4 The Production-Process of Capital

4.1 THE LABOUR-AND-PRODUCTION PROCESS

4.1.1 The Labour-Process and the Production-Process

From beneath the motion of industrial capital where it has so far remained hidden now emerges the production of use-values in general. The latter which we call the labour-and-production process in the dialectic of capital is common to all societies, but it is divested of all extra-economic contingencies. It forms the material foundation of trans- or supra-historic economic life regardless of its social form. No society can exist without production, which is here defined as “the human being’s purposive activity on nature so as to transform part of it into readily (i.e. directly or productively) consumable use-values”. That this is a supra-historic condition of human existence can scarcely be doubted, despite the mystification of the concept of production by bourgeois economics. A clear distinction must be maintained between the production of material objects (use-values), which involves the human being's purposive action on nature, and the mere rendering of services by one person to another, which neither directly nor indirectly involves any transformation of nature.

The provision of services is, of course, not inessential to society’s existence. It, however, does not belong to the labour-and-production process which underlies the motion of industrial capital. Services are rendered “between us”, so to speak. They are not use-values, and hence cannot become commodities which Marx specified as “objects outside us” (Capital, I, p. 43). Since they are not commodities, they cannot be produced as value. Since they do not embody value, their provision cannot underlie the value-formation-and-augmentation process of industrial capital. “Services” usually refer to forms of unproductive labour, and they are classifiable into the following three categories: (i) personal; (ii) public-administrative; and (iii) business-administrative. In a purely capitalist society only the third category is of theoretical importance. Thus these services will be treated in the next chapter as types of “commercial labour”. For commercial labour is essentially an extension of the capitalist’s own entrepreneurial and managerial effort.
The second category which includes the services of soldiers, teachers, ritualists, health-care workers and bureaucrats, belongs to the state, which must be held implicit if the logic of capitalist society is to be prominently displayed. As for the first category, it can be considered as a carryover from pre-capitalist society, which is in the process of disappearing under capitalism because of what I would call "the tendency towards the progressive materialisation of economic life". This phrase refers to the increasing tendency in capitalism to substitute material objects, such as alarm clocks, for direct human services, such as a maid's call in the morning. Capitalism cannot produce maids, but it can produce alarm clocks. Therefore, if social life requires many persons to wake up punctually in the morning, capitalism responds to the need by producing alarm clocks and rendering the maid's service in that regard unnecessary.

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The production of use-values should, in the first place, be viewed as a labour-process, i.e. as the human being's purposive work on nature. It is a direct extension of his biological life, compelled by the necessity of self-preservation. Even the most primitive person works on nature in order to survive. The "subject" (operator) of this labour-process, which Marx aptly describes as "the everlasting, nature-imposed condition of human existence" (Capital, I, p. 179), is undoubtedly the human being himself who possesses labour-power as the source of productive labour. In this process, however, the human being works on specific parts of nature, called the objects of labour, such as trees which he intends to transform into lumber. He is also assisted by means of labour such as axes, saws, a lumber yard, and the like. He may also utilise supplementary or auxiliary materials, such as a whetstone with which to sharpen his axes, the measuring tape to determine lumber sizes, and so on. These categories classify the means of production in the order of proximity to nature, and show the direct and indirect (round-about) use of nature in the labour-process.

Once the labour-process is completed, however, the produced use-values are products, which have resulted from the labour-process. From the point of view of the products, the labour-process can be regarded as the production-process of things by things. From this point of view, the objects of labour, the means of labour, and the supplementary materials can be collapsed into the one category of the means of production \( P_m \), and together with labour-power \( L_p \), they are called the elements or factors of production. This new categorisation means