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**Karl Marx
A Workers' Inquiry**

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Transcribed & marked up by Eide O'Callaghan for ETOL.**

This little work, a product of Marx's last years, first appeared in France, in 1880. It attained a comparatively wide circulation at that time, but subsequently disappeared from sight for fifty years. It has never before been published in this country. It retains, we believe, a variety of interests for us today. In the first place, it is a convincing commentary upon the neo-revisionists now flourishing who try to tell us and the world that Marx was a rabbinical metaphysician spinning out a deductive picture of society from the depths of an Hegelian imagination. We see from this series of questions how Marx's decisive point of reference was not a set of abstract categories but the concrete incidents in the daily lives of the workers. "Exploitation", "surplus value", "rate of profit", are here traced to their living source. Secondly, we may observe the simplicity and directness of Marx's approach to the actual problems confronted by the workers; again, a comment upon those who today find Marx a "great theorist" but so lacking in "an understanding of psychology". Thirdly, the indirect effect of the questions indicates what Marx meant when he said that the emancipation of the workers must come from the workers themselves. The whole aim of the questions is to make the worker aware of his own predicament in capitalist society, to cut through the fog of illusions and habitual responses and fictions which prevent the worker from understanding his social world, and by thus making the worker conscious of his predicament giving him a chance to solve it. With the changes in industrial production during the past half-century, certain of these questions in their given form have, of course, become archaic. But no one would find difficulty in modifying them in such a manner as to bring them up to date. And no one will doubt what the truthful answer to them would reveal, more shockingly and brutally today by far than fifty years ago: the incalculable, hideous cost that the masses of humanity pay for the continuance of the rule of capitalism. – THE EDITORS.

Works of Karl Marx 1880

A Workers' Inquiry

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Not a single government, whether monarchy or bourgeois republic, has yet ventured to undertake a serious inquiry into the position of the French working class. But what a number of investigations have been undertaken into crises — agricultural, financial, industrial, commercial, political!

The blackguardly features of capitalist exploitation which were exposed by the official investigation organized by the English government and the legislation which was necessitated there as a result of these revelations (legal limitation of the working day to 10 hours, the law concerning female and child labor, etc.), have forced the French bourgeoisie to tremble even more before the dangers which an impartial and systematic investigation might represent. In the hope that maybe we shall induce a republican government to follow the example of the monarchical government of England by likewise organizing a far reaching investigation into facts and crimes of capitalist exploitation, we shall attempt to initiate an inquiry of this kind with those poor resources which are at our disposal. We hope to meet in this work with the support of all workers in town and country who understand that they alone can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer and that only they, and not saviors sent by providence, can energetically apply the healing remedies for the social ills which they are prey. We also rely upon socialists of all schools who, being wishful for social reform, must wish for an *exact* and *positive* knowledge of the conditions in which the working class — the class to whom the future belongs -works and moves.

These statements of labor's grievances are the first act which socialist democracy must perform in order to prepare the way for social regeneration.

The following hundred questions are the most important. In replies the number of the corresponding question should be given. It is not essential to reply to every question, but our recommendation is that replies should be as detailed and comprehensive as possible. The name of the working man or woman who is replying will not be published without special permission but the name and address should be

given so that if necessary we can send communication.

Replies should be sent to the Secretary of the *Revue Socialiste*, M.Lecluse, 28, rue royale, saint cloud, nr. Paris.

The replies will be classified and will serve as material for special studies, which will be published in the *Revue* and will later be reprinted as a separate volume.

1. What is your trade?
2. Does the shop in which you work belong to a capitalist or to a limited company/ State the names of the capitalist owners or directors of the company.
3. State the number of persons employed.
4. State their age and sex.
5. What is the youngest age at which children are taken off (boys or girls)?
6. State the number of overseers and other employees who are not rank and file hired workers.
7. Are their apprentices? How many?
8. Apart from the usual and regularly employed workers, are there others who come in at definite seasons?
9. Does your employer' undertaking work exclusively or chiefly for local orders, or for the home market generally, or for export abroad?
10. Is the shop in a village, or in a town? State the locality.
11. If your shop is in the country, is there sufficient work in the factory for your existence or are you obliged to combine it with agricultural labor/
12. Do you work with your hands or with the help of machinery?
13. State details as to the division of labor in your factory.
14. Is stream used as motive power?
15. State the number of rooms in which the various branches of production are carried on. Describe the specialty in which you are engaged. Describe not only the technical side, but the muscular and nervous strain required, and its general effect on the health of the workers.
16. Describe the hygienic conditions in the workshops; the size of the rooms, space allotted to every worker, ventilation, temperature, plastering, lavatories, general cleanliness, noise of machinery, metallic dust, dampness, etc.
17. Is there any municipal or government supervision of hygienic conditions in the workshops?
18. Are there in your industry particular effluvia which are harmful for the health and produce specific diseases among the workers?
19. Is the shop overcrowded with machinery?
20. Are safety measures to prevent accidents applied to the engine, transmission and machinery?

