

Are 'We' Getting Bribe by Prosperity?

By
E.B. Jacobson

"THE American workingclass is being bribed by prosperity!" This is a phrase that is being bandied about today with a dangerous disregard for truth. Even supposedly well-informed workers are deceived by its defeatist ideology. Intriguing as the phrase is, how long does it stand under the scrutiny of facts? Let us see!

In 1926, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the "current income of the American people" was over 89 billions of dollars. In 1921, the same bureau reports a national income of 62 billions. So the "American people" have made 27 billions more in 1926 than in 1921. "We" are getting richer—almost 33½ per cent richer!

Do All Share Alike?

But do we all share alike in this gain—in fact, do some of us share at all? Where, for instance, do the workers come in—the millions of semi-skilled and unskilled, the unorganized, the women, colored workers—even those within the American Federation of Labor? How much are they "bribed"?

The economic bureau reports that 44,600,000 people were "gainfully employed" in 1926. Dividing the 89 billion dollar income by the 44½ million employed, we find that if all shared proportionately



in the increase it would mean an average yearly income of approximately \$2,000.

How Many Get \$2,000?

How many workers get \$2,000 a year? Do the farm laborers? Do the cotton pickers, shoe workers, textile operators, steel workers, lumber jacks? Do the soft coal miners, the employees of packing houses, biscuit factories, knitting plants, laundries? Does the average worker get \$2,000?

According to the economic bureau, the earnings of the factory workers in the state of New York for 1926 averaged \$29 a week. This means \$1,500 a year if the full 52 weeks were worked, which would be a very exceptional case. And this applies only to New York State, which pays higher wages than Illinois, Ohio, Georgia, Mississippi, Texas, California, Massachusetts or Pennsylvania. The iron foundries, stock yards and coal mines of Illinois are estimated to pay a weekly average of only \$27. And the seasonal nature of this work, shut-downs and lay-offs cut into this wage disastrously.

"Prosperity" Down South.

In the South, the lowest level of annual income is reached, with a drop to \$1,089 in Texas; in Missouri to \$754 and in Georgia to the inhuman level of \$671. With the expanding industrialization of the South, competition with the North is bound to result in an even lower standard of living for northern workers.

Even now, however, the North feels the demoralizing effects of this, due to the influx of Negro workers. Their use in the coal fields and steel mills of Pennsylvania has lowered the wage average there to \$25.00, according to labor bureau statistics. In Massachusetts, the unorganized textile and shoe factories go below even this starvation pay, forcing their employees to put wives and children to work to eke out the men's average wage of \$23.00. Quite evidently it is none of these workers, either colored or white, who are being "bribed" by prosperity.

Are Women Workers Bribed?

And how about the women workers? Their conditions are even more deplorable than the men's; and worse than that, are a continual threat to the national standard of wages. In a pamphlet recently issued by the Women's Bureau of the U. S. department of labor, the following facts are pointed out: In the 14 states investigated, only one state, and that in a peak year, was found to pay wages as high as \$16. Even in that one state—Rhode Island—the average wage of all women investigated was only \$16.85 a week.

Medians in other states ranged from \$8.60 in Mississippi to \$14.95 in New Jersey, with the remaining eleven as follows: Ohio, \$13.80; Oklahoma, \$13.00; Georgia, \$12.95; Missouri, \$12.65; Kansas, \$11.95; Arkansas, \$11.05; Kentucky, \$10.75; South Carolina, \$9.50 and Alabama, \$8.80.

Since these figures represent capitalism's "bribery" of the great masses of unorganized, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, men and women—then capitalism can expect no returns for its "bribery" except bitter antagonism, wider spread discontent and more militant striving for the betterment of labor conditions. Such pittance wages in our basic industries, such debasing of the famous "American" standard of living does not breed class-collaboration; it makes the soil fertile for intensified class struggle. Can such an industrial situation turn the workers to the "right"? Surely it is a curious method prosperity has chosen to "bribe" the proletariat!

Nevertheless, the question must be answered—Is any section of the American labor movement "going to the right"? Capitalism is sufficiently class-conscious to understand the need for a rear-guard. It wants "peace" at home. Besides, certain industries such as the building and printing trades are not under the pressure of international competition as are, for instance, the coal, textile and steel industries.

It is in these more sheltered trades that we must look for "bribery." The building and printing trades now play a predominant role in the American Federation of Labor, and it is under their pressure, as well as pressure from the capitalists and the great pressure of capital invested in industry through la-

bor banks, etc. that the A. F. of L. bureaucracy is corrupted. Of the 23,000,000 industrial workers in the United States (over half of the entire population listed by the census as "gainfully employed"), the A. F. of L. has scarcely more than 2½ million organized in its ranks. Twenty million workers, the great bulk of the American workingclass, are completely unorganized and being forced to the left.

