

**Karl Marx**  
**The Breakdown of Production Based on Labor Time\***  
**Translated by K.R. Dove (1963, emended 1998)**

The exchange of living labor for labor made object-like,<sup>1</sup> i.e., the positing of social labor in the form of an opposition between capital and wage-labor, is the final stage in the development of the *value relation* and of production based on [exchange] value.

This form of production presupposes and develops on the assumption that the deciding factor in the production of wealth is the mass of unmediated [i.e., abstract homogeneous] labor time, the quantity of applied labor. But with the development of large industry, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less and less on labor time and the quantity of labor expended, and increasingly more on the power of the instrumentalities set into motion during labor time. These instrumentalities and their powerful effectiveness are not proportional to the unmediated labor time which is expended in their production; their effectiveness rather depends on the attained level of science and the progress of technology, i.e., the application of this science to production. (The development of this science, especially natural science, and with it all the others, is itself proportional to the development of material production.) Agriculture, for example, becomes the mere application of the science of material metabolism—how to regulate it most advantageously for the whole societal body.

Real wealth manifests itself more and more in the immense [quantitative] disproportion between applied labor time and its product, and in the qualitative disproportion between labor that is reduced to a pure abstraction, and the power of the productive process which labor merely watches. This is shown by large industry. Human labor then no longer appears as enclosed in the process of production—man rather releases himself to the productive process as a supervisor and regulator. (This observation is valid not only for machinery but also for the organization of human activities, and for the development of human communication.) The laborer no longer employs a modified natural object [i.e., an instrument, a tool] as an intermediary between himself and the object; he now transforms the natural process into an industrial process and employs it as an intermediary between himself and inorganic nature [as a whole]. Through this transformation man develops his mastery over nature.

Instead of being, *qua* laborer, the main agent in the productive process, man assumes a position beside it. In this transformation, the great pillar of production and wealth is no longer the unmediated labor performed by man himself, nor his labor time, but the appropriation of his universal power of production, his knowledge and mastery over nature through his societal existence—in one word: the development of the societal individual. The theft of another man's labor time, on which [social] wealth still rests today, then appears as a miserable foundation compared with the new basis which large-scale industry itself has created. As soon as human labor, in its unmediated form, has ceased to be the great source of wealth, labor time will cease, and must of necessity cease to be the measure of wealth, and exchange value must of necessity cease to be the measure of use value. The surplus labor of the masses

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\* Selections from *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (London notebooks of 1857–58), Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1953, pp. 592–600.

<sup>1</sup> *Vergegenständlichte*

[of population] has thus ceased to be the condition for the development of social wealth, and the leisure of the few has ceased to be the condition for the development of the universal intellectual faculties of man. The mode of production which rests on exchange value thus collapses. Moreover, the [technologically] unmediated process of material production [which, under capitalism, serves as the norm] is itself liberated from the [hitherto governing] principle of want [based on scarcity] and antagonism.

The free development of all individuals cannot be brought about simply through a reduction of necessary labor time which is designed merely to replace necessary labor with surplus labor. This freedom is only made possible through a reduction of the necessary labor of society as a whole [i.e., as global] to a minimum, liberating time and creating means for all individuals to develop their artistic, scientific, and other potentialities.

Capital itself is the litigating contradiction which destroys the possibility of reducing labor time to a minimum because capital [by its very nature] posits labor time as the only measure and source of wealth. It therefore reduces necessary labor time in order to increase superfluous labor time. Thus superfluous labor time is more and more posited as the condition—la question de vie et de mort—for necessary labor time. So, on the one hand, capital invokes all the powers of science and nature, such as social organization and social communication, in order to make the creation of wealth (relatively) independent of the labor time applied to it. On the other hand, capital wants to measure the gigantic social forces thus created in terms of labor time and wants to confine these forces within the limits necessary to preserve the already created value as value. Productive powers and social relations—both different aspects of the development of the social individual—appear to capital only as means, and are used by capital only as means for production only within its narrow horizon of understanding and its constricted material conditions. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow it up. “Truly rich is a nation where you work six instead of twelve hours. Wealth is not the manipulation of surplus labor time” (real wealth), “but disposable time, besides that needed for direct production, for each individual and the entire society.” [*The Source and the Remedy* etc., 1821, p. 6]

Nature does not construct machines, locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules, etc. They are the products of human industry, natural material transformed into instruments which may be used either for a human control over nature, or for human activity within nature.<sup>2</sup> They are instruments of the human brain created by the human hand; they are the power of human knowledge objectified in material form. The development of fixed capital indicates the degree to which universal social knowledge has been transformed into a direct force of production, and thus the degree to which the very conditions of the social life process have come under the control of the general intellect and have been recreated according to the standards of human knowledge. It also shows to what degree the social forms of production are produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as unmediated instruments of social practice, of the real life process.

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<sup>2</sup> As in capitalism, see *Capital*, pp. 169ff. (Modern Library edition).

