

Press-a-Button Counter-Revolution

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STUART CHASE, G. D. H. Cole, Lewis Mumford, the technocrats, and many others who like to boast that they follow "blindly" where the facts seem to lead irrespective of "Marxist orthodoxy," have for the past few years harped on the point that the advance of technology has "liquidated" the class struggle and the working class. Their deduction from this false premise is that consequently a new set of tactics must be evolved based on the striking powers of the "new middle class"—the technicians, the management experts, etc. An examination of the thesis of these middle class apologists for what Mr. Chase now likes to call "consumer capitalism" brings out the incorrectness of their position.

All of these "fact-mongers" have suddenly "discovered" the phenomenon of technological change. To an unbelieving world they announced the "astonishing" fact that machinery and techniques grow obsolescent, that they are continually modified and replaced by more efficient machinery and more advanced technique. From this social phenomenon, which Marx long ago described as the permanent revolution in the methods of capitalist production, the technology writers drew the following series of conclusions:

1. Capitalism has finally solved the age-old problem of production. All that is required for the world—or at least the United States—to enter into an economy of abundance is correct supervision by technicians and other experts. Then the poor will get rich, the rich will get richer, and everyone will live on an electrified Connecticut farm.

2. This miracle of abundance is entirely the result of innovations introduced by technicians during the last three decades. Stuart Chase puts this point in the following naive fashion: "Today the mental labor of technicians harnesses inanimate energy to create far more wealth in total tonnage than is created by manual labor."

3. Old-fashioned capitalism as we know it "is being liquidated under technological pressure" from middle-class experts and technicians. We are heading for a consumers' utopia where, according to Lewis Mumford, everyone will enjoy the comforts of a fixed income.

4. A corollary to Proposition 3 is that the same technological pressure is also "liquidating" the working class and that consequently the class struggle is out of date, a relic of "paleotechnic barbarism."

5. Marx was a pretty fair mind in his time, but modern technology has made his economics obsolescent. His social strategy must be overhauled to fit the facts of an economy of abundance.

6. Exponents of general strikes as a weapon

leading ultimately to the revolutionary seizure of power by the working class are simply misguided disciples of Marx. In the United States and in other advanced capitalist countries the dominant force in society is the technicians. They could crush any general strike or revolutionary insurrection and bring the capitalists and the workers both to their knees, by simply going off to play tennis.

All of these propositions are flights into the realm of fantasy. The technology exponents are dreaming of how nice it would be to run a society where they would be headmen, and where the uncouth capitalists would have to take orders from lovers of flowers, garden-cities and handicrafts. But their day-dreams have an ugly objective result. They are picked up by the ruling class and disseminated wholesale for the purpose of keeping the middle class hostile to the proletariat. And secondly, they are used to discourage working-class action. Technology is portrayed as anti-proletarian. Especially now, with the strike wave gaining momentum daily, will these doctrines be propagated, since the general strike in San Francisco proved the falsity of every single one of them.

In the first place, capitalism has not created an industrial plant capable of producing an economy of abundance. The "overcapacity" of American industry in the twenties was an overcapacity in relation to the capitalist market. Certainly the workers and farmers of this country were not suffering from an overabundance of goods. There was actually an acute shortage of housing, food and clothing, even when a minimum standard of health and decency is used to measure the effects. Mr. Robert R. Doane in the *New Outlook* (August issue) points out that "In the great prosperous year of 1929 the male population of the United States were supplied, on a per capita basis, with a bare one-third of a garment of new outer-wear." The same article discloses a shortage of 100,000,000,000 pounds of foodstuffs in the existing producing capacity of the American agricultural establishment according to a yearly per capita food budget drawn up by the Department of Agriculture.

Industrial and agricultural production must be stepped up if the 75 percent of the population who are now on, or below, a minimum standard of living are to enjoy an economy of abundance. Capitalism, however, can no longer step up production, if it is to survive. Its direction is towards greater and greater scarcity. Even the excellent plant equipment of the country is beginning to feel the effects of an economy geared to starvation and war. Some engineers believe that the industrial plant in the United States is 50 percent obsolescent and semi-obsolescent.

Capitalism has entered a period of the rela-

tive stagnation of technology. There are indications that the rate of invention is falling, at least relatively. Invention and discovery have as their objectives profits and mass destruction. On such a basis, technology as a whole must deteriorate, although certain phases of technique no doubt will advance considerably to meet the demands of the imperialists.

Thus an economy of abundance cannot be based on the present industrial plant, which meanwhile the capitalists are wrecking. It must be preceded by the proletarian revolution. On this social base the working class and its allies will rebuild and reconstruct the industrial plant of the country. All the present potentialities in technology will be fully realized only when the present fetters which shackle technological advance—profit and war—are destroyed. An economy of abundance is not merely a matter of technical achievement. Its prerequisites are a workers' and farmers' state and social economic planning. That planning is impossible under capitalism surely requires no further discussion, while the example of the Five Year Plan is conclusive proof that under the dictatorship of the proletariat the opposite is true.

