George E. Delehanty, *Nonproduction Workers in U.S. Manufacturing* (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 75.

8. Thorstein Veblen, *Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times* (New York, 1923), pp. 305–306.
9. Donald L. Schon, *Technology and Change: The New Heraclitus* (New York, 1967), pp. 60–61.

Chapter 13

The Universal Market

It is only in its era of monopoly that the capitalist mode of production takes over the totality of individual, family, and social needs and, in subordinating them to the market, also reshapes them to serve the needs of capital. It is impossible to understand the new occupational structure—and hence the modern working class—without understanding this development. How capitalism transformed all of society into a gigantic marketplace is a process that has been little investigated, although it is one of the keys to all recent social history.

Industrial capitalism began with a limited range of commodities in common circulation. On the household level these included the basic foodstuffs in more or less unprocessed form, such as grains and meals, fish and meats, dairy products, vegetables, distilled and fermented liquors, bread and biscuits, and molasses. Other regular household needs included tobacco, coal and candles, lamp oils and soap, tallow and beeswax, paper and printed matter. Clothing production was in its infancy, but the market in the early part of the nineteenth century was already well developed for thread and textiles, including knit goods, and boots and shoes. Household items also included the lumber products of sawmills and planing mills, iron hardware, bricks and stone, clay and glass products, furniture, furnishings, china and utensils, musical instruments, tinware and silverware, cutlery, clocks and watches, apothecary chemicals and drugs.

Behind these were the commodities required as raw materials for the manufacture of such articles: iron and nonferrous ores and metals, raw lumber, tar, pitch, turpentine, potash, furs, hemp, quarry products, and so forth. Transportation required the manufacture of carts, wagons, coaches and carriages, ships and boats, casks and barrels. And the industries which produced tools and implements, such as scythes, plows, axes, and hammers, had just begun to produce machinery in the form of pumps, steam engines, spinning and weaving equipment, and the early machine tools.

In this earliest stage of industrial capitalism, the role of the family remained central in the productive processes of society. While capitalism was preparing the destruction of that role, it had not yet penetrated into the daily life of the family and the community; so much was this the case that one student of United States industrial history described this as the "family stage, in which household manufacturing was supreme. Practically all of the family's needs were supplied by its members. The producer and consumer were virtually identical. The family was the economic unit, and the whole system of production was based upon it. Before 1810 this stage was common throughout many sections of the country; after this date it became more or less localized." [1]

So long as the bulk of the population lived on farms or in small towns, commodity production confronted a barrier that limited its expansion. On the United States farm, for example, much of the construction work (apart from basic framing, as a rule) was accomplished without recourse to the market, as was a good deal of house furnishing. Food production, including the raising of crops and livestock and the processing of these products for table use was of course the daily activity of the farm family, and in large measure so also was the home production of clothing. The farmer and his wife and their

children divided among them such tasks as making brooms, mattresses, and soap, carpentry and small smith work, tanning, brewing and distilling, harness making, churning and cheese making, pressing and boiling sorghum for molasses, cutting posts and splitting rails for fencing, baking, preserving, and sometimes even spinning and weaving. Many of these farm activities continued as the natural mode of life of the family even after the beginnings of urbanization and the transfer of employment from the farm to the factory or other city job. Here is a description of the life of workers around the turn of the century which indicates the extent of the transformation that has taken place in the last seventy or eighty years:

> Except in the crowded tenement districts of the large cities—which housed a small fraction of the total urban population—town and city dwellers often produced some of their own food. Especially in the coal and steel regions, the grounds around the urban and suburban house sometimes looked much like a rural farmyard. Many families kept chickens or rabbits, sometimes pigs or goats, and even a cow or two, and raised vegetables and fruits in their own garden plots. A study of 2,500 families living in the principal coal, iron, and steel regions in 1890 suggests that about half of them had livestock, poultry, vegetable gardens, or all three. Nearly 30 percent purchased no vegetables other than potatoes during the course of a year. Describing the anthracite coal region of Pennsylvania in 1904, Peter Roberts wrote that "it is interesting to pass along the Schuylkill and Tremont valleys and see the many little farms which are cultivated by mine employees of the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company. In the strike of 1902, hundreds of mine employees' families could not have carried on the fight were it not for the small farms and large gardens they cultivate."
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> Though only a few miles from the center of the greatest metropolis in the land, Queens County and much of Brooklyn were still semirural in 1890, and many families were as dependent on small-scale agriculture as on the industrial or

commercial employment of the men in the family. North of what is now the midtown area, Manhattan itself was more bucolic than urban, and pigs and goats were often seen along the East River as far south as Forty-second Street. At a time when men worked ten or twelve hours a day, six days a week, much of the care of urban livestock and gardens inevitably fell to women—quite apart from the fact that such tasks were theirs by tradition.

