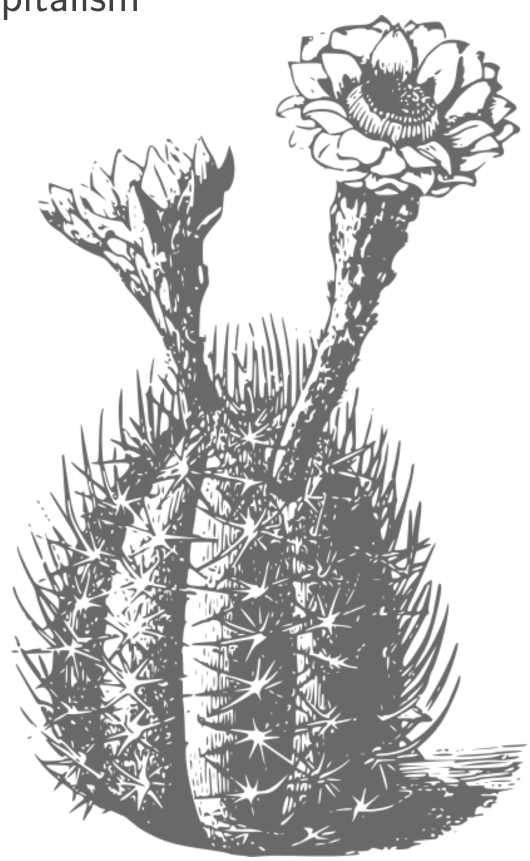
EN

OPEN MARX

A Gentle Introduction to Capitalism



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If there is indeed this constant technological progress, why do our working hours never decrease? Why must we always fear for our jobs, and why is it never seen as something positive in our society when there is less to do?

For well over 150 years, there has been a movement that refuses to let these questions rest. A movement that knows the answer to them and, because this answer is so devastating, strives for a real break with the existing order. The movement questions everything we think we know about work and our social coexistence, but anyone who wants to understand the movement must read its books—and they are rarely written in simple terms.

This booklet is an attempt to reveal the science and the goals of this movement in as accessible a manner as possible. In particular, this means explaining what the term *capitalism* means for them—a term that, for them, contains far more than we commonly suspect.

Making Money from Labour

PRINCIPLE OF EXCHANGE

The science of this movement, which calls everything we take for granted in our working world into question, begins by examining a society based on exchange. An exchange-based society means that citizens are themselves responsible for providing for their livelihood. They do this by producing things or offering services. They exchange their products and services for money and then exchange this money for everything they need for their lives: food, clothing, technology, holidays, etc. Whether this exchange takes place at the weekly market, in a hair salon, or on the website of a global online retailer, plays no role here.

EXCHANGE OF LABOUR-TIME

What is being exchanged is always human labour-time. In the case of services, this labour-time is directly visible. With products, the labour-time has already passed and is, in a certain sense, contained within the things. That is to say, a carpenter cannot buy wooden boards if someone had not previously taken the time to produce them. If the carpenter needs eight hours to build a table from these boards, then the table contains both her eight hours of labour-time and a few minutes of labour-time from the person who made the boards from a tree trunk. When the carpenter then sells the table and buys a new tool with the money, she is thereby paying for the labour-time of the tool manufacturer and all those who produced the parts for it. Suppose, however, that there were not just one tool manufacturer but several, and all tools had exactly the same quality—which product will she reach for? Tending towards the cheapest, which in our very early form of analysis means: the tool containing the least labour-time. To prevail in the market, it is therefore necessary, for producers as well as service providers, to save on labour-time.

The carpenter seems to have understood this, for labour-time can be saved essentially through the use of tools. By tools we mean everything that supports labour: electric kitchen appliances, specialised computer programs, or large industrial machines. What is relevant for the sale of one's own products and services is not how labour-saving this technology is in general. What is relevant is only how labour-saving this technology is *in comparison* to the technology employed by the competition. If a 3D developer works with a modern graphics card, then she needs considerably less time to create the same 3D model than a developer with PC equipment from ten years ago. And if a young carpenter owns a band saw, she can naturally produce much faster than an old carpenter still pottering away with a hand saw.

Significance of the Means of Production

Just briefly, to illustrate the effects of this: suppose both carpenters were self-employed, their products of equal quality, and their living costs—i.e. rent, food, insurance, etc.—equally high, let us say €600 per week. While the young producer, with her modern tools, puts together three tables per week, her older competitor manages only a single one. Disregarding the additional material and operating costs, the young carpenter, in order to finance her life, can sell the three tables for €200 each, while the older carpenter must insist on €600 for one table. The old man will not be able to hold his ground in the market for long. Incidentally, the same applies if they both had the same tool but the young carpenter works much faster or more hours per day. If a carpenter wants to build himself a living-room table privately, he can take as much time as he likes and gladly use his old apprentice's tools. But since he is not making the tables for himself, but for sale—that is, for others—he must be on a par with his competition in terms of his tools, his intensity of labour, and the length of his working day.

Socially Necessary Labour-Time

What does all this mean? Above all, that in exchange-based societies the freedom of citizens is restricted in a certain way. On the one hand, because they are dependent on the products and services of others and therefore always need enough money. On the other, because they only come by this money if they adapt their way of producing goods or offering services to the competition. Labour therefore does not turn into money simply—as if randomly—but rather a few rules must be followed that emerge from the market situation itself. What we can see through this are the first signs of a social order created by no human

The Impersonal Rule

being consciously, but into which we, as human beings, must fit our lives.

The Commodity and Money

THE COMMODITY

What is bought and sold on the market is always commodities. A commodity is something twofold: it has a use-value and an exchange-value. Use-value means that the commodity is useful for something, and exchange-value means that the commodity can in principle be bought or sold for money. In what follows we always assume commodities that are not one-off items (works of art, heirlooms, etc.) and could therefore be produced by different people.

THE SIMPLE FORM OF VALUE

On the market, money appears as a practical invention, but is in fact indispensable as a common point of reference. Let us assume I brew beer and want to exchange it at the market for useful things for my life— money, however, does not exist. If I were to take the beer from my production to a baker to exchange it for bread rolls, then the beer would serve only one purpose for me: to be exchanged. The baker needs the beer for something else: to get drunk. So suppose, at the baker's counter at eight in the morning, there are two bottles of beer and beside them lie ten bread rolls. We agree on the exchange ratio. I, who would now like to have breakfast, am not interested here in the use-value of the beer, but only in that of the bread rolls. The baker, who wants to drink with her partner in the evening, is interested only in the use-value of the beer. She thinks: "ten bread rolls are worth two bottles of beer" and I think: "two bottles of beer are worth ten bread rolls".

$$x \text{ commodity } A \text{ (2 bottles of beer)} \quad = \quad y \text{ commodity } B \text{ (10 bread rolls)}$$

THE DUAL CHARACTER OF THE COMMODITY

One commodity thus measures its exchange-value against the use-value of the other. The exchange-value of a bottle of beer cannot be demonstrated on the bottle of beer itself—it needs a counterpart, and here that is the bread rolls. While the beer thus has exchange-value from my perspective, it has use-value for the baker. While the bread rolls have use-value for me, they have exchange-value for the baker. If the baker and I had a shared enterprise that produced bread rolls and beer, then we could not arbitrarily exclude each other from the use of these things and could therefore not exchange them with one another. Bread rolls and beer would thus have no exchange-value for us, but only a use-value, and we would divide them among ourselves in a certain manner. Only when we need a third product that we cannot produce ourselves do beer and bread rolls once again become a means of exchange for us, and they lose their purely useful character.

