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**Social Anthropology of
Work**

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WORK AND VALUE:

Reflections on Ideas of Karl Marx

RAYMOND FIRTH

Introduction

The sociological significance of Karl Marx's ideas has been a matter of debate now for about a century. One of the keystones in Marx's construction of a critical theory explaining the capitalist mode of production was his assertion that work is the basis of value, leading to "the law of value" as it has been commonly called. Anthropologists have shown understandable reluctance to face the questions involved in this conception of value, though a few of them, such as C.S. Belshaw, R.F. Salisbury and Maurice Godelier have considered the notion of labour-time as providing a plausible measure of comparative worth in exchange.¹ I have thought it of interest to examine Marx's ideas about value further, with special reference to their possible significance for economic anthropology. First I outline his general views on the subject; then I explore the implication of some of the terms used, since they have often been accepted uncritically. After a brief glance at some economists' commentary on Marx's propositions in this field I then look at what may be the relevance of these propositions for the kind of non-monetary economy with which anthropologists have often had to deal.

Marx himself recognized that dealing with the concept of value presented some difficulty, though characteristically he saw this as a problem for the reader rather than the writer. The essence of his view was that in the whole process of production and distribution it was work alone that gave title to the product. A view often put forward in less systematic form, it was expressed by Marx with such analytical keenness, flair for categorization, battery of argument, and intolerance if not sheer brutality towards demurring opinion that its impact was immense.²

Outline of the Law of Value

In outline what Marx himself wrote in the first volume of *Capital* is fairly clear. He distinguished between exchange-value, use-value,

and what he called "value" without qualification but which sometimes appears as the "substance of value". Descriptively, each of these can be identified without much trouble. Exchange value or price is what an object produced for exchange, a "commodity", will fetch in the market. Use-value is the consumer's estimation of the object as fulfilling the technical function for which it was produced — as a table has use-value for standing things on. "Value", unqualified, is defined neither in money terms as exchange value is, nor in utility terms as use-value is, but in labour terms: the substance of value is labour; and the measure of value — its "magnitude" — is the labour time socially necessary to produce the object, its labour cost to the producer. Marx regarded his "law of value" as applying only to developed commodity production. In simple commodity production (and presumably in less well developed economic conditions) where things are produced to fill wants and are exchanged only to meet further wants, the standards of value invoked are those of use-value. Only in developed commodity production, where things are made specifically in order to sell them, are use-value standards replaced by exchange-value standards. But "value" is still there as the amount of materialized, objectified or "congealed" labour embodied in the thing produced.

The "law of value" fell into three major propositions. The first was that the value of an object produced was the labour time socially necessary to produce it. The second was that in a capitalist society with a wage structure, the labourer receives not the whole of the value he produces, but only a portion of it. He is paid not for his labour in producing a thing but only for his "labour power" (a concept to which Marx attached great importance) — his capacity to work, which is maintained in effect at a subsistence level for himself and his family (the source of future labour power). The third proposition was that having acquired in exchange the whole value of the product and paid to the worker only a maintenance allowance, the capitalist absorbs a substantial part of the value — a part which has been generally translated in English as Surplus Value.

In discussing Marx's labour cost theory of value one must remember that he wrote in German, and that handing his writings in translation can easily involve subtle divergences from his own original meaning. His statements used as basis for the present discussion refer to *Arbeit* and to *Wert*. The multiple roots of our terminology allow us to render *Arbeit* either as WORK or as LABOUR. The connotation of "work" is of direct activity, applied to an object. The emphasis is on expenditure of energy — linked with

use of it for measurement purposes in physics. But it also implies, in a more personal sense, that the energy expenditure does not give complete satisfaction in itself — as recreation may be thought to do — but is in pursuit of some further end — if only the acquisition of further energy. The connotation of "labour", though similar, tends to carry the notion of more protracted activity, with emphasis on the more negative aspects of energy expenditure. One may speak of the satisfactions to be gained from work, but not so easily of satisfactions to be gained from labour. The distinctions are vague, but it is significant that in English "labourer" is a low-status occupation of little skill, whereas to describe someone as a "worker" can imply a positive contribution. So the labelling of Marx's theory in English as the "labour-cost theory of value", not the "work-cost theory" carries an implication of pain and sacrifice which would seem to be in accord with Marx's concept. Marx's term *Wert* can similarly be translated into English more colloquially or more abstractly, as either WORTH or as VALUE. "Value" seems adequate, but to have translated his *Mehr-Wert*, literally "More-Worth" as Surplus Value seems to give the concept a twist not implied in Marx's term, for which Added Value or Additional Value might have seemed more appropriate. But though superficially to read of Surplus Value may give a false idea of Marx's concept, the term does conform to Marx's insistence on the production of increment or surplus on capital as the supreme driving force in capitalist production, and need not stop merely at the idea of some part of value just "left over".

Marx was careful to specify that labour operated within certain parameters. Labour was the source of value, not of wealth. He castigated the formulation of the Gotha Programme which began "Labour is the source of all wealth" by commenting

Labour is *not* the source of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists) as labour, which is in itself only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power. (1968: 315; also 1976: 134.)

Labour is purposeful, resulting in products, and the products are not only the results but also the essential conditions of labour, and so on. But what Marx consistently implied also was that labour was the source of relationship, between persons as well as between persons and things.

Critical Significance of Human Energy

It is this notion of a relationship created by labour that, it seems to

me, is in part responsible for the logical jump that Marx makes right at the start of his exposition. He stated that if we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains in them, that of being products of labour. Even if not quite accurate, since presumably properties of dimension and specific gravity still remain, this is acceptable in the analytical context of socio-economic discourse.

Marx held that the commodities can be regarded as congealed quantities of homogenous human labour power. But when he proceeded "As crystals of this social substance (human labour) which is common to them all, they are values — commodity values" he made a statement of a different order. The transition from *labour* to *value* is simply an asserted identification, which Marx nowhere attempted to justify. Further, he appeared to involve himself in some literal contradiction. In the same section of his enquiry he argued

Nothing can be a value without being an object of utility. If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value. (1976: 128, 131, cf. 179. The German text — MEW 1972: 23 : 52, 55 — is to the same effect.)

This looks like a complete give-away. If it is necessary for an object to have utility in order to have value, then value cannot be determined by labour alone, and the "law of value" seems to be imperilled. In the light of such contrasts, one can see why books have been written with titles such as *What Marx Really Said* (Acton 1967) and *What Marx Really Meant* (Cole 1934).

When Marx asserted that the value of a commodity is measured by the labour necessary for its production, he was intent on distinguishing this labour-value from its use-value on the one hand and its exchange-value on the other. He was thus ruling out the estimations of the utility of the commodity by would-be purchasers, and the immediate price paid for the item in the marketplace. But what he was left with as *value* was a shadowy and elusive concept in its own right. His description of it in labour-time terms seems to leave it without any independent conceptual status.