Most purchased foods came into the urban home in their natural, unprocessed, uncanned, unpackaged state. Perhaps the majority of wives undertook a strenuous annual bout of preserving, pickling, canning, and jelly-making, and most baking was done in the family kitchen. Among 7,000 working-class families investigated by the U. S. Bureau of Labor between 1889 and 1892, less than half purchased any bread, and almost all bought huge amounts of flour, an average of more than 1,000 pounds per family per year. Even among the families of skilled craftsmen, who earned more than most other workingmen, one fourth bought no bread, and flour consumption averaged over two pounds per family per day.

No respectable home in 1890 was without a well-used sewing machine—one of the first items widely sold on the installment plan. Most men's clothing was bought, but most of the clothing of women and children was still made at home. In addition, there were curtains and sheets to be hemmed, caps and sweaters and stockings to be knitted and darned. Every prospective mother was expected to knit and sew a complete wardrobe for her first child, and to replenish it thereafter as needed.[2]

Before the present stage of capitalism, food processing was the province on the one side of the farm family, and on the other of the household. The role of industrial capital was minimal, except in transportation. But during the last hundred years industrial capital has thrust itself between farm and household, and appropriated all the processing functions of both, thus extending the commodity form to food in its semi-prepared or even fully prepared forms. For example,

almost all butter was produced on farms in 1879; by 1899 this had been reduced to well under three-fourths, and by 1939 little more than one-fifth of butter was being made on farms. Livestock slaughter moved away from the farm both earlier and more rapidly. The proportion of flour used by commercial bakeries climbed rapidly from only one-seventh in 1899 to more than two-fifths by 1939. And during the same period, the per capita production of canned vegetables multiplied fivefold, and of canned fruits twelve times over.[3] As with food, so with clothing, shelter, household articles of all sorts: the range of commodity production extended itself rapidly.

This conquest of the labor processes formerly carried on by farm families, or in homes of every variety, naturally gave fresh energy to capital by increasing the scope of its operations and the size of the "labor force" subjected to its exploitation. The workers for the new processing and manufacturing industries were drawn from the previous sites of these labor processes: from the farms and from the homes, in great part in the form of women progressively transformed in ever larger numbers from housewives into workers. And with the industrialization of farm and home tasks came the subjugation of these new workers to all the conditions of the capitalist mode of production, the chief of which is that they now pay tribute to capital and thus serve to enlarge it.

The manner in which this transition was accomplished includes a host of interrelated factors, not one of which can be separated from the others. In the first place, the tighter packing of urbanization destroys the conditions under which it is possible to carry on the old life. The urban rings close around the worker, and around the farmer driven from the land, and confine them within circumstances that preclude the former self-provisioning practices of the home. At the same time, the income offered by the job makes available the wherewithal to purchase the means of subsistence from industry, and thus, except in times of unemployment, the constraint of necessity which compelled home crafts is much weakened. Often, home labor is rendered uneconomic as compared with wage labor by the cheapening of manufactured goods, and this, together with all the other pressures bearing on the working-class family, helps to drive the woman out of the home and into industry. But many other factors contribute: the pressure of social custom as exercised, especially upon each younger generation in turn, by style, fashion, advertising, and the educational process (all of which turn "homemade" into a derogation and "factory made" or "store bought" into a boast); the deterioration of skills (along with the availability of materials); and the powerful urge in each family member toward an independent income, which is one of the strongest feelings instilled by the transformation of society into a giant market for labor and goods, since the source of status is no longer the ability to make many things but simply the ability to purchase them.

But the industrialization of food and other elementary home provisions is only the first step in a process which eventually leads to the dependence of all social life, and indeed of all the interrelatedness of humankind, upon the marketplace. The population of cities, more or less completely cut off from a natural environment by the division between town and country, becomes totally dependent upon social artifice for its every need. But social artifice has been destroyed in all but its marketable forms. Thus the population no longer relies upon social organization in the form of family, friends, neighbors, community, elders, children, but with few exceptions must go to market and only to market, not only for food, clothing, and shelter, but also for recreation, amusement, security, for the care of the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped. In time not only the material and service needs but even the emotional patterns of life are channeled through the market.

It thereby comes to pass that while population is packed ever more closely together in the urban environment, the

atomization of social life proceeds apace. In its most fundamental aspect, this often noticed phenomenon can be explained only by the development of market relations as the substitute for individual and community relations. The social structure, built upon the market, is such that relations between individuals and social groups do not take place directly, as cooperative human encounters, but through the market as relations of purchase and sale. Thus the more social life becomes a dense and close network of interlocked activities in which people are totally interdependent, the more atomized they become and the more their contacts with one another separate them instead of bringing them closer. This is true, for related reasons, also of family life. Apart from its biological functions, the family has served as a key institution of *social life, production,* and *consumption.* Of these three, capitalism leaves only the last, and that in attenuated form, since even as a consuming unit the family tends to break up into component parts that carry on consumption separately. The function of the family as a cooperative enterprise pursuing the joint production of a way of life is brought to an end, and with this its other functions are progressively weakened.

