

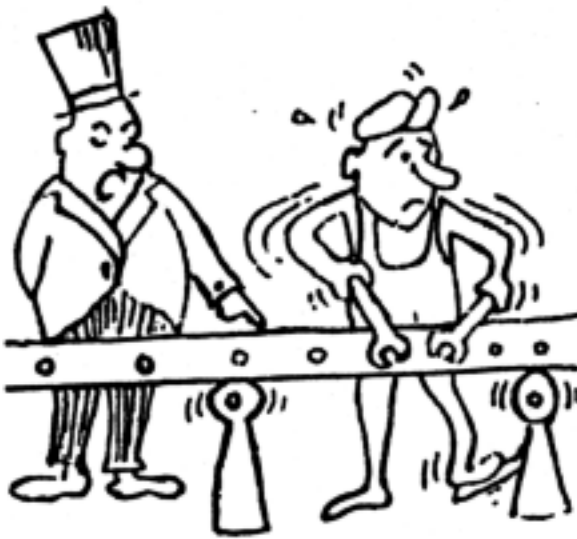
Notes on Theory No 4

In previous issues of Vukani we've seen how bosses make profits at the expense of workers (Surplus Value, Vukani No.2). We've also discussed how some capitalists grow bigger and make more money by competing with other capitalists in the exploitation of workers so that increasingly, wealth is concentrated into the hands of fewer and fewer people (Accumulation of Capital, Vukani No.3). In the last issue of Vukani we've shown how the class that rules economically, that is, those who own the means of production (land, mines, factories) - the capitalists, also rule politically: they control the State. The state includes the police, army, courts, education system and media. These parts work together. We've concluded that in a capitalist society, the function of the state is to uphold the system of oppression and exploitation. In this issue of Vukani we examine the concept "alienation".

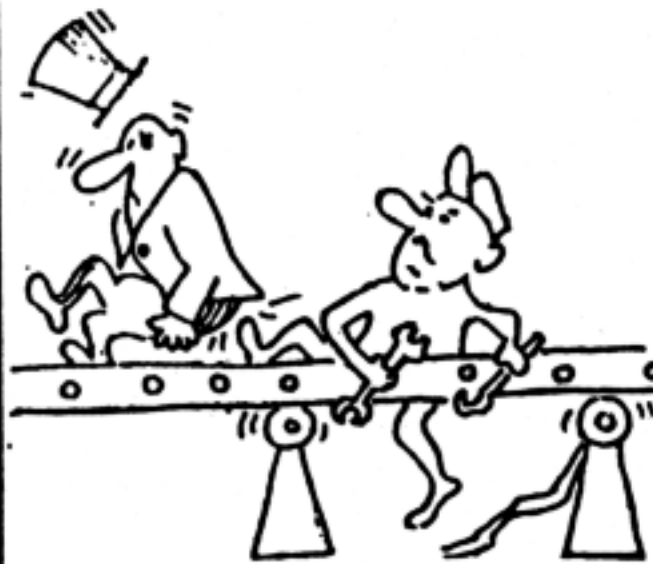
DIVISION OF LABOUR

Alienation basically means being cut off or isolated from oneself, the work one does, and from society.

Jobs for most factory workers are divided up or fragmented into a number of smaller tasks, each done by different workers. This is called the technical division of labour. For example, single workers in a car factory don't build a car from start to finish alone.



1. Can't you do something with your right foot as well?



2. Yes, this!



Individual workers build one part of a car over and over again. Different workers build different parts. Most workers do the same work day in, day out for years.

NO CONTROL

With this division of labour, a worker only needs to know one part of the whole job. This is boring and repetitive work. Workers are forced to do this kind of unsatisfying work in order to survive. The word "alienation" is used to describe how this work affects people. Alienated workers feel unfulfilled and cut off from themselves. They also feel cut off from the products they produce, which belongs to someone else (the capitalists), and not to themselves. Workers have no control over their jobs and the goods they make.

They have no say in what kind of goods must be made to benefit society and how these must be distributed. Workers have no opportunity to think about the goods they make. They cannot give suggestions about how a product can be improved or changed. Their capacity to think must stop, but their bodies must work. There is no creativity involved when they work. Workers, one can say, are then reduced to the level of animals.

Think of this example. You can compare a bee with an architect. Both

ALIENATION AND WORK

of them are builders. Architects design houses for people. Bees build wax-cells. So what makes human labour different from the work of bees? One difference is that bees can't think about what they do. They work by instinct. Human beings on the other hand, think about what they are doing. They can imagine all sorts of things before they actually make them - the architect before building a house thinks of its size, the material he's going to use, its shape, which direction the house is going to face, etc. Bees can't do this. They are programmed to use the same material and build the cells in the same way.

doing part are also called conception and execution. We have shown how these become separated. People who execute tasks - factory workers, for example - have no opportunity to think about or conceive of these tasks. They



are deprived of that aspect of work which is special and unique to human beings: thinking!

COMMODITIES

It is important to note that workers are seen by the capitalists in the same way as goods or commodities. Commodities are bought and sold on the market. In a similar way,

workers are hired and fired in the "labour market". If there exists too much of a particular commodity, the price of it decreases or much of it is destroyed to keep the price up. We have seen that if there are many workers for the same job, bosses can reduce and keep wages down. We also have to remember that in a capitalist society, there will always be unemployment. So workers will always compete with one another. In this way, human beings in a capitalist society are seen in terms of how they can be used to make profits for a few capitalists.



So basically, human labour has two parts: a thinking part and a doing part. Under capitalist organisation of the economy, the thinking part and the

REPRESSION IN THE TRANSKEI

On 24 September 1985, in Cala, Transkei, a law student and health worker Bantandwa Ndonga was shot and killed in broad daylight by the Transkeian police.

The killing was witnessed by Lungesile Ntsebeza, Dumisa Ntsebeza, Godfrey Silinga, Victor Ngaleka and Monde Mvimvi. These five witnesses were detained by police shortly after the killing, and banished to remote villages in the Transkei. The banishment orders were temporarily lifted, but by the end of January, all five were re-detained.

Kaiser Matanzima, "President" of the Transkei bantustan, condoned the murder of Ndonga by blaming him for a bomb blast which destroyed a fuel depot in Umtata. Addressing a public meeting in Idutywa, Matanzima said: "I want the whole world to know that here in the Transkei we know the people who are causing trouble."