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Debate: An Investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002, pp. 135-148.

Affairs, March 1998, and H. Cleaver, 'Computer-linked Social Movements and the Global Threat to Capitalism".

Contents

Fortunately, there is increasing evidence that the spreading networks of grassroots social movements challenging current policy at the highest levels are casting their critiques not only in anti-neoliberal terms but anticapitalist ones as well. In the Zapatista-inspired Intercontinental Encounters in Chiapas in 1996 and Spain in 1997 the theme of opposing neoliberalism was almost universally understood as involving opposition to capitalism. In a variety of European mobilisations, against unemployment and the terms of European integration, we find a similar widespread awareness. In the international mobilisation of Global People's Action against the World Trade Organisation we find, once again, a clear awareness that the problem is not just this or that policy but the system they are designed to bolster. Finally, in the global mobilisation against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) being negotiated at the OECD a more general opposition to capitalism appeared again and again in the fight against the effort to give more rights to multinational capital through the MAI. All of this suggests not only that the trend of the 1980s and 1990s toward the neglect of Marxism in favour of 'post-modern' new social movement and identity politics is passing, but that we are beginning to see the formation of a new grassroots power to confront capital politically at the global level.[12] For with the recognition of capitalism as a common enemy must come a renewed interest in the only body of theory providing a critique that clearly spells out its nature and methods of exploitation.

Notes

* This piece was written for a conference on "The Labour Debate" held at the University of Warwick, England, February 1999. It was published in Ana C. Dinerstein and Michael Neary (eds), *The Labour*

[12]Two recent papers dealing with this are H. Cleaver, 'The Zapatista Effect, the Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric', *Journal of International*

Marxian categories are not enough. To the degree that we fight for and win just such exteriority we need new words to talk about the new realities we create. Thus so-called 'deep ecologists' have been culling both the human experience and their own imaginations for new concepts to denote new relationships and projects of new relationships. Thus feminists have sought to escape concepts and frameworks that they have found to be imprinted with patriarchy and develop new ways of talking about what they are trying to do.

These kinds of self-valorising efforts and the intellectual efforts they generate hold the potential of constituting at least elements of postcapitalist worlds. Unfortunately, to the degree that such pioneers turn their back on Marxism because it is inadequate to their creative needs, the possibilities of that potential being realised is reduced. Without the critical analysis of capitalism that Marxism provides they are much more vulnerable to being either crushed or co-opted.

In the case of ecologists, processes of co-optation can be found not only in the willingness of institutions like the World Bank to listen, but in the corporate and state acceptance of the notion of sustainable development. Today, sustainable development is a buzzword of the corporate world and should be recognised by the ecologists as a nightmare vision of an endless capitalist exploitation of both humans and the rest of nature. In the case of feminists, the dangers of co-optation came early as the demand for 'equal rights' was translated into equal access to every level of corporate control and the system sucked women into itself turning them into female copies of organisational man. Even today some feminist journals celebrate female entrepreneurs and in the process reinforce a major factor limiting women's self-development: capitalism.

capital. To the degree that struggles over better working conditions raise the costs of production and undermine profits, they are not compatible with the system. And so on.

This chapter makes two arguments. First, taking sides in the historical question of whether work is ceasing to be the central dominating mechanism in capitalist society, it argues that this is so far from being the case that the general thrust of capitalist policy in this period aims at the intensified imposition of work in response to ongoing struggle against it. Second, given that work is, indeed, very much at the centre of class conflict, the chapter takes up the concept of work and argues that in order to understand both the struggles against work in capitalist society and the possibilities of moving beyond capitalism we have to learn to think about and talk about the kinds of activity that we now call work in other terms.

Capitalist Policy

Persistent high unemployment over the last two decades has added new theories to an older one that capitalism, understood as a work society, is in a fundamental crisis and threatened with doom. The older theory had argued that the rise of consumer culture was replacing work as the central organising mechanism of society.[1] Instead of keeping people working, capital, it was said, was keeping them shopping. Against the traditional image of the dominated class as industrial worker was raised that of the middle class consumer. The recent persistence of high levels of unemployment, on the other hand, has given rise to arguments that capitalism is running out of jobs -that is to say job growth is less than that of the labor force - and thus the percentage of people (or of people's time) devoted to work must continue to fall and with that fall will come that of capital.[2]

[1] This is the theory of consumerist society, largely a legacy of the work of critical theorists out of the Frankfurt School. A recent example is some of the work by Claus Offe such as 'Work: The Key Sociological Category?', in *Disorganized Capitalism,* MIT Press, Cambridge, 1985.