It seems to me that what Marx was really arguing was the case for recognition of the primal role in human experience of the application of human energy to things. Nothing in nature is relevant to the purposes of man unless human energy has been applied to it. But the result of application of energy to things is *change*. And the change takes place in the human being applying the energy as well as in the thing to which it is applied. This Marx expressed in various ways, such as "what on the side of the worker appeared in the form

of unrest now appears, on the side of the product, in the form of being, as a fixed, immobile characteristic" (1976: 287. The German text contrasts directly "unrest" [*Unruhe*] with "unmoving characteristic" [*ruhende Eigenschaft*] — MEW 1972: 23 : 195). But in all his discussion of the labour process and its relation to the valorization process he just assumed that labour creates useful things. He saw change as of primary significance, and gave it the name of value. More than that, he sometimes used the term value without qualification when it seems clear that he meant it with a qualification, usually exchange-value.³ Looking forward to Marx's pronouncements about "surplus value", what he was saying about work and value could be put in another way: Things are useful to man only when they have been changed by human effort; this change is the one fundamental process that has happened to them from a human point of view; and therefore irrespective of any subsequent relationships, the person who made the change should get the benefit.

From this point of view the fact that things are "owned" by people is irrelevant. Their differential ownership in no way changes the fundamental quality of the things; only human energy applied to the things does this. So from Marx's position as a sort of cosmic observer — which is what he seemed to see himself as — all rules for ownership are just so much froth stirred up by society on the surface of the deep-flowing waters of human progress. Hence Marx's objections to the institution of private property. From this too came the inference that any claim to the product of energy application on the ground of "ownership" of things was sheer impudence. So also the virtue of capital, that stock of equipment which enabled production to be undertaken with greater efficiency, lay in its being a store of accumulated labour.

All this is an intelligible, if one-sided, way of looking at the productive process. Though not new, the thesis has a certain compelling force. But it does leave out of account the fact that some kinds of change due to human endeavour have repercussive effects of a negative order, e.g. destruction of the environment. Here some concept of "usefulness" is needed to give meaning to any simple association of value with labour. Also, if value standing alone is reduced to an alternative label for human energy-change it is deprived of the precision needed to allow it to be compared closely with other variables in the economic system. The ambiguity and amorphous character of the concept of "value" have led to much difficulty in interpreting Marx's ideas.

But it is plausible to conclude that what Marx was aiming at was not any very logical examination of the concept of value as such,

but at the establishment of an entity capable of fairly simple figurative expression. He was seeking as the "substance" of value some quality (labour) which was both "contained in" a commodity and yet distinguishable from it, which could be generalized away from the particular use-qualities of the commodity and which could be capable of expression in quantitative terms. And his ultimate aim was a political, not simply an economic expression. It is very relevant here to note that in Marx's thinking, so it appears, his concept of surplus value was not derived from this theory of value, but the reverse (Meek 1973: 126). The "manifest existence of surplus value in the real world" led to a labour theory of value to explain it. The concept of value as embodied, crystallized labour, as Meek has emphasized, in effect expressed Marx's view that the economic process should be analyzed in terms of the social relations between men in the production of commodities. His idea of the formal requirements of a theory of value was subordinate to his wish to demonstrate the principles governing exchange ratios, in particular the ratio between the prices given to a worker for the use of his working capacity and the price received for the worker's product in the marketplace.

For Marx . . . the task of showing 'how the law of value operates' was virtually identical with the task of showing how relations of production determined relations of exchange. (Meek 1973: 156, 164.)

And in the forefront of the relations of production Marx placed the institution of private property and the economic power which this gave to the capitalist entrepreneur.

If one focusses on the main trend of Marx's argument rather than on his precise formulations, there are several points of interest to note.

Marx and the Mediaeval Canonists

The labour theory of value in its most general form was not invented by Marx but, as has often been pointed out, had a long history in economic and social thought. He himself makes it quite clear that his formulations owed much to the classical economists, especially to Adam Smith and Ricardo. His long traverse of their theories⁴ accepts their exposition of the basic role of labour in the creation of values, and focusses critically on the defects, from his point of view, in their perception of the role of other factors in production, and of the nature of the distributive process resulting in rent, interest and profits. But as Hannah Sewall showed long ago (1901) in a study of the theory of value before Adam Smith (she was not

concerned with Marx), a fundamental conception of the mediaeval canonists was that the true or real value of anything was the social estimation of the sacrifice needed to produce it. The emphasis was on the amount of labour expended upon the creation of the thing rather than on the satisfaction to be derived from using it. This was essentially a labour-cost theory of value rather than a utility theory, and was associated among much else with the scriptural text that "the labourer is worthy of his hire". Indeed, Albertus Magnus argued further, that there was a social necessity for the labourer to be paid his price, otherwise the product of his toil would not continue to be supplied to the community (Sewall 1901: 12-15, 121). Moreover, running through much of the mediaeval exposition was the idea that whereas "natural" exchange of things to meet the needs of life was a proper activity, gainful exchange by trading a thing for more than one paid for it was in some sense dishonourable. The mediaeval concept of the just price came to be overborne by what appeared as the impersonal forces of the market but the notion of value as related primarily to producer's cost persisted as an ethical as well as an economic theme. It is clear that Karl Marx's labour-cost theory of value was in line with a tradition of the great ecclesiastical moralists from the 13th century onwards. Marx, unlike the mediaeval thinkers, was not concerned with criteria for the establishment of a just price, but he believed as they did in the idea of a true value for things, and of this being based ultimately on the worker's effort in the making of the things.

Marx's concept of the "substance" of value or absolute value as embodied or materialized labour involves several assumptions about the character of work which he himself took for granted and did not examine. One such is a production assumption — that labour in itself is somehow a worthy, or worth-creating activity. This view Marx himself would probably have denied, claiming that recognition of the creation of value by labour arose from perception of historical process and involved no moral preconceptions at all.⁵ Yet throughout the argument of *Capital* runs the theme that while it is part of the historical development of commodity production that the capitalist entrepreneur should absorb part of the fruits of the labourer's effort, such absorption is a matter for disapproval, indeed of fierce criticism. An obvious question here is: what happens to the analysis if this normative assumption be qualified or rejected? Should it be conceded that not all labour is worthy activity, or not all labour is equally worthy, then how does the value theory fare? This is the point

at which some discrepancy between individual and social understanding of the meaning of "work" can emerge. The mediaevalists met the problem in a pragmatic way by introducing the element of community estimation as the basis of just price. (Market conditions, they thought, could be trusted to yield a just price, but this could only be ascertained by experts capable of interpreting the community's estimation — which suggests an analogy with modern central planning conditions.) They also argued that a fair compensation to the producer of a good should depend on the quality of living customary in the class to which the producer belonged — A concept which is reminiscent of distributive schemes over a wide range of socio-economic systems. Marx ignored such notions. He disposed of one common norm of evaluation in the notion of "productive" labour by defining it simply in terms of capitalist's profit expectations. In the capitalist system productive labour is simply that type of work which yields the capitalist a surplus value which he can absorb. But Marx did make some concession to possible challenge to his normative assumption by introducing a set of qualifications — or refinements as Meek terms them — to his concept of the way labour relates to value.

