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**Communist Manifesto and the Modern Working Class :
What Revolutionary Potential?**

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A notion is current among many in Marxist circles as well as other Left radicals that with the setting in of the ongoing scientific and technological revolution and the consequent changes in the labour process, the proletariat as a class is fast declining and a 'new middle class' is developing in its place. The contention is that the 'new middle class' is devoid of any revolutionary perspective or potential and the 'fast declining proletariat' does not naturally possess any revolutionary capability. Thus they seek to disprove the validity of the call for a proletarian revolution, as urged for, in the *Communist Manifesto*. The following discussion takes up this point and seeks to point out the emerging reality.

REVOLUTIONARY CALL OF THE MANIFESTO

A hundred and fifty years ago in 1848, the *Communist Manifesto* written by Marx and Engels concluded with the reverberating call 'Working Men of All Countries, Unite'.

The *Communist Manifesto* envisaged a proletarian revolution, the end of bourgeois rule. The Manifesto said, "... the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons -- the modern working class -- the proletarians." 1 The Manifesto further said, "of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product." 2

While explaining that the essential condition for the existence and

flourishing of the bourgeois class is the formation and expansion of Capital, Marx pointed out, "the condition for capital is wage-labour."³ This wage-labour is the worker in a bourgeois society and the mass of wage-labours is the working class -- the proletariat. Marx further pointed out, "...With the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number, it becomes concentrated in, greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more."⁴

What Marx hammered out in the *Manifesto* is that class struggle is the motive force of history. In fact, a fundamental feature of Marxism is an understanding of politics in the light of the class struggle. Marx and Engels wrote in 1879,

"For almost forty years we have stressed the class struggle as the immediate driving power of history, and in particular the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution."⁵

MARX'S THEORY OF CLASS

As is well known, the concluding chapter of *Capital* (volume three) on Class is uncompleted. However, the general drift of Marx's theory of class is clear enough. In that unfinished Chapter L11 on 'Classes' in *Capital* (volume three), Marx defines:

"The owners merely of labour-power, owners of capital and land-owners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground-rent, in other words, wage-labourers, capitalists and land-owners, constitute these three big classes of modern society based upon the capitalist mode of production."⁶

In the *Communist Manifesto* about formation of the antagonistic classes, Marx wrote.

"Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and servant, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an un-interrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a

revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes....

"In modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonism. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones." 7

While defining class, Marx started with "The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers", and "determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element, upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves." 8

In other words, classes are defined in terms of the exploitative relations of production which constitute the society in question. These relations of production depend, according to Marx, on the distribution of the means of production. Thus, underlying the relationship between capital and wage-labour, as explained by Marx in *Capital* (volume two), "distribution, not distribution in the ordinary meaning of distribution of articles of consumptions, but distribution of the elements of production itself, the material factor of which are concentrated on one side, and labour- power isolated on the other." 9 In *Capital* (volume three), Marx further classifies the significance of 'distribution relations'. He states that the capitalist mode of production, "produces not merely the material products, but reproduces continually the production relations in which former are produced, and thereby also the corresponding distribution relations... The aforementioned distribution relations are the basis of special social functions performed within production relations by certain of their agents, as opposed to the direct produces. They imbue the conditions of production themselves and their representatives with a specific social quality! They determine the entire character and the entire movement of production." 10 (emphasis added.)

It follows from the aforesaid analysis that the class position of an individual depends on his or her relationship to the means of production. To quote Marx again, "In view of what has already been said, it is superfluous to demonstrate anew that the relation between

Capital and Wage-labour determines the entire character of the mode of production. The principal agents of this mode of production itself, the capitalist and the wage-labourers, are as such merely embodiment, personifications of capital and wage-labour; definite social characteristics stamped upon individuals by the process of social production; the product of these definite social production relations." 11 The capitalist owns the means of production, the worker does not; these facts determine their respective class position. Class thus conceived is *objective*; it is formed within the relations of production, and does not arise from individual's consciousness. Moreover, for Marx, class is a social relationship. It is much less concerned with what individuals do -- what sociologists call 'occupation' -- than with how what they do fits into the antagonistic relationship through which one group exploits another within the process of production. According to Marxian analysis class is thus a reflection of the exploitation in a social structure -- who exploits whom.

