HUMAN NEEDS AND HUMAN WANTS

THE physical needs of man are few—food and fuel, clothes and dwelling place. His wants are as many as his desires.

The weakness of capitalism is that it neglects the needs and continually ministers to the wants; seeking to gratify every whim, wholesome or unwholesome, that the natural man confesses. Why this is so can be seen without difficulty.

The aim of the capitalist—and by the capitalist we mean the managing director of companies and amalgamation of companies—is to secure profits for the payment of interest to the people who have lent him money; that is to the shareholders. Our captains of industry do not ask, "Is this needful?" but "Will it pay?" when some fresh venture is proposed. Nor do our captains of industry, our ennobled and knightly masters of big business, consider whether the toil of tending, year in, year out, machines for the production of trivial luxuries is employment worthy of a Christian man. It is compulsory labour; the machine-minder is free to starve if he declines the job. (Indeed thousands are thankful for this employment, so thankful that positive gratitude is expressed, for permission to endure the monotony of the factory, sure of a regular wage. No wonder, too, when they are married, with wife and children and some measure of domestic happiness dependent on the weekly wage, that thankfulness is expressed.)

Capitalism is no more concerned with the worthwhileness of the workman's job than with the utility of the article produced for sale. By its very nature capitalism must seek to persuade us to buy novelties, to get the habit of buying things not at first seen as necessary till in course of time we have turned the luxury into a necessity. The advertiser and canvasser persuade us that what we were doing very well without is really indispensable to our well being; and at the expense of our very needs we indulge the imagined want. The house to house canvasser bent on getting customers for a newspaper he despises or for an article he will never use is,

perhaps, in a more unhappy state than the machine tender in the factory. The alternative for the canvasser is starvation and he pleads, as the shareholder living on interest pleads, as the compiler of attractive advertisements pleads, that he must live.

The two more obvious examples of the gratified desire transformed into habit are the motor car and the motor cycle. (But let the reader count up the number of things that in the last fifty years have achieved—for better, for worse—a place in our weekly expenditure.) Motor car and motor cycle are as necessary to-day for the country doctor and the country clergyman, Catholic priest or Anglican parson, as were the horse and trap for an earlier generation. The convenience of car and cycle when many miles must be covered in the day's work is not to be disputed. But the motor car and the motor cycle, bought and maintained for the sheer pleasure of joy rides, increase in numbers and inevitably the cost of these desires must be met by self-denial in other matters. (However if people left off buying motor cars what would become of the ancient University of Oxford and other richly-endowed places of education that did somehow manage to drag out a precarious existence before motor cars were invented?)

The aim of the capitalist is profit; the end of capitalism is not the satisfaction of common human needs but the sale of products. And while in dulcet, or raucous tones it cries "Buy this" or screams at us to eat more, drink more, clothe ourselves in every variety of strange raiment, capitalism is continually depressing the condition of the workman by finding a machine that looked after by one man will do the work of ten, or in many cases will get rid of employment altogether. Capitalism, for ever trying to lower the costs of production by reducing wages or using more machinery, calls on us to raise our standard of comfort by spending more; at the same time always insisting that our wages must be kept down. We are to buy more the less we have to buy it with—which seems absurd.

The concern of the capitalist for profit and his indifference

to human needs may be observed in the multiplication of cinemas and the lack of dwelling places. There is money in the cinema, dividends for shareholders; there is it appears no money in housebuilding, or not enough to pay dividends. Incidentally there is no "housing problem" as it is called for wealthy people. They build wherever the fancy takes them, erecting their desirable mansions all over the Cotswolds, holding no place sacred where money can have its way. And there is no doubt it pays the builder to carry out their plans. Private enterprise is eminently successful—for the wants of the rich; there is nothing it won't do if you have money to pay for it. But private enterprise is not robust enough to build houses for the poor.

Capitalism, the child of private enterprise, in its turn assists the private enterprise whence it came.