21. Mention the accidents which have taken place in your personal knowledge.
22. If you work in a mine, state the safety measures adopted by your employer to ensure ventilation and prevent explosions and other accidents.
23. If you work in a chemical factory, at an iron works, at a factory producing metal goods, or in any other industry involving specific dangers to health, describe the safety measures adopted by your employer.
24. What is your workshop lit up by (gas, oil, etc.)?
25. Are there sufficient safety appliances against fire?
26. Is the employer legally bound to compensate the worker or his family in case of accident?
27. If not, has he ever compensated those who suffered accidents while working for his enrichment?
28. Is first-aid organized in your workshop?
29. If you work at home, describe the conditions of your work room. Do you use only working tools or small machines? Do you have recourse to the help of your children or other persons (adult or children, male or female)? Do you work for private clients, or for an employer? Do you deal with him direct or through an agent?
30. State the number of hours you work daily, and the number of working days during the week.
31. State the number of holidays in the course of a year.
32. What breaks are there during the working day?
33. Do you take meals at definite intervals, or irregularly? Do you eat in the workshop or outside?
34. Does work go on during meal times?
35. If steam is used, when is it started and when stopped?
36. Does work go on at night?
37. State the number of hours of work of children and young people under 16.
38. Are there shifts if children and young people replacing each other alternately during working hours?
39. Has the government or municipality applied the laws regulating child labor? Do the employers submit to these laws?
40. Do schools exist for children and young people employed in your trade? If they exist, in what hours do the lessons take place? Who manages the schools? What is taught in them?
41. If work takes place both night and day, what is the order of the shifts?
42. What is the usual lengthening of the working day in times of good trade?
43. Are the machines cleaned by workers specially hired for that purpose, or do the workers employed on these machines clean them free, during their working day?
44. What rules and fines exist for latecomers? When does the working

- day begin, when it is resumed after the dinner hour break?
45. How much time do you lose in coming to the workshop and returning home?
 46. What agreements have you with your employer? Are you engaged by the day, week, month, etc.?
 47. What conditions are laid down regarding dismissals or leaving employment?
 48. In the event of a breach of agreement, what penalty can be inflicted on the employer, if he is the cause of the breach?
 49. What penalty can be inflicted on the worker if he is the cause of the breach?
 50. If there are apprentices, what are their conditions of contract?
 51. Is your work permanent or casual?
 52. Does work in your trade take place only at particular seasons, or is the work usually distributed more or less equally throughout the year? If you work only at definite seasons, how do you live in the intervals?
 53. Are you paid time or piece rate?
 54. If you are paid time rate, is it by the hour or by the day?
 55. Do you receive additions to your wages for overtime? How much?
 56. If you receive piece rates, how are they fixed? Of you are employed in industries in which the work done is measured by quantity or weight, as in the mines, don't your employers or their clerks resort to trickery, in order to swindle you out of part of your wages/
 57. If you are paid piece rate, isn't the quality of the goods used as a pretext for wrongful deductions from your wages?
 58. Whatever wages you get, whether piece or time rate, when is it paid to you; in other words, how long is the credit you give your employer before receiving payment for the work you have already carried out? Are you paid a week later, month, etc.?
 59. Have you noticed that delay in the payment of your wages forces you often to resort to the pawnshops, paying rates of high interest there, and depriving yourself of things you need: or incurring debts with the shopkeepers, and becoming their victim because you are their debtor? Do you know of cases where workers have lost their wages owing to the ruin or bankruptcy of their employers?
 60. Are wages paid direct by the employer, or by his agents ((contractors, etc.)?)
 61. If wages are paid by contractors or other intermediaries, what are the conditions of your contract?
 62. What is the amount of your money wages by the day week?
 63. What are the wages of the women and children employed together with you in the same shop?
 64. What was the highest daily wage last month in your shop?
 65. What was the highest piece wage last month?
 66. What were your own wages during the same time, and if you have a