THE CLASS OF WAGE-LABOUR -- THE WORKING CLASS

Engels in his classic study on '*The Condition of the Working Class in England*' which was written in 1844 and first published in German in 1845 observed in the introduction that 'The history of the proletariat in England begins with the second half of the last century, with the invention of the steam-engine and of machinery for working cotton. These inventions gave rise, as is well known, to an industrial revolution, a revolution which altered the whole civil society ... 'and' only in England can the proletariat be studied in all its relations and from all sides'... as "England is ... the classic land of its chief product also, the proletariat."12 Like Marx, Engels also in all his works interchangeably used the terms 'working class' and 'proletariat' in the capitalist relation of production. Thus though in the title of his book, Engels has used the term 'Working Class' during his actual investigation in the book, he mostly used the term 'proletariat'. Engels mentions, 'The first proletarians were connected with manufacture whom Marx analysed in his *Capital* as 'Wage-labour'.13 But Engels also mentions, "while the industrial proletariat was thus developing with the first still very imperfect machine, the same machine gave rise to the agricultural proletariat."14 Thus Marxian lexicon mentions two types of proletariat -- the industrial and the agricultural. Engels, however, in his book devoted himself to the investigation into the condition of the industrial proletariat in England as it was in the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century.

THE INSTRUMENTS OF PRODUCTION AND LABOUR --PROCESS

But development of industry and that of the working class did not stop in the mid-nineteenth century. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx wrote, "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionalising the instruments of production, and thereby the relation of production and with them the whole relations of society." 15 Marx elaborated this very important subject in his *Capital*, on what is the instrument of production or in other words labour. (Part III, volume one)

While stating that "Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates and controls the material reactions between himself and nature", Marx points out that "The elementary factors of the labour process are 1, the personal activity of man, i.e., work itself, 2, the subject of that work, and 3, its instruments." 16 Marx in his analysis showed that soil (including water) in its virgin state exists independently of man and is the universal subject of human labour. Marx also pointed out that though all raw materials are the subject of labour, every subject of labour is not raw material, it becomes so after it has undergone some alteration by means of labour. Marx thus comes to the conclusion that,

"An instrument of labour is a thing, or a complex of things, which the labourer imposes between himself and the subject of his labour, and which serves as the conductor of his activity. He makes use of the mechanical, physical and chemical properties of some substance in order to make other substances subservient to his aims." 17

These instruments of labour occupy a very important place in Marxian economy and sociology in understanding different forms of economic activity. Marx refers to Franklin who defined man as a tool making animal as distinct from other animals. Marx showed that as fossil bones are important for determination of extinct species of animals, "It is not the articles made, but how they are made and by what instruments that enable us to distinguish different economic epochs." (emphasis added.) 18

UNPRECEDENTED ACCUMULATION OF CAPITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 and his classic work *Capital* came out in the sixties of the nineteenth century. What distinguishes the present economic epoch, when the world is celebrating the completion of 150 years of the publication of *Communist Manifesto* from the economic epoch of Marx's time? Marx himself provided the clue to understanding the special characteristics of the present economic epoch when he wrote in the *Manifesto*, "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe" and then Marx notes the rapid improvement of all 'instruments of production' and 'the immensely facilitated means of communication' by the bourgeoisie. 19 And after 150 years, now it is the economic epoch of vast accumulation of Capital -- the era of capitalist globalisation and the scientific and technological revolution. The vast accumulation of capital and its expansion has also resulted in vast expansion of the mass of labour-power. Marx in his *Capital* (volume one) defines this expansion of the mass of labour power as "reproduction of a mass of labour-power, which must necessarily re-incorporate itself with capital for that capital's self-expansion...." and "this reproduction of labour-power forms, in fact an essential of the reproduction of capital itself" and then Marx concludes "Accumulation of capital is therefore, increase of the proletariat." 20

The vast increase in the mass of working class is accompanied in the present economic epoch with the phenomenon of the ongoing revolution in science and technology in consequence of which instruments of labour has undergone a revolutionary change. This is creating a contradictory situation also restricting the expansion of the mass of working-class by the instruments labour-displacing capacity.