THE EXPANDED FORM OF VALUE

With ten bread rolls in my bag, I continue my morning shopping trip and must negotiate a new exchange ratio with each individual producer. In my role as a brewer, I must additionally hope to be dealing with a society of drinkers. When I finally get home for breakfast and my girlfriend asks me how the shopping went, my answer could look something like this:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{2 bottles of beer} &= \text{10 bread rolls} \\ \text{2 bottles of beer} &= \text{1 jar of marmalade} \\ \text{2 bottles of beer} &= \text{400 g butter} \end{aligned}$$

THE GENERAL EQUIVALENT

It is absurd: every market participant would have to negotiate a new exchange ratio with every other person and constantly keep in mind how the need for each respective commodity compares to the labour-time expended on one's own product. In every known market society, a single commodity has therefore emerged to which all others relate. Suppose this commodity were a 12-year-old Scotch whisky:

$$\left.\begin{array}{l} \text{2 bottles of beer} \\ \text{10 bread rolls} \\ \text{1 jar of marmalade} \\ \text{400 g butter} \end{array}\right\} = \text{30 ml 12-year-old Scotch whisky}$$

By all commodities relating to the 12-year-old Scotch whisky, they become comparable with one another. If two beers are worth 30 ml of it and the 400 g of butter likewise, then a direct exchange of two beers for 400 g of butter would also be fair. If twenty bread rolls are worth 60 ml of the 12-year-old Scotch whisky, then I can exchange them loss-free for 2 jars of marmalade. So at eight in the morning I am not standing at my baker's with a crate of beer, but with a bottle of 12-year-old Scotch whisky, pouring a certain amount of it into a measuring jug for her. What has now changed is that the baker no longer needs to think about how great her need for it is. Nobody cares about the use-value of the whisky.

Its taste or its effect are nothing special. What is special is only its social function: that of being the general point of reference for all commodities on the market.

That, ultimately, is money: an ordinary commodity whose use as a general point of reference in exchange has become a social habit. Historically, gold and other precious metals were weighed out for this purpose, and it is their social function at the time that still makes them appear especially "valuable" today. This commodity with the special social status of the money form was for a very long time of a tangible nature, but has since shed this shell. Money, through a long historical process, has become a purely symbolic form: as digital figures in online accounts, printed on notes and stamped on coins.

The Money Form

In a market society, this notion that every thing has a monetary value is automatic and necessary. Since nearly everything today can be sold or bought under one use or another, every thing in everyday life appears to have not only a use but also a monetary value— you can eat off the table and it is worth €200. It is just as if value were a natural property of things: "Everything has its value." Just as beer is golden, liquid and alcoholic, it also costs a certain amount of money. If I ask myself how many bottles of beer a new Mercedes might be worth, I cannot think this without going the detour via money. I first think of the money value of the car, then divide it by the money value of a bottle of beer. But no matter which laboratory I send the beer to, viewed in isolation, no scientist in the world will find even the slightest value-atom in it.

The Spectral Objectivity

Value is a social property, just like those of the holy relics, artefacts and books of the religious world: although they are never more than clay figures, wood carvings or ink on paper, magical abilities are ascribed to them, or they are supposed to have been sent to Earth by God himself. These magical properties are preserved through stories that believers must tell one another for life. The value-property, by contrast, is the necessary result of a society based on the division of labour, made up of independent producers who are dependent on the products of others and can only satisfy their needs via the market—that is, through buying and selling. The feeling of normality that now attaches to exchange and money conceals the simple fact that we live in a very particular form of society.

The Fetishism of Commodities

Crisis as an example to show what power this abstract value-property has gained over our common life: a crisis in societies not based on exchange could be a famine, because it did not rain all summer. In today's society, when a crisis occurs there is no scarcity and, viewed purely externally, no difference to the time before a crisis is discernible. When a crisis sets in, the shelves remain full, people remain qualified in their professions and the machines are fully functional. And yet the world suddenly turns upside down. People lose their jobs, fear for their future, famines reappear and nobody really knows what actually happened. If a power plant then fails or a hospital has to close, that is the consequence of the crisis, not its cause. The cause is found in a fictional world of value that seems to exist "above our heads", much as a battle in the Greek pantheon once did. We scoff at the madness of old religions, yet we ourselves submit to abstract movements of the financial market and think they are of eternal and unstoppable significance. But: modern forms of society that are not subject to the movements of money are conceivable and possible.

Fetishism and Crisis

Money is the gulf between independent producers, between the brewer and the baker. Let us imagine a woman who is stranded on a deserted island and must build an existence there. Every one of her productive activities will aim to bring forth useful objects of use, such as food or tools. What exchange-value these things might have in civilisation will play no role for her. Instead of a single woman, let us think of a group of people stranded on the island. If they manage to coordinate their activities jointly, to use the tools in common and to divide the food fairly among themselves, then these products of labour will also never appear to them as exchange-values. All they have are things they need for their shared survival. No abstract value-dimension arises here, playing itself out seemingly independently of them and to which they think themselves subjected. If there were a famine, then more people would pitch in to procure food. If there were new tools that made labour easier, there would be less to do for everyone. It is this simplicity that is absent today. The value-character of things, along with the logic standing behind it, will dissolve of its own accord once a modern organisational form of this simple kind is found and socially established.

Association of Free Individuals

Making More Money from Money

Conditions of Exclusion

Wherever money exists, so too does the individual power, through personal arbitrariness, to exclude other people from the things of the world. If a society is based on money, then it is based on exclusion. The more money a person has, the less they are excluded from social wealth. Right at the beginning we saw that money can be obtained through labour. To do so, however, certain rules must be followed—rules not devised by human beings, but which arise from the market situation itself. The most important of these rules is: do not invest more labour-time in a product than is socially necessary on average for its production. To prevail on the market, one should always work somewhat faster than the competition. Working for oneself in order to obtain money can therefore be very exhausting. Nicer would be to earn money without having to work.

Capital

Whoever wants more money without having to work must make more money from money. Since nobody exchanges a large sum of money for a small sum of money, an intermediate step is needed, and this is the buying and selling of commodities. Money that thus becomes more money is capital. But how can I make money through buying and selling commodities when everyone on the market with whom I can exchange is also only seeking their own advantage?

Merchant's Capital

What I can do is buy cheap from A and then sell dearer to B. Simple and effective. This only works for me, however, until other market participants see through my trade route and themselves buy cheap from A and then offer it to B somewhat cheaper than I do. Competition on the market increasingly equalises the potential profit margin of simple buying and selling, until, ideally, in the end only the same value of one product exchanges for the same value of the next product once again.

Productive Capital

I am therefore looking for a way to permanently transform money into more money without violating the rule of the market that a thing with a determinate money-value can only be durably exchanged for the same money-value. But if only through labour does something arise that can be sold, how then is money to be multiplied without having to work? Through the purchase of something that works for me. In an exchange-based society everything has an exchange-value and a use-value. In theory, then, I can buy something whose use-value is the ability to work. I buy this something, then, and use it in such a way that it produces something else that is worth more money than I paid for the first something. The only thing that matters, then, is that I find such a commodity on the market that is as cheap as possible to obtain and that I can use as efficiently as possible.

