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LECTURE 1:

OUR MODERN SOCIETY AND HOW IT AROSE.

The working class is engaged in a continuous struggle, for higher wages, for better working conditions, for social security and generally for a better life for all. In this struggle the working class seeks not only to better life for itself, but it seeks to create a social order of justice, freedom prosperity, and security for all.

In order to succeed in this struggle, the workers must understand the structure of our society, how it arose, how it functions and where it is going. This study of society must be based on a scientific examination of all the experiences of humanity, so that the laws of history are clearly understood. We must not only study the past history of human society, but more particularly its present-day economics and we must carefully observe what developments and changes take place daily in our present social order. Thus we can continuously learn how to adapt the workers' struggle to the changing conditions of the times.

From the above it is clear that the study of society is necessary in order to enable us to change it, to make it into a better society.

The history of mankind is the history of movements of masses of people or groups of people. It is true that sometimes great individuals arise who profoundly influence history, but these great individuals are invariably part of the movement of masses of people and they express the desire and aspirations of people. Those who study history as if it was just a sequence of dates and names will never properly understand the laws of history. To do that we must study why people acted as they did, and how these actions further influenced society.

Society is, as the saying goes, "as old as the hills". Even when man was a savage, he lived in groups, perhaps at first only as a family, but later in tribes or in some other form of living together. This was necessary, because man found that by banding together, with others, he could protect himself better against the wild animals; he could provide better shelter against the uncertainties of the weather, he could secure more easily the food he needed, he could hunt better - in short, he could conquer nature easier for the satisfaction of his needs. Thus the prime motive of a really human society is to secure the necessities of life for each member of the society, to make life easier and better

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for each member of society and to conquer and master the forces of nature, so that they can be used for the welfare of the whole of society.

Of course, everybody knows that this is not the case with our present-day society. Even those who want to maintain "forever" the present order of things, have to admit that the distribution of the wealth of society is not a little lopsided, that there is a tremendous wealth at the one end of society (the very small end) whilst poverty and insecurity haunts the overwhelming mass of the people at the other end. These adherents of the present system usually try to justify it by such phrases as "there have always been poor and rich", of "the poor have always been with us".

That saying is quite untrue. In the earliest form of human society, scientifically known as "primitive communism" there was no such thing as "rich and poor". Whatever the society wrested from nature, belonged to the whole of society and was shared by all the members of society. It is true that under "primitive communism" man led a very tough sort of life. Life was hard and dangerous, food was hard to obtain, shelter and clothing was very primitive. That was due to the fact that man had not yet learned to improve his tools with which he could hunt better, or build better, or clothe himself better - in other words his means of producing the necessities of life were still very backward. Nevertheless, the fact remains that whatever food or shelter he managed to wrest from wild nature belonged equally to the whole of society and was shared by all of them equally.

However, soon man's ingenuity helped him to improve his methods of getting his living from nature. He began to develop tools and weapons, which are in effect nothing more than extensions of man's senses and limbs. For instance, the invention of the spear helped man to reach out to the wild animal without being too close himself. In other words, the spear was an extension of his arm. When the wheel was invented, man was able to extend his legs, as it were.

Each time there was such a new development in the means of production, there was also a change in the relationship of men to each other. The owner or inventor of the particular new means of production would assume a dominant position in relationship to the other member of society. Thus we have the creation of classes, i.e. groups of people in society who make their living by the same

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methods, (For instance, the workers in capitalist society make their living by selling their labour power to the capitalists, whilst the capitalists make their living by exploiting the labour power of the workers. Of course, there can be no comparison between the two types of "living").

Ever since there have been classes in society, there has also been a continuous struggle between them. In fact, the whole of recorded human history is a history of class struggles, with one class overthrowing another and taking domination to itself. These class struggles and the victory of one class over another have always followed on the development of new productive powers. As soon as these productive powers could not be fully utilised under the domination of one class, the class which controlled the new means of production forcibly overthrew the old class which stood in its way. The new ruling class then proceeded to introduce its own new social order, with its own new type of government, its own laws and its own institutions.

The capitalist class in our own modern society arose in exactly such a manner and at one time it was the revolutionary class in history. When the old structure of Feudalism, in which the lords owning the land were the rulers, began to hinder the development of capitalist productive forces, the capitalists forcibly and by revolutionary means overthrew the powers of the feudal landlords and established their own capitalist rule and society. The capitalists then abolished all privileges of the old ruling class and instead introduced their own.

What we have just said in a few brief words only covers this vast subject very superficially. It is really a study in its own, but unfortunately, our time is short and we must limit this study course to the things which we need immediately in our struggle to build our Trade Union Movement. But a good trade union leader should make it his business to understand our past history well.

In capitalist society we have classes, just as there were in the previous social systems. Briefly these classes are:-

- 1) The working class or proletariat.
- 2) The capitalist class.
- 3) The peasantry.
- 4) The Middle class.

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Let us analyse the role of these classes and their relationship to the productive process and to each other.

THE WORKING CLASS: This class owns no means of production, excepting its own labour power. It is compelled in order to live, to sell this labour power to the owners of the means of production, the capitalist class. Without the labour power of the working class, the means of production, i.e. machines, factories, transport, etc., are so much dead stuff. With the workers' hands the means of production become alive and produce wealth. The working class is engaged in a constant struggle against the capitalists for a higher price for its own labour, for better working conditions, for more security of jobs. Ultimately, the workers find that they cannot secure lasting improvements and security under capitalist conditions of production and that they must themselves take over control of the means of production.