[2] Examples are Jeremy Rifkin's book *The End of Work* and most of what Andre Gorz has written in the last decade.

The political conclusions of these two kinds of theory have been quite different. The first critical theory of consumerist society focused on a radical critique of the reduction of human being to 'having', and 'acquiring' from the fuller life of 'doing', 'making' and self-construction. In short consumerism involved a reduction of an active life to a passive one. The current focus on emerging lack of jobs, on the other hand, has provoked debate and discussion about how to move from traditional working class demands for full employment to demands for organizing social participation around less and less work. So for example some have argued for job sharing (spread the work over all) while others have argued for developing ways to separate income from work, that is to say how to move from a private wage to a 'citizen's income'.[3]

The limitations to the older theory of the replacement of work by consumer culture lay in two phenomena. First, those who took this position argued but failed to demonstrate that shopping (and other forms of consumption) rather than work was the central organising force that dominated people's time and lives. Indeed, it was easier to demonstrate that most of people's lives were still consumed by work and that much of 'shopping' and other forms of consumption were tied to the reproduction of people's lives as labour-power than it was to show that people worked only to spend.[4] Second, as unemployment rose in the 1970s and persisted into the 1980s and 1990s in Western Europe and some other areas, and as wages and real income fell, an accentuated struggle of many *for* work (for jobs, for second jobs, for other members of the family to find jobs, and

[3]Debates on these issues seem to be most fully developed in Western Europe, especially in Germany, France and Italy that have had persistent high rates of unemployment. A nice summary of these debates and the various positions taken in Italy can be found in Agostino Mantegna and Andrea Tiddi, *Reddito di cittadinanza verso la societa del non lavoro,* Infoxoa Tools, Roma, 1999.

[4]See, for example, my critique of Offe's work in H. Cleaver, 'Lavoro, Valore e Dominio: Sull'attuale Rilevanza della teoriea di Marx del lavoro-valore nella crisi dello stato peiano keynesiano', *Vis à Vis*, no. 2, primavera 1994.

non-human nature. Similarly, against the familiar concepts of gender and differentiated gender traits, some feminists have raised the concept and proposal of androgyny where traits are not distributed according to sex but are accessible to all.

Beyond the use or non-use of the category of work these arguments clearly have implications for our understanding of the nature of our struggles. The first argument reasoned that the capitalist effort to impose work, and people's efforts to resist that imposition are still central to the social struggles of society. The second proposed that while Marxian categories are appropriate to understanding the forces ranged against us, they are not adequate for thinking about the future that we are trying to build. So as we fight for higher wages, or better working conditions or resist having our lives subordinated to work, it makes perfectly good sense to say we are involved in *class struggle* in the sense that we are resisting subordination of our lives to work and to being reduced to working class.[11]

To the degree, however, that we are able to free ourselves from such subordination, then we are freeing ourselves from the reality (if not the threat) of class (or, as John Holloway says in his chapter in this book, from being 'classified') and the term 'class struggle' only grasps our self activity negatively - it denotes what we are fighting not to be. But precisely to the degree we gain some room for manoeuvre and are able to elaborate new patterns of self-valorisation that are not those of class, the concept of 'class struggle' fails. From the point of view of capital, everything we do is class struggle, including efforts to escape; it (and the Marxian categories that represent it) refuses to recognise any exteriority.

But for us, in our needs to articulate the character of our self-valorising efforts, to develop new languages for new worlds, the

[11]Some have argued that battles within capital, e.g. for higher wages or better working conditions, are not against capital as such but mere recuperated moments within its dialectic. That depends. To the degree that wage struggles succeed in forcing wages up faster than productivity, it creates a crisis for

Second, the extension of capitalist power into the world outside of waged work re-creates similar conditions and similar resistance and rebellion. Parents resist being truant officers for their kids because of the way it poisons their relationships. Kids resist being brainwashed because it is deadening and they fight for studies they want. The unemployed resist doing the work of looking for work and television viewers resist their own reduction to passive observer status by subjecting the spectacle to acerbic critique and using the material to talk about the things that interest them with others. And so on.