THE COMMODITY LABOUR-POWER

The only thing that can work is the human being. The commodity I am after for the multiplication of money is therefore the human capacity to work. In short: the commodity labour-power. Its value: the sum of the means of subsistence (housing, food, clothing, etc.) that a human being requires on the social average for their life. Its use-value: to produce something for me with a higher value than the employment costs me. But which persons would produce for others when they could also work for themselves? Quite simply, those who, like the old carpenter, do not have modern means of production at their disposal and thus do not manage to produce their commodities in a market-ready manner. They therefore sell the one commodity they always have and which is there: their labour-power. Since we do not wish to examine a historical development, it is simply presupposed in what follows that this group exists—one subjected to no personal rule, and which offers its labour-power on the labour market in order to work 30, 40 or more hours a week under the direction of others. Such a wage-dependent class is not too bold a presupposition, since I as author belong to it just as you as reader presumably do.

SURPLUS-VALUE

Since this life in wage-dependence brings with it certain disadvantages (the lack of self-determination, for example), I want to rise above it. To do so, I first imagine myself in possession of a fortune that I can multiply. With this money I buy means of production on the market (premises, tools, materials, etc.) and advertise positions for labour-powers who can handle them. Wage-labourers send me their applications and I select those who do not cost me too much but are useful. The wage-labourers I have hired are to produce new commodities with my means of production, the sale of which on the market earns me back their own costs and also the costs of the means of production. At this point I have covered my costs, but nothing has yet come out of it for me. So I let the wage-labourers continue to produce commodities for still longer, and from this point on every sale-proceed of the newly produced commodities goes beyond my mere cost recovery. The commodities are thus worth more than my investment. This *surplus-value* generated in the production period (e.g. a month) is at my sole disposal and is the reason I have production carried out at all.

$$\text{Money} - \text{Commodity} < \begin{matrix}\text{labour-power}\\ \text{m. of production}\end{matrix} - \begin{matrix}\ldots\ \text{process of}\\ \text{production}\ \ldots\end{matrix} - \begin{matrix}\text{Commodity of}\\ \text{higher value}\end{matrix} - \begin{matrix}\text{more}\\ \text{Money}\end{matrix} < \begin{matrix}\text{Investment}\\ +\ \text{Surplus-value}\end{matrix}$$

Example

By way of example: I am a mid-sized media entrepreneur and produce television reports. As means of production I have rented premises and bought cameras, sound-recording devices, servers, work computers and software. Including depreciation, insurance, etc., this costs me €3,000 per month. In my agency work four wage-employees, who carry out all tasks from pre-production to filming and post-production. They receive a wage of €1,500 each, so €6,000 in total. The entire production process thus costs me €9,000 per month. Let us assume, for simplicity, that the team produces one finished report each week, which is sold to a broadcaster for €4,500. After the team has worked for two weeks, my invested money of €9,000 is recovered and my employees have money to get through the month. But I myself still have nothing from it. As an entrepreneur, I therefore let work continue, and the reports produced and sold in the last two weeks of the month now form my surplus-value, likewise amounting to €9,000.

The Surplus Product

Like the wage-labourers, I as entrepreneur use part of the surplus-value generated for my private consumption. With the remaining money, however, I must proceed differently than, for example, an ancient slave-holder or medieval nobleman: both could fashion a pleasant life out of the surplus product—the part of the product worked up that goes beyond the subsistence of the producers (slaves, serfs, etc.). The more people were in their possession and worked for them, the more luxury they could tend to indulge in. On the market, by contrast, constant competition threatens.

Surplus-Value and Competition

Suppose, as an entrepreneur, I had the highest moral intentions—in the example of the media entrepreneur just given we might still assume that my enterprise would grow over time and the resulting profit would be divided between me and my employees. But now a new media entrepreneur comes to town. She produces television reports just like my enterprise does, but sells them for only €4,000 each, as opposed to my €4,500. Suppose the product were equivalent to mine, then the broadcasters would naturally, according to the logic of the market, reach for the cheaper commodity. What possibilities do I have, then, to hold my own on the market and thereby also to secure jobs?

1. I make my employed wage-labourers work longer. Whether through overtime or by setting the weekly working hours higher in new employment contracts. I stop counting smoking breaks and travel times as working time. If I owned a classical industrial enterprise, I would no longer let the wage-labourers clock in at the factory gate, but only after they had changed, in front of the production hall. Since I would also make them work in shifts there, what I am driving at becomes clear: part of my means of production (rent, machines, programmes, etc.) cost me the same every month. If I therefore leave work running on them for longer, I can produce more overall, while only the costs for wages and the materials and operating costs entering into the product (e.g. wood and electricity in the joinery) rise. Since I thus have more products produced overall, with lower costs calculated per piece, I can sell them more cheaply on the market.

Increasing Absolute Surplus-Value: Working Hours and Wages

2. I make my employed wage-labourers work in a more divided manner. It is of no use to me if they can all operate the camera or the sound-recording device and are good at researching. It is of no use to me if they can all edit the film material and apply effects. A person who does nothing all day but text overlays achieves many times the speed and quality of someone who only pursues this activity now and then. In the same way, I know that in the case of damage to my equipment, my insurance corporation will draw on a specialist department and within it a specialist who does nothing else all day but deal with exactly such cases. I do not need all-rounders in the enterprise, but specialist personnel. By each wage-labourer taking over a specific task, the enterprise is no longer merely the sum of its employees, but becomes an organism. The individual employee creates nothing complete any more, but merely delivers their part towards the total labour of the enterprise. In principle, one can say: the more specific the task of the individual at full capacity, the more efficient the enterprise as a whole.

Increasing Relative Surplus-Value: Intensity of Labour

3. I invest in more efficient means of production. If a new programme accelerates the labour of one of my employees by 10%, the production of the individual product again costs fewer labour-hours overall. If I wanted to keep the total quantity of products manufactured per month constant, I could, through the deployment of new technology, continuously reduce the number of my employees and thus save wage costs. The assumption that, while technological progress displaces jobs, it always creates new jobs in return, is therefore only partly true: as an entrepreneur I invest in technological progress either in order to produce more or better overall—that is, also to displace the competition with its employees—or in order

Increasing Relative Surplus-Value: Means of Production to save costs. Since the means of production themselves are additional costs, I want to cut the costs for paid labour-time. Either I save a better-paid position by replacing the labour with a machine (programme, etc.) that can be operated by a more poorly paid labour-power. Or I save many poorly paid positions by replacing their labour with a machine that is operated by a single specialist. It is no problem here if the wage of this specialist is comparatively high, so long as it is only lower than the total wage costs of the dismissed labour-powers.

Extra Surplus-Value

As an entrepreneur, through the application of the three ways of increasing surplus-value, I manage to produce my individual product more cheaply and can thus undercut my competitor. Since she does not want to be driven from the market, she will (as, of course, will our other rival colleagues) restructure her enterprise accordingly. Independently of one another, but because of each other, we make our enterprises more efficient in order to produce more cheaply while keeping quality as constant as possible. Let us say that, after some years, I can produce the reports for €2,250 each, while my rival colleagues still have to charge at least €2,750 for theirs. I can now sell at the same price as them, but make an extra surplus-value of €500 per report sold, with which I can further expand my enterprise. I am only in this position because I produce more efficiently than the average of the competition. As soon as they have caught up with me by adapting technology and enterprise structure, I am once again producing at average cost, and my additional profit disappears.

