POLITICAL ECONOMY has always confined itself to stating facts occurring in society, and justifying them in the interest of the dominant class. Thus it is in favor of the division of labor created by industry. Having found it profitable to capitalists it has set it up as a principle.

Look at the village smith, said Adam Smith, the father of modern Political Economy. If he has never been accustomed to making nails he will only succeed by hard toil in forging two to three hundred a day, and even then they will be bad. But if this same smith has never done anything but nails, he will easily supply as many as two thousand three hundred in the course of a day. And Smith hastened to the conclusion--"Divide labor, specialize, go on specializing; let us have smiths who only know how to make heads or points of nails, and by this means we shall produce more. We shall grow rich."

That a smith sentenced for life to the making of heads of nails would
lose all interest in his work, would be entirely at the mercy of his employer with his limited handicraft, would be out of work four months out of twelve, and that his wages would decrease when he could be easily replaced by an apprentice, Smith did not think of it when he exclaimed--"Long live the division of labor. This is the real gold-mine that will enrich the nation!" And all joined in the cry.

And later on, when a Sismondi or a J. B. Say began to understand that the division of labor, instead of enriching the whole nation, only enriches the rich, and that the worker, who for life is doomed to making the eighteenth part of a pin, grows stupid and sinks into poverty--what did official economists propose? Nothing! They did not say to themselves that by a lifelong grind at one and the same mechanical toil the worker would lose his intelligence and his spirit of invention, and that, on the contrary, a variety of occupations would result in considerably augmenting the productivity of a nation. But this is the very issue now before us.

If, however, only economists preached the permanent and often hereditary division of labor, we might allow them to preach it as much as they pleased. But ideas taught by doctors of science filter into men's minds and pervert them; and from repeatedly hearing the division of labor, profits, interest, credit, etc., spoken of as problems long since solved, men, and workers too, end by arguing like economists, and by venerating the same fetishes.

Thus we see a number of socialists, even those who have not feared to point out the mistakes of science, justifying the division of labor. Talk to them about the organization of work during the Revolution, and they answer that the division of labor must be maintained; that if you sharpened pins before the Revolution you must go on sharpening them after. True, you will not have to work more than five hours a day, but you will have to sharpen pins all your life, while others will make designs for machines that will enable you to sharpen hundreds of millions of pins during your lifetime; and others again will be specialists in the higher branches of literature, science, and art, etc. You were born to sharpen pins while Pasteur was born to invent the inoculation against anthrax, and the Revolution will leave you both to your respective
employments. Well, it is this horrible principle, so noxious to society, so brutalizing to the individual, source of so much harm, that we propose to discuss in its divers manifestations.

We know the consequences of the division of labor full well. It is evident that we are divided into two classes: on the one hand, producers who consume very little and are exempt from thinking because they only do physical work, and who work badly because their brains remain inactive; and on the other hand, the consumers, who, producing little or hardly anything, have the privilege of thinking for the others, and who think badly because the whole world of those who toil with their hands is unknown to them. The laborers of the soil know nothing of machinery those who work at machinery ignore everything about agriculture. The ideal of modern industry is a child tending a machine that he cannot and must not understand, and a foreman who fines him if his attention flags for a moment. The ideal of industrial agriculture is to do away with the agricultural laborer altogether and to set a man who does odd jobs to tend a steam-plow or a threshing-machine. The division of labor means labeling and stamping men for life--some to splice ropes in factories, some to be foremen in a business, others to shove huge coal-baskets in a particular part of a mine; but none of them to have any idea of machinery as a whole, nor of business, nor of mines. And thereby they destroy the love of work and the capacity for invention that, at the beginning of modern industry, created the machinery on which we pride ourselves so much.

What they have done for individuals, they also wanted to do for nations. Humanity was to be divided into national workshops, having each its specialty. Russia, we were taught, was destined by nature to grow corn; England to spin cotton; Belgium to weave cloth; while Switzerland was to train nurses and governesses. Moreover, each separate city was to establish a specialty. Lyons was to weave silk, Auvergne to make lace, and Paris fancy articles. Economists believed that specialization opened an immense field for production and consumption, and that an era of limitless wealth for mankind was at hand.

But these great hopes vanished as fast as technical knowledge spread
abroad. As long as England stood alone as a weaver of cotton, and as a metal-worker on a large scale; as long as only Paris made artistic fancy articles, etc., all went well, economists could preach so-called division of labor without being refuted.

But a new current of thought induced all civilized nations to manufacture for themselves. They found it advantageous to produce what they formerly received from other countries, or from their colonies, which in their turn aimed at emancipating themselves from the mother-country. Scientific discoveries universalized the methods of production and henceforth it was useless to pay an exorbitant price abroad for what could easily be produced at home. Does not then this industrial revolution strike a crushing blow at the theory of the division of labor which was supposed to be so sound?

This text was taken from a 1st edition of The Conquest of Bread, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London, 1906.

From: Anarchy Archives.

Chronology:

**November 30, 1905**: Chapter 15 -- Publication.


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