Finally then, with the previous discussion providing us with an analysis of what we do not want, let us turn to the question of the elaboration of conceptual alternatives. The suggestion that we should not project the concept of work either backwards or forwards into the future has implications in the present period. If we understand the creation of new worlds as something which is happening now (and not later after some MarxistLeninist transition), as a diverse array of projects of self-valorisation, or self-constitution, then we must be wary of using only concepts appropriate to capitalism to analyse the new forms of activity and relationships we develop.

Instead of thinking about creating new forms of non-alienated work, for example, we may keep the concept of work as alienated activity as a reference to what we do not want to do but then seek to develop new concepts appropriate to the new activities and relationships we come up with. On;, example of this can be found in the ecological movement in the conscious shift from anthropomorphic to biocentric perspectives. Instead of Marx's 'work process' that involves a one-sided human activity imposed on an essentially passive (or dead) nature, some ecologists have sought, under the rubric of biocentrism, to reconceptualise human relationships with nature in terms of true interactivity. What such a concept means is currently debated, but the debate is a clear effort to find new ways about talking about and understanding human interactions with

for fulltime jobs rather than part-time) precarious jobs made 'shopping culture' look like a short-term, middle class phenomenon that lived on in the 1980s only in the elite ranks of yuppiedom.[5]

The more recent prophets of the 'end of work' have focused their foreseeing on the relative growth rates of jobs and labour force and concluded, with the latter outstripping the former, that work was decreasingly able to play its former role as homogenising force in society. In both their Marxist and non-Marxist variants these prophets have focused on the displacement of waged workers by automation and computers - a process highlighted by recent epidemics of 'down-sizing' through mass layoffs. The most serious objections to this vision derive from two sources: the narrowness of their understanding of 'a job' and the successes of the current capitalist offensive to impose ever more work.

The narrowness of their vision of dwindling jobs derives from the way they largely ignore unwaged work and the way its growth must be taken into account in any contemplation of the evolution of work. In the developed world high rates of unemployment are generally accompanied by increasing unwaged work. What can no longer be paid for must be done at home on what is usually dramatically reduced income. Meals out are replaced by home cooking, medical consultations by home care, storebought books by trips to the library, purchased food by home grown, working on the job by the work of looking for a job and so on. In this way what a one-sided representation of high unemployment portrays as a reduction in jobs available, a more comprehensive view must understand as a redistribution of work between waged and unwaged sites.

In the South where high rates of formal unemployment and underemployment have persisted for much longer, the kinds of redistribution of work from waged to unwaged has crystallised into

[5] I do not want to give the impression that people had become enamoured of work. On the contrary this job search was, for the most part, a search for income to sustain falling standards of living.

shifting work patterns of the so-called 'informal sector' where very large percentages of many countries' labour forces are employed in various kinds of work necessary to the functioning of capital and to their own survival. The unavailability of fulltime waged jobs has not meant a reduction in work, on the contrary.

The second objective to this line of argumentation is that it fails to recognise, or to take seriously, the central thrust of capitalist policy in this period which is focused on the imposition of work, sometimes of waged work, sometimes of unwaged work, but always of work. Just as capital renews its commitment to keeping the world organised around work, these social critics think it is disappearing - someone has serious illusions, and I'm inclined to think it is the critics.

Even without retracing all the metamorphoses of capitalist policy in the last two decades it is not hard to see how policy has been oriented toward the renewed imposition of work. The basic elements of the counteroffensive in this period have been a direct assault on working class income aimed at inducing a greater willingness to work (in ways more profitable to capital) and, at the same time, a multi-dimensional restructuring designed to break the power of workers to resist the imposition of work and increased exploitation. The attack on working class income can be seen in everything from inflation to lower real wages through assaults via high interest rates and high unemployment to systematic attempts to eliminate the Welfare State whose unwaged income guarantees undergirded the wage hierarchy as a whole. The restructuring has come in everything from a recomposition of industrial sectors through technological reorganisation of what and how things are produced to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's 'structural adjustment' programmes designed not only to impose massive austerity, but to break the power of worker organisations and police-military-paramilitary measures where such 'economic' programmes fail.