Capitalist Progress

Then one day, when a competitor no longer had the necessary means at their disposal and their insolvency finally afforded me a moment of peace, I become nostalgic and leaf around a little in my old bookkeeping. I notice that a report used to bring in €4,500 per sale, and that today, after all the restructurings, I get only half the money-value for it, but produce twice as much. Two reports today have the same value as a single report used to. Through the doubled quantity, my surplus-value may have remained the same, but I must also constantly strive for new buyers. And as I sit in the office in the evening, it slowly dawns on me that many of my former employees are now standing in line at the job centre and the ones who remain, without any benefit to themselves, must work under higher pressure in markedly more monotonous ways. And just as I sip from my glass of red wine, the meaning of a leaflet that a young trade unionist once pressed into my hand becomes clear to me for a brief moment:

> "Crisis no longer means war, sickness or drought. During a crisis, the shelves are overflowing, yet we workers stand before them as though behind armoured glass. Their eternal competitive struggle has pressed our wages to the ground and fuelled their production! We have produced everything, but to buy it we now lack the money. Because this is so, they will destroy the things before it occurs to us to take them. In order to each save their own capital, they will now set us to work still harder, and it makes no difference at all whether there is anything to set to work on. Their crisis is called overproduction. Our crisis is dependence on them."

Advancing Structures of Capital

I want to preface this by saying that I do not consider it strictly necessary to know every structure of the entrepreneurial world precisely in order to understand why a different form of living together is necessary. Whoever has had enough of this wretched economic theme is welcome to skip the chapter and can always come back to it later. For everyone else, it shall be shown briefly how the capitalist process digs itself ever deeper into society and increasingly organises it according to its rules.

Introduction

Since, in my social role as entrepreneur, with a constant number of employees, through the increase in efficiency I produce more commodities overall, I must expand my market in order to turn these back into money as well. I am not the only one who has to do this— of course all my rival colleagues and entrepreneurs from other branches must too. Without the sale of our commodity we can hardly make new purchases and thus maintain the production circuit. Quite generally, I can expand my sales market in two ways: through the path inward, into the spheres not yet opened up capitalistically, and through the path outward, into the sphere of my competition. Ultimately, it will also become visible here why capitalism always brings crises with it—that is, can never be a stable social foundation.

The path inward: as an entrepreneur I must try to penetrate into spheres of life that have not yet been opened up capitalistically. Capitalistically opened up does not necessarily mean that they were not previously mediated through money, only that no surplus-value arose in the mediation. For example, I discover that there is a private driving service that relieves parents of the work of taking the kids to sports in the evening and picking them up afterwards. So I invest money in child-friendly cars, perhaps even hire unemployed educators as drivers and have an algorithm developed so that as many children as possible can be picked up efficiently in one car in the evening and taken to their sports. The parents gratefully accept my work, for through my structure I can offer the service more cheaply than the private driver could before, while simultaneously showing them through location tracking, etc., that their children are in good hands. I now earn money through the labour of the drivers, the drivers have a secure job, the parents have more time, and the state has fewer unemployed. Everyone is happy, and once again a small part of social life is subordinated to the structure of capital.

SUBSUMPTION

The path outward: if I stand in competition with other enterprises, I try to win their customers for myself. I can thus turn my commodities into money, while the competition is left sitting on their products. Not every capitalist process works out; it is always a speculation to produce and hope that buyers will eventually be found on the market. For me, therefore, additional value arises through the failed speculation of my competitors, and my enterprise grows. But I do not always have to invest my surplus-value only in my own production: I can invest it on the stock exchange in other enterprises where I have a feeling it would multiply more easily there. If I have enough money, I can also buy up enterprises or aim for a merger. Administration costs thus become lower, production can become more efficient, and competition is suspended to a certain extent, through which my commodities can once again be sold more dearly. To become concrete for a moment: according to a Zurich study using data from 2007 ("The Network of Global Corporate Control", 2012), back then there were already only 147 corporations that, measured by their turnover, organise 80% of the global economy. 147 corporations among nearly 6.5 billion people, using unimaginable capital values to further increase their profit and their market control. Or a more vivid example: after the First World War there were about 80 mid-sized car manufacturers in Germany, after the 1930s still 30, and today three German corporations stand in competition with at most 15 relevant manufacturers worldwide. This centralisation arose within the rules of the market. The naive idea of a market in which everyone has

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the same chance has never been a historical reality and is today nothing short of absurd.

The First Opium War

There is no intention here to speak at length about the historical development of capital, but by way of one example I do want to show that the principle of the exchange-logic and competition did not prevail in world history by way of democratic means: in the 19th century, the European nobility tried to maintain its power by leaning on the economy. During the colonial period this led to the Opium War waged by England against China. The Chinese emperor wanted to protect his own realm from foreign influence and restricted the import of English goods to the minimum. At the same time, however, he let Chinese goods be sold abroad. The general point of reference in exchange—the money-commodity with which the value of products was measured—was silver at the time, and this became increasingly scarce in England owing to the one-sided trade balance. The British trading company "East India Company", on whose supervisory board representatives of Parliament sat, therefore intensified— supported by the Crown—the import of the drug opium into China. The Chinese emperor thereupon banned the consumption of opium and its import into China. England was not interested in the ban, and when cargo ships full of opium again reached China, an envoy of the emperor had 1,400 tonnes of the drug confiscated and burned. England's response was a fleet of warships that set every major Chinese city ablaze. What was the demand made of the defeated Chinese emperor? The opening of the Chinese markets. English production could now turn more and more commodities into money in a productively backward China; China's own national economy was brought to its knees and thus forcibly integrated into the free global market economy. The tens of thousands of Chinese inhabitants systematically made dependent on opium are merely a footnote in the expansion of the rule of capital.

Credit and Circulation Time

Commodities must be turned into money in order to keep the production circuit alive—the market-economic conquest of China helped England here, but the challenge is a daily one. It is a peculiarity of capitalist relations that products are produced before it is known whether anyone needs the product and can afford it. That means the entrepreneur invests money in production, yet the wage-labourers she pays produce no money, but rather new commodities. Months, if not years, can pass until buyers are found for them. The entrepreneur is not allowed, however, to wait until the commodities have been sold, but must go on producing, so as not to fall behind the competition. Since the invested money is tied up in the as-yet-unsold commodities, the entrepreneur needs new money to let production go on. At this point banks come into play. Entrepreneurs can obtain loans from banks to bridge the periods until their commodities are sold, or to invest in means of production that should withstand the competition. The bank is a simple capitalist enterprise with a certain special status. It too is interested in the multiplication of money and does this by lending out money that has been deposited with it as loans. The entrepreneurs must continually repay these loans plus high interest. How do the entrepreneurs come by the money for this? In the same way they come by their own profit. They use the labour-powers they have purchased ever more efficiently and thus beat the money out of the labour of others. So even if it may seem to investors as though their deposited money multiplied itself in the bank of its own accord, every cent of the interest stems only once again from the exploitation of people in the situation of wage-dependence.

