

The Great Money Trick

Taken from "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist" by Robert Tressel

"Money is the real cause of poverty," said Siphso.

"Prove it," said Thandi.

"Money is the cause of poverty because it is the device by which those who are too lazy to work are enabled to rob the workers of the fruits of our labour."

"Prove it," repeated Thandi.

Siphso slowly folded up the piece of newspaper he had been reading and put it into his pocket.

"All right," he replied, "I'll show you how the Great Money Trick is worked."

Siphso opened his lunchbox and took from it two slices of bread, but as these were not enough, he asked that anyone who had some bread left should give it to him. They gave him several pieces, which he placed in a heap on a clean piece of paper, and, having borrowed the knives they used to cut and eat their lunches with from Nkosi, Thandi and Abendigo, he addressed them as follows:

"These pieces of bread represent the raw materials which exist naturally in and on the earth for the use of all people; they were not made by any human being, but were created for the benefit and sustenance of all, the same as were the air and the light of the sun."

"Now," continued Siphso, "I am a capitalist; or rather, I represent the bosses and landlords; the Capitalist Class. That is to say, all these raw materials belong to me. It does not matter for our present argument how I got possession of them: the only thing that matters now is the admitted fact that all the raw materials which are necessary for the production of the necessaries of life are now the property of the Capitalist Class. I am that class: all these raw materials belong to me."

"Now you three represent the Working Class. You have nothing, and for my part, although I have these raw materials, they are of no use to me. What I need is the things that can be made out of these raw materials by work: but I am too lazy to work for myself. But first I must explain that I possess something else besides the raw materials. These three knives represent all the machinery of production: the factories, tools, railways, and so forth, without which the necessaries of life cannot be produced in abundance. And these three coins" - taking three 5 cent pieces out of his pocket - "represent my money, capital."

Siphso proceeded to cut up one of the slices of bread into a number of little square blocks.

"These represent the things which are produced by labour, aided by machinery, from the raw materi-

als. We will suppose that a week's work is worth one Rand."

Siphso now spoke to the Working Class as represented by Nkosi, Thandi and Abendigo.

"You say that you are all in need of employment, and as I am the kind-hearted Capitalist Class, I am going to invest all my money in various industries, so as to give you plenty of work. I shall pay each of you one Rand per week, and a week's work is that you must each produce three of these square blocks. For doing this work you will each receive your wages; the money will be your own, to do as you like with, and the things you produce will of course be mine, to do as I like with.

You will each take one of these machines and as soon as you have done a week's work, you shall have your money."

The Working Class accordingly set to work, and the Capitalist Class sat down and watched them. As soon as they had finished, they passed the nine little blocks to Siphso, who placed them on a piece of paper by his side and paid the workers their wages.

"These blocks represent the necessaries of life. You can't live without some of these things, but as they belong to me, you will have to buy them from me: my price for these blocks is, one Rand each."

As the Working Class were in need of the necessaries of life and as they could not eat, drink or wear the useless money, they were compelled to agree to the kind capitalist's terms. They each bought back, and at once consumed, one-third of the produce of their labour. The Capitalist Class also devoured two of the square blocks, and so the net result of the week's work was that the kind capitalist had consumed two Rand's worth of the things produced by the labour of the others, and reckoning the squares at their market value of one Rand each, he had more than doubled his capital, for he still possessed the three Rands in money and in addition four Rands worth of goods. As for the Working Class, Nkosi, Thandi and Abendigo, having each consumed the Rand's worth of necessaries they had bought with their wages, they were again in precisely the same condition as when they started work - they had nothing.

This process was repeated several times: for each week's work the producers were paid their wages. They kept on working and spending all their earnings. The kind-hearted capitalist consumed twice as much as any one of them and his pool of wealth continually increased. In a little while, reck-

oning the little squares at their market value of one Rand each, he was worth about one hundred Rand, and the Working Class was still in the same condition as when they began, and were still tearing into their work as if their lives depended upon it.

After a while the rest of the crowd began to laugh, and their merriment increased when the kind-hearted capitalist, just after having sold a Rand's worth of necessaries to each of his workers, suddenly took their tools, the machinery of production, the knives, away from them, and informed them that as owing to over-production, all his storehouses were full-to-bursting with the necessaries of life, he had decided to close down the works.

"Well, and what the bloody hell are we to do now?" demanded Thandi.

"That's not my business," replied the kind-hearted capitalist. "I've paid your wages, and provided you with plenty of work for a long time past. I have no more work for you to do at present. Come round again in a few months' time and I'll see what I can do for you."

"But what about the necessaries of life?" Demanded Nkosi.

"We must have something to eat."

"Of course you must," replied the capitalist, in a friendly way; "and I shall be very pleased to sell you some."

"But we haven't got any bloody money!"

"Well, you can't expect me to give you my goods for nothing! You didn't work for me for nothing, you know.

I paid you for your work and you should have saved something: you should have been careful like me. Look how I have got on by being careful!"

The unemployed looked blankly at each other, but the rest of the crowd only laughed; and then the three unemployed began to

abuse the kind-hearted capitalist, demanding that he should give them some of the necessaries of life that he had piled up in his warehouses, or to be allowed to work and produce some more for their own needs; and even threatened to take some of the things by force if he did not agree with their demands. But the kind-hearted capitalist told them not to be cheeky, and spoke to them about honesty, and said if they were not careful he would have their faces battered in for them by the police, or if necessary he would call out the army and have them shot down like dogs, the same as he had done before at many other places.



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