In the process of examining what work is, we have also seen some of the reasons why capitalists seek to impose it and workers resist it and try to do other things.

Capitalists seek to impose work, and more work, not just because they are greedy, but because work is the only way they know to organise the totality of society they would continue to command. They employ other means, including military violence, starvation and the violence of incarceration as well as spectacle (television, films, sports) and brainwashing (formal politics, school) but all of these are geared to either getting people into work or getting rid of those who won't. These methods all appear to be operations carried on at the periphery of formal waged work with the aim of reinforcing its power to organise people's time and energy. But when we examine these activities more closely we also realise that they perform the work of producing or reproducing labour-power and in the process create a situation in which either the work of producing the commodity labour power or the work of producing other commodities take up as much of society's time as capital can possibly impose.

Workers resist this imposition (and indeed it is their resistance that makes it an imposition) because it involves the subordination of their lives to external criteria that are limiting and alienating. First, with respect to waged labour, as Marx pointed out in the 1844 *Manuscripts,* the ability of capital to impose work involves the separation of workers from their activity (because it is designed and overseen by capital), from their products (that now belong to the capitalists and are used against the workers), from their fellow workers (who are pitted against them) and thus from their ability to be human in the sense of a free collective exercise of will. In *Capital* he added to this discussion an historical one of how capitalists seek to extend the working day as much as possible, usurping people's lives in the process. And, of course, all of this is surrounded by the potential or actual violence of the state regularly brought to bear on those who resist these arrangements.

has converted human activity into work. When we examine Marx's theory of work in his writings, say *Capital,* we see that just as his discussion of the money-form hardly exhausted his understanding of money, so too does the discussion of the work process hardly exhaust his understanding of work. Money had yet to be grasped as a moment of capital and its command over people. The discussion of the labour process (Chapter 7) only began the discussion of the meaning of work in capitalism. When we want to grasp this concept, as well as others, as designations of particular moments of the social relations of capital, we probe further and situate the 'labour process' within broader meanings of work.

When we follow the development of his analysis of the work in capitalism we see that its meaning even goes beyond the extraction of a surplus (value) or profit. In Section 2 of Chapter 10 Marx begins with the statement that 'Capitalism did not invent surplus labour.' If not surplus labour, then what? His answer: the endlessness of the process of extraction within the context of commodity production and expanded reproduction. So surplus labour appears as a means to an end (more work, wider social control) and not just an end in itself.

To Marx's emphasis on the endlessness of the imposition of work, we can add another aspect of his analysis, namely the tendency of capital to progressively convert more and more human activities into commodity producing work. Today we know that this trend has become almost omnipresent, reaching into every nook and cranny of our lives, to an extent that perhaps not even Marx anticipated. Contemporary Marxist analyses have highlighted this phenomenon in the analysis of culture and the rise of the social factory.

So, the concept 'work' (or labor if you prefer) in capitalism denotes not merely the labour process but also the endless subsumption of more and more human activities to commodity production and thus to the organisation of society through work.

The results of such policies, to the degree that resistance has been overcome and they have been successfully imposed, has been to weaken many workers' unwillingness to work. So for example we find waged workers fighting for longer hours to make up for wage reductions. We find the unwaged looking for waged jobs to add to their unwaged ones, or waged workers looking for second jobs. We find the unwaged working harder to survive on even less access to money than before. We find students willing to take 'practical' courses and programmes of study in a search for waged work. And so on.

All of this, however, is not to say that capitalist strategies have always worked and succeeded in imposing more work. Resistance has continued, has often been fierce, and in some places has grown apace with the increasing pressures to work. Indeed, even if the working class had abandoned the struggle against work (say to pursue consumerist ways of life) the capitalist counteroffensive to intensify the imposition of work would have been enough to put it back on the agenda.

So, to sum up this first argument, it seems to me that not only is work *still* the central mechanism through which social domination is sought, but people's resistance to the imposition of work and their efforts to go beyond it to craft new forms of social organisation *still* form the core of social conflict today.

Work is a Capitalist Category

If work is still the central issue in social conflict in contemporary society, then we need to be clear about what we understand work to be, why capitalists try to impose it, why workers struggle against it, what are the alternatives that people are trying to develop and what are the implications of these things for our struggles. Some of what I write below amounts to a sharp revision in Marxist theory and in some aspects revision in my own understanding of the subject.