Crisis

The constant danger of a crisis arises from the temporal divergence between production and sale. Since entrepreneurs and investors try to bridge the time difference with credit and the trade in debt instruments, they stand in a growing reciprocal dependence on one another. Neither the credits nor the debt instruments can be honoured, however, if the commodities produced by the enterprise are not sold. With the increasing efficiency improvements of enterprises (which they must undertake in their competitive struggle), the possibility of such non-sale of commodities rises rapidly. Efficiency improvements mean in particular that the wage-labourers must work longer for less money and tools are purchased with which production can proceed faster and labour-powers can thus be saved. More and more commodities are thus produced, while the purchasing power of the wage-dependent sinks. This excessive supply of commodities then lies on the shelves ready for sale and it must also be sold so that the entrepreneurs can discharge their debts. On the other side stand the wage-labourers before these shelves, contemplating this social wealth created by them, but remain excluded from it because their money is not enough. The crisis is now a chain reaction, with enterprises going insolvent, pulling other enterprises (which had invested their money with these) down with them, and a further falling purchasing power in the wage-dependent class through rising unemployment. Crises therefore arise necessarily, again and again, and the cause is not that people managed the economy wrongly, but rather, from the standpoint of the individual entrepreneur and investor, always exactly correctly. With this madness we can now finally leave the perspective of the entrepreneur.

Life in Wage-Dependence

Self-Hostility

To begin with, the dilemma of a parcel courier: suppose a parcel courier makes a comfortable internet order. Like most of us, as a buyer she wants to save money and decides on a seller where she does not have to pay postage. To offer this free shipping, the mail-order company looks for transport companies that are as cheap as possible. In their competition for contracts, these transport companies try to undercut one another by making the delivery more efficient. The parcel courier's working day is thus exactly timed, and every friendly chat with the parcel recipients she is forced to decline. Exhausted, she makes online orders ever more frequently, since after such a working day it is less strenuous than going into town in the evening. In their competition for the growing orders from the online retailer, the transport companies begin to circumvent collective wage agreements by pushing labour-powers—like the parcel courier—into tariff-free sub-companies. If it was still convenience at the beginning, by now at the latest it has become a compulsion for the parcel courier to shop ever more cheaply. Since the parcel courier herself buys cheaply online, she is therefore to blame for her own fate. At least, that is easy to say when a capitalistically organised society is regarded as normal and immutable.

The Normality of Wage-Labourers

So far we have got to know the perspective of an entrepreneur who acts rationally in order to survive on the market. The entrepreneur obtains money by buying the human capacity to work as a commodity and integrating this labour-power into her enterprise structure. Employing staff and workers is something quite normal too. But what is special about normality is the absence of the special. To a caveman it might not have been special if a large part of his clan miserably starved or froze to death in winter. To serf peasants of the Middle Ages it might not have been special to find themselves in the possession of a liege lord and to hand over every surplus produced to his family. And to wage-labourers today it is nothing special that they must work 30, 40, 50, sometimes 80 hours every week.

Life Situations of Wage-Labourers

Like any other commodity, the commodity labour-power can be sold better or worse. If I want to sell my labour-power dearly, then I polish it up for this purpose in a course of study. If I do not want to study, then I can try my hand at a down-to-earth job as a lab assistant, bank employee, media designer, educator, merchant or metalworker. In economically lean times, as a wage-labourer I can be forced to take a temp position, to work as a bogusly self-employed person, or—in the hope of a permanent post—to start my third consecutive internship. If I am unemployed, I have a special role: the enterprises do not want me, for the state I am a burden, and for the working population I am a constant threat of doing their job for less money. Since I (like them) have ongoing costs and, in the hope of a better future, must also accept poor working conditions, their fear is justified: I would sooner take a stranger's job away than end up with a gap in my CV myself. If the security of my job matters to me, I can apply to the state and take a position as teacher, police officer or soldier. I thus escape capitalist money-multiplication, but I am still dependent on the national total capital. This freedom I have as a wage-labourer: to choose to whom I sell my labour-power. This one I do not have: not to sell my labour-power.

Searching for Meaning in Wage-Labour

That, in the sphere of wage-labour, most people cannot necessarily pursue work in which they see meaning is obvious: if trained specialists are sought in a given area, that does not mean that there are socially necessary tasks there. It only means that, through the use of human labour-power, a capital can grow there. Thus, the fewest people probably have the feeling that ever more and ever more intrusive advertising is sensible for our society. Yet far better-paid jobs arise in the advertising industry than in elderly care. Advertising helps enterprises to maintain their production circuit. Elderly care workers, by contrast, merely keep people alive whose labour-power can no longer be used and who are thus superfluous from a capitalist perspective. In view of the often dreadful conditions in care homes that go with this, there is often nothing left to do but make care a private matter.

Activities of Reproduction

A private life alongside the world of work not only exists—the capitalist relations even need it. In this private life, the socially necessary activities are still far from over: shopping, cooking, child-rearing, providing support, and so on. And although socially necessary, these activities cannot be inserted into the structure of money-multiplication, are therefore not paid, and thus appear, in a society that functions through money, as secondary. Just as if it were not essential to ensure that the people with whom I live together in one way or another are well. Just as if it were not the elementary condition of the capitalist mode of production to be able to access healthy and work-capable human material. Yet as a result of this splitting of life into paid labour, which serves money-multiplication, and unpaid labour, which serves fellow human beings, those people who devote themselves primarily to the latter fall into dependence on such persons as hold a position within capitalist money-multiplication. And although we are dealing in itself with a system in which everyone must subordinate themselves to the market movements of things, many on top of that remain delivered over to the arbitrariness of others.

Character Masks of Capitalist Production

Wage-labourers and "capitalists" (entrepreneurs or investors) are not two different kinds of human being. They are roles brought forth by the capitalist mode of production. Whoever wears the mask of the capitalist calculates, and the world consists of figures. Whoever wears the mask of the wage-labourer is a leaf in the storm of those figures. For an entrepreneur, purchasing a programme for automatic data processing that saves positions is a matter of calculation. She tries it out and sees in the balance sheet at the end of the year whether it was worth it. The employee whose position was saved and who was a number in that calculation no longer appears in this balance sheet. She had given her life a form. She knew how she paid her rent. She had colleagues she would not necessarily invite home, but was glad to see at work. She entered into a relationship and made plans for the future. Then the entrepreneur purchased this programme for automatic data processing, and the employee's plans for the future were extinguished. The ex-employee is now unemployed and the job centre wants to know what she owns and whether it is not too much. She receives a threat that she will not be paid any money if she does not find a new position within the shortest time. Then there is the person who loves her and tries to help her. He brings her among people again, who then ask her what she does, and she does not know whether to lie or to do this to the person she loves: say, "I am unemployed". The unemployed woman no longer wants to see the pitying looks, and now she sits in job interviews and must appear self-confident. As though she wanted to take the positions on offer for pleasure, and not because she has to turn every cent over. Whether she would not move to another city for a job, she is asked—no one asks whom she is leaving behind. Whether she would not, "to tide her over", be shut away in the cell of a call centre, she is asked. Whether she would not like to try a temp agency, which pockets part of her wage for every one of her working hours because this temp agency can still place failed existences like her. Soon she is sitting somewhere again—regardless of whether she likes it or not; whether it is a meaningful activity or not; whether she is shouted at by her superiors or not. Everything is better for her than the powerlessness of her time of unemployment and the awkward silence when she spoke of that powerlessness. Whoever wears the mask of wage-dependence does not wear it voluntarily, and it can be taken off in the rarest of cases.

