

Manual and intellectual work

Errico Malatesta

1922

The origin of this division of men into “intellectuals” (who are often simply idle without any intellectuality) and “manuals” can be found in the fact that in times and circumstances in which producing enough to largely satisfy one’s own needs required an excessive and unpleasant effort and the benefits of cooperation and solidarity were unknown, the strongest or most fortunate found a way to force others to work for them.

Then manual labor, in addition to being more or less painful, also became a sign of social inferiority; and therefore the lords willingly tired themselves and killed themselves in equestrian exercises, in exhausting and dangerous hunts, and in very tiring races, but they would have considered themselves dishonoured if they had soiled their hands in the smallest productive work.

Work was a slave thing; and it remains so even today despite the greater enlightenment and despite all the progress of mechanics and applied sciences, which make it easy to provide abundantly for everyone’s needs with pleasant work, moderate in duration and effort.

When everyone will have free use of the means of production and no one will be able to force another to work for him, then it will be in everyone’s interest to organize work in such a way that it is as productive and attractive as possible — and everyone will be able to cultivate, usefully or uselessly, studies without thereby becoming parasites.

There would be no parasites, first because no one would want to feed parasites and then because everyone would find that by giving his share of manual work to contribute to production he would at the same time satisfy his own organism’s need for physical activity.

Everyone would work, even poets and transcendental philosophers, without harm to poetry and philosophy. Indeed...

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