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Illegal Work – The Racial Holocaust

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Try to imagine the hidden holocaust within these statistics: 300,00 prostituted children in Thailand, half of them HIV positive; 20 million bonded labourers, many in debt slavery after the third generation; 750,00 child carpetworkers in South Asia, many considered slaves under international law; 4500 abused overseas domestic workers, kicked, starved and sexually assaulted behind the doors of the rich. Many of these people are exploited because they are culturally or ethnically 'inferior' to the dominant class they are subjugated, bought, brutalised by mafia type gangsters, generals and profiteers throughout the world. Capitalism has always had as a main feature the severe exploitation of workers through sweated labour. This form of labour is only possible where the workers are isolated by culture, language or illegal status and was suffered by immigrant workers in the US in the 19th Century (for example) as much as by Bengali women in the textile industry today. Throughout its history racism has justified and been intensified by such exploitation. There are four main types of exploitative labour threatening the working class. They are Slavery, Debt Bondage,

Child Labour & Prostitution and Servile Marriage. How extensive is such exploitation and what is the reality of exploitation ?

Slavery is a common and traditional feature of many African societies. In Mauretania for instance, the dominant Maures keep slaves from both the black ethnic groups and Black Maures the officially free descendants of slaves who form the majority population. Culture, tradition, poverty, illiteracy and the lack of strong indigenous resistance perpetuate the trade in slaves and child abduction into slavery. Often religion sanctions slavery. In South India children are 'dedicated' to a god and afterwards can be bought by the temple priests who then have the right to their sexual favours or immediately sell them into prostitution. Where culture, ancient tradition and religion combine it becomes impossible for people to avoid or resist such slavery and every hand is turned against them if they flee or protest.

Only when they cease to have an economic or sexual value do they regain their freedom. But this only leads to a less intense but still murderous form of exploitation. As the drought in the Sahara spreads, masters are freeing slaves they cannot afford but they are forced into rural and urban slums where a relentless struggle for life goes on. Even as free people their names and traditions mark them and they are subject to severe discrimination in education, social life and work without democratic or civil rights they remain subject to exploitation by masters, landholders and moneylenders all their lives. Possibly worse are the countries where an armed and oppressive regime (for instance China) imprison political prisoners and protesters and use them as forced labour in enterprises owned by members of the ruling class. As 'criminals' stripped of all their rights, hidden in rural farms and factories, their exploited labour fuels the economic advance of developing countries and entrenches a culture of repression and exploitation.

Probably by far the worst form of exploitation because it is both widespread and vicious is Debt Bondage. Debt Bondage is where a person pledges their labour in return for a loan. Millions of people worldwide are forced into debt as a result of bad harvests or price slumps (themselves a consequence of capitalism) and then intimidated by local mafias into selling themselves

For their children. Often illiterate, not only are such people paid a pittance but the employer charges extortionate rates for accommodation, food or 'services' so that the debt goes on growing. This vicious system is often sanctioned by religious law and tradition (for instance in Pakistan and India where 16m are in Debt Bondage) but is often fuelled by racism and profit (for instance in Brazil where poor farm workers are recruited into labour camps by the promise of good pay, are cheated and imprisoned by armed guards until they work off their debt or escape. The exploiters target the poorest members of oppressed and minority communities and many millions of people are born into Debt Bondage. Capitalism first causes poverty and then creates the conditions in which governments and the boss class can sanction and profit from such exploited labour.

Servile Marriage is another form of mass exploitation. Women are forced into early marriages, become the exclusive property of their husband, and are then threatened with violence by the husband, his family or society at large should they try to leave. In such a situation, the labour of millions of women is a commodity that the husband exploits either domestically (where the woman must prove herself a 'good person' by unremitting labour) or outside the family (in sweatshop factories or as domestic labour for rich patrons). The employer knows that social custom will sanction his exploitation. In numerous cultures the family of the woman feels disgrace if she flees her situation and will not take her back. It is not uncommon for both families to approve the murder of such wretches and the law to sanction the act or apply a small fine.

Her social worth is solely defined by her subservience and willingness to be exploited. Millions of women suffer health problems, physical and sexual abuse, violence and murder because they are seen as property, commodities with a right to life only so long as they remain socially valuable.

Child Labour and Prostitution is now reaching epidemic proportions and will intensify as a result of the removal of trade barriers following the Uruguay GATT agreements this year. Moral outrage and fear of competition from sweated labour is beginning to affect the agendas of the world leaders but the scale of the problem and the mobility of capital will inevitably result in only partial solutions. The worst exploitation is of the children of marginalised groups such as former slave groups, indigenous people, migrants or untouchables. Such oppressed people provide a valuable source of cheap and compliant labour. Again, India, Pakistan and Nepal are areas where upto 800,000 children work in the carpet industry alone. Many children begin work at the age of six and seven, suffer damage to their eyesight and lungs and are physically isolated from their families and society at large. They receive very low wages and often have to pay for food and lodging or their parents are charged massive interest on loans advanced to them. In Indonesia, with its murderous regime, the ILO estimates that 6.5m children between 7 and 15 are at work, a figure that excludes child domestic labour. So much for the 'economic miracle' of the Pacific Rim countries.

Prostituted children is where the greed and sexual egoism caused by capitalism combine to create a sick trade in gratification. In just four countries in SE Asia it is estimated that there are 150,000 child prostitutes, most of them working in brothels and clubs serving tourists from Europe, Australasia, Japan and North America, so called civilised nations. Governments frequently turn a blind eye to a trade that keeps rural populations with large families from mass poverty and encourages tourism. The physical and psychological damage to these children is ig-

nored, especially as self mutilation, servility and excessive fear of authority is no threat to the future of their control.

Such exploitation is not far away, the exclusive burden of illiterate minorities under repressive regimes. Racism is a means towards capitalist exploitation. Wherever there is capitalism, such systems will appear and, if unchecked by libertarian forces, spread. For instance, a police raid in Los Angeles discovered an illegal garment factory where 72 Thai workers had been held against their will in a compound surrounded by razor wire and forced to work an 18 hour day for \$2 an hour. Nearer to home, two 13 year olds in Manchester were conned by the offer of good wages into sneaking out of school and working for a local telesales company. Ten minutes late one morning they were sacked, marched to the door and turfed out without being paid a single penny. So far, neither local unions, the police, courts, Council or any of the other so called civilised protections we have against child exploitation have brought the company to book.

In order to power their economic expansion and go on satisfying the West's demand for cheaper and cheaper goods, the ruling classes and bosses of Majority World countries will go on intensifying their exploitation of workers and rural peoples. They will use racial and religious differences, social degradation and repressive laws to sanction and perpetuate slavery and illegal work. Such exploitation is carried out by the entrepreneurs of the middle and lower classes but sanctioned by the ruling classes. The economic benefit it brings is the bond that ties them together but it is the ruling classes who ultimately benefit. As long as such people act as the gaolers for millions of enslaved, prostituted and indentured workers, there can be no escape from the holocaust, no freedom from a misery stretching far into the past and looming in our future.