But these are revisions that have been slow in coming and I want to spell out in some detail why I think they make sense.

For most of its history Marxist theory has drawn a distinction between work and labour, in part thanks to Marx's own exposition of the 'labour process' in *Capital* and in part as a result of Engels' insertion of a footnote that drew a sharp line between the two. In Marx's exposition he defines 'labour' generically before going on to discuss the specific attributes of labour within capitalism.

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature …The simple elements of the labour process are (1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work …Relics of bygone instruments of labour possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economic formations of society as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals.[6]

When Marx does discuss the specificities of labour in capitalism, his primary concern is valorisation or the extraction of surplus labour from the workers.

In Engels' footnote, he argues that the term 'work' should be used to designate labour in general, while the term 'labour' be reserved for work under capitalism.

In both texts we can see a similar distinction between a generic concept of labour (work for Engels) and a more specific labour-in-capitalism. Even in Marx's earlier writing, such as the 1844 *Manuscripts,* there was a distinction between alienated labour (in capitalism) versus some other kind(s) of un-alienated labour .

In making these distinctions I think both men were making a mistake, and violating a fundamental tenet of Marx's own methodology to boot. The mistake and violation lay in the conceptualisa-

[6]Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, chapter 7, 'The Labor Process and the Valorisation Process'.

this kind of concept to frame an investigation into the relationship between the people in a particular culture and the earth excludes other conceptions and realities which might exist, such as an interactive as opposed to a one-sided instrumental relationship. The fact that the researcher from our time can 'see' (i.e. impute) Marx's categories in the activities observed hardly means that their use will reveal their real nature. After all, Marxists have repeatedly complained of how neo-classical economists (and formalist anthropology) imperialistically impute their categories everywhere and throughout history, reducing all humans to *Homo economicus* in their theories. Yet, despite this post-Marx sensibility, Marx's own warning against such practices is very weak:

Although it is true, therefore, that the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society, this to be taken only with a grain of salt. They can contain them in a developed, or stunted, or caricatured form, etc., but always with an essential difference.

So too, for Marx's own concepts, such as labour. It is OK to apply it to earlier forms of society, he seems to suggest, but one should always seek out the 'essential difference'. In the case of capitalism, Marx does precisely this and provides us with a complex analysis of the central role of labour in social organisation and control. In another society he might seek to do the same even if labour was a marginal (for slaves only) or secondary means of social organisation (as opposed to, say, politics or religion). But developing such analyses hardly removes the problem that the basic concept being employed - labour as such - is being applied transhistorically even though it originates in the capitalist period within a particular set of circumstances. On a larger scale, the problem here is reproduced in the projects of 'historical materialism' which seeks to analyse all of history with concepts developed during the period of capitalism and dialectical materialism that extend the process to the cosmos.

All this said, in order to cope with the present, and to imagine the future, we do need to be clear about what capitalism has done as it

order. It is this social dimension of work that is designated, at least in a part, by what Marx calls the 'substance of value' or 'abstract labour', is measured by socially necessary labour time and has the form of exchange. Thus value is the conceptual tool for analysing human activities incorporated into capital as work.

Moreover, I think all this is reinforced by looking more closely at Marx's analysis of the 'work process'. Of his three elements of work, only one is active and the other two are completely passive. The human agents play the active role, imagining their project, the methods of its execution and its achievement. The tools these agents use and the nature upon which they work are the passive elements. While most people would probably concede the notion that human-made 'tools' are passive, growing numbers of people who have been focusing on ecological issues these last few decades are unwilling to accept the notion that of all of nature, only human beings can be viewed as active.[10] This vision of work as involving active, imaginative humans creatively reaching out and transforming passive nonhuman nature is one Marx took over from Hegel and is a very anthropomorphic, enlightenment vision common to the times, but neither common to, nor appropriate to, other times and places, past and future.

