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THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

PAGES FROM A
NEGRO WORKER'S
NOTEBOOK

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CHAPTER 4

The Outsiders

Many people in the United States are aware that, with automation, enough could be easily produced in this country so that there would be no need for the majority of Americans to work. But the right to live has always been so tied up with the necessity to produce that it is hard for the average person to visualize a workless society. The result is that when people face the perspective of their jobs being eliminated by automation, all they can think of is learning a new trade or a new profession, hoping that in this way they can maintain their right to live.

As long as this country was in the situation that most underdeveloped countries are in today, it was natural to tie together the right to live with the ability to produce. But when a country reaches the stage that this country has now reached, productivity can no longer be the measure of an individual's right to life. When you travel around this country and see new automated plants springing up in one area after another, it becomes apparent that the era when man had to earn his right to live through work is rapidly drawing to a close. Within a few years, man as a productive force will be as obsolete as the mule.

It is in this serious light that we have to look at the question of the growing army of unemployed. We have to stop looking for solutions in pump-priming, featherbedding, public works, war contracts, and all the other gimmicks that are always being proposed by labor leaders and well-meaning liberals. Nor is there any solution through production to aid the underdeveloped countries. Perhaps this would be a possibility if we lived in a world society where the whole world was working in a unified way to advance the welfare of all. But the fact is that we are living in a nation-state society in which millions of

dollars worth of goods rot away unless they can be used abroad to further the foreign policy of this particular nation-state.

So there is no way to avoid facing the fundamental problems. What we need today is a new Declaration of Human Rights to fit the new Age of Abundance.

This nation cannot long endure short on rights and long on goods. We must accept the plain fact that we are moving towards an automated society and act on the basis of this fact.

The first principle that has to be established is that everyone has a right to a full life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, whether he is working or not. The question of the right to a full life has to be divorced completely from the question of work.

Society must recognize that the magnificent productive tools of our day are the result of the accumulated labors of all of us and not the exclusive property of any group or class. Now that our productive machinery has been developed to the point that it can do the tasks which have heretofore been done by men, everyone, regardless of class, regardless of background, is entitled to the enjoyment of the fruits of that development, just as all men are entitled to warm themselves in the heat of the sun.

Once it is recognized that all men have the right to a full life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, whether they are working or not working, have worked or have not worked, it will be necessary for society to create a completely new set of values. Up to now, because productivity has been low, a man's value has been determined by his labor from day to day, by how much he could produce both to sustain himself and to permit investment in new machinery. Now that man is being eliminated from the productive process, a new standard of value must be found. This can only be man's value as a human being.

Up to now it has always been possible if not always easy to cast aside the productive forces that have become obsolete. Work animals were put to pasture; tools, machinery, factories, and even whole industries have been simply scrapped or put to the torch. It has been said that capitalism wages wars so that it can get rid of surplus manpower that has become ob-

solete. Whether or not this has been true in the past, no capitalist in these days of nuclear warfare would be foolish enough to take this way out. The key question therefore is what should be done with man who is being made obsolete by the new stage of production. Obviously no ordinary solution is possible. This is the social dilemma of our time.

No one understands better than a worker the humiliation and sense of personal degradation that is involved when some big shot is coming through the shop and the superintendent tells him to "look busy" in order to prove that there is useful work going on. That is what our whole society is like today. By all kinds of gimmicks—including war work, which may end up by killing off those for whom jobs are being created, and a host of government agencies set up to study the problems of "full employment"—the American government is now trying to make work when we are already on the threshold of a workless society.

In the fall of 1961 as Chrysler workers were streaming out of the plant, they were telling one another: "This could be a long strike because the company don't need us at all. They got plenty of cars in storage." That these workers practically to a man felt this way is a sign of the work situation in the United States, not only in the auto plants but in the TV plants, appliance plants, the furniture industry, the clothing industry, and in every domestic industry. It is a known fact that one single auto company like GM or Ford, or a single refrigerator company like General Electric or Westinghouse, or any major steel firm like U. S. Steel or Bethlehem, could produce enough so that all their competitors could close down. All they would have to do is bring in a little more automation and cybernation (automation plus computers). What they are doing today is "competing" with one another and splitting up the profit. Only in war work, and particularly in missiles, can workers feel sure that if they go on strike they will be missed. *This* is the dilemma of the United States: What is to be done with the men and women who are being made obsolete by the new stage of production?

The American economy is kept going today by the pump-priming of war contracts. This kind of work produces no goods

that will reach the consumer market, because what is produced is blown up or stored—some of it at the bottom of the sea. However, by this means money is put into the hands of the large corporations to pay out to their employees, who in turn buy consumer goods.