- family, what were the wages of your wife and children?
67. Are wages paid entirely in money, or in some other form?
 68. If you rent a lodging from your employer, on what conditions? Does he not deduct the rent from your wages?
 69. What are the prices of necessary commodities, for example:
 - (a) Rent of your lodging, conditions of lease, number of rooms, persons living in them, repair, insurance, buying and repairing furniture, heating, lighting, water, etc.
 - (b) Food — bread, meat, vegetables, potatoes, etc, dairy produce, eggs, fish, butter, vegetable, oil, lard, sugar, salt, groceries, coffee, chicory, beer, wine, etc., tobacco.
 - (c) Clothing for parents and children, laundry, keeping clean, bath, soap, etc.
 - (d) Various expenses, such as correspondence, loans, payments to pawnbroker, children's schooling and teaching a trade, newspapers, books, etc., contributions to friendly societies, strikes, unions, resistance associations, etc.
 - (e) Expenses, if any necessitated by your duties.
 - (f) Taxes.
 70. Try and draw up a weekly and yearly budget of your income and expenditure for self and family.
 71. Have you noticed, in your personal experience, a bigger rise in the price of immediate necessities, e.g., rent, food, etc., than in wages?
 72. State the changes in wages which you know of.
 73. Describe wage increases during so-called prosperity periods.
 74. Describe any interruptions in employment caused by changes in fashions and partial and general crises. Describe your own involuntary rest periods.
 75. Compare the price of the commodities you manufacture or the services you render with the price of your labor.
 76. Quote any cases known to you of workers being driven out as a result of introduction of machinery or other improvements.
 77. In connection with the development of machinery and the growth of the productiveness of labor, has its intensity and duration increased or decreased?
 78. Do you know of any cases of increases in wages as a result of improvements in production?
 79. Have you ever known any rank and file workers who could retire from employment at the age of 50 and live on the money earned by them as wage workers.
 80. How many years can a worker of average health be employed in your trade?
 81. Do any resistance associations exist in your trade and how are they led? Send us their rules and regulations.
 82. How many strikes have taken place in your trade that you are aware of?

83. How long did these strikes last?
84. Were they general or partial strikes?
85. Were they for the object of increasing wages, or were they organized to resist a reduction of wages, or connected with the length of the working day, or prompted by other motives?
86. What were their results?
87. Tell us of the activity of the courts of arbitration.
88. Were strikes in your trade ever supported by strikes of workers belonging to other trades?
89. Describe the rules and fines laid down by your employer for the management of his hired workers.
90. Have there ever existed associations among the employers with the object of imposing a reduction of wages, a longer working day, of hindering strikes and generally imposing their own wishes?
91. Do you know of cases when the government made unfair use of the armed forces, to place them at the disposal of the employers against their wage workers?
92. Are you aware of any cases when the government intervened to protect the workers from the extortions of the employers and their illegal associations?
93. Does the government strive to secure the observance of the existing factory laws against the interests of the employers? Do its inspectors do their duty?
94. Are there in your workshop or trade any friendly societies to provide for accidents, sickness, death, temporary incapacity, old age, etc.? Send us their rules and regulations.
95. Is membership of these societies voluntary or compulsory? Are their funds exclusively controlled by the workers?
96. If the contributions are compulsory, and are under the employers' control, are they deducted from wages? Do the employers pay interest for this deduction? Do they return the amounts deducted to the worker when he leaves employment or is dismissed? Do you know of any cases when the workers have benefitted from the so-called pensions schemes, which are controlled by the employers, but the initial capital of which is deducted beforehand from the workers' wages?
97. Are there cooperative guilds in your trade? How are they controlled? Do they hire workers for wages in the same ways as the capitalists? Send us their rules and regulations.
98. Are there any workshops in your trade in which payment is made to the workers partly in the form of wages and partly in the form of so-called profit sharing? Compare the sums received by these workers and the sums received by other workers who don't take place in so-called profit sharing. State the obligations of the workers living under this system. may they go on strike, etc. or are they only permitted to be devoted servants of their employers?

99. What are the general physical, intellectual and moral conditions of life of the working men and women employed in your trade?
100. General remarks.

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