

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Transition and the right to well-being

Albert Meltzer

Albert Meltzer
Transition and the right to well-being
April 1981

Retrieved on 19th May 2021 from www.katesharpleylibrary.net
Published in *Black Flag : Organ of the Anarchist Black Cross*
v.6,no.7 (April 1981).

theanarchistlibrary.org

April 1981

Contents

Transition	5
Consequences of defeat	6
Why unemployment	7

versal. Not just for the famous, or the rich, or the well connected; not just for the proletariat or for all those who work – but *all*.

Since the major advance in technology has meant that there is not enough work for all to do, the solution lies in reducing the amount of work we do, and extending the amount of leisure that we have, and balancing work and leisure, so that work is not a punishment and leisure is not a bore. The fact that no governments of whatever hue, and no States of whatever economic background, wish to achieve this, does not mean that we cannot nevertheless insist on our basic human right to share in *well-being*. The sooner this is realised the better, for even though it needs a complete revolution, the moment this is appreciated [it] colours our attitudes. No one need be ashamed of asking for “too much” when they know we have been deprived of everything, nor regard a mystical “social welfare” and moderate their demands accordingly.

Everything is ours, the government creates nothing. We have the right to live well. The State has no right to exist but force.

It is a deliberate lie to say that we are in the grip of a *recession*, which is a temporary slump in trade, part of the ebb and flow of normality.

This does not describe the economic situation in Great Britain nor that prevailing in most of the capitalist nations. It is pure governmental propaganda to suggest that it is; and all the slogans of getting the Tories out, “ditch the bitch” and the like are an attempt to trivialise and personalise the issue. It is not Mrs Thatcher’s lack of compassion or dogmatic errors that are responsible for the present slump. She could, as the previous Labour governments did, direct the economy in such a way that the nature of the unemployment crisis is overlooked. Labour governments became adept at cosmetic surgery and also, to do them justice, introduced or permitted to continue what one might call first-aid measures to help the casualties of economic crisis. These are now cut because they are clearly cosmetic and therefore “uneconomic”.

But Labour politicians accepted, and made a great national saga of, the theory that there is an inevitable ebb and flow of world trade, the crisis theory of economics that balances the conspiracy theory of politics. It is untrue. This is not a recession but a transition.

Transition

The capitalist world is undergoing a major change similar to economic revolutions of the past, which have displaced class after class. Now it is the working class who are being displaced. They are losing the right to work. It is not that there is a temporary lull in work: the need for work is disappearing. Technology has displaced the need for many human hands before and is doing so still. What we now see is the whole of heavy industry vanishing, whole towns and regions made redundant – not just in the industrial sense either. It is a problem of “what to do with the people”, which States have often on their hands – which criminal Statism often deals with by

genocide but which less totalitarian regimes have to settle by evasive measures. There are now whole regions which the State may as well write off as no longer being financially viable. The work of keeping industry going falls into fewer and fewer hands. The industrial proletariat as such is vanishing. Under rising capitalism an expanding work force was essential, and it had power in its hands: it lost its opportunity to take over and is now paying the price.

It was always possible under rising capitalism for an increasing number of the work force employed in industry to think of itself as “middle class” socially because it once had, and in many cases still has, social advantages – not getting their hands dirty, or getting paid holidays and sickness when these were not general – which have now dwindled solely to having had further educational facilities, but with the same ability to be turned on the dustbin as anyone else – their social advantages reduced to being able to get a better grasp of the small print in DHSS circulars.

Consequences of defeat

The working class movement was defeated long ago, or taken over by others. It has collectively no more idea of what has hit it than any of the social classes dispossessed in the past and most of the protests that have arisen have been diverted into pointless political demands with the only coherent one “the right to work”. A pathetic slogan: The right to work is the right to be exploited; it is the right to be slaves, (which the government does not deny). It is the right not to be subjected to genocide, the logical outcome of redundancy for a class: which is certainly an important right, but surely we have a long way to come to that? The opposite of the right to work – the right to drop out and stagnate – is equally destructive: that is the right to accept what the State propose, capable of realisation, since no government will object to it!

Why unemployment

The capitalist countries face unemployment and “recessions” and not communist countries for a simple reason: the uninhibited free market (to which the Tory Government is devoted) means there is no economic necessity for the people who have been displaced by the technological progress of the twentieth century.

They have therefore to be pushed out of meaningful productive jobs into the “digging holes and filling them in” type of toil, upon which governments, according to the degree of human feeling prevalent, may make variations. (One of the main ones, for instance, is the huge growth of the university industry, not to spread education, or to provide a better educated workforce, but humanely to reduce unemployment and incidentally to brainwash and condition).

The totalitarian countries are able to plan ahead and utilise their workforce as they wish. No need to use the lever of unemployment, or face union opposition through putting workers out of their homes or into jobs far below those for which they have trained. The work force there is like an army and it goes where it is put. There is no point in unemployment, all that is done is to alter the categories when putting them through the educational stage and planning for the future – fewer industrial workers, more psychiatrists; more manual jobs, more servile jobs and less skilled work for the period ten years ahead. In fact (like it or not) unemployment shows the democratic side of capitalism, not its dictatorial side; for in dictatorships there is no unemployment since people are set to work as the government requires. This does not alter the fact that unemployment is a major social evil, but the alternative is not the right to work but *the right to well-being*.

If the community advances all are responsible – if we are not now in the conditions of the Middle ages everyone has contributed in one way or another to what is, and the right to well-being is uni-