It is when you begin to think of a peacetime economy that everybody, from the average worker to the labor leader, from the government official to the big capitalist begins to have nightmares. Each may have a different view of what should happen to the unemployed, but they all have one thing in common: they believe that man must work.

The average worker believes this because that is the only way he or she has been able to live. The labor leaders believe it because if workers didn't have to work, labor leaders wouldn't have anyone to lead. The government official believes it because the role of the government has become that of regulating relations between management and labor, both of whom must exist in order for government to play its part. Thus, as Kennedy's speech to the UAW convention and his overtures to industry show so clearly, government alternately appeases and rebukes both wage-earners and capitalists. Finally, the big capitalists can only see themselves growing richer and more powerful if they are in control of the destinies of the workers and the means whereby they must earn a living.

None of these people, and this includes the liberal economists who propose public works and foreign aid as a substitute for war contracts, has left behind the 18th-century philosophy that man must earn his living by the sweat of his brow, and that anyone who can't or doesn't work (unless he happens to own property), is a misfit, an outcast, and a renegade from society.

None of these people is ready to admit that with automation and cybernation we have to have a much bolder and more radical approach to society. The change which we are facing is more radical than the change which 5,000 years ago transformed men from roving bands of tribesmen and hunters into forced laborers on the irrigation projects of the early states.

Today the creative work of production is being done by the research engineers, the program planners, the scientists, the

electronic experts. Already there are over 850,000 scientists in industry, without counting all those outside of industry who are working toward much the same goals. What they are creating is a mode of production which, as long as the present system continues, excludes more and more people from playing any productive role in society. This means that our society, as we have known it, is just as finished as feudal society was finished by the time capitalism arrived on the scene. It means not only that hundreds of thousands are yearly being displaced from production, but also that millions are outsiders to begin with. These millions have never been and never can be absorbed into this society at all. They can only be absorbed into a totally new type of society whose first principle will have to be that man is the master and not the servant of things.

Today in the United States there is no doubt that those at the bottom are growing in numbers much faster than the system will ever be able to absorb. This reflects the population explosion which is taking place right here inside the United States. Already there are millions of young men and women who have never held any jobs at all and who live from hand to mouth, either by charity or by petty crime: in other words at the expense of those who are working. They cannot be integrated into society unless they work, and there is no prospect of any work for them. What is more, the social measures which made work for such people in the days of the New Deal are completely silly in an age when you can dig ditches, lay bridges, and build buildings merely by pushing a few buttons.

All this means that there can be no smug plan for reforming this system. Because when you add to those who are daily being displaced from the plant the millions who have never even had a chance to work inside a plant, what you have is no longer just the unemployed and the castaways, but a revolutionary force or army of outsiders and rejects who are totally alienated from this society.

We must have no illusions that there will be any easy unity between these outsiders and those who are inside the system because they are still working. Already, as we have noted above, the labor organizations themselves are separating off the employed from the unemployed for whom they can do

nothing. The present work force is itself a product of the old society and struggling to survive within it. This means that we must look to the outsiders for the most radical, that is the deepest, thinking as to the changes that are needed. What ideas will they have? They have not yet expressed them clearly, but their target is very clear. It is not any particular company or any particular persons but the government itself. Just how they will approach or penetrate this target I do not know nor do I know what will happen when they have done what they must do. But I know that the army of outsiders which is growing by leaps and bounds in this country is more of a threat to the present "American way of life" than any foreign power.

Ask the average American what is the biggest threat to our way of life and the chances are that he will blurt out "Communism." He sees the threat as coming from a foreign power. Yet the fact that, after all these years of capitalism, he is so afraid of another system means that capitalism has definitely not proved itself to be the system which man must have to live his life as a full and equal human being.

If you can once get the average American to stop blaming everything on the Communists (or the Negroes, or the Jews, or the Italians) and finally face up to the fact that there is a crisis in his own country, and then ask him what the real crisis is, the chances are good that he will say "Automation." But when he says this, he still has a distant look in his eyes as if automation, too, is something that will pass without creating or demanding too great a change in the present system of having to work for a living.

But for the outsiders who have never been and can never be involved in this system, regardless of how much free enterprise or initiative they show, automation means something much deeper. It means that they have to find a new concept of how to live and let live among human beings. A new generation of these "workless people" is rapidly growing up in this country. For them, the simple formula of "more schools and more education and more training" is already outmoded. We already have with us a generation of youth who have completed high school and had some kind of training and yet have found no mode of production into which they can fit. Because as fast

as they are trained for a higher technical stage of production, just as fast does a new technical revolution take place. Whereas the old workers used to hope that they could pit their bodies against iron and outlast the iron, this new generation of workless people knows that even their brains are being outwitted by the iron brains of automation and cybernation. To tell these people that they must work to earn their living is like telling a man in the big city that he should hunt big game for the meat on his table.

