

Disprove the “Communism Breeds Laziness” Theory

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Some capitalists and bourgeois intellectuals are worried that Communism will breed laziness. In the eyes of conscious working people, this is a baseless anxiety and is not worth argument; but persons, in whose minds there is still soil for growing individualism, are very interested in this theory, and, judging others by themselves, think that others will become lazy in the future Communist society. They say; “To like ease and dislike labor is human nature;” “One’s desires are unlimited, and for each to get his needs will throw everything into confusion;” “A hard-working man needs some incentives like fame, position, grade, etc. If all such are gone, who will work hard?” Arguments run endlessly along these lines. It is necessary for us to discuss the question seriously.

Persons who think a Communist society will breed lazy-bones always regard laziness as a common nature of mankind having nothing to do with social conditions. They seem to think that to dislike labor is an inborn disposition of man, that it is only because of his desire to eat better and dress better or to seek fame and profit that he is compelled to work, and that he will be lazy when such incentives are gone. They think in these terms and believe others, think in the same way. It does not occur to them that it is precisely this idea in their minds that Communism will transform. “You cannot talk to summer insects about the ice.” Without changing this attitude of exploiting classes toward labor, one can understand

absolutely nothing about Communism. Conscious workers and peasants are never worried about the question of lazy-bones because ideas of “like ease and dislike labor” and “pay remuneration according to labor” never enter their minds. Judging others by themselves, they naturally feel that in a Communist society each and all will take “one for all and all for one” as a criterion of their life.

To those who advocate the theory that “Communism will breed laziness,” we will openly and frankly say that laziness cannot be regarded as an above-class common “human nature” or “weakness of human character” any more than Ah Q’s “method of spiritual victory” can be regarded as a “weakness of human character.”³ Laziness is a sort of living habit of the exploiting class and its intellectuals not engaged in productive labor, and the lazy habit among a small number of working people is formed under the impact of the idea of an exploiting class which dislikes labor. Do you say Communism will breed laziness? Probably you admire the practice of obtaining something without labor! One gentleman describes with the following words the Communist society in his imagination: “In a Communist society, each and all will lead a capitalist life, working half an hour a day and spending the remaining hours as they like, fishing, smoking, resting on a sofa, drinking tea, taking cakes. . . as happy as spirits. It is a paradise in the world.” This is to represent the Communist society as a society of lazy-bones. If each and all lead a capitalist life in the Communist society, we can let others be capitalists and why would we need to eliminate the exploiting class and its ideological influence and realize Communism, and why would we need to inculcate integration of education with productive labor? Yes, the future standard of material life will top that of capitalists, but the bourgeois hedonist mode of life will never appear, and hard-working and simple living habits will be regarded as a virtue. The high material standards of Communism will never be separated from a high degree of

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² *Wen Hui Bao* [文汇报], *Literary Report*, is a daily newspaper in Shanghai.

³ Ah Q is a character in the stories of leftist writer Lu Xun (1881–1936). Ah tried to interpret every defeat or humiliation as a “spiritual victory.”

conscious labor. The higher the standard of material life, the more Communist-minded laborers will be conscious of the happiness of working more for all and of the shamefulness of seeking only enjoyment. To talk of Communism apart from Communist labor shows a complete ignorance of the substance of a Communist society and of the essence a happy life. To imagine the Communist society as anarchy is a fantasy permeated with individualism. In Communist society, democratic centralism will continually be enforced. Democratic centralism is a Communist method for correctly handling the relations between individuals and collective bodies, between the part and the whole, and between discipline and freedom. Some people want to distort Communism according to their individualist desires and by representing it as anarchy—free of organization, leadership, and centralism. We must watch them.