This process is but one side of a more complex equation: As the social and family life of the community are weakened, new branches of production are brought into being to fill the resulting gap; and as new services and commodities provide substitutes for human relations in the form of market relations, social and family life are further weakened. Thus it is a process that involves economic and social changes on the one side, and profound changes in psychological and affective patterns on the other.

The movement of capitalist society in this direction is bound up, on the economic side, with the capitalist drive to innovate new products, new services, new industries. The surplus produced first of all in the manufacturing industries in the form of concentrations of wealth is matched on the side of labor by the relative decline in demand for workers in those same industries as they are mechanized. The ample streams of capital meet the "freed" labor in the marketplace upon the ground of new products and industries. This results first of all in the conversion into a commodity of every product of human labor, so that goods-producing labor is carried on in none but its capitalist form. Then new commodities are brought into being that match the conditions of life of the urban dweller, and are put into circulation in the forms dictated by the capitalist organization of society. Thus a plentiful supply of printed matter becomes a vehicle for corporate marketing, as do scientific marvels of the twentieth century such as radio and television. The automobile is developed as an immensely profitable form of transportation which in the end destroys the more practical forms of transportation in the interest of profit. Like machinery in the factory, the machinery of society becomes a pillory instead of a convenience, and a substitute for, instead of an aid to, competence.

In a society where labor power is purchased and sold, working time becomes sharply and antagonistically divided from nonworking time, and the worker places an extraordinary value upon this "free" time, while on-the-job time is regarded as lost or wasted. Work ceases to be a natural function and becomes an extorted activity, and the antagonism to it expresses itself in a drive for the shortening of hours on the one side, and the popularity of labor-saving devices for the home, which the market hastens to supply, on the other. But the atrophy of community and the sharp division from the natural environment leaves a void when it comes to the "free" hours. Thus the filling of the time away from the job also becomes dependent upon the market, which develops to an enormous degree those passive amusements, entertainments, and spectacles that suit the restricted circumstances of the city and are offered as substitutes for life itself. Since they become the means of filling all the hours of "free" time, they flow

profusely from corporate institutions which have transformed every means of entertainment and "sport" into a production process for the enlargement of capital.* By their very profusion, they cannot help but tend to a standard of mediocrity and vulgarity which debases popular taste, a result which is further guaranteed by the fact that the mass market has a powerful lowest-common-denominator effect because of the search for maximum profit. So enterprising is capital that even where the effort is made by one or another section of the population to find a way to nature, sport, or art through personal activity and amateur or "underground" innovation, these activities are rapidly incorporated into the market so far as is possible.

The ebbing of family facilities, and of family, community, and neighborly feelings upon which the performance of many social functions formerly depended, leaves a void. As the family members, more of them now at work away from the home, become less and less able to care for each other in time of need, and as the ties of neighborhood, community, and friendship are reinterpreted on a narrower scale to exclude onerous responsibilities, the care of humans for each other becomes increasingly institutionalized. At the same time, the human detritus of the urban civilization increases, not just

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* A story datelined Los Angeles in the *New York Times* of February 20, 1973, tells of a car-smashing derby attended by almost 24,000 persons: "Around a centerpiece of wrecked automobiles, a Cadillac Eldorado bearing a red sign: 'See Parnelli Jones destroy this car,' a Rolls Royce Silver Shadow, a Lincoln Continental Mark IV and some $50,000 worth of other late-model cars bashed each other into junk here yesterday. Billed as the 'world's richest demolition derby,' it ended in a limping, sputtering confrontation between a battered Ford LTD and a Mercury station wagon. . . .

" 'I figure it's a little like the last of the Roman Empire,' George Daines said as he bought tickets (at $8 for adults and $4 for children) for himself and his son. 'I wanted to be here to watch the last of the American empire.' "

because the aged population, its life prolonged by the progress of medicine, grows ever larger; those who need care include children—not only those who cannot "function" smoothly but even the "normal" ones whose only defect is their tender age. Whole new strata of the helpless and dependent are created, or familiar old ones enlarged enormously: the proportion of "mentally ill" or "deficient," the "criminals," the pauperized layers at the bottom of society, all representing varieties of crumbling under the pressures of capitalist urbanism and the conditions of capitalist employment or unemployment. In addition, the pressures of urban life grow more intense and it becomes harder to care for any who need care in the conditions of the jungle of the cities. Since no care is forthcoming from an atomized community, and since the family cannot bear all such encumbrances if it is to strip for action in order to survive and "succeed" in the market society, the care of all these layers becomes institutionalized, often in the most barbarous and oppressive forms. Thus understood, the massive growth of institutions stretching all the way from schools and hospitals on the one side to prisons and madhouses on the other represents not just the progress of medicine, education, or crime prevention, but the clearing of the marketplace of all but the "economically active" and "functioning" members of society, generally at public expense and at a handsome profit to the manufacturing and service corporations who sometimes own and invariably supply these institutions.