This means that the new generation, the outsiders, the workless people, now have to turn their thoughts away from trying to outwit the machines and instead toward the organization and reorganization of society and of human relations inside society. The revolution which is within these people will have to be a revolution of their minds and hearts, directed not toward increasing production but toward the management and distribution of things and toward the control of relations among people, tasks which up to now have been left to chance or in the hands of an elite.

There are some people among the older generation who recognize that this is the threat or promise contained in automation and cybernation, but most of them are afraid to face the reality and continue to hope that the old house can still be patched up. The outsiders, in contrast, owe no allegiance to any system but only to themselves. Being workless, they are also stateless. They have grown up like a colonial people who no longer feel any allegiance to the old imperial power and are each day searching for new means to overthrow it.

I am not saying that this new generation of outsiders is as of now an organized force. It is not as simple as that. In fact, no existing organization would even think of organizing them, which means that they will have to organize themselves and that the need to organize themselves will soon be forced upon them as they grow in numbers like the beggars on the streets of India. The big difference between them and Indian beggars is that in India the means to live without having to work are not available, while in the United States these means are all around them, before their very eyes. The only question, the trick, is how to take them.

The forces of a cold war are thus taking shape inside the United States: the war between those who are setting up all kinds of social agencies, training bureaus, and the like to head off the stateless and workless people, and those who are learning every day that these stop-gaps offer no solution to their problems. Just as the natural wealth and technical advances of this country have meant that a lot more people here can share in the material things of life than anywhere else, so the eruption of this new group will pose radical concepts beyond the imagination of us all, but certainly founded on the principle that people should be able to enjoy everything in life and from life, without being fettered or limited by any system.

These radical concepts cannot come from organized labor. In the 30's the class struggle of the American workers, united, organized, and disciplined by the process of production, reached its greatest height in the organization of the CIO. Today in the 60's the American labor movement has reached the end of the road. In the face of the social and ideological adjustments that are necessary to meet the revolutionary changes that have taken place in technology, organized labor is as reactionary today as organized capital was thirty years ago. The fundamental reason for this is that organized labor continues to cherish the idea that man must work in order to live, in an age when it is technologically possible for men simply to walk out on the streets and get their milk and honey. To talk about full employment and getting the unemployed back to work at this point when we are on the threshold of the workless society, is as reactionary as it was for the "rugged individualists" to say in the 30's that the only reason why a man wasn't working was that he didn't have the initiative to go out and get himself a job.

Even in their best days, it should be remembered, the CIO and AFL were not able to do much about unemployment. In 1939 when the Second World War began, there were still more than 9 million unemployed, well over twice today's official figure. With the war, millions of old and new workers went into the plants and the last layer of the population, which had up to then been completely outside of industry—the Negroes—was finally brought in. Following the war the pent-up purchasing power of the population kept employment high for several

years. But after the Korean War management started a two-pronged attack, automating the plants and tightening up on work rules. At about the same time, unemployment began creeping up again.

Organized labor, instead of facing the challenge inherent in automation and the potentiality of material abundance, responded by continuing to seek ways and means to achieve full employment—ranging all the way from demands for a shorter work week and retraining programs to appeals for bigger tax cuts and fatter war contracts.

Why is organized labor unable to face the issues posed by the 60's? To answer this question we have to look at the changes that have taken place in this country, industrially and socially, over the last quarter century.

As long as the vast majority of a population has not begun to acquire the consumption goods that are possible under conditions of modern technology, the employers are producing not only for profit but also for social use. The people actually need the goods that are being produced, the refrigerators, the cars, the radios, the TVs. These goods provide the material base so that the people can live like human beings. But once the point is reached where the vast majority have acquired these goods, then the manufacturers are no longer producing for social use. Apart from a reduced need for service and replacement, they are producing for a market which has been created not by the needs of the people but by the needs of the manufacturers. They continue producing so that they can continue to make profits and to stimulate the necessary demand, they produce shoddy goods, plan obsolescence, and above all "sell" the population, stimulating its appetite for more and more useless commodities, propagandizing and corrupting it.