Conceptual Difficulties in the Theory

He had to meet two obvious problems — about difference between skilled and unskilled workers, and between fast and slow or even lazy workers. So he was concerned, he argued, with homogeneous human labour, abstract labour, and not with the variation of innumerable individual units of labour. And the production of an article in normal technical conditions was conceived in terms of average labour time, socially necessary labour time. While these qualifications were represented or implied by Marx to be manifest in the historical process itself, they were really logical rather than empirical insertions into his notion of labour as a factor of production. Insofar as they did have an empirical referent they also indicated the existence of a social component of judgement by comparison which could not be completely eliminated if the historical dimension was to retain any meaning. When Marx was arguing that his notion of abstract labour was justified by a reduction of skilled to unskilled labour he put forward the view that more complex labour counts only as simple labour intensified, or rather, as multiplied simple labour, a given quantity of skilled labour being considered equal to a greater quantity of simple labour. "*Simple average labour*", it is true, varies in character in different countries and at different times, *but in a particular society*

it is given" (1976: 135 — my italics for last clause; cf. Meek 1973: 169). By this analytical reduction of skilled to unskilled work, however necessary for the logic of this argument, Marx robbed the concept of work of a very important criterion, the *quality* of the activity. Involved in this is not merely the possible satisfaction in creative activity which can arise even in relatively simple technical manipulations, but also the pervasive identification of job accomplishment with personal status. Even in the simplest tasks in our industrial economy, the notion of doing them well or badly still tends to be bound up with notions of personal evaluation. Marx appealed to experience to show that the reduction of skilled to unskilled labour was constantly being made. A commodity may be the product of the most skilled labour, he argued, but its value, by equating it to the product of simple unskilled labour, represents a definite quantity of the latter labour alone. And by this value, Marx expressly stated, he meant not the labourer's wage but the value of the commodity in which that labour time is materialized. But if "experience" be appealed to, then an anthropologist can justifiably comment that in a "given society" the "value" of a commodity produced by skilled labour is *not* equated to the product of simple unskilled labour. In some societies this is manifested in differential spheres or circuits of exchange. A Tikopia canoe, requiring the work of skilled craftsmen to build, cannot be equated with any quantity of food produced by the labour of relatively unskilled people. Canoes and food lie in different circuits of exchange, and their "value" as products of labour alone is not directly commensurable. When therefore Marx has stated "The various proportions in which different kinds of labour are reduced to simple labour as their unit of measurement are established by a social process that goes on behind the backs of the producers; these proportions therefore appear to the producers to have been handed down by tradition", an anthropologist can reply that in some societies which have come into his own experience, tradition has debared such reduction in certain major types of production.⁶ It can of course be argued that Marx was writing only of commodity production, and only of goods brought to the bar of exchange, and that societies such as Tikopia fall outside this category. While this can be agreed, there is a question as to how far some presentations of goods in exchange in a pre-commodity phase of production may not show the same principles of value determination as in simple commodity exchange conditions.⁷ But more to the point, perhaps, if a commodity is defined in terms of its social qualities, the social

function which it performs (cf. Kautsky 1925: 2), if it is wanted at all for its use-value, then any estimation of its "value" in labour terms may well incorporate elements of regard for skill as well as for quantities of abstract labour-time.

There are still further difficulties about this "value as congealed labour" concept. At the same time as Marx stressed the significance of *abstract* labour as the element of common reference in value he also argued that commodities had an objective character as values only insofar as they were all comparable expressions of an identical *social* substance, human labour, and their objective character as values was therefore "purely social" (1976: 138–139). From this it follows "self-evidently" that this value character can appear only in the "social relation" between commodity and commodity. In Marx's argument "social" (*gesellschaftlich*) was conceived in a very austere if not even impoverished sense as response to the existence and pressure of others in inequality under capitalism rather than to a broader more positive set of rules and obligations. But to an anthropologist this recognition of the social criterion at the heart of the value concept would seem to open the door to admission of elements other than simple abstract labour as a value determinant.

Marx's argument about comparability was very ponderous. In explaining his notion of how the values of commodities can be arrived at he not only distinguished the object which is being valued from its measure in exchange by the terms relative value and equivalent value, he also retained the concept of a "value" which is different from either of these. So he conceived of "real changes" in the magnitude of value as being manifest in variation of "relative value" of a commodity although its "value" remains constant; of variation in the "value" of a commodity though its "relative value" remains constant; and finally of simultaneous variations in "the magnitude of its value and in the relative expression of that magnitude" (1976: 140–46). In more ordinary language what he seems to have envisaged were distinguishable changes in price and in the amounts of labour needed to make the article. And what he considered to be a change in the "real values" of commodities would be apparently an increase or decrease in their quantity for a constant labour-time in manufacture. Marx was also concerned with the relation of form to content, and of general to specific (or of species to individual), but the language in which he expressed this concern was by no means clear. Notions of the activation of properties of a thing by its relations, and of conditions of reflection in relationship (1976: 148–50; MEW 1972: 72) can be

interpreted and may be suggestive, but tend to be obscure where they are not banal.

Marx was concerned with important distinctions, but his way of conceptualizing them was cumbersome and didactic, and his insistence on the "mystery" of forms of value which he alone was able to solve smacked of arrogance. One can see then why economists of various shades of thought have found the labour theory of value unsatisfactory. G.D.H. Cole called it a dogma, and said that Marx's idea of value was purely and simply objectified use-value, an attempt like the classical economists to find some objective validity underlying the subjective valuations of the market. Joan Robinson, one of the most distinguished commentators on Marx's economics and not unsympathetic to his theories, has praised Marx's penetrating analysis of exploitation but criticized the labour theory of value as a misleading oversimplification of the economic situation in any industrial economy. She holds that it is awkward, obscuring Marx's position, and indeed any of the important ideas which he expressed in those terms could have been better expressed without it. The labour theory of value, Robinson argues, merely provides the "incantations" in which Marx clothed his bitter penetrating analysis of capitalism and hatred of oppression (Robinson 1966: 10–22). In the course of a rigorous mathematical examination of the labour theory of value, Morishima, another sophisticated commentator, has demurred at the position taken by most orthodox economists, that Marxian values were not operationally meaningful, i.e. did not have any measurable counterparts of analytical interest. He has considered Marxian labour values to be of direct operational importance as employment multipliers, as measures of the rate of exploitation in the economy, and as giving stable weights in problems of aggregation of industries. But he regards Marx's theory of value as inadequate as a guide to production conditions, since admission of the heterogeneity of labour leads to implications which contradict Marx's own theory of exploitation and the simple two-class view of the capitalist economy. Morishima suggests to Marxian economists that they ought to revise radically their attitude to the labour theory of value, though he seems to think this unlikely because of the inspiring ideological rationale it provides for the workers in their struggle against bourgeois régimes (Morishima 1973: 18, 190–4; cf. von Weizsäcker 1973).

These are views which are strenuously opposed by most Marxist writers. They are inclined to argue, as Meek has done, that while the concept of value could not be "scientific":

very formal sense (Meek 1973: 164) the logical abstractions of Marx in regard to values have been borne out by historical experience. Or, like Pilling (1972), they argue that prices are the appearances which conceal values.