The Industrial Reserve Army

Wage-labourers always oscillate between work and unemployment. Full employment can never exist given the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production. There is no magical process through which new and equivalent jobs always arise when jobs are cut elsewhere. For capital, full employment—whatever that is supposed to look like—would also be a catastrophe. If an enterprise's products sell well, it must be able to grow by leaps and bounds, and for this it needs access to free labour-powers. Conversely, if there were no fear of losing one's job, and thus of unemployment, the wage-labourers could lightly stand up for higher wages and shorter working hours. Calling for full employment is nothing other than the command that the unemployed exert more pressure on the employed and the employed fight still harder for their jobs. "Unemployment" is itself already a term that only makes sense in a society shaped by capitalism. Someone might nurse their sick mother, raise three children on top of that, work every day as a volunteer in a homeless shelter, and would still count as "unemployed". Overwork and unemployment are not mutually exclusive in capitalism. Whoever wants to fight unemployment calls for nothing but a complete subjugation of all wage-labourers to the logic of the capitalist mode of production.

Capital knows neither genders nor cultures, religions or nationalities. The only thing that interests the capitalist process is the surplus-value that arises through wage-labour. Capital has no goal, for it is no thinking subject. Capital does, however, have a direction in which it tends to move. For the life situation of wage-labourers, the tendency of capital's movement means: working hours that go on so long that there is just enough recovery to be fully deployable the next day; a wage that just suffices to secure one's own existence and the existence of children—future labour-powers. But capital is not, like the idea of God in heaven, outside of us. It is the result of our banal actions of buying and selling, and the mediation through money that goes with them. "Living in order to work" is, however, no divine dogma imposed on human beings. There are ways out of this form of economic life, even if it appears immutable today.

Framework Conditions of Wage-Labour

Eternity

Capitalism means that money is both the means and the purpose of production. Just as the entrepreneurs are dependent on surplus-value and thus on the constant exploitation of labour, the wage-labourers themselves must always work. If wage-dependence is perceived as a natural life-situation, then the immediate goal for improving one's own life circumstances is not a different form of social organisation, but rather a higher wage, fewer working hours, and a secure retirement entry. But for every hundred workers who hope that their boss would, out of charity, reduce the weekly working hours with full wage compensation, there is always an entrepreneur who would consider it appropriate for their employees to come to work on Saturdays unpaid. The interests of both groups are opposed. The advantage of the one is always the disadvantage of the other. If an individual wage-labourer rises up against her working conditions, she achieves merely her own unemployment. But if the wage-labourer rises up together with as large a group of colleagues as possible, the production of the enterprise is at risk, and with it the existence of the entrepreneur and the money of the investors. If they do not manage, through the means available to them, to get the wage-labourers back to work, they must agree to their terms. Trade unions are therefore no antiquated relic and are by no means confined to the steel industry. Within capitalist production they are an indispensable institution for wage-labourers in all branches. Be it for care workers, media designers, factory workers or architects. However much a trade union may also achieve within the market economy, and however important this work is, it always remains part of the capitalist order, which defines itself through the antagonism between wage-labourers and entrepreneurs. The trade union struggle will therefore never come to an end.

"THE CLASS-STRUGGLE FETISH"

In a capitalistically organised society, needs must never be finally satisfied. Needs are used to beat money out of them for as long as possible, and thereby to keep the perpetual production for the generation of surplus-value alive. The purpose of consumption itself is economic growth. Since the economy must be well, and not the people, the commodities produced must not be long-lasting and must be bought again and again. A new purchase must be either cheaper or less troublesome than the repair. New seeds must not arise from the sowing, but should

LABOUR AS AN END IN ITSELF

have to be bought again each time. Money, which at the beginning gave the impression of being merely a tool to make our labour comparable, turns the principle of life around: we no longer work so that things go better for us—we work for the sake of labour itself. The more efficient the machines become at which we must work, the more resources this never-ending production devours. Wage-labour is thereby the motor of a gigantic machinery heading towards the destruction of our basis of life.

CONSEQUENCES

So long as the market is determinant in our society, so long will we wage-labourers exist, and we wage-labourers will remain in enmity with ourselves and our environment. We shoot one another in resource-rich countries, with weapons we built to pay our rent. We buy masses of cheap articles in plastic packaging that we ourselves produce so that one day we no longer have to buy cheap articles in plastic packaging. In our working time we build surveillance systems and programme evaluation algorithms, and in our private time we are surveilled and evaluated. We never have to become good, only better than the others—so we are never good enough and must always become more beautiful, more flexible, more resilient, better educated, more ruthless. We must become numb, towards our own needs and those of others. We poison the groundwater, clear the forests, bend the laws, pollute the air, at the command of our competing enterprises, in our civic voluntariness, to pay the ongoing costs, to keep an abstract capital alive. So it was at the emergence of the capitalist mode of production, so it is today, and so it will also be in the future, until the limits of nature are pierced through by the boundless process of money-multiplication and human life on the planet will no longer be possible. By standing neutral towards the market and carrying on our lives according to our normality, we cast our vote for this.

The Window to the World

THE LABOUR PROCESS

The labour process, independently of any form of society, is purposeful activity with the help of an instrument to alter an object of labour. Within any form of society, no labour process stands merely for itself, but is part of a larger whole. How the social process of cooperation looks and who may access the social wealth under which circumstances and how, varies greatly across the different epochs. What these epochs have in common is that an individual human being, born into a society existing independently of their will, fits themselves into the given structure and perceives it as natural. And what they also have in common is that human beings, with ever new techniques and methods, attempt to improve their life circumstances—yet again and again, without being conscious of it, they thereby alter the form of their living together.

THE FIRST CIVILISATIONS

Hunter-gatherer societies generally work with simple tools such as wooden bows or animal-hide carrying bags. They work upon what they find in nature, and the products of their labour—fruit, meat, carrying bags—are common property. A harsher climate, however, can make it necessary to reduce dependence on uncontrollable nature. Communities that developed agriculture and animal husbandry could often permanently escape constant scarcity, but in doing so rarely managed to preserve an entirely communal way of life. Since, through the new way of life, they could produce more than the producers needed for their own subsistence, people could come to the fore who were no longer directly involved in production and took on coordinating tasks. Over the course of millennia, coordinators became rulers, and religion—however diverse its origin may have been—was used to justify this rule.

FALLACIES IN CAPITALISM

In the age of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, personal rule was largely overcome, birth-rights were gradually abolished, and religion was pushed into the private sphere. All of these are steps in the direction of a liberated society. Through the emergence and activity of capital, however, new boundaries were drawn, and once again a rather mystical form arose in which we perceive the world: as wage-labourers we must work for money, which we need for our (sur)vival. Money is the red thread of our society and gives it structure by being handled correctly. Debts or claims do not grow without a correct contractual determination and must always be settled. Everything is exchangeable for money, from the simplest foodstuff to the villa with a sea view to the services of other people. We receive money for our labour, and through this we can attain prosperity. Transferred from our experience as wage-labourers to society as a whole, social prosperity will therefore also grow if only as many people as possible work, and whoever has a lot of money must surely have worked a lot for it. When we then pay €2.80 for a beer in the evening—about ten minutes of our labour-time, a few minutes more for the unskilled, a few minutes less for the educated—we can imagine that the pooled labour-time from the farmer to the bar staff, apportioned to the glass of beer, was probably also about ten minutes.