STR AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES OF WORKING CLASS

The on-going scientific and technological revolution has opened up new vistas of productive forces and changes in the traditional structure of the working class. With the rise of modern industry as a sequel to the industrial revolution, Karl Marx himself noted, "The varied, apparently unconnected and patrified forms of the industrial process now resolved themselves into so many conscious and

systematic applications of natural science to the attainment of given useful effects" 21. These words were said by Marx in 1867 just at the time when the industrial revolution was showing signs of the potential role of science in production. But these were really prophetic. The on-going scientific and technological revolution confirms how 'conscious and systematic application of natural science' can revolutionize the productive forces and create altogether new problems and possibilities.

The industrial revolution was marked by specific innovation by individual scientists. Thus the steam engine was the prime mover of the industrial revolution. In contrast, no single innovation in contemporary times occupies the same position. It has been aptly stated that the advances made in large number of fields are 'tightly inter-related in a veritable seamless web of technological change' so as to constitute 'mere branches of one master technology' based upon an 'elaborate apparatus of scientific research and testing', "Science is the steam engine we have been seeking and the collective scientist is the master technologist" 22. On the basis of this objective analysis Harry Braverman, himself an industrial worker and an eminent Marxist scholar, who made an indepth study of Marx's labour-process concludes, "The scientific technical revolution, for this reason, cannot be understood in terms of specific innovations but must be understood rather in its totality as a mode of production into which science and exhaustive engineering investigation have been integrated as part of ordinary functioning. The key innovation is not to be found in Chemistry, Electronics, automatic machinery, aeronautics, atomic physics, or any of the products of these science-technology, but rather in the transformation of science itself into capital" 23.

This scientific and technological revolution (STR) while revolutionising the productive forces, have immensely changed the labour process also. Already the rise of monopoly capital and the vast expansion of administrative work created a huge stratum of clerical workers. Now among other ramifications, STR has led to the development of an immensely big service sector engaging highly skilled labour, technician, computer operators and other workers with specialised knowledge.

Ernest Mandel explained, "The expansion of capitalist services sector which typifies late capitalism thus in its own way sums up all the principal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. It

reflects the enormous expansion of social-technical and scientific forces of production and the corresponding growth in the cultural and civilising needs of the producers, just as it reflects the antagonistic form in which this expansion is realised under capitalism; for it is accompanied by increasing over-capitalisation (difficulties of valorization of capital), growing difficulties of realisation, increasing wastage of material values and growing alienation and deformation of workers in their productive activity and their sphere of consumption" 24.

Every country is now witnessing the phenomenal growth of the service sector along with the rapidly growing number of the service sector workers. This holds good for India too. The service sector employees or workers, trade unionised under the big national federations, have occupied a very important position in the trade union movement of the country. But very often the question is raised whether this service sector is productive or not. If not productive then what role the employees and workers of this sector can play in the continuing and sharpening class struggle of the capitalist society. Before proceeding with the discussion on this topic we may again revert to Marx to see whether Marx in his life time could throw any light on it.

COMMERCIAL WAGE -- WORKER

Chapter XVIII of Marx's *Capital* (volume three), on commercial profit is quite significant for properly understanding the issue.

While analysing the function of merchant's capital, Marx used the term 'Commercial Wage-Worker'. Who are they and what is their role in creating surplus value. As we have noted earlier Marx defined them as 'wage-labour' who 'pumped out' surplus- labour in the shape of surplus value for the capitalists.

Marx pointed out, "The clearly defined division of labour in a commercial office, in which one keeps the books, another looks after money matters, a third travels etc." 25 Thus, Marx himself poses the question. "What about the commercial wage-workers employed by the commercial capitalist, here the merchant"? 26 At the same time Marx provides the answer, "In one respect, such a commercial employee is a wage-worker like any other. In the first place, his

labour power is bought with the variable capital of the merchant, not with money expended as revenue, and consequently it is not bought for private service, but for the purpose of expanding the value of the capital advanced for it. In the second place, the value of his labour power, and thus his wages, are determined as those of other wage-workers, i.e., by the cost of production and reproduction of his specific labour-power, not by the product of his labour" (emphasis added).