But while historical experience can be claimed in various ways to support or illustrate Marx's more general analysis, it has proved rather embarrassing when applied to the concept of value. This has proved particularly so in the problem of how Marxian "values" are related to prices. In the first volume of *Capital* (the only volume actually produced by Marx himself) Marx stated that exchange value is nothing more than a specific social way of expressing the labour that has been applied to a thing. "Price is the money-name of the labour objectified in a commodity." (1976: 195). He held that there is no complete coincidence — the possibility that price might diverge from the magnitude of value is inherent in the price-form itself. But he did not attempt any precise formulation of the relation between price and value, i.e. between money-exchange equivalent and labour-time equivalent. (If he had, he might have been forced to admit that the incongruity lay not simply in the nature of the "price-form" but in the weakness of the labour theory itself.) The statements in volume III of *Capital* (which was edited by Engels from an incomplete first draft and published in 1894 after Marx's death) seem both to Marxists and to their critics to provide a price theory which is more realistic than the value theory of volume I. But they also raise the problem of how far this price theory can be seen to emerge from the earlier value theory or to be completely independent of it — in short had Marx revised himself? Argument on this issue has been highly technical, not within my proper competence, and not particularly relevant to this present paper. But it is of interest in its bearing upon the general problem of the role of work in an economy. Briefly, the line that western economists have taken is that Marx's value theory was too rigid in its assumptions to be of much use in the interpretation of actual economic processes and situations. Modern economists are much concerned with output concepts such as level of capital employed, level of real wages etc., and to use Marx's "value" in the sense of labour-time as a guide is "to measure with a piece of elastic" as Joan Robinson put it, since with technical progress and capital accumulation output per man-hour tends to rise and the "value" of commodities to fall. Prices could be proportional to values, i.e. labour-time expended, if capital per unit of labour were the same everywhere, and profits were uniform. But for technical reasons more capital tends to be employed in some industries than in others,

and profits relative to wages tend to be high where the ratio of capital to labour is high. In practice, competition tends to establish a uniform rate of profit on capital, not a uniform ratio of profit to wages. So prices do not correspond to values. Again, a distinction of great significance for Marx was that he drew between variable capital (used to pay wages) and constant capital (used for investment in equipment and materials). When he wrote of the "organic composition of capital" he was concerned with the proportion between the labour-time currently employed and the labour-time expended in the past to build up the stock of capital goods. But for simplification Marx made some basic assumptions, notably that capital is always used to capacity, and that this capacity is determined by technical conditions. But economists are very familiar with changes in employment of capital in response to changes in estimation of the state of trade. So, as Joan Robinson comments, even for Marx himself the concept of value has had to be strained a good deal for him to maintain the value-price broad correspondence (Robinson 1966, 1968; Samuelson 1971).

A clue to understanding some of this argument, and the defence of Marx's expressions by Marxist apologists, can be found in a remark summarizing the essence of Marx's view in 1865, in a compilation on *Value, Price and Profit*, edited by Marx's daughter, Eleanor Marx Aveling:

to explain the *general nature of profits*, you must start from the theorem that, on an average commodities are sold at their *real values*, and that *profits are derived from selling them at their values* . . . If you cannot explain profit upon this supposition, you cannot explain it at all. (Aveling 1899: 53–54 — orig. ital.; Marx 1968: 206).

From this point of view then, the labour theory of value was a necessary assumption for Marx in his interpretation of capitalism. Not that he had any particularly mystical view about the nobility or sanctity of labour. Despite some background in the Romantic period he had no specially romantic view of the labouring process. But what was essential for him in the development of his argument was to assume that there was, if not identity, at least a close correspondence between prices and *labour* contribution, in order to be able to eliminate profit as a contribution in its own right. His basic position was, not so much that value is the result of labour as that relative prices express more or less directly *relative labour input* and *nothing else*. (This assumes that return to "constant capital" in equipment is also a return to earlier labour input.) As with some other features of his exposition (see Firth 1972), Marx in effect

wrote his argument backwards. Hence since the labour contribution can be divided into a subsistence portion and a "surplus" portion, it must be from the latter that any returns to capital, land etc. can come. In a sense, as some commentators have noted, the *value* concept is irrelevant for Marx. Commodities, he held, are basically exchanged against their proportionate components in labour-time alone, but the labourer gets only a fraction of what his product fetches.

Labour Values and Prices

In this sense, one can understand Joan Robinson's point that the value concept in Marx is only a matter of words, of definition of amounts of labour. And Samuelson's point too is intelligible — that the famous "transformation-problem" is no problem at all: price = value because it is necessary for the argument that price shall be completely taken up by the labour component, leaving no space for profit as return to any other factor contributing effectively to the product.

Uncertainties about Marx's "law of value" have been more acute in socialist countries, because actual production decisions have often had to try to interpret and resolve them. Some of the issues have been: did the "law of value" indeed apply to socialist economies; should labour-time cost (with or without depreciation) be primary in production decisions, or should scarcity of other factors such as investment resources be taken into calculation; should marginality be recognized as a principle in the face of Marx's insistence on average labour cost? For a period the argument was protracted and fierce, but as it proceeded the tendency grew to forsake crude dogmatic insistence on the primacy of the labour factor in value determination in allocation of resources, in favour of more pragmatic considerations of relative scarcity, marginal productivity and strength of demand. The Soviet position was crystallized at one point by J. B. Stalin, who roundly argued that the law of value of course still continued to operate under socialism because of the persistence of commodity production and the exchange relations between agriculture and industry. He denied that it had been transformed — as some Soviet writers had postulated — by socialist planning controls. But he was rather guarded, ascribing to it the function of a "regulator" in the personal consumption field only, and in the production field as an "influence" only, through the way in which the consumer goods were needed to compensate the labour power expended in the process of production. Stalin pointed out that value, like the law of value, was a historical

category connected with the existence of commodity production. With the disappearance of commodity production, value and its forms and the law of value would also disappear, and the amount of labour expended on the production of goods would be measured directly and immediately by the number of hours worked. The allocation of labour and production generally would be regulated by "the requirements of society" in the growth of society's demand for goods. In socialist countries outside the Soviet Union there has been more open questioning of the validity of the law of value itself. Alfred Zauberman (1960) and Włodzimierz Brus (1964), for instance, wrote of uncertainties, enigmatic statements and confusion in the attempt to follow Marx's theory, and by 1965 Oskar Lange was able to write that instead of using average costs as Marxian orthodoxly would have it, most Polish economists favoured using marginal cost as a basis for price formation, as allowing planners more rational choice of inputs.⁸

The upshot of the economists' argument seems to be that in a marxist interpretation the "law of value" is a valid statement of a very general kind in regard to developed commodity production though in practice its operation is qualified by other factors than labour cost. By a non-marxist reading, the qualifications are so serious that the theory as expressed in Marx's terms has very little significance. But it seems to be agreed that Marx's theory was devised to explain production in a capitalist economy alone. What then of its relevance for a pre-capitalist economy, especially an economy where commodity production has not developed? On a literal marxist interpretation the labour theory of value cannot apply to such conditions, but I think it is of interest to enquire if some of Marx's general ideas on value and value determination cannot be used as points of stimulus for anthropological analysis. Though it be labelled as historically specific, the labour theory of value embodies categories of economic process which can be used negatively as well as positively to illumine a great range of economic conditions.