In the second place, Proposition 2 makes modern technology come full blown from Edison and the American Telephone and Telegraph Company. Actually it arose on the foundations of centuries of previous discovery and technical knowledge. Modern technology arose to meet the demands of finance capitalism for profits from centralized industry. To increase profits on watered stock the big monopolies had to introduce technological innovations and plant rationalization. Of course, the process was an interacting one. Finance capital brought in its wake sweeping technical changes, and in turn these changes speeded up the process of the concentration and centralization of capital.

The onset of the present crisis had a reverse effect upon technology. A period of crisis was conducive to increased labor exploitation, instead of to investments in more machinery and plant equipment. In his study of *Recent Changes in Production*, Charles A. Bliss found that output per man during the five crisis years rose 27 percent as contrasted with a 40 percent increase during 1919 to 1929. He points out that most of this increased productivity is the result of the direct forcing of the pace of the worker, and not of the introduction of new machinery. Mr. Bliss says that "the recent improvement [in productivity] may be in large part the result of temporary organizational changes, of greater labor effort [read: speed-up] on the part of the more skilled workers remaining in employment, and the use of the best existing equipment. . . .

These are factors probably far more important than the introduction of revolutionary mechanical innovations. . . . Little of the increased productivity since 1929 can be credited to the introduction of new machinery." Apparently we are witnessing the development of a new tendency—the reorganization of industry on the basis of an ever increasing speed-up, and not on the introduction of more efficient techniques.

Thus the trends toward remote control and the complete automatization of production are goals that were implicit in the whole development of technique and machinery, but they are goals from which capitalism, recognizing that their realization means its own destruction, is turning away. The fulfillment of the revolution in technique has come up against the barriers of capitalist social relations. It is no longer profitable, on the whole, to invest in new techniques. It is far more profitable to increase the exploitation of the workers through speed-up. But the crippling and killing of workers is no substitute for technical progress, even though they both pay dividends for a time. Consequently, technology as a whole and technicians are doomed to inevitable decay and destruction, until they are liberated by a social revolution which will destroy the capitalist relations of production.

Modern technical developments were accompanied by changes in the relation of labor to the productive processes that had a profound effect upon all social relations. The workers found themselves in larger and larger groupings as the size of factories grew. The ruthless inhumanity of the capitalist system was savagely accentuated by the conveyor system which forced workers to toil at a pace made unnecessary by technical achievement and dictated solely by sheer capitalistic greed. As a result of the advance of technology, the workers, as *workers*, not as craftsmen, became even more important to the profitable exploitation of society; and the compelled course of capitalistic exploitation in the present crisis emphasizes this truth.

The interdependent network that makes up modern society rests upon the efforts of the working class much more today than in the nineteenth century. Modern technology did not and is not liquidating the working class. Technological advance has not abolished the class struggle. It has accentuated every contradiction of capitalism; it has increased the horrors of class battles (vomiting gas, machine guns, etc.); it has forced changes in certain tactics of struggle, and modified somewhat the composition of the working class; but the proletariat and the class struggle have been liquidated only in the imagination of Stuart Chase and Company.

Take the question of the size of the working class. The census figures of 1930 indicate that around 70 percent of the gainfully employed were members of the working class. What technological change did was to increase the number of workers in the so-called service industries as compared with the number of workers in the manufacturing and machine in-

dustries. But even so, 28.6 percent of the gainfully employed were factory and mechanical workers. Fewer workers were engaged in the manufacturing industries in 1930 than in 1920, because the rate of exploitation had risen so much that fewer workers were needed to produce a much larger output of goods.

This does not mean that the strategic and dominant importance of the industrial proletariat is decreasing. On the contrary, its importance as the key factor in society has grown much larger. More than ever our highly equilibrated society is dependent upon the continual operation of machinery by workers. In the eighteenth century, or even perhaps in the nineteenth, society could have survived for a considerable period if all industrial plants stopped operating their machines. Today society is so complex, and so interdependent that if the industrial workers laid down their tools and stopped their machines, capitalist society could not function for more than a fortnight.

The increasing exploitation of the industrial worker has had a double effect. It has built up a reserve army of permanently unemployed workers whose increasing destitution makes them a menace to the existing order, if their protests can be concretized into action against the capitalists. On the other hand, it has increased the importance of the employed worker. If a single worker can now produce 30 times as much as a worker used to produce in the nineteenth century, that means the economic and social importance of that worker has increased approximately 30 times. It is easier to pull out 1,000 workers in one city than it would be to pull out 30,000 scattered in various places; and a strike of 1,000 mechanics and die workers in the automobile industry can tie up production in a way that 30,000 workers could not possibly have achieved fifty years ago. The rising productivity of the worker is an index of his increased exploitation. It is also a measure of the effectiveness with which the workers can strike back at the capitalists. All the strikes of the past two years bear out this important point.