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*Grundrisse*, pp. 595–97

*The creation of much disposable* [i.e., free] time—beside the necessary labor time—for society in general and each of its members (i.e., space for the development of individuals and thus also of society), this creation of non-labor time appears from the standpoint of capital, as from that of all antecedent historical stages, as non-labor time, leisure for a few. In addition, capital increases the surplus labor time of the masses with the help of all possible means of art and science, because its wealth is directly constituted through the appropriation of surplus labor time, since capital's direct aim is [exchange] value, not use value. Therefore, in spite of itself, capital is instrumental in creating the means of socially disposable time. This is brought about by reducing labor time for the entire [global] society to a decreasing minimum, and thus freeing the time of all men for their own development. But the tendency of capital is always twofold: (1) *to create disposable time* and (2) *to convert it into surplus labor*. If it succeeds too well in the first aim, it suffers under surplus production; then necessary labor will be interrupted because capital can make no use of surplus labor. The more this contradiction develops, the more it becomes evident that the growth of the forces of production can no longer be bound up with the appropriation of alien surplus labor; the masses of laborers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labor.

When this is accomplished, when *disposable time* thereby ceases to have a *contradictory* existence, then necessary labor time (1) will have its measure in the *needs* of the social individual, and (2) the development of the social power of production will grow so rapidly that the *disposable time* for all will increase, even though production will now be planned for the wealth of all men. Since real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals, the measure of wealth will no longer be labor time, but disposable time.

Labor time as the measure of wealth presupposes that wealth itself is based upon poverty and that disposable time only exists *in and through the opposition with surplus labor time*. In other words, [the capitalist practice of valuation by labor time] posits the whole time of an individual as labor time and thus degrades him to a mere laborer; the individual is subsumed under labor. *The most developed machinery thus forces the laborer to work longer nowadays than the savage or than he himself used to work with the simplest, crudest tools*.

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Just as during the development of large industry, its basis, i.e., appropriation of alien labor time, ceases to be instrumental in creating wealth, so too *unmediated labor* as such ceases to be the basis of production. Labor comes to lose this role in the process of production because: (1) it is more and more transformed into a supervising and regulating activity, and (2) the product ceases to be a product of individual, unmediated labor and comes rather to appear as the product of the *organization* of social activity.

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In unmediated exchange, individual, unmediated labor appears as realized in one particular product or in part of one product; the communal social character of labor, i.e., its character as universal labor made object-like<sup>3</sup> and as a satisfaction of universal need, is only shown [and here in an abstract way] through exchange. By contrast, the precondition for the productive power of the labor-mediating instruments that have developed into an automatic process in advanced industrial society is the subjugation of natural forces under a societal rationality; accordingly, *the labor of the individual in its unmediated existence [Dasein] is posited in a form which has abolished [aufgehoben] its individuality; it is posited as social labor. Thus the other [i.e., capitalist] basis of this [advanced] mode of production is eliminated.*

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*Grundrisse*, pp. 599–600

The true economy—economization—consists in economization of labor time; (reduction to a minimum of the costs of production); but this economization is identical with the development of the productive forces. Thus it is not in the least a renunciation of enjoyment, but is the development of power, of capacities of production and therefore it is also the development of capacities as well as means for enjoyment. The capacity for enjoyment is the precondition for the latter; it is therefore the primary means for enjoyment. This capacity is the development of an individual talent, the productive force. The economization of labor time is equivalent to the augmentation of free time, i.e., time for the full development of the individual, which, as the greatest productive power [i.e., science], has a reciprocal effect upon the productive power of labor. Seen from the standpoint of the immediate process of production, it can be considered as production of fixed capital—this fixed capital being man himself.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it is apparent that immediate labor time itself cannot remain in an abstract opposition to free time—in which position it appears when viewed from the standpoint of bourgeois economy.

Work cannot become play, as Fourier hoped. Fourier’s great merit was to have expressed, as an ultimate objective, the demand for transforming the present mode of industrial production rather than focusing his attention on distribution. Free time—which is leisure time as well as time for higher activities—transforms its possessor into a different subject and as this different subject he then participates in the immediate process of production. This latter is at the same time discipline for man as he becomes a different subject; it is, for example, the practice of one’s profession, experimental science, a materially creative and self-objectifying science for man who has become in the sense that the accumulated knowledge of society exists in his head. And in so far as labor demands practical activity and free movement, as in agriculture, it is at the same time ‘exercise.’<sup>5</sup>

Just as the economic system develops only gradually for us who watch civil society, its negation, which is its last result, is also a gradual development. Here we still have to deal with the immediate process of production. If we look upon civil society globally, we see that society itself always appears as the last result of the societal process of production, that is to say, man himself in his

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<sup>3</sup> *Vergegenständlichung*

<sup>4</sup> Man’s ‘second nature,’ i.e., ‘ethical life’ or *paideia*.

<sup>5</sup> Marx’s English.

societal relations. Everything which has a fixed form, such as a product, etc., appears only as a moment, a disappearing moment of this movement. Here the immediate process of production itself appears only as a moment. The conditions and objectifications of this process are themselves equally moments of the process, and only individuals appear as the subjects of this process; but these individuals exist in relations to one another which they reproduce as well as newly create. Their own constant process of movement, in which they likewise renew themselves, appears as the wealth of our globe created by them.

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