GATEWAY TO THE WORLD OF CAPITAL

To check whether her own ten minutes of labour-time equal the equivalent of ten minutes of other people's labour-time, an employee takes the trouble to look at the total value of the products her enterprise sold in a month. She deducts the costs of the materials etc. that went into the products, and let us say €80,000 is distributed monthly between the people involved in the enterprise through sales. Then she adds up the wage payments for herself and her colleagues, and let us say she arrives at €50,000. "Since the labour of my colleagues and me, just as it says on the pay slips, is worth €50,000", the employee thinks to herself, and steps into the mystical realm of capital, "the labour-contribution of the entrepreneur and the investors to the product sold must be worth €30,000."

THE ILLUSION OF THE VALUE OF LABOUR

The labour process, however, is purposeful activity with the help of an instrument upon an object of labour for the creation of use-values. Every hand movement within capitalist production—from scientific development, through the first drilling in a mine, to delivery by a transport company—is a hand movement of wage-labourers. The wage does not represent the share of their labour in the product, but merely the value of the commodity labour-power, which they themselves sold on the market. The value of the commodity labour-power is the subsistence of a wage-labourer, dependent on what is regarded as necessary for life in society. The wage-labourers themselves, their bodies and thoughts, become part of the production process. The world in which they live appears conclusive to them, but is incomplete. When they think their wage is the value of their labour and not merely that of their labour-power, everything that appears to them as a right angle in reality has far more than ninety degrees. The greater part of wage-labourers will not escape the fate imposed on them of lifelong labour for the prosperity of others. Nonetheless, wage-labourers too often transfer their life-structure onto the whole of society and take money for achievement because they themselves achieved something for it. In doing so they easily overlook that their interests stand opposed to the interests of the entrepreneurs and investors, because there are two very different ways of relating to money. The multiplication of money through the purchase of the commodity labour-power functions according to other rules than wage-labour itself. Through wage-labourers' belief that things go better for society when as many people as possible work and good work will be rewarded, their labour-power becomes a source of ever-growing wealth for the ruling class of the present.

Accumulation

If the wage makes up 40% of the commodity-value on the social average, wage-labourers can also afford only 40% of the commodities produced overall, although they themselves produced both the commodities and the tools and materials used for production to the extent of 100%. That means: as a wage-labourer I receive a fraction of the product-value I created, and when I go out to eat in the evening, the employees there receive a fraction of the money-value I paid, just as the wage-labourers in the food supply chain receive a fraction of the sales-value, and so on. While the wage-labourers feed the money back into production through their consumption, capital grows in every new production period—the surplus-value is not fully used up, but largely added back to the existing capital. That means: if a capital has a size of €100,000, and a surplus-value of €20,000 arises in production, of which an entrepreneur consumes only €5,000, then her capital in the next production period has a size of €115,000. While the wage stagnates, capital rises faster in every period. Since the capitalist mode of production has not existed only since yesterday, it should therefore surprise no one if eight people own as much money as the poorer half of humanity—about 3.5 billion persons—combined ("An Economy for the 99 Percent", 2017). This money is once again the power of access to the products and means of production worked up by the wage-labourers. What thus happens through the mediation over the market is a constant and ever-growing exclusion of the wage-labourers from the things they produce and sustain.

The Perspective of Profit

If I buy shares worth €1,000 today and in five years they are worth €2,000, how am I to recognise that every cent arose through the exploitation of a wage-labourer? While a part of the product was torn away from the medieval peasant woman under the threat of violence and the justification of religion, today this daily exploitation is veiled. The surplus-labour of the wage-labourers becomes a surplus product, and this becomes the surplus-value of the entrepreneurs and investors. Unnoticed, through mediation over the market, entrepreneurs and investors live from the labour of the wage-labourers and are not even conscious of it.

For them there is no exploitation through surplus-labour. For the entrepreneur there is the profit that arises when she manages the economy correctly—or has it managed correctly. In order to come by this profit, she proceeds with her business-administrative rationality. If she stands before a decision in which the first possibility makes her production 5% cheaper and the second only 2%, then she will rationally take the first option. Whether it is then the purchase of a new means of production, a relocation of site to a developing country, or all the working hours of the labour-powers she employs being raised as a result, plays no role in this rational world. If there is the possibility of opening a black-money account in an island state and thereby evading millions in tax, that is no moral question, but a risk calculation. If trade unions demand a wage rise, a calculation must be made of how high these additional costs would be, as against bribing the works council or dismissing trade-union-active employees. On a larger scale, not only lobbyistic influence but the actual destabilisation of states is an option, when corresponding governments stand in the way of the chance of high profit.

AGENTS OF CAPITAL

And here, in this higher sphere, there may also be the clans and secret societies, the corruption and blackmail, the buyout of media and the targeted hollowing-out of democratic institutions by neoliberal think tanks. And all of that may drive capitalist development forward and stabilise it. And all of that may consolidate the powerlessness of the wage-dependent class. And yet these are not the causes of the problems we face today, but individual moments that are themselves bound to the inner logic of the capitalist social form. Behind everything that individuals among these persons do and that has devastating effects on our lives, there need be no wickedness. It is a fixation on money-multiplication, and thus a rationality within the framework of the bourgeois order.

EQUALISATION OF THE RATE OF PROFIT

Even if entrepreneurs and investors stand in competition with one another, their actions collectively follow the laws of the market. These compulsions mean for them that they must invest their money wherever it multiplies best. If, therefore, a newly developed product promises to address the need of consumers and to sell well, then they invest a lot of money in this branch. Through the invested money, new jobs can arise in new enterprises and departments, the efficiency in the enterprises of these branches can therefore increase markedly, and with it likewise the quantity of commodities in this area. Through the flood of offerings from various manufacturers, the selling price of the individual commodity within the branch now sinks, and the chances of profit are smoothed out. Although efficiency within the enterprises rises, profit sinks. The capital-owners for the most part pull their money out again and invest it elsewhere, while workers once more lose their jobs and individual market leaders with correspondingly efficient enterprise structures emerge within the branch.

Rates of Profit and Labour-Power

The structures in which we live, think and work are created by this process, and precisely for this reason we notice little of it. We see, as a matter of course, that new products are constantly coming onto the market and are soon much cheaper. We believe, again and again, that technological development would mean less labour in the future, and each time it proves false. We see site closures, the constant search for skilled workers, and the growth of jobs in the minimum-wage sector. We do not always think it right, but see a rationality in political decisions when, for example, the retirement age is raised or unemployment is more severely penalised. We see how individual large corporations gain more and more influence, not despite, but because they proceed against trade unions, because they exploit poverty in developing countries, because the respective activities become more monotonous, because wages in production become lower, because working hours become longer. The constant compulsion to multiply capital is the reason why we must always work 30, 40, 50 hours or even longer, and why these working hours, despite all technological progress, do not decrease. Because our ongoing costs never cease, we cannot leave our one commodity, our labour-power, lying in a warehouse for months until it can be sold under good conditions. If we do not want to be thrown out of our homes or locked up for theft, then we are compelled to sell our labour-power even under the worst conditions. Every economic structure in society arises only so that we can fit ourselves into it over and over again, only so that a surplus-value, a profit, can be extracted from our wage-labour.