Work in a Pre-capitalist Economy

First, take the concept of labour, or work itself. There is an idea that "work", as a concept for energy expenditure to acquire new energy at some sacrifice of comfort, is the development of an industrial type of society concerned with commodity production and the isolation of individual human energy as a marketable item. I think this is an inadequate, unduly restrictive view. In traditional Tikopia society, for instance, the marketing of individual human

energy in a competitive sense did not occur. But there was a concept of work, described by the term *fekau*, used to indicate expenditure of energy for accomplishment of ends, at some sacrifice of comfort or leisure. And there was overt consideration of work in terms of scarcity, of *fekau* in terms of competing uses of energy resources of men (and women). Marx made great play with the notion of external labour, labour in which man alienates himself with self-sacrifice, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. He envisaged the labour as not belonging to the worker's essential being, as being not voluntary but coerced, and therefore meaning that the worker does not affirm himself but denies himself. If the product of labour does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, he argued, this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker. But while this was meant as a characterization of the industrial worker, and came from Marx's early thinking on the subject, it suggests by contrast a kind of naïve view of pre-industrial labour which is anthropologically unacceptable. Tikopia work involved burdens and disabilities; was often a matter for discontent, discomfort and bodily pain, was coercive and not simply at voluntary choice, and often resulted in a product held in the possession or control of other than the worker himself (Firth 1939: 110). The Tikopia worker was certainly not alienated in the Marxian sense, but he was no happy communal primitive enjoying simply the product of his own energy output, with labour as its own reward. The ethnographic situation is more complex than Marx by inference postulated, and his own concepts can become more widely applicable than he himself envisaged.

In the light of Marx's concepts of abstract labour, average labour and socially necessary labour-time it is pertinent for anthropologists to enquire more systematically into indigenous definitions of work, into contrast between work and alternative occupation, into concepts of skill and creative invention in work, and into what kind of relation is postulated in any particular society between skilled and unskilled work. How far, for example, is it thought that skilled work can be equated with or compensated by any amounts of unskilled work?

Some problems arising from Marx's exposition of his notions of value can be of particular interest to anthropologists. One is the linkage Marx made between the labour contribution to production, the distributive system of the economy and the socio-political structure of the society. How far, in a relatively simple technological situation, with production primarily for use rather than for

exchange, can any equivalent to surplus value be recognized? And if surplus value can be isolated as a category, is it accompanied by or manifest in what may be termed exploitation? Then what is the nature of the ideas that people of a society have about the character of their economic system? How far can anything resembling a "fetishism" of goods entering into exchange be identified? Can there be said to be a "mythification" of the relations of production in a traditional economy such that the productive forces of the workers are made to appear in their view as generated by other elements in the economic system? Commodity production, an elaborate system of private property, a developed class structure linking economy and society are not found in most African and Oceanic societies. Yet the main problems of Marx's exposition — the identification of the economic basis of power, and the relation of the dominant mode of production to the social, legal and political institutions of the society, are still relevant.

Superficially, even in a small-scale technically undeveloped society such as Tikopia, some critical points of comparison appear. As a measure of the comparative worth of many objects, both when held as group property and when used in exchange transactions, their labour cost appears as a prime element in the relative estimation. A pandanus mat, taking many days of plaiting to complete, is esteemed more in exchange than a barkcloth sheet, taking hours rather than days to prepare. As bedding, the mat underneath and the sheet on top have parallel use-values. The mat tends to be used more often, and with its more coherent fibres, to last longer, but the labour cost is the outstanding differential for exchange ranking. In this relatively undifferentiated field of women's crafts special skill is recognized. A Tikopia man's small waist mat or kilt, made of fine pandanus strips and ornamented with a geometrical pattern of red-dyed fibre, is a product particularly associated with skills of women from Anuta. These mats have been traditionally related as a commodity to the Tikopia field of exchange in two ways. They have entered into transactions parallel to those in which bedmats and barkcloth figured, though they have been transferred only rarely and by "something extra" being given in exchange for the waistmat. Again, waistmats have sometimes been "contracted for" by Tikopia men with Anuta women in the occasional visits between people of the two communities, and have so been brought into the general exchange field. But the article against which a waistman has been contracted for production has often been a cylinder of turmeric, one of the items of top evaluation in the Tikopia scheme. What is represented here for the Tikopia is not any amount of

abstract labour or socially necessary labour time, but two sets of labour inputs of very different duration, given quality by two very different sets of skills demanding precise handling — of female plaiting on the one hand and male turmeric extraction expertise on the other — compounded by scarcity of those skills. The relative value of the waistmat and the turmeric cylinder have been compounded by another type of scarcity — of turmeric raw material, which is entirely lacking in Anuta (the pandanus grows in both islands). Now Marx's concept of abstract labour, and of "value" embodying this, were so hedged in by qualification in terms of commodity production, separation of individual workers and general exchange that they cannot be applied within Marx's scheme to any Tikopia phenomena of the kind described. But in his endeavour to secure historical specificity and explain the capitalist form of production Marx confines the scope of his terms unduly. He states "It is only by being exchanged that the products of labour acquire a socially uniform objectivity as values, which is distinct from their sensuously varied objectivity as articles of utility."

(1976: 166). This is unexceptionable: when priced in exchange goods have comparable value which they lack when considered only as satisfying wants. But what about the qualification — this division "appears in practice only when exchange has already acquired a sufficient extension and importance to allow useful things to be produced for the purpose of being exchanged, so that their character as values has already to be taken into consideration during production" (ibid.). Again, lacking a generalized market, not every article will be produced for exchange, and complete comparability cannot be achieved. But what of partial comparability? Many systems of exchange in Oceanic communities are so elaborate that it seems unduly restrictive to deny the operation of a concept of "value" in them, and the need to have some formulation to express the relation between the labour inputs they represent and the exchange-equivalents they generate. In other words, what I am arguing is that anthropologists should refuse to accept the limitations of definition Marx has placed on concepts of labour and of value, but be prepared to use them outside the economic boundaries he laid down, while at the same time recognizing the importance of the ideas he has stimulated.

I would argue further, for instance, that Marx's "fetishism of commodities", which he regarded as a hallmark of capitalism and money exchange, is not the prerogative of a capitalist economy alone. It is a special case of a more general phenomenon of symbolism of social actions and social conceptions by using material goods. Marx

concentrated his notion of definite social relations between human beings assuming the semblance of a relation between things, on where useful things are produced expressly for exchange. But such commodity fetishism seems to operate more widely, in any form of exchange where a relation between groups or persons is expressed by the transaction. In a conventional Tikopia exchange, I would say that thoughtful Tikopia seem quite aware of the "semblance" aspect of the transaction — but they also behave as if the transfers represented a real exchange of use-values, and the social relation between men assumes the "fantastic form" of a relation between things. Marx uses religion as an analogy, but the analogy is perhaps closer than he thought — as Godelier has pointed out (Marx 1976: 165; Godelier 1977: 163–4).⁹

Surplus Value and Exploitation?

