



Mr. Ford's Page

A CORRESPONDENT suggests that in classifying society into groups, such as the Producing, the Consuming and the Public groups, or the Capital, the Labor and the Public groups, there should have been added the Government group, thus placing the structure on four solid legs, instead of leaving it the "three-legged stool" of recent popular expression.

The suggestion illustrates the fundamental falsity of dividing society at all, for it is an undivided organism. If we set it off into classes and interests, we do so simply as an aid to our thinking, as children first use blocks to learn arithmetic; we never imply that society is really thus divided; we never imply that life is such a hard and fast matter that every man is shut up into one caste or class.

That is where class-consciousness usually fails as a motive, and that is why the propagandists of a class-conscious strife are doomed to failure—you cannot cage an individual in any one class. Even while you are tagging him, he eludes you and glides into another class, if only for an hour. In a free country like ours, a man usually does—at least he always may—belong to all classes at once, except perhaps artificial and unwholesome classes like that which we call "the leisure class." To belong to the "leisure class" simply means that down in the mine and at the forge and in the shop there are men working for themselves and for idlers whom they never saw; it is to be a sponge, a parasite, a sign of economic disease.

There is one class which none of us escapes membership in, and that is the Consuming class. By the law of nature we are all consumers. It means our very life. Rich or poor, learned or ignorant, it does not matter—every living organism consumes the material of life, and for us this means mostly food for the body and the material necessities of residence on the earth.

Every man, be he the greatest producer ever known, is a consumer the first thing in the morning when he sits down at his breakfast table. Whether he produced what he consumes, or whether someone else produced it, does not matter—sitting at that table and eating, he has joined the consuming class. The total produce of the world is a little less because he sat there.

And then he goes to his work. He enters the shop and takes up his task, and by that act he has passed into the Producing group. No jolt and no jar attended the transition, no change in his fundamental interests occurred, he is not on one side of the fence while he is eating his breakfast and on the other as he plies his job—he is just a human being trying to support himself and dependents in a world maze.

Membership in the Consuming class is compulsory if life is to go on, but evidently membership in the Producing class is not, for there are some—a very few comparatively—who go on consuming all day long, week in and week out, during a whole lifetime, without ever putting back a single valuable contribution into the general supply. "They are living on their money," we say. But they are not. They are living on the grain which other men raised, the clothing which other men spun, the commodities which other men made—and their "money" is one of the modern fetishes by which they are enabled to do this. Money is always a sign of production, but its possession is not.

BUT returning to the normal man who has no desire to escape his duty, and who is willing to replace by production the stuff which he takes for consumption, what is his relation to these two conditions? The fomenters of labor strife say that he should be a "bull" when it is a question of how much he shall be paid for production, and a "bear" when it is a question of what he shall pay for what he consumes. In other words, make the loaf of bread cost more to bake, but sell it for less because the man who was highly paid for baking it will presently come around the front door and buy it for his family.

This, of course, would be a very favorable arrangement for the baker, if it could be kept up; but unfortunately for that dream,

there is an inviolable relation between the cost of consumption and the cost of production; even in the physical body, when repair and replacement cease to equal waste and use, old age comes and death is not far. Decrepitude and collapse come to business from the same cause.

There is, doubtless, a difference in the interests of the individual as Producer and that same individual as Consumer, but the difference merges into the same interest at last, namely, to gain enough as Producer to meet the demands made upon him as Consumer.

Some would-be guides talk as if all this could be easily arranged if the Producer took what he produced and let it go at that. The matter is complicated by another class which comes into existence between the production and the consumption. The producer is not buying of himself as producer, but of someone else who has acquired his product. This gives room for a mixture of motives—to get as much as he can as producer and give as little as he can as consumer.

This double attitude is assisted by the man's belief that he is dealing with two sets of persons whose interests seem opposed to his—his employer, who he thinks is trying to get out of him more labor than the wage is worth; and the merchant or trader, who he thinks is trying to get out of him more money than the article is worth.

The man doesn't see that—banish human greed from the equation—he is dealing only with himself after all, and that if he robs commodities at one end of the process, they rob him at the other; and so equality is established, though in a very unsatisfactory sort of way.

Now, there are advisers who insist that the way out of this condition is for the Producer-Consumer to add to his "class membership" and become Trader, too. For that is all that the abolition of the commercial class could mean. But as very few men could subsist on the commodity which they produce (the commodity usually being

only a part in some larger process of production), and would have to stop producing in order to hawk their product in the market and gain the wherewithal to procure a subsistence, the process might end practically in the same place as the present one does—but probably it would end in a much lower degree of efficiency and in a much lower state of general comfort.

IN OUR capacity as workers we are interested in just rates of reward; in our capacity as consumers we are interested in just rates of exchange; in our public capacity we are interested in the general welfare, not of ourselves alone, but of all men.

So, when our correspondent suggests that we add the Government group, it means just this: we add to all our other "class memberships" a new membership which carries power and authority with it.

The Government is not a group of men who control a group of the Public and a group of Producers and a group of Consumers; the Government is the Public, the Producers and the Consumers united to produce a political life which shall be the safeguard of all their rights and their just interests.

Perhaps the time has come for Government to consider taking over the control of economic conduct as well as those other phases of conduct which are indicated in existing laws. Certainly a Government that has power to say what shall be the standard quart or bushel, should also have power to say what shall be the standard day of work and the standard rate of reward.

The world is now moving around in a dazed sort of way simply because some extremely simple questions have not been answered—questions relating to the cost of a day's work to the man who gives it, and the rate of reward he ought to have to put him on an equality with other men who also are rewarded.

There is natural wealth enough, there is human energy enough; one is also persuaded that there could be found enough human good will, if mankind only knew what to do. The race is waiting for someone to show it the simple way out, that all interests may be brought into harmony, and the friction of unjust conflict abolished.

TO how many classes do you belong? You are a "Consumer" because you have to be. You are a "Producer" in order that you may continue a "Consumer." A few people don't have to produce—"they live on their money," so we say. But do they really? How can our interest under one class be harmonized with our interest under another class? Has Government anything to do with it?