

Karl Marx – Selected Quotations¹

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In order to be able to extract value for the consumption of a commodity, our friend, Moneybags, must be so lucky to find within the sphere of circulation in the market, a commodity, whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value, whose actual consumption, therefore, is in itself an embodiment of labor, and consequently, the creation of value. (336)

The continuance of this relation demands that the owner of the labor-power should sell it only for a definite period, for if he was to sell it rump and stump, once for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity. (337)

Definite historical conditions are necessary that a product may become a commodity. It must not be produced as the immediate means of subsistence of the producer himself. (338)

If the total of the commodities required daily for the production of labor power = A, and those required weekly = B, and those required quarterly = C, and so on, the daily average of these commodities = $\frac{365A+52B+4C}{365}$. (341)

But the value of every commodity is determined by the labor-time requisite to turn it out so as to be normal quality. (341)

But in those cases in which the formal alienation by sale of the use-value of a commodity, is not simultaneous with its actual delivery to the buyer, the money of the latter usually functions as a means of payment. (342)

The price of labor-power is fixed by the contract, although not realized till later, like the rent of a house. The labor-power is sold, although it is only paid for at a later period. (342)

Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labor-power, we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production, from whose threshold there stares us in the face. (343)

We shall now at least force the secret of profit making. (343)

This sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labor-power goes on, is in fact the very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Property and Bentham. (343)

¹ Source: Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Robert C. Tucker, ed. Norton: New York, 1978

On leaving this sphere of simple circulation of exchange or of exchange of commodities, which furnishes the “Free-trader Vulgaris” with his views and ideas, and with the standard by which he judges a society based on capital and wages, we think we can perceive a change in the physiognomy of our dramatis personae. He, who before was the money-owner, now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labor-power follows as his laborer. (343)

The capitalist buys labor power in order to use it; and labor power in use is labor itself. (344)

Though a use-value, in the form of a product, issues from the labor-process, yet other use-values, products of previous labor, enter into the means of production. The same use-value is both the product of a previous process, and the means of production in a later process. Products are therefore not only results, but also essential conditions of labor. (347)

Whenever therefore a product enters as a means of production into a new labor-process, it thereby loses its character as a product, and becomes a mere factor in the process. (348)

A machine which does not serve the purpose of labor is useless. (348)

The labor-process, turned into a process by which the capitalist consumes labor-power, exhibits two characteristic phenomena. First, the laborer works under the control of the capitalist to whom his labor belongs ... Secondly, the product is the property of the capitalist and not that of the laborer, its immediate producer. (350)

Let us now examine production as a creation of value. (351)

Our capitalist has two objects in view: in the first place, he wants to produce a use-value that has a value in exchange, that is to say, an article destined to be sold, a commodity; and secondly, he desires to produce a commodity whose value shall be greater than the sums of the values of the commodities used in its production, this is, of the means of production and the labor-power, that he purchased with his good money on the open market. His aim is to produce not only use-value, but a commodity also; not only use-value but value; not only value, but at the same time surplus-value. (351)

But the past labor that is embodied in the labor-power, and the living labor that it can call into action; the daily cost of maintaining it, and its daily expenditure at work, are two totally different things. The former determines the exchange-value of the labor-power, the latter its use-value. The fact that half a day’s labor is necessary to keep the laborer alive during 24 hours, does not in any way prevent him from working a whole day. (357)

The capitalist has bought the labor-power at its day rate. To him its use-value belongs during one work-day. He has thus acquired the right to make the laborer work for him during one day. (362)

Capital is dead labor, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks. (362)

You and I know on the market only one law, that of the exchange of commodities. And the consumption of the commodity belongs not to the seller who parts with it, but to the buyer who acquires it. (363)

If the average time that (doing a reasonable amount of work) an average laborer can live, is 30 years, the value of my labor-power, which you pay me from day to day is $\frac{1}{365 \times 30}$ or $\frac{1}{10950}$ of its total value. But if you consume it in 10 years, you pay me daily $\frac{1}{10950}$ instead of $\frac{1}{3650}$ of its total value, i.e., only $\frac{1}{3}$ of its daily value, and you rob me therefore, every day of $\frac{2}{3}$ of the value of my commodity. (363)

I demand, therefore, a working-day of normal length, and I demand it without any appeal to your heart, for in money matters sentiment is out of place. (363)

I demand the normal working-day because I, like every other seller, demand the value of my commodity. (364)

Capital has not invented surplus-labor. Wherever a part of society possesses a monopoly of the the means pf production, the laborer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra working-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production, whether this proprietor be the Athenian nobleman, Etruscan theocrat, civis Romanus, Norman baron, American slave-owner, Wallachian Boyard, modern landlord or capitalist. (364)

