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# The Working Class and Neomalthusianism

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At the Pirogov Doctors' Congress much interest was aroused and a long debate was held on the question of abortions. The report was made by Lichkus, who quoted figures on the exceedingly widespread practice of destroying the foetus in present-day so-called civilised states.

In New York, 80,000 abortions were performed in one year and there are 36,000 every month in France. In St. Petersburg the percentage of abortions has more than doubled in five years.

The Pirogov Doctors' Congress adopted a resolution saying that there should never be any criminal prosecution of a mother for performing an artificial abortion and that doctors should only be prosecuted if the operation is performed for "purposes of gain".

In the discussion the majority agreed that abortions should not be punishable, and the question of the so-called neomalthusianism (the use of contraceptives) was naturally touched upon, as was also the social side of the matter. Mr. Vigdorichik, for instance, said, according to the report in *Russkoye Slovo*<sup>1</sup>, that "contraceptive measures should be welcomed" and Mr. Astrakhan exclaimed, amidst thunderous applause:

"We have to convince mothers to bear children so that they can be maimed in educational establishments, so that lots can be drawn for them, so that they can be driven to suicide!"

If the report is true that this exclamation of Mr. Astrakhan's was greeted with thunderous applause, it is a fact that does not surprise me. The audience was made up of bourgeois, middle and petty bourgeois, who have the psychology of the philistine. What can you expect from them but the most banal liberalism?

From the point of view of the working class, however, it would hardly be possible to find a more apposite expression of the completely reactionary nature and the ugliness of "social neomalthusianism" than Mr. Astrakhan's phrase cited above.

... "Bear children so that they can be maimed" ... For that alone? Why not that they should *fight* better, more unitedly, consciously and resolutely than

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<sup>1</sup> *Russkoye Slovo (Russian Word)* — a bourgeois liberal daily published in Moscow from 1895 to November 1917; it appeared again for several months in 1918 under the title *Nashe Slovo (Our Word)*.

we are fighting against the present-day conditions of life that are maiming and ruining our generation?

This is the radical difference that distinguishes the psychology of the peasant, handicraftsman, intellectual, the petty bourgeois in general, from that of the proletarian. The petty bourgeois sees and feels that he is heading for ruin, that life is becoming more difficult, that the struggle for existence is ever more ruthless, and that his position and that of his family are becoming more and more hopeless. It is an indisputable fact, and the petty bourgeois protests against it.

But *how* does he protest?

He protests as the representative of a class that is hopelessly perishing, that despairs of its future, that is depressed and cowardly. There is nothing to be done ... if only there were fewer children to suffer our torments and hard toil, our poverty and our humiliation — such is the cry of the petty bourgeois.

The class-conscious worker is far from holding this point of view. He will not allow his consciousness to be dulled by such cries no matter how sincere and heartfelt they may be. Yes, we workers and the mass of small proprietors lead a life that is filled with unbearable oppression and suffering. Things are harder for our generation than they were for our fathers. But in one respect we are luckier than our fathers. *We have begun to learn and are rapidly learning to fight* — and to fight not as individuals, as the best of our fathers fought, not for the slogans of bourgeois speechifiers that are alien to us in spirit, but for our slogans, the slogans of our class. We are fighting better than our fathers did. Our children will fight better than we do, and *they will be victorious*.

The working class is not perishing, it is growing, becoming stronger, gaining courage, consolidating itself, educating itself and becoming steeled in battle. We are pessimists as far as serfdom, capitalism and petty production are concerned, but we are ardent optimists in what concerns the working-class movement and its aims. We are already laying the foundation of a new edifice and our children will complete its construction.

That is the reason — the only reason — why we are unconditionally the enemies of neomalthusianism, suited only to unfeeling and egotistic petty-bourgeois couples, who whisper in scared voices: “God grant we manage somehow by ourselves. So much the better if we have no children.”

It goes without saying that this does not by any means prevent us from demanding the unconditional annulment of all laws against abortions or against the distribution of medical literature on contraceptive measures, etc. Such laws are nothing but the hypocrisy of the ruling classes. These laws do not heal the ulcers of capitalism, they merely turn them into malignant ulcers that are especially painful for the oppressed masses. Freedom for medical propaganda and the protection of the elementary democratic rights of citizens, men and women, are one thing. The social theory of neomalthusianism is quite another. Class-conscious workers will always conduct the most ruthless struggle against attempts to impose that reactionary and cowardly theory on the most progressive and strongest class in modern society, the class that is the best prepared for great changes.