

**WAGE-LABOR AND
CAPITAL
&
VALUE, PRICE, AND
PROFIT**

KARL MARX

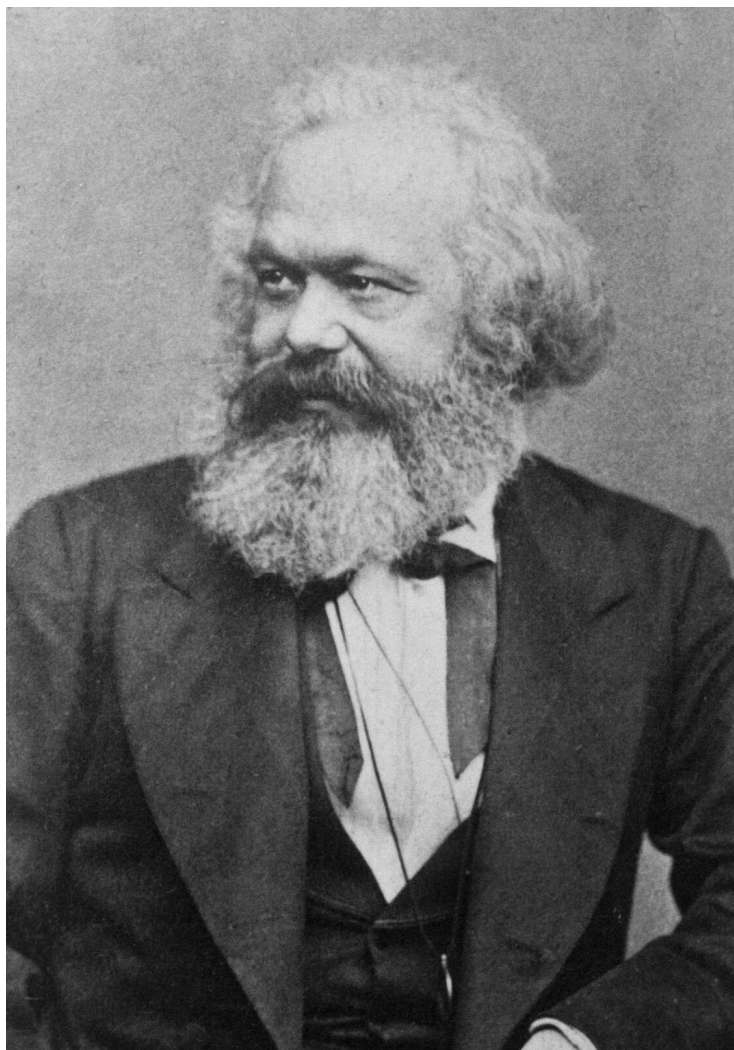


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I.

Wage-Labor and Capital

Introduction

This pamphlet first appeared in the form of a series of leading articles in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, beginning on April 4th, 1849. The text is made up of lectures delivered by Marx before the German Workingmen's Club of Brussels in 1847. The series was never completed. The promise "to be continued," at the end of the editorial in No. 269 of the newspaper, remained unfulfilled in consequence of the precipitous events of that time: the invasion of Hungary by the Russians (Tsarist troops invaded Hungary in 1849 to keep the Austrian Hapsburg dynasty in power), and the uprisings in Dresden, Iserlohn, Elberfeld, the Palatinate, and in Baden (spontaneous uprisings in Germany in May-July 1849, supporting the Imperial Constitution which were crushed in mid-July), which led to the suppression of the paper on May 19th, 1849. And among the papers left by Marx no manuscript of any continuation of these articles has been found.

Wage-Labor and Capital has appeared as an independent publication in several editions, the last of which was issued by the Swiss Co-operative Printing Association, in Hottingen-Zurich, in 1884. Hitherto, the several editions have contained the exact wording of the original articles. But since at least 10,000 copies of the present edition are to be circulated as a propaganda tract, the question necessarily forced itself upon me, would Marx himself, under these circumstance, have approved of an unaltered literal reproduction of the original?

Marx, in the '40s, had not yet completed his criticism of political economy. This was not done until toward the end of the '50s. Consequently, such of his writings as were published before the first installment of his *Critique of Political Economy* was finished, deviate in some points from those written after 1859, and contain expressions and whole sentences which, viewed from the standpoint of his later writings, appear inexact, and even incorrect. Now, it goes without saying that in ordinary editions, intended for the public in general, this earlier standpoint, as a part of the intellectual development of the author, has its place; that the author as well as the public, has an indisputable right to an unaltered reprint of these older writings.

