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Juvenile Delinquency

We hear a great deal about youthful delinquency these days and the old folks are much concerned, as well they might be, for the reports of the children's "antics" are not just so many fairy tales. Numbers of them commit acts of vandalism such as the burning and destroying of school houses, stealing of cars, looting of stores; their use of narcotics, sexual looseness and general depravity are indeed shocking and it seems almost impossible to control them.

The reason for such laxness can be traced to our way of life — the every-one-for-himself way. This entails the mass production of goods for sale and for use in wars with the consequent interruption of family and home life because both mother and father are working to turn out both the more innocent type of commodity and the sinews of international murder. In the meantime children are left to look after themselves and many of them spend a good deal of their time at the movies where they assimilate viewpoints which are often much at variance with the facts of life but which help to produce a frame of mind calculated to be favorable toward the present system. Leisure time, spent in healthy channels can lead only to the development of natural abilities and character, even under capitalism. The type of leisure-time activity which is so often indulged in by the youngsters of our modern stream-lined era, however, is quite apt to get them into mischief.

Despite the generally relative high state of employment and the vaunted high American pay-check, a large percentage of workers still must live in squalid tenements in the cities, while many more herd together in the desolate and cheerless trailer camps—slums on wheels they might be called. This type of existence in itself is enough to frustrate many a child for life. Is a child brought up in an uncongenial manner any more liable to turn out as a person of character than is a mistreated puppy to grown into a worth-while dog? Chain a young dog; tease it; starve it and feed it the wrong kind of food when one does feed it and we know what the result will be. Yet this is just what is being done in so many instances with young children. They are brought up in the wrong environment, given the wrong food, frustrated in most of their legitimate desires and given no proper outlet for their boundless energies.

Much more attention, for example, could be given to the schools. They could be made so interesting and filled with lively and varied tasks along with the required book-learning that one could not keep the children away and there would be little need for truancy laws to force their attendance at classes. It is said that in Chicago officers, looking for truants, are sometimes apt to find some of them in the Field Museum. The schools could undoubtedly be equipped so as to provide the children with a variety of interests such as can be found in a museum, but the rule under capitalism seems to be to provide the children with compulsory education to a degree requisite to the normal carrying-on of the capitalist system. This much and no more, lest too many new-fangled methods of teaching result in a working class that can *think*. There cannot be too much expected in this direction so long as capitalism exists, and consequently the problem of juvenile delinquency tends to increase despite all efforts by the authorities to lessen it.

On the other hand, what can be expected of the children when the parents themselves are far from setting the type of example they wish to see in their offspring. The kids are sent off to Sunday School where they learn the Commandments, and are told that this Code is our guide to good conduct and if followed will keep us out of jail, make good citizens of us etc. After a few sessions, however, they might start to wonder why their parents pay no attention to these precepts. They may discover that father and mother have worked out some neat methods in foiling the bill collectors, gypping the Internal Revenue Dept., "fixing" the police in traffic violations, even acting quite frequently in a very unsocial manner with little regard for the rights or feelings of others. Which raises the question, who are really the delinquents?

What is it that makes us so brutish and unsocial toward one another? A little thought given to the way of life which has been so frequently declared to be the last word in social relations should give us the answer. These upholders of the status-quo of course are always willing to admit the need for corrections and reforms here and there. The good congressmen and other law-makers of our society never rest from the task of adding to the laws of the nation; enacting every kind of social legislation that they believe may do away with some of the evil effects of their system. Lecturers and other types of reformers also put their shoulders to the wheel and exhort their delinquent audiences to behave—but with little success, which is perhaps not so bad after all for the professional exhorters as it provides them with a never-ending source of employment.

And so, we find still rampant in society, hostility between "races" and religions; a constant clash between wage-workers and employers over wages and working conditions; a lack of affection between landlords and tenants while even within the propertied class and within the working class we look in vain for signs of harmony, the harmony which is so difficult to achieve so long as we must compete with one another for our daily needs. Nor are all members of society treated alike by the law. Small transgressors are apt to get severe penalties for their paltry misdemeanors while those with wealth and influence, with more finesse in their dealings and stealings are treated more gently. In many instances they receive a slap on the wrist, or at the very worst, a fine which they can well afford and a comparatively light if not suspended sentence.

The fact that our shameless conduct toward one another is caused by the struggle over the products turned out by the working class — laborers, superintendents, draftsmen, machinists, carpenters etc., would seem to indicate that there is no answer under the capitalist system to the solution of delinquency or of the unbridled savagery we sometimes display toward our fellowmen. However, consider the solution offered by the socialists who maintain that more than enough of the things that make life worth living can be now produced, with present techniques of industry, not even taking into consideration the many labor saving discoveries and inventions that are locked up in vaults and kept out of circulation because the capitalist system can not absorb them. Atomic power, so terribly destructive in its present uses and so revolutionary in