New Words for New Worlds

While Marx's formulation may quite accurately characterise the way many activities are organised within capitalism, the ecologists are suggesting that other kinds of relationships are not only possible but also desirable. Moreover, in other times and places using

[10] Among the few who might object to Marx's view of tools as passive are science fiction buffs and ecologists. The former keep waiting for computers to become companions (Asimov) or to revolt (*Colossus*), while the latter might suggest that a sheepdog is not a human constructed, passive implement, but a willing and quite active participant in herding, one quite capable, moreover of taking independent action.

tion of a generic or transhistorical concept of work (or labour) that could be applied retrospectively throughout history and, by implication, projected forward into the future. The retrospective application meant looking back at a vast array of human activities in diverse cultures in terms of 'work', e.g. studying bygone tools as a key to understanding bygone labour processes and the societies within which they occurred. The forward projection meant thinking about postcapitalist society in terms of post-capitalist work or unalienated work or communist work, or some such:

Freedom, in this sphere [of necessity], can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature.[7]

The methodological tenet being violated was the one spelled out in what is now known as the 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse*. In that introduction, written for, but not published with, his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy,* Marx discussed the historical character of concepts and made two interrelated arguments. First, he argued that modern concepts can provide 'insights' into previous social forms:

Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organisation of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also *allows insights* into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up (author's emphasis).[8]

Second, he warned against applying those concepts developed in one period to the phenomena of other periods in any simple-

[7] Karl Marx, *Capital,* Volume 111, chapter 48, 'The Trinity Formula'.

[8] This and the next few quotes are all from the section on 'The Method of Political Economy' in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse,* trans. Nicolaus, Penguin Books, London, 1973.

minded way. His example was 'ground rent', a concept that as developed within capitalist society refers to the part of surplus-value generated by labour that accrues to the owner of land used in the production process. It would be a mistake, Marx argues, to look backwards at the medieval phenomenon of 'tithe' and try to understand it in terms of the modern concept of 'rent' even though there may be superficial similarities between the two:

The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc. But not at all in the manner of those economists who smudge over all historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society. One can understand tribute, tithe, etc., if one is acquainted with ground rent. But one must not identify them.

Now I think this latter argument makes sense generally, essentially it outlaws transhistorical categories, and applies specifically to the category 'work' even though Marx clearly disagrees. For him, although the intellectual grasp of 'labour-in-general' only came with capitalism and its generalised imposition of work, he claims that:

the conception of labour in this general form -as labour as such - is also immeasurably old… The simplest abstraction, then, [labour as such]… expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society…

He does not, however, provide any evidence for this claim, whatsoever. Yet, unless he can show that the concept really has been around forever but only given full meaning today (something he argues more persuasively with respect to 'money'), then the most he can claim is his earlier suggestion that knowledge of current forms (labour) can provide 'insights' into previous forms, while those insights must be leavened with the recognition that the concepts are not really appropriate and others, more specific to the time, are required.[9]

[9]He has the same problem with the equally modern concepts of production, or mode of production that he applies, willy-nilly, to earlier societies.

Without going into a lot of etymology and philology, I think it is true that prior to capitalism most societies had no generic concept of work. People were engaged in a wide variety of activities but it never occurred to anyone to refer to all these activities collectively as 'work'. Some people raised animals or tended crops, others made barrels or ships or silver dishes and so on. But they were referred to as shepherds or farmers, coopers or shipwrights or silversmiths rather than 'workers'. Different kinds of activities were just that and those who performed them were associated with particular castes, or subcultures or status groups. Members of exploited classes were often viewed as individuals representative of their social position, e.g. slaves or vassals or serfs, but again, not as 'workers'.

Marx took the concept of work or labour from both the philosophy and the political economy of his times. It seems to me that the reasons why the use of such a concept makes sense in capitalism - but not necessarily in any other period - are two. First, as Marx argued:

when it is economically conceived in this simplicity [labour as such], 'labour' is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple abstraction …Indifference toward any specific kind of labour, presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant.

Second, the real indifference toward any specific kind of labour is not that of the workers, who may have very distinct preferences, but is that of capital. In commodity-producing, profit-generating, reinvesting capitalism the particular characteristics of commodity producing activities are entirely secondary. It does not matter what people are put to doing as long as they produce commodities that make possible the realisation of a profit that can be used to put them to work all over again, preferably on an expanded scale. Under such circumstances it is reasonable to refer to all of these diverse activities under one rubric: work (or labour) that refers not to the specificity of the activity but to its central role in maintaining