Here Marx makes two specific points very distinctly. "The commercial employee is a wage-worker like any other" and "his wages are determined as those of other wage-workers". But during the ongoing discussion on the character and role of the commercial wage-workers or service workers, this clear Marxist analysis is very often missed.

Marx did not stop here. Marx further clarifies, "we must make the same distinction between him (commercial wage-workers) and the wage-workers directly employed by industrial capital which exists between industrial capital and merchants' capital...". "Since the merchant, as a mere agent of circulation, produces neither value nor surplus value ... it follows that the mercantile workers employed by him in these same functions cannot directly create surplus-value for him. Here as in the case of the productive labourers, we assume that wages are determined by the value of the labour-power .. he does not enrich himself through cheating his clerks etc." 27 (emphasis added).

While putting the commercial wage-workers at par with the industrial wage-workers so far as the same principle operating for determining their wages, Marx also felt some difficulty in this respect. But Marx's line of argument is cogent. He explains, "The difficulty as concerns mercantile wage-workers is by no means to explain how they produce direct profits for their employer without creating any direct surplus-value (of which profit is but a transmitted form). This question has indeed, already been solved in the general analysis of commercial profits and "The relation of merchant's capital to surplus value is different from that of industrial capital. The latter produces surplus value by directly appropriating the unpaid labour of others. The former appropriates a portion of this surplus-value by having this portion transformed from industrial capital to itself" 28. In other words, commercial wage-labour also creates surplus value in a different way.

That this surplus value, the merchant appropriates to himself, through unpaid labour of this clerk is made more clear by Marx when he explains, "The mass of the individual merchant's profits depend on the mass of capital that he can apply in this process, and he can apply so much more of it in buying and selling, the more the unpaid labour to his clerks. ...The unpaid labour of these clerks, while it does not create surplus value, enables him to appropriate surplus-value, which, in effect, amounts to the same thing with respect to his capital. It is, therefore, a source of profit for him" 29. Further, "Just as the labourers' unpaid labour directly creates surplus value for productive capital, so the unpaid labour of the commercial wage-worker secures a share of this surplus value for merchant's capital" 30.

Marx very clearly analysed the functions of the commercial clerks as commercial wage-workers producing surplus value for merchant's capital in a way different from that of the industrial wage-worker. Marx never used the phrase 'White Collar worker' for this category of wage-workers, though it has become the usual practice to use this phrase not only by non-Marxist sociologists but even by Marxists. Though Marx did not use the phrase 'Commercial Proletariat' as he used for the industrial wage-worker, he, nevertheless, has amply clarified their role as wage-worker, as an oppressed and exploited category in the capitalist relations of production.

Is commercial labour like industrial labour productive? The usual notion is that it is not, i.e. commercial labour is unproductive. Contrary to this prevalent idea Marx makes an interesting point. "The commercial worker produces no surplus value directly", stated Marx but he then argues, "But the price of his labour is determined by the value of his labour-power, hence by its cost of production, while the application of this labour-power, its exertion, expenditure of energy, and wear and tear, is as in the case of every other wage-labourer by no means limited by its value. His wage, therefore, is not necessarily proportionate to the mass of profit which he helps the capitalist to realise. What he costs the capitalist and what he brings in for him, are two different things. He creates no direct surplus-value, but adds to the capitalists' income by helping him to reduce the cost of realising surplus-value, inasmuch as he performs partly unpaid labour" 31.

As for the other commonly held notion that the commercial workers are a better paid class and so they are not prone to struggle, Marx again argues "The commercial worker, in the strict sense of the term belongs to the better-paid class of wage workers -- to those whose labour is classed skilled and stands above average labour. Yet the wage tends to fall, even in relation to average labour, with the advance of the capitalist mode of production." 32 (emphasis added.) But from which stratum of the society are these commercial wage labourers recruited? Marx answers, "The universality of public education enables capitalists to recruit such labourers from classes that formerly had no access to such trades and were accustomed to a lower standard of living. Moreover, this increases supply, and hence competition. With few exceptions, the labour-power of these is therefore, devalued with the progress of capitalist production." 33 The meaning is clear, with the advance of capitalism, these sections of workers are subjected to intensified exploitation.