On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the laborer maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working-day to one of definite normal duration. (364)

Between equal rights force decides. (364)

The comparison of the greed for surplus labor in the Danubian Principalities with the same greed in English factories has a special interest, because surplus labor on the corvee has an independent and palpable form. (365)

It is evident that in this atmosphere the formation of surplus-value by surplus-labor is no secret. (366)

No branch of industry in England (we do not take into account the making of bread by machinery recently introduced) has preserved up to the present day a method of production so archaic, so – as we see from the poets of the Roman Empire – pre-Christian, as baking. (368)

After what has just been said, it will be understood that the Report of the Commission classes journeymen bakers among the short-lived laborers, who, having by good luck escaped the normal decimation of the children of the working-class, rarely reach the age of 42. (370)

In the last week of June, 1863, all the London daily papers published a paragraph with the “sensational” heading, “Death from simple over-work.” It dealt with the death Mary Anne Walkley, 20 years of age, employed in a highly-respectable dressmaking establishment, exploited by a lady with the pleasant name of Elise. (371)

The occupation [blacksmith], instinctive almost as a portion of human art, unobjectionable as a branch of human industry, is made by the mere excess of work, the destroyer of man. (372)

To appropriate labor during all the 24 hours of the day is, therefore, the inherent tendency of capitalist production. (372)

“What is a working-day? What is the length of time during which capital may consume the labor-power whose daily value it buys? How far may the working-day be extended beyond the working-time necessary for the reproduction of labor-power itself?” (373)

It is not the normal maintenance of the labor-power which is to determine the limits of the working-day; it is the greatest possible daily expenditure of labor-power, no matter how diseased, compulsory, and painful it may be, which is to determine the limits of the laborers’ period of repose. (373)

Capital cares nothing for the length of life of labor-power. All that concerns it is simply and solely the maximum of labor-power that can be rendered fluent in a working-day. (373)

The slave-owner buys his laborer as he buys his horse. (374)

If he loses his slave, he loses capital that can only be restored by new outlay on the slave-mart. (374)

Considerations of economy, moreover, which under a natural system, afford some security for human treatment by identifying the master's interest in the slave's preservation, when once trading in slaves is practiced, become reasons for racking to the uttermost the toil of the slave; for, when his place can at once be supplied from foreign preserves, the duration of his life becomes a matter of less moment than the productiveness while it lasts. (374)

It is accordingly a maxim of slave management, in slave-importing countries, that the most effective economy is that which takes out of the human chattel in the shortest space of time the utmost amount of exertion it is capable of putting forth. (374)

Après moi le deluge! Is the watchword of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation. Hence capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the laborer, unless under compulsion from society. (375)

The establishment of a normal working-day is the result of centuries of struggle between capitalist and labor (376)

To the out-cry as to the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of over-work, it answers: Ought these to trouble us since they increase our profits? (376)

The duration of the surplus labor, however, is arrived at, by subtracting the necessary labor-time from the total work day. (378)

The surplus-value produced by prolongation of the working-day, I call absolute surplus-value. On the other hand, the surplus-value arising from the curtailment of the necessary labor-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working-day, I call relative surplus-value. (379)

The value of commodities is in inverse ratio to the productiveness of labor. And so, too, is the value of labor-power, because it depends on the values of commodities. (382)

The value of a commodity is, in itself, of no interest to the capitalist. What alone interests him, is the surplus value that dwells in it, and is realizable by sale. (383)

The shortening of the working-day is, therefore, by no means what is aimed at, in capitalist production, when labor is economized by increasing its productiveness. (383)

Capitalist production only then really begins, as we have already seen, when each individual capital employs simultaneously a comparatively large number of laborers; when consequently the labor-process is carried on on an extensive scale and yields, relatively, large quantities of products. (384)

The directing motive, the end and aim of capitalist production, is to extract the greatest possible amount of surplus-value, and consequently to exploit labor-power to the greatest possible extent. (385)

Moreover, the cooperation of wage-laborers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them. (385)

If, then, the control of the capitalist is in substance two-fold by reason of the two-fold nature of the process of production itself, - which, on the one hand is a social process for producing use-values, on the other, a process for creating surplus-value – in form that control is despotic. (385)

As cooperation extends its scale, this despotism takes forms peculiar to itself. (385)

Just as at first the capitalist is relieved from actual labor so soon as his capital has reached that minimum amount with which capitalist production, as such, begins, so now, he hands over the work of direct and constant supervisor of the individual workmen, and groups of workmen, to a special kind of wage-laborer. (385)

