
Labor and Work:

Labor is the Enemy of Human Dignity: Work, Voluntary Activity for Self-Improvement — Wage Labor a Delusion and a Snare — Incentives to Overwork — Development

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We state a difference between labor and work; we think that this difference ought to be observed in all writings on political economy. Labor is the opposite of capital, work is human activity for the purpose of useful production. Labor is working force employed by capitalists and *exploited* by them; work is a much more general and comprehensive expression. Labor is at war with natural laws, with the destiny of mankind, being involuntary work for others. The term work ought to be reserved for voluntary activity to one's own boat, and the welfare of society.

That such distinction is justified follows from the fact that man is an autonomous being who cannot be the means for the ends of others. He obeys more or less the laws (instincts, inclinations, talents) inborn in him, and only when he is allowed to do so does he feel really happy — the development of his gifts grows and performs his best and noblest work. When, however, his natural inclinations are thwarted by forced work, by labor for others, his human dignity is being disgraced and, perhaps, crushed, he is being degraded more or less to a working beast and cannot develop himself into a reasonable being that obeys self-given laws.

Work is a means not only for creating goods

that support the existence of man and society, but also for the self-improvement of the individual and of mankind. There is no really human existence imaginable without work. But labor is the enemy of human dignity and self-development.

It is an undeniable fact that no race, nation, tribe, or sex is found anywhere but which likes work, self-employment, voluntary activity for useful and necessary purposes. Likewise men as a rule dislike labor for the purposes of others, forced activity not of their choice. In this respect all men are alike, though it may not seem to be. There was a time when slavery was in part necessary for the development of science and art, which were originally the work of very few persons who needed leisure for research and discoveries. But this time is passed, and slavery was abolished as unnecessary and a hindrance to progress, at least within the civilized world.

In place of slave labor another kind of labor has been introduced — wage labor. This is equally at war with humanity. It is true that wage labor appears like voluntary work, but it is not. Slave labor may have been tolerated because it was enforced by superior power; but no independent tribe was ever found which would voluntarily work for wages. It is against human nature and could

never have been introduced anywhere, except as a transition from enforced slavery or servitude into a more voluntary activity.

Indeed, it was by calling wage labor “free labor” and removing all the outward appearances and constraint that wage labor could be introduced at all into the most civilized nations. Even then the workers did not jump at it, but accepted the new conditions because they had not their own means of work, they had no better choice, or only in exceptional cases. This so-called free labor was greatly more productive for capitalists than slave labor had been. Under the impulse of seeming freedom from constraint, the wage-slaves could be goaded into twofold or threefold more efforts than chattel slaves could ever be forced to furnish. The latter could not forget that the laws of nature in them rebelled against doing their full measure of possible performance. But wage slaves would forget it under the deceptive appearance of freedom; they would still more refuse to listen

to the warning voice of their innermost law, not to sacrifice health, longevity, and comfort for the profit of capitalists. They would, regardless of consequences, overwork themselves in the hope of saving in a comparatively short time sufficient wealth to become themselves capitalists or “independent workmen.”

By thus stifling the inner voice inborn even in savages, which prevents the latter from furnishing involuntary work for profit-mongers, the wage-slaves were gradually rendered more helpless, and, unaware of their dignity as freemen, constrained themselves to do labor of the most uniform, mind-killing, disgusting, and brutalizing kind, and to become slaves of machines, parts of a machine, employed by the machine, and stimulated to work as quick as the machine would command.

Blessed be the day that promises — in the near future — to do away with wage labor!

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