Finally, Marx directly arrives at the crux of the problem, whether commercial labour is productive or not. Marx explains, "To industrial capital the costs of circulation appear as unproductive expenses, and so they are. To the merchant they appear as a source of his profit, proportional, given the general rate of profit, to their size. The outlay to be made for these circulation costs is, therefore, a productive investment for mercantile capital", and then Marx concludes "And for this reason, the commercial labour which it buys is likewise immediately productive for it!" 34 (emphasis added)

In unequivocal terms, Marx defined the commercial labourer as productive and this proves the falsity of the current un-Marxist notion about the character and role of commercial wage-workers in the general working-class movement against capitalist exploitation.

DEFINITION OF PROLETARIAT

Since the days of Marx, things have changed enormously and as has been pointed out, the technological revolution has also led to a revolutionary change in the labour process. For the present generation of Marxists this change has to be properly understood and things are to be judged and examined in the light of the basic formulations of Marx and Engels.

The working class has always had to undergo a particular pattern of labour-process depending upon the structure of capitalist accumulation and technological developments of the instruments of labour. In Marx's day a huge number of wage-labourers belonged to the domestic industry. Even in industry, 'machinofacture', the distinctively capitalist method of mass production based on the large-scale use of machinery which Marx analysed in depth in *Capital* (volume one) was limited for much of the nineteenth century to a few advanced sectors, notably the Lancashire Cotton trade. A vast amount of capitalist enterprise was organised on the basis of manual rather than steam-power technologies. In fact, Machinofacture was generalised, not during the period of the Industrial Revolution itself, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the development, especially in the United States, of mass assembly-line production.

The working class did never possess any fixed structure or composition. Rather, this structure and composition had changed as the needs of capital accumulation have altered. Periods of crisis can be seen at times of reorganisation and restructuring, as inefficient sectors are run down, bankrupt capitals taken over, and new sectors and more efficient capitals take their places. The working class itself participates in this process as some are destroyed and others created.

In the present era of scientific and technological revolution combined with capitalist globalisation of economy, the capitalists are more and more using labour saving devices. Electronics, cybernetics and automation have provided the capitalists with these drastic labour saving devices.

As Marx has said, with the universalisation of education, the merchant capitalists get a ready-made mass of job-seekers who can be employed as commercial wage-workers doing the work of accountancy, buying and selling etc. Like wise, high level of technical education in computers and automation have also provided the service sector industries the opportunity for recruiting technically skilled workers for performing the desired job. It means the industrialists need various types of workers doing various types of jobs -- some manual workers, some mechanists, some clerical, some computer-operators, some supervisors and so on. In fact, Marx also visualised this proliferation of the workers in various types of work, all in the interest of the capitalists.

In *Capital* (volume three), in the chapter on *Classes*, Marx perhaps tried to explain this situation but the manuscript remained unfinished.

Marx posed the question and sought to answer, "What makes wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords constitute the three great social classes?"

"At first glance -- the identity of revenues and sources of revenues. There are three great social groups whose number, the individuals forming them, live on wages, profit and ground rent respectively, on the realisation of their labour-power, their capital, and their landed property.

"However, from this standpoint, physicians and officials, e.g. would also constitute two classes for they belong to two distinct social groups, the members of each of these groups receiving their revenue from one and the same source. The same would also be true of the indefinite fragmentation of interest and rank into which the division of social labour splits labourers as well as capitalists and landlords -- the latter, e.g., into owners of Vineyards, farm owners, owners of forests, mine owners and owners of fisheries." 35 (emphasis added.) Unfortunately, the manuscript breaks off here and Marx did not complete his observations on the nature of fragmentation and splits of the labourers.

But Marx mentioned 'interest and rank' which causes 'infinite fragmentation of social labour' which 'splits labourers'. In fact, in modern manufacturing industry including service industry the splitting of labourers depending upon skill required and rank is obvious.

In another place Marx said, "The real lever of the overall labour process is increasingly not the individual workers. Instead, labour-power socially combined and the various compelling labour-powers which together form the entire production machine participate in very different ways in the immediate process of making commodities... some work better with their hands, other with their heads, one as a manager, engineer, technologist, etc, the other as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge. An ever-

increasing number of types of labour are included in the immediate concept of *productive labourer*, and those who perform it are classed as *productive workers*, workers directly exploited by capital and subordinated to its process of production and expansion." 36 (emphasis added).

