THE ROLE OF THE SCIENTIST

It is an anomaly of modern society that science, which could contribute much to the welfare and happiness of mankind, creates, more often than not, the very things which add to human unhappiness, insecurity and suffering.

What then of the scientists? Are they inhuman monsters relishing the spectacle of increased unemployment brought on by their mechanical creation, or gloating over the destructiveness of their atom bombs, etc., Or are their inventions the outcome of some force behind the scenes?

Let us see whether examination will throw light upon the role of the scientist in the social order of today.

We live in a society split into two classes — the Capitalist class, and the working class. The former, through its ownership of the land, mines, factories, railways, etc., exploits the labour power of the working class in the production of commodities. Masses of commodities are acquired, but cannot bring a profit until they are sold. Individual Capitalists, therefore, must see that their commodities are on sale at prices which bring profit, but, at the same time, are at least as low as the commodity prices of their rivals. Thus we find the Capitalists endeavouring to keep production costs at a minimum by keeping down or reducing wages.

From a Capitalist viewpoint, however, this measure has a disadvantage. Wages cannot profitably be reduced below the level which maintains in the workers a satisfactory standard of working fitness. The Capitalist class, then, finds itself finally reliant upon an alternative course — that of introducing machinery which will reduce the amount of labour time spent upon the commodities produced. Thus we find Capitalists competing with each other to introduce machinery which will appreciably lower their production costs and keep their commodities at competitive prices. Only mechanisation will ensure for the Capitalists the retention or expansion of markets, and the consequent high demand for machinery here and overseas brings rich rewards to the owners. On the other hand, inventions that would benefit mankind but would do nothing towards maintaining or increasing profits, are, by comparison, unsaleable.

Inventors and scientists, therefore are faced with the fact that only the ideas beneficial to Capitalism are acceptable. Small wonder that these are the ideas upon which scientists, in the main have to concentrate.

And what of when Capitalist competition overflows national boundaries and becomes a case of each nationalistic entity competing against the Capitalism of other countries? What of when the struggle for markets, trade routes, and sources of raw material inevitably ends in war?

It is then that the most urgent need of sectional Capitalism is that its own nationalistic entity should survive against the Capitalism of other countries. It is then that the individualistic competition within the opposing countries is temporarily abandoned and every muscle is strained to achieve a greater task for national Capitalism —i.e., to win the war.

The fruits of science most needed by Capitalism thus change from industrial machinery to weapons of destruction and the machines that will manufacture such weapons. Only these things will now be in high demand.

In this manner we find that scientists, in order to live, must resort to the creation of things which either throw many workers out of employment, or intensify the horrors of modern war.

Nor does nationalisation prevent this. Nationalised industries, like private concerns, run for the purpose of making profits and must therefore adopt every possible measure to achieve that end. Moreover, countries wherein nationalisation exist still find that the functioning of Capitalism inevitably drives them into periodic wars. Consequently they are forced to use all the hideous means of killing and destruction entailed in waging war.

Not until Capitalism is replaced by socialism, an order of society wherein there could be no such things as commodities, buying and selling, markets, etc., will scientists cease to be restricted by the question: "Will our discoveries be profitable to Capitalism?" The only question facing them within socialism will be: "Will the things we create benefit mankind?"

F. W. HAWKINS, S.P.G.B.

Soviet Payola

(From an article, "Bosses in the 'Workers' State'" in the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union Record, Sept. 11, 1960.)

In this country we've come to call influence peddling "payola"; the Russian term for it is "blat." With minor variations, the techniques are the same in Kharkov as in Chicago...

To help short-cut and undercut the system of supply, Red bosses use black market-type expediters called "tolkachi." These jobs are not listed as such on the plant's payroll, but, according to Berliner,* Russian management "somehow" provides employment for them.

How Russians Get Payola

How do they operate? Here's Berliner's description:

"The chief job of the expediter is to make sure that his enterprise gets the materials it needs when it needs them. Accordingly he spends most of his time on the road, visiting his enterprise's suppliers, handing out little gifts here and there to assure that his orders are well handled, picking up supplies of one kind or another that his firm may be able to use or trade for other goods. Much of their activity is associated with the black market, that is, obtaining materials for which no allocation order has been issued...To keep the record clean, they are carried on the books as 'senior buyer' or 'supply agent.' If they are known to be particularly expert at this work they may be asked by other firms to represent them. Nothing is known of their incomes, but there is no doubt they earn many times their base pay."

Nor do the tolkachi deal in small potatoes. Izvestia (April 4, 1959) reported the case of the expediter who was sent by his firm to pick up some tires. He was given 62,000 rubles for his trip; spent 42,000 of it for gifts. That's about $10,500 worth of payola for the privilege of buying $5,000 worth of tires. Perhaps he was wallowing in too much vodka or was downright careless; at any rate that blat peddler was caught and imprisoned...hence the news story.

* "Factory and Manager in the U.S.S.R. by Joseph Berliner."

Verbal Shots Hit Marxmen

"Spittoon philosophers" got a tongue lashing Thursday night for telling people to spoil their ballots in the Sept. 12 election.

Vancouver East CCF MP Harold Winch lit into a group which calls itself "the Socialist Party of Canada" and claims nine members in Victoria.

They aren't CCFers, they aren't Communists, they say. They call themselves "true Marxists." They set up outside Douglas Hall Thursday night, distributed pamphlets and told voters to spoil their ballots as none of the parties is any good.

"They should be ashamed to call themselves socialists," said Mr. Winch.

Tearing up or spoiling a ballot was a denial of centuries of struggle.

These "socialists" don't have any candidates, they just talk, said Mr. Winch.

"A true socialist is a person of action."

Report in the Victoria Daily Times 8-26-60 These "Marxmen" hit their target and it stung!