

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 11, NO. 12.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, JULY 12, 1910.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

“HOW CAN EITHER GROW WEALTHIER?”

By DANIEL DE LEON

TWO readers, from very different parts of the country, refer to the recent article “‘Use-Value’ and ‘Exchange-Value’” (*Daily People* June 15; *Weekly* 25) asking the same question in almost identical language.

The article “‘Use-Value’ and ‘Exchange-Value’” had for its purpose to meet a critic’s objections to the Marxian law of “Surplus Value,” or “Surplus Wealth.” Our critic claimed the law was unsound; he argued that the extraction of “Surplus Value” was nothing peculiar to the employer, but “was true of all transactions between buyer and seller”; and he sought to illustrate his point with a bricklayer who bought a pair of shoes from a shoemaker, both of whom, bricklayer and shoemaker, he held, extracted more value from the labor-power of the other than he parted with, as each realized the moment he “put to use” that which he received in exchange from the other.

The obvious answer—our critic’s confusing the thought of the new “Use-Value” that the bricklayer and the shoemaker received, with the thought of the “Exchange-Value” of their respective goods, and which determined the amount of these that each was willing to part with in the exchange,—our correspondents realize to be correct; but, both come with a startled question which amounts to asking: “If the magnitude of wealth is determined by its ‘Exchange-Value,’ and the bricklayer and the shoemaker in the transaction gave ‘Exchange-Value’ for ‘Exchange-Value,’ how, then, could either ever grow wealthier?”

The question illustrate an instance in which the psychology wrought by an error, retains force enough to overpower the argument by which the error was overthrown. Our correspondents recognize the error in the anti-Marxian criticism; but the wrong habits of thought to which they were formerly subject still retain

force enough with them to have dulled their perception of two important links in the very argument, the soundness of which they admit enlightened them on the subject of values—in use and in exchange.

The illustration of the shoemaker and the bricklayer, used by the anti-Marxian critic, is so archaic—no shoe-maker is to-day also a shoe-seller in retail, except, possibly, in isolated localities—that the complete answer to our correspondents’ demands three different suppositions—

1st. The supposition that the shoe-maker, in the anti-Marxian fable, is also his own shoe-retailer;

2nd. The supposition that what the anti-Marxian critic calls a “shoe-maker” is, in reality, a shoe manufacturer; and

3rd. The supposition that what the anti-Marxian critic calls a “shoe-maker” is, in reality, a shoe-store-keeper.

In the first instance, the stock of shoes in the shoemaker’s shop represent, because they embody, a lump amount of “Exchange-Value,” made up of the “Exchange-Value” of the raw materials consumed, plus the “Exchange-Value” of the shoemaker’s labor-power that produced the goods.

But the shoemaker in this fable is also his own retailer. The result of the combination is that he imparts to each particular pair of shoes an additional amount of “Exchange-Value”—the “Exchange-Value” imparted by the labor-power that is expended in the distributive part of what is termed “production,” generally; in short, in “distribution.”

Combining these two flows of “Exchange-Value,” and supposing, for the sake of clearness, that the stock of shoes consists of 10 pairs of shoes, then this is the result obtained:—each pair of shoes would embody $\frac{1}{10}$ of the “Exchange-Value” of the raw materials consumed by all the 10 pairs of shoes; plus $\frac{1}{10}$ of the “Exchange-Value” of the shoemaker’s labor-power expended in producing all the 10; plus the “Exchange-Value” of the shoemaker’s labor-power expended upon each pair in his function of distributor, that is, seller. The final result is that the shoemaker in this instance is wealthier by the difference between the “Exchange-Value” of the total labor-power that he expended and the “Exchange-Value” of the “Surplus Value” or “Surplus

Wealth” which it is the specific “Use-Value” of the commodity labor-power to yield in excess of what it needs to restore itself, in short, in excess of its normal “Exchange-Value.”

In the second instance, the stock of shoes in the shoe-manufacturer’s factory represent, because they embody, a lump amount of “Exchange-Value” made up, as in the first instance, of the “Exchange-Value” of the raw materials consumed (which includes the wear and tear of machinery; etc.), plus, differently from the first instance, the “Exchange-Value,” not of the manufacturer’s own labor-power, he expends none, but of the labor-power of his employes who produced the goods.

The final result is that, in this instance, the shoe-manufacturer is wealthier by the difference between the “Exchange-Value” of the labor-power that he bought at its “Exchange-Value” in the labor-market, and the “Exchange-Value” of that “Surplus Wealth” which it is the specific “Use-Value” of the commodity labor-power to yield in excess of its “Exchange-Value,” and only for the sake of which “Use-Value” the manufacturer at all buys the commodity labor-power.

Finally, in the third instance, the stock of shoes of the shoe-store-keeper represent, because they embody, a lump amount of “Exchange-Value,” made up of the “Exchange-Value” of the stock that he bought from the manufacturer, plus, the same as in the second instance, the “Exchange-Value” of the labor-power of the salesmen or girls whom he employs and who do what may be called “produce distribution.”

The final result, in this third instance, is that the shoe-store-keeper is, as in the second instance, wealthier by the difference between the “Exchange-Value” of the labor-power that he bought at its “Exchange-Value” in the labor-market, and the “Exchange-Value” of that “Surplus Wealth,” or “Surplus Value,” which it is the specific “Use-Value” of the commodity labor-power to yield in excess of its “Exchange-Value.”

There are more combinations of instances possible: the three cited will suffice. They answer the question, as to how the “shoemaker” can grow wealthier. In the first instance he grows wealthier by the Surplus Wealth he himself produces; and in the other two instances he grows wealthier by the appropriation of the surplus

wealth produced by his wage slaves.

The question now comes, What about the bricklayer in the anti-Marxian critic’s illustration, does he also grow wealthier, if so, how?

The bricklayer remains just where he was—that is, just where all the other employes of the shoe-manufacturer and the shoe-store-keeper remain—and he remains there for the identical reason that they do—he has nothing to sell but his own labor-power, and the “Use-Value” of that, its quality of yielding more wealth than it costs to restore it, can accrue only to the personage who has the necessary capital to enable labor-power to functionate. The bricklayer having, no more than the other employes of the shoe capitalists, that requisite capital, the “Use Value” of his commodity can, as a consequence, never fall to himself, as it does in the first, the instance of the shoemaker who is his own employer in the making and the selling of his shoes; the “Use Value” of the bricklayer’s commodity falls, as a consequence, to the employer, the capitalist, who thereby grows. wealthier, while the bricklayer himself, along with the. rest of the proletariat, remains in poverty—hence in deepening poverty.

The two links, in the argument presented by the article “‘Use-Value’ and ‘Exchange-Value,’” and which our correspondents failed to give their full importance to, were that the “Exchange-Value” of a commodity is the amount of socially necessary labor power for its production; and that the wealth yielded by human labor is in excess of the wealth that the laborer can consume, even under the highest standard of living.

The wage-earner has but one salvation—the Socialist or Industrial Republic where the “Use-Value” of man’s labor-power, the producing of wealth in excess of his needs will accrue to himself. Nor can he organize too quickly to reach that goal.

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Uploaded July 2011

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