The need for human habitation, for dwelling houses to replace the shameful one room tenements, the horribly overcrowded slum lodgings of town and country—rural housing conditions in no way better than urban—is not met by capitalism with its private enterprise. The overcrowded tenement is a rich housing property to the private landlord who will be handsomely compensated when a slum clearance is ordered.

Co-operative enterprise, the levying of a general rate by county council or district council is required when dwelling houses must be built for the satisfaction of human needs. (Often enough the private landlord is happy to get rid of tenants from the tumble-down, but highly picturesque country cottage. He will be able to find a purchaser with money who will put the place in order, and refashion it with all modern improvements as a week-end retreat.)

It used to be acclaimed, or denounced, as "socialism" this co-operative municipal enterprise that built houses because the private enterprise of capitalism failed to supply the demand. Nowadays men and women of good will of all political parties are agreed that houses are necessary and refuse to be hindered from their duty to their neighbour by talk of "socialism."

Even more remarkable than the willingness to support co-operative enterprise in housing is the positive enthusiasm for public libraries displayed by some of the sternest critics and stoutest opponents of "socialism" and "communism." The public library of town and country is obvious "socialism." The common rate supports it, public authority controls it and appoints its officers. The reader is not required to go before the local public assistance committee and plead that he cannot afford to buy his weekly dose of fiction and must be given it free. Sheer "socialism"—but it doesn't clash with the private enterprise of the book-selling trade and is by now a recognised amenity. As for the newspaper room in the public library this is open to all, ratepayer and non-ratepayer alike. What is that but "communism"?

Yet if books and newspapers are allowed to all who ask for them, without any application of means test or other degrading attendance before public assistance committee, why not bread and boots, clothing and coals? First things first. It would seem more reasonable that "socialism"—or whatever we prefer to name it—should attend to houses and food, fuel and raiment before organising the admirable public libraries and supply of free novels—not forgetting the graver works of serious authors—up and down the land. The anti-communist and anti-socialist might well devote their energies to extending the principle of the free public library, demanding of our county councils the public bakery, the municipal coal yard and clothing factory. (How many of us know the conditions of the tailoring trade?)

Capitalism declines to supply common needs because its reward is in many inventions. Let anti-socialist and anti-communist recognise the failure of capitalism and join in co-operative action for the ending of starvation—thousands of men, women and children are still underfed though food abounds—and the release from destitution. Verbal denunciation of "communism" by those who are doing nothing to assist a better social order, who cling to capitalism, dividends and all the rest of the money-lending

business, naturally invites the suggestion that the anti-communist cry is not entirely disinterested. In fact the capitalist exploits anti-communism all the time. It is capitalism in danger that arouses strong feelings, and many who live on dividends can see no other way of living if capitalism disappears. (Yet it is but a growth of a few centuries at the utmost this capitalism and already its failings are conspicuous.)

Capitalism, by making profit its end, not only fails to meet our common human needs, it panders to the desire for gain, fosters the acquisitive spirit and perverts the natural instinct for self-preservation beyond all bearing. Mutual aid has proved over and over again more serviceable to man than the "get rich quickly or get rich slowly but anyway get rich" catechism of the individualist. When our common necessities are secure there will be leisure to attend to our private wants. Producing to supply common needs by co-operative enterprise we shall at least get rid of the class struggle between labour and capital, the struggle for the division of profits between wage-earner and investor, and we shall in some measure mitigate the discomforts of modern industrial life. Still, capitalism does provide an immense number of entirely useless things, and it allows us to buy all manner of cheap and shoddy goods (no, "ills" rather than "goods") that fashion prompts, so that we can ruffle it with the best, at small expense. Alas! also it clothes the ministers at our altars and decorates our churches with inferior, shamefully inferior, examples of ecclesiastical commercial art.

But the multiplication of useless and quite unbeautiful machine-made articles does not really promote the Kingdom of God and the justice of God. Neither does it extend the peace of Christ. It is doubtful if it even strengthens the cause of anti-communism.

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