So, if what Marx said above is considered in the light of what Marx said in regard to 'splitting of labourers', then it is pertinent to conclude that all those who form part of what Marx called 'Collective Labour', the complex division of labour involved in producing commodities, are productive workers, even if they do not work with their hand. Moreover, in the light of Marx's analysis of the commercial wage-worker, there is no evidence to suggest that Marx regarded only productive workers in manufacturing industry as forming the proletariat.

In fact, the distinction between productive and unproductive labour is therefore, between labour which contributes to the self-expansion of capital and labour which does not. Marx's main example of the latter is that of domestic servants, the largest single category of workers in Victorian Britain, employed out of the revenue of the middle and upper classes. But one point Marx did not mention that these poor strata of the people who engaged themselves as domestic servants had no other means of livelihood and so they were forced to sell their labour-power. While Marx said of splitting of labourers whatever complex form it may assume, it follows from Marx's analysis of capitalism that socio-economic compulsion to sell one's labour-power is the obvious characteristic of the proletariat. Accordingly all wage-labourers are subject to the fundamental constraints of the capitalist relations of production -- non-ownership of means of production, lack of direct access to the means of livelihood, non-accessibility of land or insufficient money to purchase the means of livelihood without more or less continuous sale of labour-power. These categories will include not only commercial clerks and lower government employees and other numerous number of scattered daily labourers (including domestic servants) since they have no other means of livelihood except selling his or her labour-power.

Here it may be pertinent to heed what Rosa Luxemburg said in her *The Accumulation of Capital*, Chapter XVI on *The Reproduction of Capital and its Social Setting* about the sources from which the rural and urban proletariat is recruited. She pointed at the source, "the

continued process by which the rural and urban middle strata become proletarian with the decay of peasant economy and of small artisan enterprises, the very process, that is to say, of incessant transition from non-capitalist to capitalist conditions of a labour-power that is cast off by pre-capitalist, not capitalist, mode of production in their progressive breakdown and disintegration."³⁷ This analysis is valid not only for 19th century Europe, it is equally valid in the conditions prevailing in India today.

Another point has to be considered in this respect. Marx provided a general definition of service when he said, "A service is nothing more than the useful effect of a use-value be it of a commodity, or be it of labour." He then made an interesting comment on skilled and unskilled labour: "in every process of creating value, the reduction of skilled labour, average social labour e.g. one day of skilled labour to six days of unskilled labour, is unavoidable." ³⁸

A worker who is employed for producing goods renders a service to the capitalists. And because of this service a tangible and vendible object takes shape as a commodity. But when the useful effects of labour do not result in a vendible object then it creates a different situation. Harry Braverman's explanation of these circumstances appear quite logical. He states, "When worker does not offer this labour directly to the user of its effects, but instead sells it to a capitalist, who re-sells it on the commodity market, then we have the capitalist form of production in the field of services." ³⁹

Arguing in detail that service is also a productive labour generating surplus value in the capitalist relation of production, Braverman makes the following illuminating observation:

"In the history of capitalism while use of one or another form may play a greater role in a particular area, the tendency is towards eradication of distinction among its various forms, particularly in the era of monopoly capitalism, it makes little sense to ground any theory of the economy upon any specially favoured variety of labour process. As these varied form came under the auspices of capital and become part of the domain of profitable investment, they enter for the capitalist into the realm of general or abstract labour, labour which enlarges capital. In the modern 'Corporation' all forms of labour are employed without any distinction, and in the modern conglomerate Corporation some divisions carry on manufacturing,

others carry on trade, others banking, others mining and still others 'service' process. They live peacefully together, and in the final result as recorded in the balance sheet the forms labour disappear entirely in the forms of value." 40 (emphasis added)

The question sometimes arises that since the workers' wages and amenities are rising, of course due to their resistance struggle, whether the workers who are better paid or whose standard of living has risen, still possess a revolutionary potential.

Marx dealt with this question before he wrote *Communist Manifesto*. In his *Wage Labour and Capital*, Marx observed,

"When productive capital grows, the demand for labour grows; Consequently, the price of labour, wages, goes up. ...