Let us return to the question of “lazy-bones.” The transformation of monkeys (apes in scientific terms) into men was due to labor. Why does a man have two hands? For counting money, or for taking “a cup of strong tea” to the sofa? In the age of apes, probably there was no money or strong tea; thus, the gradual formation of two hands came from labor and served to perform labor. “Hands are not only organs of labor but a product of labor.”⁴ If our ancestors were lazy-bones, probably there would be no offspring like us. Therefore, labor is a primary and most fundamental characteristic of mankind as distinct from other animals, as well as a fundamental condition for developing mankind in other respects. All men should perform labor and should use both hands to do it. In the era of primitive communes free of exploitation, private property, and distinction between mental labor and physical labor, men had no conception of “laziness.” Men living in primitive communes “went to work at day-break, rested after the sun set, dug wells to get water, tilled the land to get

food,”⁵ knowing nothing about laziness. Since there were none who did [not] work, it is very obvious that there could be no lazy-bones who were fond of “laziness” in practical life. With the emergence of exploiting classes and the distinction between exploitation and labor, lazy-bones and laziness as a social phenomenon appeared, and images of lazy-bones were ridiculed in folk stories. Laziness on the part of a small number of working people comes precisely from the parasites of the exploiting class who obtain things without labor.

The Chinese people are an industrious and courageous nation. With their bare hands they opened the national territory of China and made their history. In a feudal society, the laziest were landlords and big merchants: this point was admitted even by intelligent persons of the feudal class. “Men did not plow land, women did not weave, only elegant clothes were worn and only the best food was taken;”⁶ such was the life of the rich. Were not they the laziest in the world? Were not those young gentlemen “who had their clothes scented, faces shaven and powdered, who rode on elaborate carts and wore high-heeled shoes. . . . moving about as leisurely as fairies. . . ,” too lazy to read even the Four Books and Five Canons⁷ regarded as “classics” by the feudal class, and so lazy as to ask others to write poems on their behalf? A number of emperors were the premier lazy-bones in the world. They were so lazy as to be absent in their early court sessions, getting up late, as “the spring night was too short,” leading a lewd and shameless life day and night. Some “intelligent” persons formed the habit of laziness

⁴ This is a quote from F. Engels, “The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man.” See *Marx Engels Collected Works*, New York: International Publishers, 1976, vol. 25, p. 453.

⁵ From the “Ground Thumping Song,” in *Gu Yao Yan*, a collection of Chinese ballads and proverbs compiled by Du Wenlan (1815–1881).

⁶ The phrase “Men plow and women weave,” [男耕女织] dating from the Zhou period of Chinese history (1100–770 BCE), expresses a traditional division of labor between men and women peasants. The 11th century female poet Qian Tao lamented that upper class, silken clad “beauties” knew or cared little “of a weaving girl / Sitting cold by her window / Endlessly throwing her shuttle to and fro.”

⁷ The *Four Books* and *Five Canons* are works by the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE).

and resorted to laziness in their opposition to the rulers. Wine and laziness often went together. Even Zhuge Liang⁸ was not free from self-indulgence while living in his Lungchung retreat. “Bowed down he exhausted his energy in the public service”—that was after he became Liu Pei’s military adviser. In creating *Oblomov*, Russia’s Goncharov⁹ gave a comprehensive and concentrated expression to the laziness of landlord class: he is so lazy that he will not think of getting up from his bed. Are there not numerous facts and instances to show that “like ease and dislike labor” is a character of the exploiting class, and by no means the so-called “common nature of mankind?” And laziness mainly comes from a life of exploitation—separation from labor and acquisition of things without labor. This is true of the landlord class as well as the bourgeoisie. Capitalists live in fine buildings and, when they are lazy, might lie on their sofas counting their money. The so-called “free” life advocated by the same bourgeois intellectuals is actually a sort of lazy life. They always look forward to a life which is not too “tense.” They do not want collectivization or combat action. They want to set aside some time in which they can remain “idle” and comfortable. Lying on the bed, yawning, reciting Tang poems, “feeling happy as a fairy,” shutting one’s self off from the life of the working people. . . . Thus, the complete elimination of the exploiting class and the idea of exploitation, the gradual elimination of the distinction between mental labor and physical labor and the realization of Communism are precisely intended to eliminate lazy-bones as a social phenomenon. How can it be said that Communist will breed laziness? How absurd it is to confound black and white!