The growth of such institutions calls forth a very large "service" employment, which is further swelled by the reorganization of hospitality on a market basis in the form of motels, hotels, restaurants, etc. The growth not only of such institutions but of immense amounts of floor space devoted to wholesaling and retailing, offices, and also multiple-dwelling units, brings into being a huge specialized personnel whose function is nothing but cleaning, again made up in good part

of women who, in accord with the precepts of the division of labor, perform one of the functions they formerly exercised in the home, but now in the service of capital which profits from each day's labor.

In the period of monopoly capitalism, the first step in the creation of the universal market is the conquest of all goods production by the commodity form, the second step is the conquest of an increasing range of services and their conversion into commodities, and the third step is a "product cycle" which invents new products and services, some of which become indispensable as the conditions of modern life change to destroy alternatives. In this way the inhabitant of capitalist society is enmeshed in a web made up of commodity goods and commodity services from which there is little possibility of escape except through partial or total abstention from social life as it now exists. This is reinforced from the other side by a development which is analogous to that which proceeds in the worker's work: the atrophy of competence. In the end, the population finds itself willy-nilly in the position of being able to do little or nothing itself as easily as it can be hired done in the marketplace by one of the multifarious new branches of social labor. And while from the point of view of consumption this means total dependence on the market, from the point of view of labor it means that all work is carried on under the aegis of capital and is subject to its tribute of profit to expand capital still further.

The universal market is widely celebrated as a bountiful "service economy," and praised for its "convenience," "cultural opportunities," "modern facilities for care of the handicapped," etc. We need not emphasize how badly this urban civilization works and how much misery it embraces. For purposes of our discussion, it is the other side of the universal market, its dehumanizing aspects, its confinement of a large portion of the population to degraded labor, that is chiefly of interest. Just as in the factory it is not the machines that are at fault but the conditions of the capitalist mode of production under which they are used, so here it is not the necessary provision of social services that is at fault, but the effects of an all-powerful marketplace which, governed by capital and its profitable investment, is both chaotic and profoundly hostile to all feelings of community. Thus the very social services which should facilitate social life and social solidarity have the opposite effect. As the advances of modern household and service industries lighten the family labor, they increase the futility of family life; as they remove the burdens of personal relations, they strip away its affections; as they create an intricate social life, they rob it of every vestige of community and leave in its place the cash nexus.

It is characteristic of most of the jobs created in this "service sector" that, by the nature of the labor processes they incorporate, they are less susceptible to technological change than the processes of most goods-producing industries. Thus while labor tends to stagnate or shrink in the manufacturing sector, it piles up in these services and meets a renewal of the traditional forms of pre-monopoly competition among the many firms that proliferate in fields with lower capital-entry requirements. Largely nonunion and drawing on the pool of pauperized labor at the bottom of the working-class population, these industries create new low-wage sectors of the working class, more intensely exploited and oppressed than those in the mechanized fields of production.

This is the field of employment, along with clerical work, into which women in large numbers are drawn out of the household. According to the statistical conventions of economics, the conversion of much household labor into labor in factories, offices, hospitals, canneries, laundries, clothing shops, retail stores, restaurants, and so forth, represents a vast enlargement of the national product. The goods and services produced by unpaid labor in the home are not reckoned at all, but when the same goods and services are produced by paid

labor outside the home they are counted. From a capitalist point of view, which is the only viewpoint recognized for national accounting purposes, such reckoning makes sense. The work of the housewife, though it has the same material or service effect as that of the chambermaid, restaurant worker, cleaner, porter, or laundry worker, is outside the purview of capital; but when she takes one of these jobs outside the home she becomes a *productive* worker. Her labor now enriches capital and thus deserves a place in the national product. This is the logic of the universal market. Its effect upon the patterns of employment and the composition of the working class will later be treated in greater detail.

Notes

1. Rolla Milton Tryon, *Household Manufactures in the United States: 1640–1860* (Chicago, 1917), pp. 243–44.
2. Robert W. Smuts, *Women and Work in America* (1959; paperback ed., New York, 1971) pp. 11–13.
3. George J. Stigler, *Trends in Output and Employment* (New York, 1947), pp. 14, 24.