Nor can the exponents of technology use the service industries as an example of the disappearance of the working class. A service station attendant, or a milk truck driver, may or may not wear a white collar. But they both belong, economically and socially, to the working class. The growth of the number of workers in the transportation and service industries is not a factor making for proletarian weakness, but for proletarian strength. Minneapolis and San Francisco have shown that a strike of a few thousand truck drivers can paralyze a city in 48 hours. The writer, for one, would like to see Stuart Chase and the Continental Committee on Technocracy tie up a city as effectively as was done by the striking San Francisco teamsters. In Milwaukee, the mere threat of pulling out the powerhouse workers, brought the immediate granting of certain demands to the striking street-car men. The possibilities inherent in a na-

tional railway or sea transport strike are obviously so vast that further discussion of the important role of the service industry workers seems unnecessary. It is significant that despite Mr. Chase's claim of the technicians' industrial omnipotence, when San Francisco was turned into a "ghost city" by the workers, the capitalists called upon their labor lieutenants, and not upon the technocrats, to break the strike.

We see, therefore, that the advance of technology while increasing the effectiveness of capitalist terror has also increased the strength of the proletarian counter-attack far more. This is the key to the last propositions of the techno-dogmatists. The development of technology has not concentrated power so completely in the hands of the capitalists that all efforts to overthrow their rule are doomed to failure. Furthermore, we shall see that Communists are not faced with the job of overhauling their strategy of social conflict. Modern technique has confronted them with new problems of defense; it has provided them with additional methods of attack.

It must be emphasized that one of the products of technological advance is the complete dependence of society upon transportation and industry. It has also weakened the defense of capitalism when the latter is faced by an aroused and resolute working class. One of the lessons of the San Francisco general strike is that society is so constituted today that the workers have victory in their hands from the beginning, if they only stand their ground. But for the deliberate crippling of the strike by the American Federation of Labor bureaucrats, the workers could have beaten the capitalists to their knees within a week.

For example, by pulling out the pressmen and the typographical workers, the strikers would have silenced the venomous rage of the press. Strikes by railway workers and radio operators would have completely isolated San Francisco from the rest of America, and would have cut off the military forces from their supplies. The hysteria of the capitalists is indicative of how they feared the spread of the strike, of how little they believed that their thugs and cops and national guardlets could replace 140,000 workers.

The fundamental lesson of the general strike is not that it is doomed to fail, but that the general strike to succeed must spread and become complete. We can paraphrase Marx and say that to toy with the general strike is disastrous, but if it is pushed to the limit it can succeed. The German general strike in 1920 and the British general strike in 1926 prove the gigantic strength of a unified working class, if it is not struck from behind by traitors. The British workers had victory within their grasp when they were sold out by MacDonald.

What about the revolutionary seizure of power by the proletariat and its allies—has modern technology robbed the workers of their chances of success?

Here again technology reveals itself to be a double-edged weapon, with the advantages.

undoubtedly on the side of the workers.

Bourgeois experts contend that the advance of war techniques—poison gas, airplanes, high explosives—has made it possible for the ruling class to bomb or gas revolutionaries out of existence in a few minutes.

This analysis fails to point out that the modern war-machine is completely dependent upon the uninterrupted operation of industry and transportation. Disrupt any branch for a short time and the whole machinery of war comes to a halt. Consequently, the very strength of the war machine is its undoing when it is confronted by a strong and disciplined working class. The military effectiveness of the bourgeoisie has increased at the expense of its increasing dependence upon the working class for the successful operation of the war machine, which can only function when industry supplies its needs. These external needs of the military apparatus are supplemented by an internal need for mechanics, radio operators, and innumerable other skilled workers, a need that is increasing as armies and navies become more and more mechanized. One can hardly function in the air force or the navy these days without knowing how to operate a machine of some sort, and without having some sort of technical knowledge. The strike of the British sailors at Invergordon a few years ago demonstrated that the officers are the prisoners of their men, if the latter should rise against them. In similar fashion,

a machine-gun company or a squadron of tanks or a gas platoon, are also dependent upon a great deal of technical skill, and could be tied into knots by a strike or a mutiny.

