

Ownership and Commodity of Labour Force in Socialist Society

Haoxuan Lu^{1,a,*}

¹Arts and Bachelor of Advanced Studies, University of Sydney, 39, Darling Drive, Sydney, NSW, Australia

a. halu3035@uni.sydney.edu.au

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In the original sense, labour, as a kind of production and living activity, is only a way of existence accompanying human progress. It is not produced for sale but appears for completely different reasons. At the same time, the activity of labour cannot be separated from other parts of life; it can neither be stored nor circulated. However, in a capitalist society, labour is commodified, monetized, and privatized. The fictional concept of "labour is a commodity" is widely spread and deeply rooted in people's hearts without restriction. Transforming "labour" into "labour force" is a long and painful historical process involving complex means such as natural violence, political power, and economic temptation. The author attempts to begin with the distribution of labour products, study the problem of labour commercialization in the socialist market economy, and investigate where there is agreement on globalization concerns. To summarize, under the socialist system, when laborers have a specific property, the labor force can still become a commodity, but this just implies that the labor force can become a commodity, not that it must become a commodity.

Keywords: ownership, commodity labour force, socialist society

1. Introduction

More than 100 years ago, Marx pointed out that two conditions must be met at the same time for labour force to become a commodity: first, labourers have personal freedom and have the right to control their labour force; second, labourers have nothing but their labour power, no means of production and The means of subsistence can only rely on selling labour to support the family. Only when these two conditions are met simultaneously can labour power become a commodity. This view of Marx was formed in the early stage of the development of capitalism, which was completely in line with the political and economic conditions at that time. Because at that time, the bourgeois revolution, especially the primitive accumulation of capital, caused many farmers and small handicraftsmen to lose their means of production and subsistence, thus forming the two conditions for labour force to become a commodity mentioned by Marx.

The debate on labour commercialization mainly involves two focuses: China's current dual economic structure and the two conditions of Marx's labour commercialization and the distribution system. Around these two focuses, scholars have formed three different views in their debates: the theory of labour commodities under socialism, the theory of labour non-commodities, and the theory of dual attributes of labour. Although the discussion on the commercialization of labour force has yet

to reach a consensus, the real foothold is always the result of the distribution of labour products. The author will try to start with the distribution of labour products, analyze the problem of labour commercialization in the socialist market economy, and explore where there is consensus on issues of globalization

2. Individual Ownership of Labour Still Exists in a Socialist Society

It must first be admitted that not only does the socialist society have the category of labour ownership, but its nature is the individual ownership of labourers. Labour ownership is an economic category that exists in all human societies. It first appears as a physical relationship of ownership. Marx once wrote in the fourth chapter of the first volume of "Das Kapital": "If the owner of labour power wants to sell labour power as a commodity, he must be able to control it, so he must be the property of his labour capacity and his freedom" [1]. As a human being, it must always treat its labour-power as its property, and, thus as its commodity. He does not relinquish his ownership of his labour-power when he alienates it" [2]. That is to say, in a general abstract sense, labourers own labour. This natural law will not change with changes in social and economic forms.

At the same time, labour ownership in any society must be expressed as an economic ownership relationship, and labour ownership is one aspect of the ownership relationship. Marx pointed out: "Any distribution of consumption means nothing but the result of the distribution of production conditions itself. The distribution of production conditions expresses the nature of the production mode itself. For example, the basis of the capitalist production mode lies in: the production of materials. Conditions are in the hands of non-workers in the form of capital and landed land, while the masses have only the personal conditions of production, that is, labour power" [3]. The production conditions that Marx mentioned here obviously include both the material conditions of production. The means of production also includes the personal conditions of production - the labour force.

The distribution of production conditions is the question of who owns, occupies, dominates and uses the means of production and labour force. The ownership in the research of Marxist political economy is the owner of the production conditions, including the two aspects of the ownership of the means of production and the ownership of the labour force. The study of the ownership of the means of production must never replace or cancel the study of the ownership of the labour force. We can only make a scientific and correct distribution and description of the social economy by comprehensively examining these two ownership systems. All physiological relations of the labour force and all economic relations can be separated or unified.

As mentioned earlier, physiologically, no matter what in any society, the labour-power is owned by the individual labourer. However, from the perspective of economic relations, labour is not owned by the labourer regardless of occasion or condition. History has proved that it can have different ownership relations in different social and economic forms. In primitive societies, due to the shallow productivity level, people could not fight against nature and wild beasts alone. In order to survive, people had to combine their labour, implement common ownership of labour, work together, and cooperate. Later, with the development of productive social forces, the ownership of means of production and labour results came into being, successively transitioned to slave society and feudal society, and the public ownership of the labour force in primitive society was replaced by complete and partial ownership of labour by others. This replacement is a historic negation in the development of labour ownership. In a capitalist society, labourers have become individuals with personal freedom. The labour-power labourers own the labour power historical negation of labour ownership in enslaved persons and feudal societies. This negation is a great progress in the development of human society and a great liberation of productive social forces. The author believes that the physiological and economic relations of the labour force in a socialist society are also unified, and they all belong to the individual labourer.

When discussing the labour of labourers in socialist society in the "Critique of the Gotha Program", Marx once pointed out: "One person is physically or intellectually superior to another, so he can provide more labour at the same time, or be able to work a longer period, and labour, in order to be a measure, must be determined in terms of its time or intensity, or it would not be a measure. This equals power for unequal labour and unequal rights. It does not recognize any class distinctions since everyone is a mere labourer like everyone else. However, it acquiesces as a natural privilege to unequal individual endowments, and thus the unequal capacity to work" [4]. The "individual talent" and "working ability" mentioned by Marx here obviously refer to the labour force of labourers. The unequal labour force is a "natural privilege" by default, which implies that the labour force belongs to the individual labourers as a matter of course. Marx also pointed out in the twenty-fourth chapter of the first volume of "Das Kapital": "Capitalist production has caused its negation due to the inevitability of the natural process. This is the negation of the negation. This negation is not a re-established private property. Rather, the individual property should be re-established based on the achievements of the capitalist age, that is, based on co-operation and common ownership of the land and the means of production by labour itself" [5].