It can definitely be said that it will take a fairly long time to raise the Communist consciousness of all the people greatly and that the Party will have to do hard political and ideological work,

⁸ Zhuge Liang [诸葛亮] (181–234) was a famous as an ingenious military leader and inventor.

⁹ The novel *Oblomov*, published in 1858 by Russian writer Ivan Goncharov, describes the life of a young nobleman who spends most of his time in bed.

and will certainly raise Communist consciousness to a great extent. Within the ranks of the people, a transformation will take place deliberately and ideas of belittling labor will be changed through labor and criticism. In this process, a few persons imbued with ideas of laziness will fundamentally change their attitude toward life and their thoughts will certainly change either quickly or slowly along with the change in their mode of life. Counter-revolutionaries, murderers, thieves, swindlers, and hoodlums, as well as other undesirable characters will be compelled to reform themselves through labor. Those who will not “work according to their ability” will not be permitted by the people to “get things according to their needs.”

It may be envisaged that after a number of years all people of China will be transformed into new men of Communism and that there will not be a single one who does not work. Persons brought up in such a society will take part in productive labor from childhood. They will form a living habit of labor and study in the same way as they form a habit of eating. Labor and study will become the prime wants of life. They will be uncomfortable if they do not work in the same way as they will be hungry if they do not take food. They will undergo Communist education from their childhood and consciously and selflessly perform labor for society. They will know nothing about “fame, position” and private property, and nothing about “lazy-bones.” Just as they will see rats only in a museum, they will see the images of lazy-bones only in books. Their “desire” is to perform creative labor, and their greatest happiness lies in creating new wealth for mankind so that others can acquire greater happiness, will not lazy-bones be completely eliminated In this circumstance? Kang Youwei¹⁰ is also afraid that Communism will breed laziness. In his *Da Tong Shu (Book on Utopia)* he imagines “four taboos,” the “first taboo is laziness.” He has no idea that men of that era will be Communist-minded and not individualists. Nor does he understand the theory that social being determines

¹⁰ Kang Youwei [康有为] (1858–1927), Chinese philosopher and reform movement leader, who regarded Confucius as a utopian political reformer.

one's social consciousness. After all he is a Utopian socialist, not understanding the necessity for the genesis and elimination of laziness as a social phenomenon.

Of course, we are not Utopians in the belief that in a Communist society all kinds of contradictions do not exist. In a Communist society, there will also be contradictions between the advanced and the backward, and there will be persons who perform labor well and persons who perform labor not so well; there will still be ideological struggles and evolution. However, in collective life the situation is that no backward persons may be "lazy-bones." Collective strength and ideological and moral strength will be so great that the backward will soon be compelled to make progress. In the play "Brother and Sister Open Up Waste Land," sister sings: "You young and strong man, how can you lie in bed like a lazy worm?" Brother instantly takes up his hoe and goes to the field. This was a scene witnessed in the New Democratic society,¹¹ which is not to be compared with a Communist society. It follows that laziness as a social phenomenon will definitely be eliminated in a Communist society.

Thus, "laziness," which comes from private property, will completely disappear with the disappearance of private property. As things stand at the moment, the attitude toward conscious and selfless labor as an aspect of the Communist spirit is rapidly growing up in the course of the Great Leap Forward.¹² From this we can draw only one conclusion as stated by Comrade Liu Shaoqi: "Only when Communism is completely realized can laziness be completely eliminated." The conclusion is completely contrary to the "Communism breeds laziness" theory.

Translation corrected, March 23, 2023. Thank to E. J for fixing errors.

¹¹ In the political theory of the Communist Party of China, New Democracy is the social formation of the immediate post-capitalist period, preceding the construction of socialism.

¹² The Great Leap Forward, 1958–1960, was a period of intense economic construction in China that gave rise to the People's Communes, which were just beginning as this article was written. Policy errors and natural disasters caused a major famine, and many died.