically solved by industrial capitalism except through a specific action that is carried out through the principle that guarantees wages only to the extent that they are equal to the marginal product of labour. That is to say, work is only offered to the worker as long as his employment allows an income at least equal to its cost.

Employment is then said to be secured up to the limit in which the last employed worker adds to production a share X , say 10, equal to the purchasing power of his wage. If the addition of another worker reduces the contribution to production to quota 9, this addition is rejected by the employer. If, however, the latter is in a position to play through the price mechanism until the real value of the purchasing power of the wage is brought up to quota 9, the increase in employment becomes possible.

It is then evident that the industrialist comes to make a further profit on the workers previously employed, so that at a certain moment the development of employment is a direct interest of the employer, the means of increasing his profits, all the more so since the possibility granted to him of developing the monetary game through the mechanism of supply and prices cannot in any way be counteracted by the instruments of struggle and defence in the hands of the proletariat and even less so by the opportunist trade unions.

The problem of workers' employment and its increase is a problem of capitalist order and of immediate benefit to the employer, as long as the workers' movement remains anchored in the struggle for economic and political appearances, i.e. for the defence of the nominal rather than real wage or for the defence of the right to work. This right, the capitalist is quite willing to see it recognised even in an article of the constitution, as it essentially guarantees his profits and gains.

One of the most distinguished bourgeois economists, Keynes, writes:

"It is therefore fortunate (for the capitalists: note ours) that the workers, however unconsciously, are by instinct more rational economists than those of the classical school, inasmuch as they resist reductions in monetary wages which are never or almost never of a general character, even if the real equivalent of such wages at present exceeds the marginal disutility of existing employment; whereas they do not resist reductions in real wages that are connected with increases in total employment and leave the relative monetary wages unchanged,

except when the reduction is so far-reaching as to threaten a reduction in real wages below the marginal disutility of existing employment. Every workers' association will resist the reduction of monetary wages, however small it may be: but no association will think of going on strike every time there is a rise in the cost of living. Therefore they do not create that obstacle to any increase in overall employment, which is attributed to them by the classical school."

Today's trade unions, by recognition of one of the highest authorities of modern bourgeois economics, thus contribute to the solution of the most burning problems of the moment in the industrial field and their opposition does not go beyond appearances, leaving completely free the exploration of the monetary and market game that allows industrialists to achieve considerable and undeniable advantages over the need to achieve full employment and greater exploitation of the masses.

Note that the problem of industrial employment and capitalist profit is not in contradiction with what we have said above about the modern tendency to develop unproductive labour and always burden productive labour.

For the capitalist, useful becomes synonymous with productive, and useful is considered to be all those processes that allow the average profit to be extracted from the capital employed. To pave a major city thoroughfare ten times in a row in the course of a year is a very useful activity for the enterprise that has this task, even if the task entrusted to it with public or municipal funds has no other purpose than to temporarily solve an important social problem.

The difference between the concept of the useful and productive in the normal capitalist sense and that which is expressed by the real sense of the word - i.e. the creation of any good or service that corresponds to an evidently felt need - makes it necessary to draw a clear distinction between capitalist economic activity and economic activity directed towards the satisfaction of needs.

Capitalist society is unable to guarantee total employment as a function of the satisfaction of general needs, and instead directs itself towards employment aimed at creating goods, services or activities, only capable of providing an income for the industrialist who deals with them.

It follows that to speak of the defence of labour, of the fight against redundancies, of full workers' employment, while maintaining the postulate of the permanence of the production system based on profit, is to solidarise with its demands and allow it to proceed with the consolidation of constituted interests.

The defence of blocking redundancies can only make sense, from a revolutionary point of view, in the case of an obvious economic and industrial

crisis, in which capitalism is paralysed in its normal activity and must therefore try to get rid of idle workers.

In this case, it may be useful to try to mobilise the masses on the principle that if society perishes, if the social order fails to function, and if there are faults to be borne, it is not the proletariat but the ruling class that must pay the price.

No change to the state of affairs that would allow a return to a capitalist normality, to a situation where the exploitation of the proletarian masses is resumed and repeated with greater energy. If this is no longer possible, change the road, don't fill the potholes and level the roughness.

In this case, the watchword 'fight against redundancies' contributes to accelerating the breakdown of the established order, not to defending the state of affairs.

It may also be the case that capitalism poses the problem of redundancies as a necessity for political cleansing, or with the ulterior motive of exerting terror on the boldest and most fearsome elements of the proletariat; but even in this case opposition cannot be separated from the general struggle against the economic and political regime as a whole; and therefore resistance to redundancies assumes the function of proletarian defence, not of a political principle to be postulated as an element of a party programme.

Unemployment is the perennial torment of today's society, the functioning of the plants and the work of the workers are the direct condition of the attainment of capitalist profits, so one can be sure that it is in the order of capitalism itself to give work to all, and if it fails to do so it is because of a specific incapacity of the system, not for lack of 'goodwill'.

A class party, a revolutionary party, must be able to rightly assess these tendencies and then be able to exploit the situation in such a way as to clarify to the masses the scope of certain watchwords that sometimes lend themselves to being used by opportunist forces to maintain their prestige and influence over the workers, and in order not to move them towards the solution of their definitive and substantial historical problems, which are summed up in the need for a radical transformation of society, but for reasons that coincide with the internal needs of this, and more particularly, at the present time, with the manifestations of the contrast between the two greatest world imperialisms.