Marx's concept of surplus value seems less applicable to the conditions of non-commodity production — though he himself remarked that capital did not invent surplus labour. In the traditional Tikopia economy it would be hard to identify an extra gain obtained by an entrepreneur who was able to mobilize the labour of others and reap an advantage by exchange of the product against other items or services. Where an element of surplus value in exchange may be looked for more plausibly is in modern conditions, where Tikopia sell items of traditional culture, made by themselves or by others, for money, either to occasional tourists or to other Tikopia in settlements away from the home island where traditional goods are harder to come by. Very recently, I gather, at Waimasi, a Tikopia settlement on San Cristobal, traditional items of barkcloth, mats and bowls have become scarce, and still being wanted for institutional transactions, are sought at substantial prices: 50 cents to \$1 for a barkcloth girdle, \$5 for a barkcloth sheet, \$10 for a wooden bowl, \$10 to \$20 for a pandanus mat. Price varies according to quality, scarcity of the goods and of money to pay for them, and kinship relations sometimes modify the amount of money that changes hands. But these ratios, which broadly correspond to the amount of labour and skill incorporated in them, do exemplify traditional Tikopia evaluations of the goods (Firth 1939: 337–44; cf. 1959: 144–45, 150). Theoretically, then, a Tikopia man who acted as an intermediary between an Anutan or Tikopia woman waistmat maker and a Tikopia or westerner abroad could extract a margin of value over and above the initial payment to the mat maker. But this would not be surplus value in Marx's sense. The situation still does not have enough generality, and the craftswoman's subsistence does not

depend, even nowadays, upon payments initially or subsequently made to her by the intermediary. Even nowadays too, such purchase often has a distinct utility aim.

But if surplus value cannot be identified, what about exploitation? This question is complicated by the structural factors of chieftainship and rank of members of chiefly families. Both concepts are value-laden, but whereas the position of chiefs is empirically defined, the existence of exploitation must be inferential. Undoubtedly, in contemporary socio-economic conditions as well as traditionally, Tikopia have contributed to the support of their chiefs what may be termed a production surplus. They work occasionally in a chiefs' taro gardens, they take baskets of food and fine fish to his house, and in modern times they give him presents of money. The form of support varies according to circumstances, e.g. whether he is living on or off Tikopia, but no chief yet is simply living off his own personal resources. There is evidence, too, that such contributions are at times resented by some Tikopia, and linked with the power exercised by chiefs in major policy decisions for the community as a whole. Occasionally, though usually fairly muted, criticism of undue privilege is voiced.

Any judgement as to the existence of exploitation of people by their chiefs involves certain assumptions as to the nature and validity of the processes of selection of those leaders, and of the immaterial assets and services they represent and render to the community. If it be thought that the Tikopia chiefs obtain their living and build up their wealth from the contributions of their people, with no return to the latter, then one could correctly speak of exploitation. If Tikopia chiefs, instead of always living among their people, were to behave like absentee landlords and live away from other Tikopia upon the proceeds of the work of the community, the case would be clear. Even if while living among other Tikopia, chiefs and their families worked manually in their cultivations and engaged in various forms of craft manufacture — as they do — their relationship could still be judged as exploitation if they creamed off the energies and superior products of their people to their own benefit. But this is not so. Tikopia chiefs and their families do not live as a class off Tikopia ordinary people. Elements of such exploitation, and the potential for its development can be detected in both traditional and modern Tikopia society, but they have been held in check by a complex combination of relations of production: the holding of land in relatively small, scattered parcels; a strong conceptualization of kin-group rights to land and other major property; the absence of alternative markets for products of labour; and what may be

termed the ideology of reciprocity. For the material transactions are certainly not only one way. Food supplies sent in to the chief are disbursed by him substantially to other, non-chiefly households; chiefs reciprocate in exchange and engage like commoners in provision of services demanded by kin obligation. All this is very familiar to anthropologists.

The most controversial issue, however, is estimation of the significance of *immaterial* assets and services. From the material side, Tikopia chiefs may be regarded as "appropriators of surplus value" in a way reminiscent of Marx's conception of the role of guild-masters (1976: 423, 1029–30; cf. Kautsky 1925: 117). But Marx's insistence on the social parameters of labour ought to draw attention to such immaterial elements in the socio-economic process. Here it is clear, from Tikopia recent history that almost all if not all Tikopia regard their chiefs as essential components of their society. They speak of the chiefs as contributing much to the public recognition of Tikopia in the contemporary Solomon islands social and political scene, they accept the decisions of their chiefs on major political issues — though they may not always agree with those decisions — and they go out of their way to welcome and show respect to the chiefs whenever they appear in settlements of Tikopia abroad, and use them as foci for general assembly. An obvious inference is that the chiefs help to give to all Tikopia that element of unique identity as a society and culture which is very relevant to preservation of the integrity of a people (cf. Firth 1969).

Marxists are fond of reiterating that in capitalism, power relationships are not transparent — as if by contrast they have been transparent in other forms of society! I would not find it easy to argue that power relations have been transparent between chiefs and people in Tikopia society. But I think there is a difference between lack of transparency, and the "mystification" syndrome in Marx's diagnosis, where the true nature of exploitation is concealed by representing it as reciprocal service.¹⁰ It would be arrogant, though, in the line of Marx's own exposition, for an anthropologist to claim that he had revealed the "mystery" of Tikopia power relations. I doubt if these can be considered a mystery to the Tikopia. They do contain substantial non-rational elements, such as a belief, even in modern conditions, in some aspects of the sanctity (*tapu*) and special powers (*manu*) of Tikopia chiefs. But Tikopia can discuss these beliefs objectively, can speculate how far they may be validated in actual cases, and have been known both to criticize chiefs for some of their actions and approve the institution of

chieftainship for the values it represents to the Tikopia. So while the issues are complex, to the Tikopia as to an anthropologist, a considerable degree of rational judgement and argument is exercised by Tikopia upon them.

The question of possible exploitation is bound up with that of freedom of choice by the parties concerned. Here the opinion of a Marxist economist is of interest. E. Wolfstetter of the University of Dortmund has pointed out that in almost every society we can distinguish between one part of the net product which serves as subsistence for those who do the work and another part which serves for general social purposes. Accordingly, we can divide the total labour-time expended into two respective parts: necessary labour and surplus labour. The latter is the work spent in order to provide for maintenance of equipment and future growth — or capital-building in non-Marxist terms. When the production decisions eventuate from an egalitarian decision process "nobody could consider this surplus labour as an index of exploitation". So while surplus value in its phenomenal form of profits represents a capitalist form of production, "positive surplus labour" as result of a free decision by the owners of the means of production is "not a sufficient condition for establishing that there is exploitation" (Wolfstetter 1973: 799). Now this, which could well be an apologia for a socialist form of production, clearly involves assumptions about the nature of "free" decision and of "ownership" of the means of production in the particular social economy under consideration. But as a general statement it can be taken as applicable to the Tikopia situation, in its traditional setting.