Organized labor shares the concern of the employers to keep production going. Its motive is different but the aim is the same. The manufacturers want to maintain production for the sake of profits; the unions want to maintain it to keep up their memberships. Thus the labor organizations have in effect become partners with management in a system of corrupting the population. Each needs the other because each is faced with the same insoluble predicament of capitalism today—that

through the use of machines enough can now be produced for everybody without any need either for millions of dollars in profits or millions of people at work.

In order to continue with its philosophy of full employment, organized labor has become part and parcel of the "American way of life." It has become partners with the military in establishing and maintaining a war machine the only purpose of which is to threaten the destruction of all humanity.

The philosophy of "Solidarity Forever" on which the labor movement was built is today in rags and tatters. There is a never-ending dog-eat-dog fight going on between international unions over the available work—who is going to build a new factory, who has jurisdiction in a new construction project, who is going to do the electrical work or transport the equipment. There is a never-ending dog-eat-dog fight going on between locals of the same union over which plant is actually going to get a particular operation or which local will have jurisdiction in a new construction project, who is going to do the electrical work or transport the equipment. There is a never-ending dog-eat-dog fight going on between those workers who want to work only 40 hours a week and the money-hungry ones who spend all their time catering to the boss and stool-pigeoning on their fellow-workers in order to get the fat \$150-\$200-a-week checks that come from working 50, 60, and 70 hours. Meanwhile those inside the plant become ever more removed from those outside.

The philosophy of "Workers of the World Unite" is also in rags and tatters. The AFL-CIO has official connections with organized labor in other countries and periodically sends a token sum to support a strike. But American organized labor's attitude to the workers of the world is essentially the same as its attitude to the outsiders at home. They should be thrown a bone now and then, but if they were to make any real progress it would be a threat to the insiders. Thus, organized labor is as opposed to imports from foreign countries and as anxious about America's future in relation to the European Common Market as the most reactionary employer. It is as opposed as the American government to the independent development of

the economy of the underdeveloped countries and as ready to act as a counter-revolutionary force against all revolutions in the underdeveloped countries.

What about the union militants? Every few months around any auto shop, groups of workers are getting together to discuss how to "bring the union back to the shop." The union is already there, officially. It is recognized by the company; a contract exists between the company and the international governing that particular plant. Yet these workers are constantly getting together with the expressed purpose of "bringing the union back." For them "bringing the union back" means bringing back the atmosphere that existed in the late 30's and the early 40's—when they would shut down the plant over a production dispute and settle the issue then and there; when they could talk back to the supervisor without being penalized; when they could go to the toilet whenever they needed to; when they could get a day off to attend someone's funeral without begging the foreman, as they have to do nowadays.

These are very natural and human rights, rights which the workers themselves know they have lost. Yet these groups attract very little support. In fact, the more militant they are the less support they get. Instead, the groups who more or less follow the union machine usually win majority support, easily coming out on top in union elections without even making any promises to the workers except to support the policies of the international.

The militants who are always meeting and discussing and devising ways and means of "bringing back the union" are generally the most advanced workers in the sense that they are ready to struggle for better working conditions. Yet when you tell these militants that they are never going to bring the union back to where it was, because the union that they are thinking about and hoping for has already outlived its usefulness, and that the workers are never again going to struggle for and through this kind of organization, they can't understand why. They have become so accustomed to what used to happen in the early days of the union, when large numbers of workers were very militant, that they still believe that there are plenty of militant workers left in the shop and that all they have to do

is to get together and organize them. They cannot face the changes that have taken place in production since the 30's. They cannot get it into their heads that these old workers who used to be so militant are now a vanishing herd who know that they are a vanishing herd, who know that, because of automation, the days of workers like themselves in manufacturing are numbered, and who have therefore decided that all they can do now is fight to protect their pensions and seniority and hope that the company will need them to work until they are old enough to retire or die, whichever comes first.

You would think that in this restless group of militants who have fought so hard for progress, there would be some who could see the handwriting on the wall and realize that work as they have known it, and the mobilization of people in struggle over working conditions, have become obsolete. But it is in this group of militants that you find the greatest reluctance to accept the inevitability of the workless society. In this refusal to face reality, these militants who are so advanced are really behind the average worker who has reconciled himself to eventual oblivion. Why?

It is precisely because these workers are more advanced, in the sense of wanting to struggle for progress, that they cling to the idea of organizing the struggle through work. The fact is that it is through the struggle over work that social reforms have been won over the last 100 years, and especially in this country from the middle 30's to the middle 40's. The struggle around working conditions has been the most progressive factor in American society, educating and organizing people to fight for human rights as nothing else in this society has been able to do. These militants know this because they have lived through it. Most of them, without ever having read a word of Marx, have experienced in life what Marx analyzed in theory. They cannot give up an idea or a method on which they have depended for progress until they can see another one, and they have not yet seen or figured out another way to fight for human needs and human rights.

