

## Lecture Notes 7 : Chapters 14-15

### Chapter 14: The division of labour and manufacture

Contrast between simple cooperation and manufacture. Under the latter, individual worker

becomes exclusively assigned to a partial function and... his labour power becomes transformed into the life-long organ of this partial function. (458)

#### The collective worker

This gives rise to the collective worker:

The collective worker, who constituted the living mechanism of manufacture, is made up solely of such one-sidedly specialized workers. (458)

Heterogeneous (e.g. watchmaking) vs. organic manufacture (e.g. glassmaking)

#### The dialectic of despotism and anarchy

A reconstruction of the argument of pp. 476-7:

- (1) Authority within the workshop and authority within society 'are in inverse ratio to each other'.
- (2) Capitalism involves 'anarchy in the social division of labour' and 'despotism' in the workshop.
- ∴ (3) Passing over control and regulation of the economy to society 'in accordance with an... authoritative plan' would abolish despotism in the workshop.
- But
- (4) Anarchy in the social division of labour is dictated by competition, of the 'coercion exerted by the pressure of... reciprocal interests'.
- ∴ (5) To abolish anarchy in the social division of labour is to abolish such coercion, i.e. the law of value.

#### The teratology of manufacture

Marx says that manufacture 'realizes' the 'absurd' story of Menenius Agrippa, in which 'man appears as a fragment of his own body':

Unfitted by nature to make anything independently, the manufacturing worker develops his productive activity only as an appendage of that workshop... What is lost by the specialized workers is concentrated in the capital which confronts them. It is a result of the division of labour in manufacture that the worker is brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power which rules over him. (482)

### Chapter 15: Machinery and modern industry

Here Marx offers a principled distinction between the division of labour in manufacture and in industry:

In manufacturing, it is the workers who... must carry on each particular process with their manual implements. The worker has been appropriated by the process; but the process had previously to be adapted to the worker.

This *subjective* principle of the division of labour no longer exists in production by machinery. Here the total process is examined *objectively*, viewed in and for itself, and analysed into its constitutive phases. (501, emphases added)

## The teratology of large-scale industry

In manufacturing man is reduced to his limbs, caused by the crippling one-sidedness of the division of labour. In large-scale industry he is reduced to being the limbs of a lifeless, self-moving thing, the machine.

## The effects of machinery on the worker

Introduction of machinery → demand for skilled labour ↓, demand for unskilled labour ↑ → wages ↓, employment of women and children ↑ → child mortality, disease, degeneration, unemployment ↑

Hence too the economic paradox that the most powerful instrument for reducing labour-time suffers a dialectical inversion and becomes the most unfailing means for turning the whole life-time of the worker and his family into labour-time at capital's disposal for its own valorization... machinery is the surest means of lengthening the working day. (533)

Why does this happen? One mechanism is through temporary superprofit (see chapter 13, and Cohen (1978)).

## The factory

The factory is an 'automaton' in which the worker functions as a 'conscious organ' (544). But:

Here, as everywhere else, we must distinguish between the increased productivity which is due to the development of the social process of production, and that which is due to the exploitation by the capitalists of that development. (547)

Marx here uses the ancient analogy of the knife against the 'bourgeois economist', who identifies opposition to capitalism with opposition to the use of machinery.

## Manufacture vs. large-scale industry

The outcome of this confrontation is as certain as that of 'an encounter between an army with... rifles and one with bows and arrows.' (578) But its intensification gives rise to lower wages, unemployment, extension of the working day and eventually the Factory Acts.

Unlike manufacture:

Modern industry never views or treats the existing form of a production process as the definitive one. Its technical basis is therefore revolutionary, whereas all earlier modes of production were essentially conservative... Thus large scale industry, by its very nature, necessitates variation of labour, fluidity of functions, and mobility of the worker in all directions. But on the other hand, in its capitalist form it reproduces the old division of labour with its ossified particularities. (617)

Large-scale industry, 'through its very catastrophes', holds the promise of replacing 'that monstrosity, the disposable working population held in reserve, in misery, for the changing requirements of capitalist exploitation', with 'the totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn.' (618)

## Suggested Reading

Ware, R. (1982), 'Marx, the Division of Labour, and Human Nature', *Social Theory and Practice* 8: 43-71.

## Further Reading

Cohen, G.A. (1978), *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, ch. 11.