In such a case, I would not have dreamed of changing a single word in it. But it is otherwise when the edition is destined almost exclusively for the purpose of propaganda. In such a case, Marx himself would unquestionably have brought the old work, dating from 1849, into harmony with his new point of view, and I feel sure that I am acting in his spirit when I insert in this edition the few changes and additions which are necessary in order to attain this object in all essential points. Therefore, I say to the reader at once: this pamphlet is not as Marx wrote it in 1849, but approximately as Marx would have written it in 1891.

Moreover, so many copies of the original text are in circulation, that these will suffice until I can publish it again unaltered in a complete edition of Marx's works, to appear at some future time. My alterations center

about one point. According to the original reading, the worker sells his labor for wages, which he receives from the capitalist; according to the present text, he sells his *labor-power*. And for this change, I must render an explanation: to the workers, in order that they may understand that we are not quibbling or word-juggling, but are dealing here with one of the most important points in the whole range of political economy; to the bourgeois, in order that they may convince themselves how greatly the uneducated workers, who can be easily made to grasp the most difficult economic analyses, excel our supercilious “cultured” folk, for whom such ticklish problems remain insoluble their whole life long.

Classical political economy¹ borrowed from industrial practice the current notion of the manufacturer, that he buys and pays for the labor of his employees. This conception had been quite serviceable for the business purposes of the manufacturer, his book-keeping and price calculation. But naively carried over into political economy, it there produced truly wonderful errors and confusions.

Political economy finds it an established fact that the prices of all commodities, among them the price of the commodity which it calls “labor,” continually change;

¹“By classical political economy, I understand that economy which, since the time of W. Petty, has investigated the real relations of production in bourgeois society, in contradistinction to vulgar economy, which deals with appearances only, ruminates without ceasing on the materials long since provided by scientific economy, and there seeks plausible explanations of the most obtrusive phenomena for bourgeois daily use, but for the rest confines itself to systematizing in a pedantic way, and proclaiming for everlasting truths, trite ideas held by the self-complacent bourgeoisie with regard to their own world, to them the best of all possible worlds.”
- Karl Marx, Capital Vol. 1, pg. 93.

that they rise and fall in consequence of the most diverse circumstances, which often have no connection whatsoever with the production of the commodities themselves, so that prices appear to be determined, as a rule, by pure chance. As soon, therefore, as political economy stepped forth as a science, it was one of its first tasks to search for the law that hid itself behind this chance, which apparently determined the prices of commodities, and which in reality controlled this very chance. Among the prices of commodities, fluctuating and oscillating, now upward, now downward, the fixed central point was searched for around which these fluctuations and oscillations were taking place.

In short, starting from the price of commodities, political economy sought for the value of commodities as the regulating law, by means of which all price fluctuations could be explained, and to which they could all be reduced in the last resort. And so, classical political economy found that the value of a commodity was determined by the labor incorporated in it and requisite to its production. With this explanation, it was satisfied. And we, too, may, for the present, stop at this point. But, to avoid misconceptions, I will remind the reader that today this explanation has become wholly inadequate.

Marx was the first to investigate thoroughly into the value-forming quality of labor and to discover that not all labor which is apparently, or even really, necessary to the production of a commodity, imparts under all circumstances to this commodity a magnitude of value corresponding to the quantity of labor used up. If,

therefore, we say today in short, with economists like Ricardo, that the value of a commodity is determined by the labor necessary to its production, we always imply the reservations and restrictions made by Marx. Thus much for our present purpose; further information can be found in Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*, which appeared in 1859, and in the first volume of *Capital*.

But, as soon as the economists applied this determination of value by labor to the commodity "labor," they fell from one contradiction into another. How is the value of "labor" determined? By the necessary labor embodied in it. But how much labor is embodied in the labor of a laborer of a day, a week, a month, a year? If labor is the measure of all values, we can express the "value of labor" only in labor. But we know absolutely nothing about the value of an hour's labor, if all that we know about it is that it is equal to one hour's labor. So, thereby, we have not advanced one hair's breadth nearer our goal; we are constantly turning about in a circle. Classical economics, therefore, essayed another turn. It said: the value of a commodity is equal to its cost of production. But, what is the cost of production of "labor?" In order to answer this question, the economists are forced to strain logic just a little. Instead of investigating the cost of production of labor itself, which, unfortunately, cannot be ascertained, they now investigate the cost of production of the laborer. And this latter can be ascertained. It changes according to time and circumstances, but for a given condition of society, in a given locality, and in a given branch of production, it, too, is given, at least within quite narrow limits.