The individual ownership mentioned here can be understood as the individual ownership of the means of production and includes the individual ownership of the labour force. The labour force in a socialist society is owned by individuals, which determines that the socialist society must distribute corresponding remuneration according to the labour provided by the labourers.

3. Labourers Must Exchange Their Labour Power as Commodities

Identifying the nature of individual ownership of the labour force in a socialist society does not mean it becomes a commodity. However, it lays the premise for determining the commodity attribute of the labour force. So far, the focus of disagreement on whether the labour force in a socialist society is a commodity has focused on whether the labour force used in the public economy is a commodity. The most important theoretical basis for comrades who hold negative views is: that Marx pointed out that two conditions must be met for the labour force to become a commodity: first, labourers have personal freedom and can freely dispose of their labour force; second, labourers have neither means of production nor other sources of livelihood have to rely on selling labour to make a living. In the socialist public ownership economy, labourers have become the masters of the means of production, have "what is necessary to realize their labour force", no longer need to control their labour force as a commodity [6]. Therefore, labour force The most critical conditions for becoming a commodity no longer exist, and labour power will naturally cease to be a commodity. In the socialist public ownership economy, workers are indeed the masters of the means of production.

However, the crux of the problem is: as the master of the means of production, does the condition for the labour force to become a commodity no longer exist? The author believes that in the socialist public ownership economy, there are still objective economic conditions for labour as a commodity. The objective existence of these conditions determines that even though labourers have become their families and masters, they must still treat their labour as a commodity—commodities to exchange. The level of productive forces at the current stage of socialism and the development of socialist public ownership fundamentally determine that the labour force in public ownership is still a commodity.

At the current stage of socialism, the level of productivity is still relatively low in general, which determines that public ownership can only take specific forms such as state ownership, collective ownership, cooperative system, and joint-stock system. In these forms of public ownership economy, as far as the labourers are concerned, they are the joint owners of the means of production. However, as far as individual labourers are concerned, they cannot unconditionally combine with the publicly owned means of production, cannot rely on public means of production to seek personal self-interest. In this case, on the one hand, it should be noted that labourers, as owners of the means of production,

can enjoy certain benefits brought about by the public ownership of the economy, such as the distribution of profits from state-owned and collective assets, dividends from shares, and Obtain some benefits in public welfare, social security. This is the concrete realization of his mastery. However, on the other hand, it should be noticed that due to the low level of productive forces at the current stage of socialism and the low level of development of public ownership, the economic benefits that labourers get from the public ownership of the economy are meagre and limited after all. The means are still their labour. He must separate the ownership of his labour-power from the right to use it, transfer the right to use it, and exchange it as a commodity. In this alone, it can be said frankly that it is similar to the situation under capitalism. It can be seen that in socialist public ownership, the exchange of labour force does not take place between labourers and capitalists but between individual labourers and labourers as a whole. This creates a two-way choice between individuals and labourers (state-owned enterprises, collective enterprises, cooperative enterprises, and joint-stock enterprises). Labourers must choose employment in enterprises that can give full play to their expertise to maximize the value of their labour force and obtain the greatest self-interest. In contrast, enterprises, as independent economic entities under the conditions of a commodity economy, for their survival and development, Workers must be selected and hired according to their labour force value and price. As a commodity, the labour force in the socialist public ownership economy also has two factors: use value and value.

The value of its labour force is greater. Since the labour force in the socialist public ownership system is a commodity, the wages of labourers are mainly the value or price of their labour power. This is not inconsistent with the socialist principle of distribution according to work. Distribution according to work does not mean that labourers will receive The value of all products created by their labour. In the total product value, the value part used to supplement the consumed means of production must be deducted first. The added value part used for expanded reproduction and other necessary social funds should be deducted next.

After the above deduction is made, the portion of the value available for personal distribution remains. In this way, "every producer, after making various deductions, receives back from the society exactly what he gives to the society. What he gives to society is his labour" [7]. It can be seen that the labour of labourers in socialist public ownership is divided into two parts: one part is necessary labour, which is labour for themselves; the other part is surplus labour, which is different from the capitalist private ownership economy. Yes, this part of surplus labour does not belong to the individual capitalists but to the society and the labourers collectively. Although the value created by the latter part of the labourer's labour will eventually benefit the labourer in one form or another, what he directly obtains and uses for personal consumption is the value created by the former part of the labour. The former part of the value is the remuneration received by labourers according to the principle of distribution according to work, and it is expressed in the form of wages [8]. In this way, in socialist public enterprises, wages as a form of distribution according to work and wages as the value of the labour force tend to be consistent. In other words, wages can be a form of distribution according to work and the value and price of labour-power.

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4. Conclusions

In summary, under the socialist system, when labourers have a particular property, labour force can still become a commodity, but this means that labour force can become a commodity, not necessarily a commodity. As long as the sale of labour power can enable labourers to obtain and increase their income and realize the maximization of self-interest under the given conditions, it is inevitable that labour power will become a commodity. Therefore, the author believes that the conditions for labour to become a commodity are: one is that the labourer privately owns labour, that is, he has personal freedom; the other is that the sale of labour can maximize the interests of the labourer under the given conditions.

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