There are a lot of people outside the shop, not only radicals but liberals also, who have much the same idea as these union militants. Only it is not as obvious in their case

because they are not in the shop and therefore do not have the opportunity to organize themselves into little groups so easily. But these liberals and radicals are also hoping and waiting on the workers to struggle. Even those who attack Marx most viciously still think like Marx, because what Marx thought was so true until only a few short years ago when the new age of nuclear energy, automation, and cybernation began.

Actually these union militants will go down fighting for things like a shorter work week (30-for-40), or two months paid vacation, or six months paid furlough, or the four-hour day—all of which demands are within the framework of keeping the work force intact. Even when there is no longer any reason, because of the development of automation and cybernation, to keep the work force intact, they will still fight to keep it intact. Therefore it is hopeless to look to them as the ones to lead the fight for a workless society. The workless society is something that can only be brought about by actions and forces outside the work process.

Government officials, labor officials, and the university professors whom they both hire to help them beat their brains are working overtime, trying to find some scheme to create full employment. But whatever schemes they come up with, whether the 35-hour week, new training programs, bigger and badder war contracts, or bigger and better public works projects, they are playing a losing game. America is headed toward full unemployment, not full employment.

In 1962 I visited the West Coast where a large percentage of the country's war work is concentrated and the newspapers rejoice every time a new war contract is awarded to the area. Yet, talking to guys who work in the plant like myself, I found that their main worry is what to do about automation and the people it is throwing out of work. A friend of mine told me about a Mexican-American who works in the plant with him and who describes automation as a beast of the world which is moving in on people and nobody knows what to do about "it." This worker has come to the conclusion that the only sensible solution is for the company to put in new machines as fast as it can, while every guy who is displaced by these new machines continues to receive his weekly paycheck. His idea

is that the sooner the machines become fully employed and the people become fully unemployed, the better.

My friend has put some thought into how this would work and has decided that if the old philosophy that man has to go to work must be retained, then the displaced workers could continue to go to the plant and just sit around and watch the machines. He was quite sure that if this happened the workers would be continually putting forward new suggestions as to how to redesign the machines to make them more efficient and displace more men, instead of doing what they are now doing, constantly trying to think up new ways to fight the machine so as to keep their jobs. We both agreed that there is nothing more agonizing than holding back the ideas that every worker is constantly getting as to how to increase productivity.

I told him that I could foresee a time when machines would be so perfected that there would be no need for the great majority of people to go into the plant except occasionally, and that I was quite sure that, once released from the necessity to work, men and women would come up with new ideas for increasing productivity that would astonish the world. Fishermen just fishing for fun would come up with new ideas for fishing, guys puttering around their lawns would think up new ways to grow grass, people with nothing to do but sit around and observe would be constantly producing new ideas and bursting to share them with others. It is only the necessity to work, *forced labor*, that has created in man the need to fight new modes of production and to keep new ideas about increasing production to himself.

One immediate step out of the dilemma would be to employ the seniority system in reverse. As new machines are brought in, those who have been working longest, instead of being kept on the job, should be eased out of work. Every company, even if it has to get subsidies from the government to do so, should put in the most modern equipment available, and as this is done those workers with the highest seniority should be laid off with continued full pay equal to that of those still working.

This would be very far from being a solution, however,

since it does not take into consideration the million and a half young people who are entering the adult world every year plus the millions like them who, being unemployed, have no claim on any company. It is in connection with this group of outsiders that those who hope for full employment are really caught in a dilemma. These millions can never become part of any work force in the sense that we know it. There is no Siberia to which they can be sent, and even if there were they wouldn't go. They have seen too much of what is possible in this society; they also know that there are enough of them around to be a threat. Already the big question in cities like Detroit is whether a way can be found for these outsiders to live before they kill off those of us who are still working. How long can we leave them hanging out in the streets ready to knock the brains out of those still working in order to get a little spending money?

Obviously it would be far better to give these outsiders a weekly check also, rather than leave them with no alternative but to look for guns and knives to use against the insiders. But giving them a check is not enough. There has to be some way in which to develop their creative abilities and sense of responsibility, because without this they can become completely empty creatures. What makes it so easy to propose a weekly pay check for those who have worked all their lives is that they have already acquired some discipline and sense of responsibility from their work. But those who have never worked and will never get a chance to in this society will have to find some other way to develop their creative abilities before these are destroyed by forced idleness.

This is one of the great challenges facing our society today. Another is the question of peace and war to which we now turn.