"A noticeable increase in wages presupposes a rapid growth of productive capital. The rapid growth of productive capital brings about an equally rapid growth of wealth, luxury, social wants, social enjoyments. Thus, although the enjoyments of the worker have risen, the social satisfaction that they gave has fallen in comparison with the increased enjoyments of the capitalist, which are inaccessible to the workers, in comparison with the state of development of society in general. Our desire and pleasure spring from society; we measure them, by society and not by the objects which serve for their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature.

"In general, wages are determined not only by the amount of commodities for which I can exchange them. They embody various relations". 41

These words of Marx are quite significant in understanding the present situation when due to workers' struggles and various other factors, the wages and other amenities of the workers have gone up and their standard of living is not also at the same level as it was in the mid-nineteenth century. Capitalism leads to a wider disparity in economic terms between the owners and the wage-workers. The workers may achieve a higher wage level or amenities, but in comparison to that the wealth and prosperity of the owning or

propertied class are rising in geometrical progression.

Particularly, in this era of capitalist globalisation and the triumph of finance capital, this disparity in income is reaching an unprecedented height. Even the protagonist of globalisation, the World Bank in their successive reports has expressed concern at this rapidly widening disparity and that more and more people getting impoverished and jobless and World Bank apprehend an increasing dissatisfaction among the toiling and poorer sections against the ruling regimes.

So it is not a question of how much rise has taken place in the wage level; the question actually centres round whether the toiling sections are getting their due proportion of the income generated in a country. This sense of deprivation and disparity actually gives impetus to working class militancy.

Considering all these facts and formulations, today's manufacturing workers, skilled service sector workers, commercial workers in the mercantile firms and financial institutions like banks, insurances and the clerical and subordinate workers in the service to the capitalists in the phenomenally expanded government sectors, the scattered and individual daily workers -- all naturally come within the definition of the wage-workers while the industrial wage-workers form the core of the proletarian class.

Even the domestic workers who have no other way of sustenance than selling their labour-power, though they do not produce any value and not organised against capitalist exploitation but a highly deprived and exploited lot, are also getting proletarianised within the broader definition of the term. But if one sticks to the definition of proletariat to the manual industrial workers only in the pattern of nineteenth century, then the proletariat will be reduced to a small and declining nineteenth century stereotype only and this definition will not be compatible with the reality of the present situation when manual workers in traditional industry are sharply declining giving place to service workers and commercial workers including part-time and casual workers.

All these factors taken together prove the untenability of the fashionable notion that the proletariat is a fast declining class or

even disappearing and a 'new middle class' is appearing on the scene with high level of wages and amenities who do not possess any militancy of struggle or revolutionary potential.

THE PRESENT PHASE OF CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE AND WORKING CLASS MILITANCY

Marxism is a science which always develops through practical experiences. It is not a fixed dogma.

The present phase of capitalist globalisation vividly shows that capital's essential dynamics and contradictions cannot be altered by simply new prescriptions of capitalist development. The present globalisation is not an absolutely new and unexpected development. Marx in his *Communist Manifesto* envisaged this phenomena and later Rosa Luxemburg made it further clear when she said, "Capital needs the means of production and the labour power of the whole globe for untrammelled accumulation; it cannot manage without the natural resources and the labour power of all territories." 42

Exactly this is happening in today's capitalist globalisation. Severe problems of over accumulation and over capacity are plaguing globalising capital today. It also shows how accelerated capital can give rise to a new generation of working class capable of fighting back against intensified capitalist exploitation.

The sharpening contradiction of capitalism is best exemplified by the breakdown of the economy of the much touted 'Asian Tigers' and the sharply rising militant working class struggles in those countries. The recent militant wave of working class resistance in South Korea and even Indonesia against the manifestations of the crisis and even formation of new illegal trade unions with tremendous mass support, confirm the new awakening among the working class, which so long remained dormant under the brutal oppressive regime which banned all working class activities. The latest ILO Report points out to the newly developing trade unions and their struggles even in countries like Cambodia and Taiwan.

