

VI Conclusion

The analysis of Chapter One has brought out many determinations of capital — the class struggle — both generally and of its various divisions.

In terms of the basic class relationship of capital/labour, we have seen that it is fundamentally a relationship of work which has the commodity form. Capital appears as a means of social control through work under circumstances in which capitalists control the means of production and thus force the working class to work for them. This is not accomplished easily because the working class, too, has initiative and there is a continual power struggle — the class struggle over work. The character of that struggle has varied — whether, how much, what price — but it is always about work, about the commodity form.

The analysis of that form into use-value and exchange-value brought out some of the determinations of that struggle over the commodity labour-power and also the related position of other commodities, such as food and energy. Since they play a role in the class struggle and are hence part of it, an examination of their use-value and exchange-value from the perspective of the two opposing classes was shown to be of help in defining and clarifying their roles and hence the nature of the struggle itself: a struggle over both material wealth and exchange-value, which is the key to wealth under capital. This was made more explicit by the development of the discussion of value — its ultimate expression being money. Money appears as capital vis-à-vis the working class (i.e. as command over work), and thus the struggle is at least partly one over money, as long as it remains within capital.

Yet, the analysis of value also brought out the way in which the class struggle is not monolithic but divided. The discussion of abstract labour showed the central role of the division of the working class and the struggle over the recomposition of that

division. This discussion also showed that these divisions were not horizontal divisions but vertical, hierarchical ones. Through the discussion of money we have also seen that there are always wage divisions, either between waged and unwaged or within the wage hierarchy. The existence and fundamental role of these divisions meant the necessity for working class struggle to deal with them directly in its organization. Recognition of these divisions is due to the Wages for Housework movement as one moment of a whole series of struggles for the wage and against hierarchy. Therefore, the demand for a wage is to overcome the capitalist division of waged and unwaged, to put all workers on the same footing, so all can struggle for income against work.

The discussion of the form of value also brought out the way capital tries to mediate its relation with one segment of the working class through another segment. This is one of the meanings and functions of the hierarchy in the divisions of the class. The waged are used to mediate the relation between capital and the unwaged. The higher waged are used to mediate relations between capital and the lower waged. Or, inversely, the unwaged are used by capital to discipline the waged; the low waged are used to discipline the high waged. The discussion of the measure of value, socially necessary labour time, also brought out some more determinations suggested by the waged/unwaged division, namely, that capital tries to extend its social control through work throughout society, not just on the factory floor — to create a social factory in which both waged and unwaged work. The struggle for a wage is thus the demand for recognition of this situation and the creation of a basis (more wealth) for autonomous struggle against it. Moreover, the social factory includes a struggle over labour time similar to that in the factory.

From these observations we were also able to draw some conclusions concerning working class strategy for dealing with capital. Since capital is seen as social control through work and limited access to wealth (wage), the struggle is for less work and more access to wealth (money). This has been the character of struggle in recent years, and as it ruptures the productivity deal it attacks the basis of capitalist control. This is not a simply quantitative struggle or an economic one, because, by exploding the relations between work and income, it challenges the very nature of capital. Such struggle may be carried on in many areas; only the real extent of working class organization and power limits the ability to immediately abolish most work, to create unlimited access to wealth, and to channel rising productivity into the achievement of zerowork. The intensity of the struggle is dictated by the degree of power. When workers can organize sufficiently to directly appropriate wealth, they do so. At the same time, they struggle to obtain the kind of wealth they want — the work conditions, the leisure time activities, and the use values. In this sense, too, the struggle is qualitative as well as quantitative.

But, since the class is in fact divided, these struggles for less work and more money (wealth) reflect this division. Both the form and the aims of the struggle are different, depending on which segment of the working class is involved. Obviously, one overall aim of all segments of the class is to unite in order to have more power. But the unity can come only through the political interaction of different struggles, not the

subsuming of one into the other. We have seen that the different hierarchical segments are not on the same level of power vis-à-vis capital. Therefore the less powerful, especially, have been organizing autonomously, so that their less-powerful status is not merely reproduced within some broader organization. Each group organizes around its needs and makes alliances with other groups on the basis of mutual benefit. All may struggle for less work and more wealth, but the autonomous power of the less powerful will restrict the tendency for their interests to be sacrificed to those of the more powerful. At the same time, since the focus of their struggles is against capital, there is the possibility of all struggles coming together with common objectives.

Another organizational implication of the way the working class is divided between waged and unwaged — factory workers and community workers — includes the fact that the autonomous organizations I have mentioned exist within and between both the factory and the community. Their coordination means the coming together of the two areas of struggle. This means that the site of working class struggle and action and the site of an ‘issue’ may be geographically different but united by that action. Examples of this are community struggles in the Appalachian area over coal mine issues and the strikes by Italian factory workers over community issues. In this way, working class power is exerted at the level of the social factory, politically recomposing the division between factory and community.