Add to the factor of the dependence of the armed forces upon skilled workers the fact that the counter-revolution in its efforts to put down the revolution would have to arm workers and farmers and sympathetic middle class groups who would turn their weapons against the counter-revolution. We get a picture of the counter-revolutionary forces in a constant state of disintegration from within as a result of working class propaganda, and of assault from without by the revolutionary armies. The former would be isolated from their vital industrial needs. They could not force the workers to run the few factories they might control—sabotage and resistance would soon destroy their value. Without supplies the counter-revolutionary armies would soon be disrupted by continuous mutinies within their ranks and the overt hostility of the civil population.

Nor would a sudden, sharp attack win victory for the counter-revolution. The terror of modern warfare would act as a boomerang that would drive the neutrals into the camp of revolution. Under the conditions of gas and aerial warfare, every person of the population becomes a target. This would bring about the disintegration of the potential forces of the ruling class as incendiary and poison

gas bombs destroy the capitalist and middle class as well as the proletarian residential sections. It is impossible to control chemical and bacteriological weapons. You can no longer attack only working class quarters, while the inert bourgeoisie look on. Air raids and gas attacks would accelerate the movement of the petty bourgeoisie into the ranks of the proletarian revolution.

The counter-revolution might destroy some cities and some industrial centers. But cut off from industry and the major means of transportation, its weapons and supplies would be exhausted in a few weeks, while it had to fight the ever growing revolutionary forces. Under such conditions a revolutionary insurrection if properly planned and executed has the ultimate advantages on its side.

These comments are not meant to portray the actual tactics of the general strike and the proletarian revolution. These will be dictated by the material factors of the objective situation and by the temper and will of the working class. They do indicate, however, the essential falsity of those theories that claim that technological advance has destroyed the objective possibilities of proletarian victories. Modern technique does not deny victory to the working class; it merely demands of the working class and its leaders that they conduct more skillful struggles. If skillful tactics are used, then technology becomes a tremendous force on the side of the workers.

A California Summary

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TO THE unimaginative reader, the simple statement that A, a striker, was shot; or that B, an organizer was beaten; or that C, a worker, was kidnaped, is like the distant echo of a thunderbolt. Many are the pealing reverberation he hears during a storm. Unless lightning and thunder blend in a deafening, blinding moment, he does not care. The danger is . . . off there.

Similarly the constant repetition of the statement that Fascism is approaching in America is exciting enough, although not nearly so stirring as the bald fact that Fascism is here. To many of you, Fascism seems beyond the horizon. The battles rage here and there, troops in Toledo, police murders in Cleveland, troops in Minneapolis, terror in Alabama. Storm across the political-economic weather map. A few are struck by lightning. The storm passes your vicinity. You, in your cosmic self-sufficiency, are safe.

I tell you that Fascism is here. We in California know it. Quite true, storm troopers do not parade our streets; stiff-armed salutes are not seen in public. But Fascism is here.

In California aspirants for the post of *Fuehrer* are many. Gov. Merriam had his

day. Down in the Imperial Valley, A. N. Jack, chief of the growers, is It. In Los Angeles "Red" Hynes. In Sacramento, "Nit-Wit" McAllister, Inquisitor of Jimmie Cagney, Dolores Del Rio and Johnnie's Lupe.

What are the tactics of California Fascism? Let us see.

Death to traitors . . . meaning Communists, Socialists, Parlor Pinks and most union labor. Many votes were recorded at the state convention of the American Legion this summer. The idea was defeated. Another year is coming. A *Fuehrer* . . . then Death to Traitors.

Exile to Communists, Socialists, Parlor Pinks and most union labor. The Aleutian Islands suggested by some. Death Valley by others, notably Prof. Withagermannname who teaches Economics at the University of California at Los Angeles, a state institution.

Confiscation of property and denial of all civil rights to all leftists. This treatment was recommended by the National Commander of the American Legion, immediately following a report from Germany that the Nazis were planning such action against those who voted Nein in the so-called August plebiscite.

These are threats. Now for actualities. You have naturally heard about the Vigil-

ante and police raids on Communists during the general strike. You may be inclined to doubt that the tactics used at that time were fascist. You may point out that capitalism, harried on all sides by the dock and marine and general strikes, used temporary fascist tactics to break these labor down-tools movements.

Let us examine the facts.

In Los Angeles the right of free speech is denied except at three points. One is the Plaza, a park set in the center of an open space. Here Communist demonstrations have been permitted during the past year. The Plaza is in the center of a Mexican-Asiatic neighborhood, where English is seldom spoken or heard. In Hollywood at St. Andrews Place and Santa Monica Boulevard, meetings are permitted on Saturday nights. At San Pedro a vacant lot is assigned to such gatherings.

Only at the Plaza have Communist meetings gone unchallenged. There, however, squads of police guard the meeting. These police are armed with lengths of gas pipe, hardwood clubs, three feet long, tear gas bombs, billies, revolvers, sub-machine guns, etc. Detectives roam through the crowds. A