An industrial army of workmen, under the command of a capitalist, requires, like an army, officers (managers), and sergeants (foremen, overlookers), who, while the work is being done, command in the name of the capitalist. (386)

The laborer is the owner of his labor-power until he has done bargaining for its sale with the capitalist; and he can sell no more than what he has – i.e., his individual isolated labor-power. (386)

Hence, the productive power developed by the laborer when working in cooperation, is the productive power of capital. (386)

This power is developed gratuitously, whenever the workmen are placed under given conditions, and it is capital that places them under such conditions. Because the power costs capital nothing, and because, on the other hand, the laborer himself does not develop it before his labor belongs to capital, it appears as a power with which capital is endowed by Nature – a productive power that is immanent in capital. (386)

The capitalistic form, on the contrary, pre-supposes from the first to last, the free wage-laborer, who sells his labor-power to capital. (387)

If we now go into more detail, it is, in the first place, clear that a laborer who all his life performs one and the same simple operation, converts his whole body into an automatic, specialized implement of that operation. (390)

Manufacture, in fact, produces the skill of the detailed laborer, by reproducing, and systematically driving to an extreme within the workshop, the naturally developed differentiation of trades, which is found ready to hand to society at large. (390)

The collective laborer, formed by the combination of a number of detail laborers, is the machinery specially characteristic of the manufacturing period. (391)

Since the collective laborer has functions, both simple and complex, both high and low, his members, the individual labor-powers, requires different degrees of training, and must therefore have different values. Manufacture, therefore, develops a hierarchy of labor-powers, to which there corresponds a scale of wages. (392)

The foundation of every division of labor that is well developed, and brought about by the exchange of commodities, is the separation between town and country. (393)

But what is it that forms the bond between the independent labors of the cattle-breeder, the tanner, and the shoemaker? It is the fact of their respective products are commodities. (394)

What, on the other hand, characterizes division of labor in manufactures? The fact that the detail laborer produces no commodities. It is only the common product of all the detail laborers that becomes a commodity. (394)

The different spheres of production, it is true, constantly tend to equilibrium: for, on the one hand, while each producer of a commodity is bound to produce a use-value, to satisfy a particular social want, and while the extent of these wants differs quantitatively, still there exists an inner relation which settles their proportions into a regular system, and that system one of spontaneous growth; and on the other hand, the law of the value of commodities ultimately determines how much of its disposable working-time society can expend on each particular class of commodities. (395)

But this constant tendency to equilibrium, of the various spheres of production, is exercised only in the shape of a reaction against the constant upsetting of this equilibrium. (395)

The same bourgeois mind which praises division of labor in the workshop, life-long annexation of the laborer to a partial operation, and his complete subjection to capital, as being an organization of labor that increases its productiveness – that same bourgeois mind denounces with equal vigor every conscious attempt to socially control and regulate the process of production, as an inroad upon such sacred things as their rights of property, freedom and unrestricted play for the benefit of the individual capitalist. (395)

It is very characteristic that the enthusiastic apologists of the factory system have nothing more damaging to urge against a general organization of the labor of society, than that it would turn all society into one immense factory. (396)

Division of labor within the workshop implies the undisputed authority of the capitalist over men that are but parts of a mechanism that belongs to him. (395)

The rules of the guilds, as I have said before, by limiting most strictly the number of apprentices and journeymen that a single master could employ, prevented him from becoming a capitalist. Moreover, he could not employ his journeymen in many other handicrafts than the one in which he as a master. (396)

A merchant could buy every kind of commodity, but labor as a commodity he could not buy. (396)

In manufacture, as well as in simple cooperation, the collective working organism is a form of existence of capital. The mechanism that is made up of numerous individual detail laborers belongs to the capitalist. Hence, the productive power resulting from a combination of laborers appears to be the productive power of capital. (397)

In manufacture, in order to make the collective laborer, and though him capital, rich in social productive power, each laborer must be poor in individual productive powers. (398)

Manufactures, accordingly, prosper most where the mind is least consulted, and where the workshop may ... be considered as an engine, the parts of which are men. (398)

As a matter of fact, some few manufacturers in the middle of the 18th century preferred for certain operations that were trade secrets, to employ half-idiotic persons. (398)

[Quoting Adam Smith]: The understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employment's. The man whose whole life is spent performing a few simple operations ... has no occasion to exert his understanding ... He generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. (399)

Some crippling of body and mind is inseparable even from division of labor in society. (399)