The great strike struggles of France in the winter of 1995 and in South Korea in the next winter, mass militancy generated in those

struggles, the widespread strike struggles in Britain in western European countries and Latin American countries, in South Africa, in Japan, in former socialist countries, and now even in the United States defying the reformist dictates of AFL-CIO and the latest widespread Railway strike in November, 1998 in some Central and West European countries again point out to the phenomenon of a newly rising working-class militancy after a comparative lull caused by the compromising attitude of the reformist trade unions.

Moreover, severely hit by the furious offensive of neo-liberal policies like privatisation, retrenchment, wage-freeze, cut-back of social security benefits etc, newer sections of the working class not only under the reformist trade union leadership, but also because of some extra privileges who earlier preferred to keep aloof of the trade union struggle are now joining the militant wave of the currently developing struggle. Thus, though due to privatisation, closures, retrenchment, the total number of workers is declining and the number of jobless is formidably swelling, yet because of the participation of newer sections in this struggle, the size of the working class participation in militant trade union movement has not palpably decreased. This gives lie to the motivated propaganda that the working-class movement has no future.

In India, too, the four nation-wide general strike struggles during 1991-1994, sectoral strikes in between and after, and the great nation-wide general strike of 11 December, 1998 all against the globalisation offensive prove beyond doubt that neither the working class nor its militancy is disappearing; rather it is rising up with newer and more cohesive combination and militancy.

And it would be pertinent to note here that all these global struggles have drawn in all sections of the workers -- the industrial workers, service sector workers, commercial workers, government employees, technicians, engineers and in some cases lower level managerial staff also.

These developments pointedly indicate that the current proletarian upsurges are taking shape with the active and conscious participation of all sections of the workers -- not simply of the industrial workers.

But it has to be admitted that all these struggles are bursting forth mostly against the manifestations and effects of capitalist globalisation and neo-liberal economy, i.e., on economic issues and not straightaway against the capitalist economic order itself or for a socialist alternative. Here comes the question of working-class consciousness.

THE QUESTION OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

We may again revert to Marx. The dialectical nature of Marxist view of class consciousness was rooted firmly in an awareness of the inter-relation between material realities and uneven materially-based development of such consciousness.

In his *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which Marx wrote a few years before the *Manifesto*, Marx developed the most important distinction between class-in-itself and class-for-itself, on which is based the development of consciousness. And this was not in theoretical abstraction but in the concrete requirement of capitalism and the organisational forms thus generated. Marx said,

"Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital had created for the mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests." 43 (emphasis added).

Marx analyses the British situation as he did in the *Manifesto* also. Marx explained, "In England, they have not stopped at partial combination which have no other objective than a passing strike, and which disappear with it. Permanent combinations have been formed, trade unions, which serve as ramparts for the workers in their struggle with the employers." 44

The crucial point in this argument is that Marx never dismissed 'economic struggles' on the plea that it is not connected with political consciousness and socialism. In fact, the socialists of Marx's time did the same thing. To Marx, these economic struggles

constitute the *essential or core element* in the development of more distinct class consciousness which bears the potential of wider politicisation.

But as Lenin put it later, that political consciousness, so to say the socialist consciousness does not come to the working class automatically, it comes *from without*. This means that it is through the intervention of the revolutionary party that the socialist consciousness can be brought into the proletariat.

Facts prove that the proletariat, now comprising various components of wage-labour, is the most revolutionary class in modern capitalist society, but class political consciousness of the proletariat is not an automatic phenomenon as Lenin explicitly pointed out, nor, is its response to capitalist crisis uniform everywhere and on all occasions. Here George Lukacs, the Hungarian Marxist scholar and revolutionary practitioner makes a relevant point:

"Our aim here is to point out that class consciousness of the proletariat does not develop uniformly throughout the whole proletariat parallel with the objective economic crisis. Large sections of the proletariat remain intellectually under the tutelage of the bourgeois, even the severest economic crisis fails to shake them in their attitude with the result that the *stand-point of the proletariat and the reaction to the crisis is much less violent and intense than the crisis itself.*" 45.

The new generation of working class is on the move, if not globally, but in many parts of the globe against the latest phase of unprecedented capitalist offensive. Now it is the duty of the proletarian political parties to intervene and to raise the consciousness of the working class and guide them for a revolutionary struggle with a socialist alternative. This is what the *Communist Manifesto* urged for.

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