But let us even take those workers now organized in the A. F. of L. It is well known that the coal miners, particularly in the bituminous fields, have been anything but favored by prosperity, which factor accounts for the tremendous influence of the left wing in that industry. Today they are locked out in order to force a wage reduction upon them.

Neither can the organized needle workers, particularly in the East, despite slight wage increases be said to have benefitted by prosperity, as their actual working seasons have been so shortened that their average income today ranges from \$800 to \$1400 a year. Then we have the machinists, and the railroad employees within the A. F. of L. and outside, and here too prosperity talk becomes ridiculous. In addition there is the process of sectionalizing work that is constantly going on, and the efficiency schemes, etc. Indeed, the ranks of the so-called labor aristocracy are being rapidly narrowed down.

Under these circumstances to talk of bribery by prosperity, and of the labor movement moving to the right, means to have been doped by the bourgeois prosperity propaganda—a typical social-democratic reaction.

It is true that the dwindling ranks of the labor aristocracy in a few trades, can be said to "be bribed" and to be moving to the right. But the broad masses of the workingclass are being subjected to increasing, rather than decreasing exploitation. The A. F. of L. bureaucracy more and more tend to ignore these workers, and prove its acceptance of American imperialism's bribe by continuing to orientate itself on the surviving skilled mechanics. A be-paunched A. F. of L. leadership, is covered with the cloak of sanctity by erratic S. Pites—a united front between the labor-fakers and the petit-bourgeoisie—lawyers, merchants, bootleggers, and ham politicians. It is this motley crew that is rushing its forces to the right, though not by any means in unbroken ranks. It is the retreat of a minority, even inside the A. F. of L.; and its guilty confusion will serve to stimulate the rank and file of the labor movement to realization of the dangers confronting the labor movement, and to make them realize the need of following the left wing leadership, and of drawing new strength into the unions by the organization of the millions outside the unions, for whom "prosperity" means only intensified exploitation.

To A Young Poet Worried About Aesthetes

My child, the next time that you,
Feeling the weight of the class struggle
New upon your shoulders,
Come face to face with some unimportant
aesthete
Taking his pleasure with his music, rhymes
and cocktails,
Don't bother us with such things.

We are not troubled by a bourgeois conscience;
We're not afraid to enjoy music, books and art
Whenever we have time.
And meanwhile we don't give a damn
Whether your aesthete friend
Knows anything about our strikes or not.

—N. S.

Poems and Themes

Dear N. S.,

I'm sorry if I bothered you with my juvenile discovery. You may not believe me, but I had no intention whatever of doing so.

As you very wisely point out in your second stanza I was bothering myself. That is, I was troubled by what you—a hardboiled "proletarian"—are pleased to call a bourgeois conscience.

That was a year ago. Since then I have attained proletarian serenity and remain untroubled by aesthetes discussing Stravinsky over cocktails.

You may very pertinently ask me why I published the poem. The reason is this: Even tho the mood expressed in the poem is the product of a troubled bourgeois conscience and is no longer true of me, it's a pretty good poem.

But perhaps you disagree with that.

Yours for the aesthetes,

HARRY FREEMAN.

EDITOR'S NOTE: If the internecine warfare between our favorite poets continues we shall be obliged to lay down certain rules governing the conditions under which the belligerent rhymsters may be permitted to conduct their poetical polemics.

We consider it unfair in civilized warfare for a power well supplied with poison gas, mustard gas and laughing gas to use those lethal chemicals against a foe equipped only with low-powered fire crackers. We also consider it *manly* for Comrade Freeman to take advantage of his intimacy with the acting-editor of the New Magazine to hurl a deadly piece of prose at a defenseless hostile poet. Had Freeman's pros(e)ical retort been delivered by the mailman it might have never seen the light of day, but what can you do with a fellow who comes up to your desk with his concoction and while admitting his errors hands you something with which you agree?

A reformed poet to us is the sweetest thing that blows into our editorial sanctum and when you run into a poet who really admits that his poetry is worthy of publication, such a rare find should not be allowed to blush unseen.

Now boys, keep within the rules of free verse and don't sock below the eyes.

POLICE WERE PLACED IN
THE FOUR DISTRICT TO
PROTECT AND KEEP ORDER
(NEWSPAPER CAPTION)

OH JUSTICE!
HOW IMPARTIAL
AND STATELY
YOU LOOK!