By decomposition of the handicrafts, by specialization of the instruments of labor, by the formation of detail laborers, and by grouping and combining the latter into a single mechanism, division of labor in manufacture creates a qualitative gradation, and a quantitative proportion of the social process of production; it consequently creates a definite organization of the labor of society, and thereby develops at the same time new productive forces in the society. (400)

In its specific capitalist form – and under the given conditions, it could take o other form than the capitalist one – manufacture is but a particular method of begetting relative surplus-value, or of augmenting at the expense of the laborer the self-expansion of capital – usually called social wealth. (400)

Political Economy, which as an independent science, first sprang into being during the period of manufacture, views the social division of labor only from the standpoint of manufacture, and sees in it only the means of producing more commodities with a given quantity of labor, and consequently, of cheapening commodities and hurrying on the accumulation of capital. (401)

John Stuart Mill says in his “Principles of Political Economy”: “It is questionable of all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day’s toil of any human being.” (403)

Like every other increase in the productiveness of labor, machinery is intended to cheapen commodities, and by shortening the portion of the working-day, in which the laborer works for himself, to lengthen the other portion that he gives, without an equivalent, to the capitalist. In short, it is a means for producing surplus-value. (403)

The labor of women and children was, therefore, the first thing sought by capitalists who used machinery. (404)

The value of labor-power was determined, not only by the labor-time necessary to maintain the individual adult laborer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labor market, spreads the man’s labor-power over his whole family. (404)

If machinery be the most powerful means for increasing the productiveness of labor – i.e., for shortening the working-time required in the production of a commodity, it becomes in the hands of capital the most powerful means in those industries first invaded by it, for lengthening the working-day beyond all bounds set by human nature. (404)

Machinery produces relative surplus-value; not only by directly depreciating the value pf labor-power, and by indirectly cheapening the same through cheapening the commodities that enter into reproduction, but also, when it is first introduced sporadically into an industry, by converting the labor employed by the owner of that machinery, into labor of a higher degree and greater efficacy, by raising the social value of the article produced above its individual value, and thus enabling the capitalist to replace the value of a day’s labor-power by a smaller portion of the value of a day’s product. (405)

Surplus-value arises from variable capital alone, and we saw that the amount of surplus-value depends on two factors, viz., the rate of surplus-value and the number of workmen simultaneously employed. (405)

Hence, the application of machinery to the production of surplus-value implies a contradiction which is immanent in it, since of the two factors of the surplus-value created by a given amount of capital, one the rate of surplus-value, cannot be increased, except by diminishing the other, the number of workmen. (406)

We there saw how machinery, by annexing the labor of women and children, augments the number of human beings who form the material for capitalist exploitation, how it confiscates the whole of the workman's disposable time, by immoderate extension of the hours of labor, and how finally its progress, which allows of enormous increase of production in shorter and shorter periods, serves as a means of systematically getting more work done in a shorter time, or of exploiting labor-power more intensely. (407)

To work at a machine, the workman should be taught from childhood, in order that he may learn to adapt his own movements to the uniform and unceasing motion of an automaton. (408)

Machinery is put to a wrong use, with the object of transforming the workman, from his very childhood, into a part of a detail-machine. (408)

The lightening of labor, even, becomes a sort of torture, since the machine does not free the laborer from work, but deprives the work of all interest. Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labor-process, but also of creating surplus-value, has this in common, that it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labor, but the instrument of labor that employ the workman. (409)

The main difficulty [in the automatic factory] ... lay ... above all in training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automation. (410)

The contest between the capitalist and wage-earner dates back to the very origin of capital. It raged throughout the whole manufacturing period. Built only since the introduction of machinery has the workman fought against the instrument of labor itself, the material embodiment of capital. (411)

Modern Industry, as we have seen, sweeps away by technical means the manufacturing divisions of labor, under which each man is bound hand and foot for life to a single detail-operation. (412)

At the same time, the capitalistic form of that industry reproduces this same division of labor in a still more monstrous shape; in the factory proper, by converting the workman into a living appendage of the machine; and everywhere outside the Factory, partly by the sporadic use of machinery and machine workers, partly re-establishing the division of labor on a fresh basis by the general introduction of the labor of women and children, and by cheap unskilled labor. (412)

Modern Industry never looks upon and treats the existing form, of a process as final. The technical basis of that industry is therefore revolutionary, while all earlier modes of production were essentially conservative. By means of machinery, chemical processes and other methods, it is continually causing changes not only in the technical basis of production, but also in the functions of the laborer, and in social combinations in the labor-process. (413)

Modern Industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail-worker of today, crippled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to a mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labors, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs, are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers. (413)

However terrible and disgusting the dissolution, under the capitalist system, of the old family ties may appear, nevertheless, modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young persons, and to children of both sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes. (415)