"National Socialism and Antisemitism"

These social structures arose through the abstract system of money-multiplication, and yet we regard our activities in the factories, agencies and corporations as socially necessary and natural. Crises, site closures or wars appear as something external that has nothing to do with labour. Strikes by trade unions, or policies against the economic interest, also seem to be directed against one's own population when a production site is understood as something in which entrepreneur and wage-labourer work together for the social common good. Especially in the early years of capitalist production, industry seemed to be the self-evident successor of handicrafts and to confront financial capital with hostility. In capitalist everyday life, the abstract system in which one's own labour turns against the producers is not apparent. But what attracted particular attention at a certain point in time was a people living in Europe that had long been linked with money and was not regarded as truly belonging to any nation. They appeared rootless and internationally networked. It was the abstract properties of the emerging, border-crossing capitalist production that could be ascribed to them. And connections could be clearly recognised that had to be obvious to every thinking person and were nevertheless not real. In ignorance of the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production, this ethnic group was identified as the cause of all evil. The abstract thus received a face, and what has a face can be fought. A "we" against "them", a struggle of the Aryan race against the internationally networked world Jewry, emerged. Too many who had to suffer under the effects of capital believed in the image of the united people and the Jewish world conspiracy, and too many believe it still. In the Second World War, 55 million people died under miserable circumstances, 400,000 people were forcibly deprived of their fertility under the influence of German racial doctrine, and even in the final hours of National Socialism, German rail transports were not deployed for military resupply, but to deport Jews to extermination camps. It was the delusional belief that the terror that a capitalist production brings with it would disappear with them.

Where We Stand

> "In themselves, they lighten labour; but employed capitalistically, they heighten its intensity. In itself, machinery is a victory of man over the forces of nature, but in the hands of capital it subjugates man to the forces of nature. In itself, it increases the wealth of the producer, but employed capitalistically, it impoverishes him. But: is an other than capitalist utilisation of machinery impossible?"
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> *Karl Marx, Capital I*

THE IMAGE OF HUMANITY IN MARKET SOCIETY

That things have a dual character for us—ascribed a money-value alongside their use-value—is no student's intellectual game. The effects of this shape our reality, show themselves in our actions and in the image we have of ourselves and other people. With the development of capitalism, the working class was largely freed from personal dependence, so that it scarcely still consists of slaves and serfs. What rules over us today in their place is the market and its exchange-logic. On the market, there is no growth that does not simultaneously constrain or exclude others. Money compels us to enter into competition with one another, and if we regard this as natural, we necessarily appear as greedy and egoistic beings. But as an entrepreneur I do not cut wages for pleasure. As an unemployed person I do not gladly accept poor working conditions that put my colleagues in difficulty. As an employee I am not grateful when a colleague is dismissed instead of me because I wish her something bad, but because I am simply dependent on the wage myself. The ongoing costs never stop, and therefore I must always think of myself first; if I have a family, all the more so. Competition through capitalist production penetrates into every area of our society, and the only question is when we are finally prepared to displace competition itself. What is certain is only that it is definitely possible. If the human being and their actions were something constant, if society were as it is because "we humans simply are like that", then we would still be dividing our food among ourselves today as was the case with hunter-gatherer communities over thousands of years.

The Dual Progress

Today, entrepreneurs and investors, in their hunt for money, are compelled to have production go on and on, to penetrate ever new spheres and to address ever new needs. Capitalist society thereby crosses the boundaries of village communities, the boundaries of countries, the boundaries of cultures and traditions, and unites them through a common point of reference—money. The dimension that human cooperation has attained in capitalism is historically unique, and yet we, as human beings, seem to be completely independent of one another. I will never get to know the carpenter who once laid the floor of my rented flat. I will never find out who screwed together my desk lamp or grew my morning coffee. I do not know these people, and their labour disappears in the product. Yet like my own, their labours are also becoming ever more specialised, ever more monotonous and ever more uniform worldwide, while at the same time the class-division between us wage-labourers and the profiteers of our labour advances further. Power centralises, while our fate, as those born into wage-dependence, appears ever more hopeless.

The Veiling of Class Contradictions

Direct oppression gives way to a reified oppression—one made increasingly invisible through the mediation of money, which does not even seem to be oppression. The lie of a just meritocracy is recognised as reality. The absurdity of a fixed working week—independent of whether there is a need for corresponding products or services—becomes normalised. What business do we have, after all, with those on the other side of the world who are trapped in textile factories and must work 18 hours at a stretch? What—apart, perhaps, from being paid by the same capitalists and not improbably giving those same capitalists this money back through our consumption. Sometimes it seems as if we had long ago achieved the just, democratic society, and not as though there were a world to be won.

The Historical Process

There is no providence in nature. The human being lived for millennia in small, manageable groups, until, through agriculture and ever new technology, more could be produced than the producers needed for survival. Up to the social organisational form into which we were born, it was a long path. As a species barely outgrown the ape, we are part of a society encompassing billions. But through our limitation and the unconscious form in which this society has been brought forth, a wedge has been driven between every single human being. A hostility between those who cannot survive without one another. Interpersonal competition and state violence appear to us today as natural as the borders between countries.

Borders

Like the nation itself, a border is also only a thought, nothing real, something abstract. Something one cannot see even when standing just an arm's length in front of it. That only a sign can tell you, "This here is a border", because otherwise you would never be able to recognise it. Not a bit different is the case with value. Whoever says that "everything has its value" does not understand how society and consciousness are related, that today we perceive value as others perceived their gods. Around us are things, simple things without any kind of abstract properties. But they rule over us because we relate to them as commodities, because when buying all these things we looked at the price, because precisely for this moment of price comparison the entrepreneurs must have production go on ever more cheaply, because wage-labourers are a variable in this process, because it becomes cheaper when their wages are low, their working hours long, their activities monotonous. All of this concerns us, because that is us, as this variable, as the value of our labour-power. That is why we communists are concerned today precisely with this: to get this wedge, these borders and this rule out of our society and our heads. To find a form in which we can arrange the earth according to our needs, so that the labour of each individual always also serves the common good. Achieving this is not a question of luck, but a question of our class consciousness and a question of our organisation. As wage-labourers we may be victims of a system, but as working people we are the ones who can build a world.

With every further year of its existence, capitalism exerts more control over our lives. But with every year of its existence, new possibilities also come into the world with which we can leave these relations behind. How it can succeed is not written in any book—we are searching for it in theory and in practice. If you want to walk this path with us, then an important first step can be to educate yourself further and to learn to grasp the present-day society better. A further step can be to participate in the exploration and construction of other ways of life. Even if clear limits are set to these within the existing relations, it is a matter of understanding the challenges of a modern non-capitalist life and finding solutions to them. We seek a life in which no one is compelled to produce rubbish containing only wear-parts, so that the product must be bought again. A life in which labour is not carried out so that an abstract economy, but so that we, as members of society, are well. A life in which we do not have to build and export weapons that kill those like us merely to secure jobs. A life in which the madness of it becomes clear: that jobs are supposed to be created because everyone can be glad if there is less to do. But the naming of such madnesses or the proof of better alternatives will never be enough. It exists, this centralised power, and it exists, this will—for various reasons—to hold us in wage-dependence. And therefore a necessary step is also to organise. To organise, in order to build counter-power, and for nothing else.

On the End of Capitalism—Part 1

Who has the time, the strength and the endurance to commit to changing the social conditions? There are not many, and I am aware of it. I only hope to have shown you with this text why for well over a hundred years so many people have dedicated their life's time to overcoming capitalism. I cannot expect it, but the hope I do have that you will join our cause.

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Left here by someone, so that you find it and pocket it. Because it is not self-evident to have to work 30, 40, 50 hours every week. Because it is not normal to see no end to labour. Because a possible end to this form of labour exists, to which one is supposed to subordinate oneself until retirement. Because its end cannot be achieved alone, someone left this text here so that you find it and pocket it.