THE CAPITALIST CLASS: This is the class which in our present society owns the means of production, the machines, raw materials, factories, means of transport, etc. etc. These means of production are the result of labour of past generations of workers. (In some cases of the very great capitalist concerns, the foundation for their wealth was laid many decades ago by means of the slave trade, by piracy, by cheating and robbery in the course of usurious trading with distant backward countries). Although the capitalists own the means of production, they do not themselves take part in the productive process, but hire workers to do this. The capitalists constantly endeavour to get the labour power of the workers for as little as possible, because that way the workers produce greater surplus value from which the capitalists derive their profits. If as a result of organisation the workers succeed in raising rates of pay, then the capitalists try to get a high rate of surplus value by other means, such as longer working hours, improved production processes by which production per worker is raised, bonus schemes and motion study schemes (such as the infamous Bedaux system etc.) Thus capitalist interests are always opposed to the interests of the workers and there is a bitter struggle going on all the time between these two classes and their opposing interests. In addition, however, the capitalists are also engaged in a continuous struggle against each other, for each capitalist can only survive in fierce competition against his fellow capitalists, in a continuous drive for a bigger portion of the market.

/THE PEASANTRY.....

THE PEASANTRY: This is the large section of the population that lives off the land. ( It does not include the rich farmers who belong to the capitalist class, nor the agricultural workers who belong to the working class). It includes the large mass of poor farmers, who own small pieces of land, or squat on pieces of land hired to them by rich farmers on certain conditions, (sometimes against the supply of free labour). This class is engaged in production of food, but in capitalist market conditions have to wage a continuous losing struggle against the big agricultural capitalists, who amongst other things constantly endeavour to deprive the "free" peasant of his land, so as to turn him into an agricultural labourer compelled to work for the boss for wages.

THE MIDDLE CLASS: This includes the large mass of people, who are neither capitalists nor workers, such as small independent craftsmen (shoemakers, tailors, etc.) small shopkeepers, hawkers, lawyers, doctors, brokers, agents, teachers, etc. etc. Some of these own means of production, but work them themselves or with the help of only one or two hired workers. Some are thus themselves engaged in small scale productive efforts, but others are just hangers-on on the fringe of the capitalist machine. The capitalist drive for an increased share of the market restricts more and more the small independent craftsman until he cannot compete any longer and is forced to give up his "independence" and to sell his labour to the big capitalist. (He becomes a member of the working class).

In capitalist society there is another group of people, who cannot be really called a class, as they stand in no relationship to the productive process. These are the so-called lumpen-proletariat, which consists of criminals, illicit liquor sellers, prostitutes, gangsters, people who live on their wits. They are the dregs of society, often forced into this position by the merciless conditions of capitalism which needs a reserve army of unemployed to keep wages down. This forces many people into degraded ways of making a living, which often becomes their permanent mode of life.

From the above picture, it will be seen that the basis for changing the capitalist mode of production to a better system already exists in the class relationships. There is already in existence the new class which in its own interests must wrest the means of production from the old class and must establish a new social order. This new class must have three important qualifications in order to be able successfully to achieve its historic mission -

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It must:

- a) have nothing to lose from a change-over, but everything to gain, i.e. it must be a revolutionary class.
- b) be a productive class, for it is not enough to destroy the old - the new has to be built;
- c) be able to act together in large numbers, in an organised and disciplined fashion.

Which of the classes in capitalist society fulfil these requirements. Let us examine them and give them a plus (+) if they have this quality, and a minus ( - ) if they lack it.

CLASS.	REVOLUTIONARY.	PRODUCTIVE.	ORGANISED.
WORKING CLASS.	+	+	+
CAPITALIST CLASS.	-	-	-
PEASANTRY.	+	+	-
MIDDLE CLASS.	-	ƒ +	-
LUMPEN PROLETARIAT.	ƒ +	-	-

ƒ As we have seen some of the middle classes are productive. The lumpenproletariat have nothing to lose from a change-over, but as they are neither productive nor capable of discipline or organisation, they are usually irresponsible, unreliable and anarchistic.

It is clear from the above chart that the working class has the noble historic role of transforming society. Its closest ally in this struggle is the peasantry, whilst the middle class and lumpenproletariat are wavering and unstable. The last two may become firm allies, as the workers' struggle intensifies and nears success. On the other hand the capitalist class remain opponents of any change to the bitter end.

What kind of society is the working class aiming to establish? Will it again be a society, where one class will dominate others?

No that can no longer be. Our modern means of production are so advanced and so highly developed that they can no longer be adequately controlled and utilised by any individual class, but must ultimately pass to social ownership and control. This must lead to a society where the means of production are owned by society as a whole and where every member of society is in one form or another engaged in the productive process. The continuously

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developing technique of production, and the great sources of ingenuity and talent which will be released in such a society, will ultimately ensure a life of plenty and security for every member of society.

Thus the workers' struggle is in the interests not only of their own class, but of humanity, as a whole. Unlike previous revolutionary classes, the working class aims to abolish all domination by man over man.

How will the working class achieve this aim?

Firstly, by becoming conscious of its historic role, i.e. by gaining knowledge in the struggle and by realising, in the struggle, its own strength.

Secondly, by unity and organisation.

The working class develops many forms of organisation in the struggle. Sometimes workers form mutual aid societies, co-operatives, trade unions. The latter is the most common form of mass organisation of the workers and in this study course we shall occupy ourselves predominantly with it. We shall try to learn how to form a trade union, how to build it and how to utilise it in the general struggle of the working class.

But in addition to this kind of mass organisation, the working class must produce its own independent political party. This is a new kind of political party, the kind of party that will not so much be concerned with winning elections and seats in parliament, but will concern itself with the struggle of the working class for emancipation.

Such a political party must consist of the best and most sincere members of the working class, of leaders who are the most advanced and most class conscious amongst the fellow workers, who at the same time are prepared to devote their whole life to the noblest of all ideals, the emancipation of the whole of mankind.

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**TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961**

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