Over the last twenty-five years, however, the question of exploitation in the Tikopia economy has taken a new turn. The work situation of many Tikopia, mainly men and children, but also some women, has changed radically. Those living on Tikopia itself — perhaps about half of the total population — and many of those living off Tikopia in settlements in the Russell islands, of San Cristobal and elsewhere still engage in cultivation of the soil and fishing for themselves and their kin. But a high proportion of those off the island are also workers in a modern industrial structure, of coconut plantations, government service or other wage or salaried employment. And most of the children, both on and off Tikopia, now go regularly to school. A labour-cost theory of value with a concomitant of exploitation is not easy to apply to such service areas as school, hospital, police or welfare organization employment. But in the plantation labour area, application of such theory can follow a more well-worn path. What should be noted,

though, is that any surplus value realized from a Tikopia wage-worker's production is of a different kind from any which may be categorized from his gift to his chief. The gift to a chief is an excess from production: it represents more food or other goods than is wanted by the family of the producer, or items of superior quality which can be foregone without great loss. The profit from plantation labour is an excess from exchange — of money-wages for labour power and of money-price for copra. The traditional Tikopia type of surplus has been dependent upon the vagaries of nature, but there has been no alternative market for it. The modern plantation product has been dependent not only upon the vagaries of nature but also upon the vagaries of the market. Tikopia traditional circumstances saw a relatively constant demand; modern industrial circumstances see variable demand, with prospect of unforeseen losses or windfall gains, with the ingenuity of the entrepreneur as bargainer as a contributory factor to the amount of the surplus. In the traditional Tikopia situation the amount of "surplus" accruing to a chief has not been dependent on his manipulative skills. The structure of the modern production situation then, with its more remote and more impersonal economic and social relationships has more potential for exploitation of the Tikopia worker.

Now I want to return more directly to the value problem. But first a note about exchange. Marx had some odd ideas about exchange in a non-market economy. He held that in primitive societies property was controlled in common. There was no "reciprocal independence" of men as individuals. He seemed to think that individual exchange corresponds to a definite mode of production which itself corresponds to class antagonism. And he asserted that only when things have fully become commodities is it that "custom stamps them with definite magnitudes" (or "fixes their values" 1976: 182). Such statements can be interpreted in a special sense, but in ordinary ethnographic terms Marx was wrong about this. He was so preoccupied with his ideas about the historical development of value as a category and its relation to the development of the idea of labour as a commodity that he constructed an over-simplified scheme of development of exchange. Certainly, in the traditional Tikopia economy, there were individual exchanges, and not just in class terms; and the care taken in matching items in exchange showed a clear conception of relative magnitude. There was no general price system, no money medium to distort the relationships, but the transactions were not simply transfers of use-values.

The Nature of Marx's Contribution

That Marx's model is too simple can be seen by considering the value of turmeric in the traditional Tikopia economy. Turmeric is a crimson pigment of high esteem, used in decoration of the person on recreational and especially ritual occasions. In the form of bark-cloth-wrapped cylinders of pigment it was treated as a most prized possession, to be transferred only against goods such as a decorated waist mat, a bonito hook or a canoe, or to be sacrificed in ritual destruction at the burial of a chief or other man of rank. It was not a commodity in Marx's sense since it was not produced primarily for exchange. Did it have value in any economic sense — or at best only use-value?

Involved in turmeric production is a substantial labour input, of both skilled and unskilled labour (Firth 1939: 137–38, 276–77, 289–91). The process of production is carefully measured in days of work, but the skilled labour is recognized as being of special quality, not reducible to terms of unskilled labour. The initial technical processes of digging, grating and filtration of the turmeric are relatively simple and the outcome is predictable. But the later processes of decantation, of baking the pigment and withdrawing it as a cylinder from its wooden oven need expert direction and considerable judgement and manual dexterity. They involve considerable anxiety, and uncertainty is a definite component in the calculation of yield. The technical means of production — troughs, bowls, filters etc. — are contributed by households and are pooled for the duration of the production. The raw materials, the turmeric roots, however, are owned by domestic groups on a sub-lineage basis, with ownership expressed in terms of rights of senior men. So the product of pigment is carefully kept itemized on this basis, and the operations are carried on with a series of turmeric batches held separately. Considerable allocations of food resources are needed to maintain the workers, and a turmeric owner must be able to afford that item in the cost of production of the pigment. As a joint product an edible flour is also produced alongside the pigment. And as immaterial benefits, prestige accrues to a successful turmeric manufacturer, while traditionally it was regarded as fulfillment of a religious obligation to a premier god.

In such a description, a model with a number of interrelated variables, the value of turmeric is dependent upon: scarcity of supplies and of skilled and unskilled labour; alternative uses of such factors — say for canoe building or feast-giving, which occasionally compete with demand for turmeric manufacture; a significant joint product (of edible flour); a considerable degree of uncertainty about

the outcome of the enterprise; and a set of power considerations involved in mobilization of labour. Measurement of all these factors is hard, but some idea can be given of the relative magnitudes of most of them. Value is then the resultant of a complex set of variables of which labour power in the forms of abstract or average labour can be only one. All this can be fitted into conventional supply and demand analysis if institutional factors are built in and allowance made for change.

I think it is no accident that with the objects that are ranked together in the highest category of traditional Tikopia esteem, the element of uncertainty appears strongly in the technical outcome. In turmeric extraction and canoe-building the quality of the product can vary greatly, and in fishing with bonito hooks the chances of non-success are high. And while turmeric, canoes and bonito hooks are produced or associated partly with food, they are markedly dissociated from food in the evaluation list, and tend to be associated with rank and office. In other words, these things hold their significance not just as simple use-values, but as objects of normative estimation, normative claims and symbolic status. I would argue then that these normative elements serve in part as a diffuse prototype of effective demand in the economist's sense — i.e. wants backed by action — and so help to regulate resource allocation. If one wished to argue that in such a non-market economy labour is "the substance and immanent measure" of value, it must pass through a screen of normative estimations before being incorporated into the value schedule. Transactions whereby goods or services pass from one person or group to another in such conditions are not just an exchange of labour.

Conclusion

To conclude, I think that as positive theoretical expressions, Marx's "law of value" and the labour cost theory of value generally, are inadequate. They express important truths, but only part of the truth. And in wrestling with problems of analysis, of abstraction, of generalization, Marx allowed himself an exaggeration of language which at times he seems to have mistaken for argument. His

elaborate descriptions of economic process in terms of mystery, metamorphosis, social metabolism, were forms of figuration which may be conceptually attractive and can fit a quick conspectus. But they need to be carefully examined in detailed presentation before being incorporated into a theoretical interpretation. His analysis of commodities and money was rich in metaphor — commodities are in love with money; they must divest themselves of their natural

physical body when they enter into exchange; and they do so ungilded and unsweetened . . . (1976: 197, 199, 202 — the German expressions are parallel) which could not be taken literally. For much of his argument in *Capital*, I suggest, one can regard Karl Marx's handling of his subject as a kind of secular parallel to John Bunyan's handling of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Scepticism and irony have replaced simple faith, and Marx took a more personal interest in the slaying of the dragons he identified.¹¹ But there was a similar distrust of the world of appearances, a similar exhortation to awareness of damage done to the spirit of man by acceptance of the world's standards, and a similar belief in the ability of man in the long run to attain a state of freedom — though Marx substituted the law of history for Bunyan's reliance on the grace of God. But underneath all this figuration Marx's treatment has been very fertile for theoretical development. In particular, he gave a new dimension to the concept of work by relating it in an elaborate historical framework to the development of relations of power, and to the clothing of these relations in conceptual form which can obscure their essential character.

Notes

1. "No item may be chosen with exact significance as a standard element symbolizing real cost. Perhaps the nearest measure in Melanesian conditions would be use of the elasticity of demand for time" (Belsaw 1954: 149–50). Theoretical and practical difficulties of this approach were considered by Belsaw in an appendix to his original Ph.D. thesis in social anthropology in the University of London. Some of the difficulties emerge in the painstaking effort R.F. Salisbury made to use labour-time as a comparative measure of activity and of capital accumulation among the Siame. His results reveal the great diversity in individual behaviour and the very broad assumptions that had to be made in order to get comparable data. For example, his estimate that work with stone axes took three times as long as similar work with steel axes is a conservative figure based on a remark by his most reliable informant; but consensus of other Siame opinion was that "stone axes took between three and four times as long". But Salisbury points out that if he had taken a multiple of four times instead of three, his calculations about the use of capital relative to labour would have been markedly different (1962: 146–8, 216–20; cf. Godelier 1977: 126–51. For more general references to recent studies of labour time see Van Arsdale 1978.).
2. A brief index to his attitude is his reference to "the most violent, sordid and malignant passions of the human breast, the Furies of private interest" among the enemies to free scientific enquiry, in the Preface to the first edition of *Capital* (1976: 92).
3. For example: "Our capitalist has two objectives: in the first place, he wants to produce a use-value which has exchange-value, i.e. an article destined to be sold, a commodity; and secondly he wants to produce a commodity greater in value than the sum of the values of the commodities used to produce it, namely, the means of production and the labour-power he purchased with his good money on the open market. His aim is to produce not only a use-value, but a commodity; not only use-value, but value; and not just value, but also surplus-value" (1976: 293). When "value" is used above for the first time without qualification it cannot mean labour-cost but exchange value.
4. In his preface to vol. I of *Capital*, published 1867, Marx wrote of further projected volumes, including a Book IV, "the history of the theory". In his preface to vol. II Engels notes that a section had been written by Marx between 1861 and 1863 on the theory of surplus value. This was completed (after Engels's death in 1895) by Karl Kautsky between 1905 and 1910 and published not as Book IV of *Capital*, but as *Theories of Surplus Value* (*Theorien über den Mehrwert*) in a German edition of three volumes. Various subsequent editions and translations have been published in Moscow, and Berlin. A selection from the volumes, translated by G.A. Bonner and Emile Burns was published (by Lawrence & Wishart) in London in 1951, and a full edition in 1969, from a translation by Renate Simpson. A very substantial part of Meek's book (1973) on the labour theory of value is devoted to an historical analysis.
5. It has been strenuously denied for Marx, e.g. by Croce, and by Meek in criticism of Lindsey's argument, that the labour theory of value is primarily a theory of natural right rather than a theory of prices (Meek 1973: 215–225). But to my mind this is taking Marx too much at face value and crediting him with a neutralist position which is really foreign to his basic stance.
6. Some translations have "custom" — the German is *das Herkommen* (1976: 135; 1972: 59. Cf. Firth 1939: 340–2; Nadel 1951: 149–52).
7. In some types of exchange in non-monetary economy the goods transferred may be given and sought as much for their character as status-markers, as for their capacity to satisfy material wants. Here Marx's formula of C-M-C for simple commodity exchange can be replaced by an expression such as S-C-S, which has some analogy with M-C-M of capitalist exchange, but where S stands for status instead of money.
8. In November 1951 a conference of Soviet economists and other Marxists was held to consider a preliminary draft of a textbook on political economy. Materials from this conference were submitted to Joseph Stalin, who was associated with the project from the outset. His comments and his replies to several participants were published in the Soviet press in October 1952, and an English translation emerged the same year (Stalin 1952). In 1943 Oskar Lange, one of the most considerable Polish economists, had reviewed Sweezy's *Theory of Capitalist Development* (*J. Philosophy*, 40: 378–84) and argued for the introduction of demand and of marginal analysis explicitly into Marxian analysis. Lange modified his expressions somewhat after his return to Poland later, but his *Theory of Reproduction and*

Accumulation (trans. J. Stadler and edited by P.F. Knightsfield from a Polish edition of 1965, Oxford: Pergamon, 1969) was still critical of aspects of Marxian theory. He pointed out that according to Marx's assumption, e.g. means of consumption cannot serve as means of production, whereas in practice different situations arise, as with grain in agriculture. At various times economists of the Polish Planning Commission called for rational application of the "law of value" to planning, and for more serious discussion of Lange's views on the significance of demand factors in price determination. See also J.M. Letiche, Soviet Views on Keynes, *J. Economic Literature* IX, 1971: 442-58; Alexander Bajit (of Ljubljana), *Investment Cycles in European Socialist Economies: A Review Article, J. Economic Literature* IX, 1971: 53-63. See also discussion by Meek (1973: 256-84) and Montias (1960).

9. The subtle and stimulating treatment of Marx's ideas by Maurice Godelier (see especially 1970, 1977) has done much to improve dispassionate appreciation of Marx's work by anthropologists.
10. As Alvin Gouldner has pointed out (*For Sociology*, 1973: 222n.) it was Marx's concern for reciprocity in economic relations that formed the basis of his notion of exploitation, though he was interested mainly in its negative aspects.
11. Marx took money and labour as examples of simple abstract concepts. But his own experience of them may have given him a distorted view of the industrial process. Labour he knew personally only as a writer, and he championed the cause of the manual workers at some remove. Money gained from his writings was never great, and for years he was subsidised by Engels. It would be absurd to try and explain the essentials of Marx's massive analysis in terms of his admiration for the manual work he never did and his hatred for the money of which he never had enough. But his resentment against bourgeois society (as shown in his letters) for trying to turn him into a "money-making machine", and against money as the symbol of his "really nauseating poverty" is, I suggest, a factor of relevance if one is to understand the images in which he expressed much of his analysis.

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THE ESTIMATION OF WORK:

Labour and Value Among Paéz Farmers

SUTTI ORTIZ

Introduction

When talking about work, most anthropologists have focused their attention on the incentives that move people to action, to accept wage labor offers, or to increase their productive output. Others have focused on labor as a potential unit to measure flows and outputs. It is only recently, thanks to the polemical writings of Marxist anthropologists, that we are reminded that work is a complex creative activity like any other human activity. Work should be examined in all its complexity as the transformation of seeds and nature into food and tools. To that purpose I shall forget that one can conceive of work as a problem faced by all of us when we have to allocate resources. I shall also disregard the equally interesting Ricardian contention, initially introduced into anthropology by Salisbury (1962) and recently revived by Gudeman (1978a) that the concept of work can be used as a unit of measurement to help the analyst understand the dynamics of production and distribution. Instead, I examine what does work engender besides tools, food, and commodities.

Although one can pretend to hold a fresh analytical vision, I shall turn to the framework already provided by Marx and, in particular, by his labor theory of value. My reasons are rather pragmatic. Marx's theory of value is certainly suggestive and pregnant with questions for future research. I feel, however, that before we spend too much energy arguing about "transformation" of labor into values, wages, and prices, we should re-examine what type of transformations are in fact involved in the working of the soil and the chipping of a stone. Social relations are indeed created or transformed when a woman, as wife, becomes a farmhand, or ceases to be the tender of food crops. Meillassoux, Terray, and many others have already examined this aspect at length; for this reason I shall leave it out of my discussion. Instead, I want to focus on the suggestive proposition that work not only engenders social