

EDITORIAL

## SKELTON ON MARX'S LAW OF VALUE—V.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE buttresses hitherto considered, whereby Prof. Skelton endeavors to shore up his labyrinthian refutation of the Marxian law of value, have concerned facts only. All that was necessary to cause the previously considered buttresses to crumble was to blow the breath of Fact against the Professor's hollow bricks of Fiction. This fourth {fifth} buttress, however, is worked somewhat into the masonry of the labyrinth itself. It concerns Facts and Reasoning.

Quoting Böehm-Bawerk, who says of Marx that "He acts as one who, urgently desiring to bring a white ball out of the urn, takes care to secure this result by putting in white balls only,"<sup>1</sup> Prof. Skelton proceeds at once to explain Böehm-Bawerk's criticism and to wipe out Marx, observing that Marx "limits his inquiry to the value of 'commodities,' and adopts, without explicit warning, a definition of commodities which includes only products of labor, and excludes 'virgin soil, natural meadows, etc.'"<sup>2</sup> (pp. 117–118)

The fix Prof. Skelton, together with his Böehm-Bawerk mopsey, is in is that of the dapper barrister, whose knowledge of law is acquired "on the wing," and who finds his "impressions" and, along with them, his case, ruled out of court as if by magic by the simple quoting of some elemental principle of jurisprudence.

Guided by the star of that robustious Ignorance regarding which Ruskin wittily observes "it is noticeable that it always tells on their own side," vulgar, or bourgeois political economists lump with commodities things that are commodities not at all. The process is instinctively aidful in concealing the source of value, hence in justifying the plunder of the wage slave class. When the dapper barrister for the

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<sup>1</sup> [*Karl Marx and the Close of His System*, p. 124. (Skelton's footnote, pg. 118.)—*Editor*.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Capital*, i, p. 5. (Skelton's footnote, pg. 118.)—*Editor*.]

bourgeois presents his shallow plea at the bar of the Science of Political Economy, it falls with the mere reading of “the statute and the law.” This Marx did.

The preceding article of this series outlined the Marxian presentation of the history of production, until production reached the commodity stage. That the fruit of labor was not always a “commodity” Marx shows is a closed book to Vulgar Economy. He elaborates the proof from both the economic and the sociologic viewpoint. A few passages from *Capital* will illustrate the reasoning, the facts upon which the reasoning is banked, and last, not least, the importance thereof:—

“Man’s reflections on the forms of social life, and consequently, also, his scientific analysis of those forms, take a course directly opposite to that of their actual historical development. He begins, *post festum*,<sup>3</sup> with the results of the process of development ready to hand before him. The characters that stamp products as commodities, and whose establishment is a necessary preliminary to the circulation of commodities, have already acquired the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life, before man seeks to decipher, not their historical character, for in his eyes they are immutable, but their meaning.” (pp. 46–47)

“Every product of labor is, in all states of society, a use-value; but it is only at a definite historical epoch in a society’s development that such a product becomes a commodity, viz., at the epoch when the labor spent on the production of a useful article becomes expressed as one of the objective qualities of the article, *i.e.*, as its value. It therefore follows that the elementary value-form is also the primitive form under which a product of labor appears historically as a commodity, and that the gradual transformation of such products into commodities, proceeds *pari passu*<sup>4</sup> with the development of the value form.” (p. 31)

“A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. This is the reason why the products of labor become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.” (pp. 42–43)

One more passage to tie the knot to the string:

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<sup>3</sup> [After the feast.—A.P.]

<sup>4</sup> [At equal step or rate.—A.P.]

“The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labor as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes therefore, so soon as we come to other forms of production.” (p. 47)

Prof. Skelton's assertion that Marx adopts, “without explicit warning,” a definition of commodities which includes only products of labor, is, accordingly, without foundation in fact, like so many other of our Queen's University Professor's allegations have been found to be. The passages just quoted from *Capital* are merely a few of the leading links in a long argument which begins with page 25 and closes with page 55 of *Capital*, in the course of which, with his characteristic thoroughness and conscientiousness, Marx not only “gives warning,” but makes the warning good. Commodities are shown to be impossible in any other, and to represent a certain historic stage in production—the social stage when co-operative labor has set in; the social stage when the producers are eliminated from and the products arise in social relation to one another; the social stage when the product becomes a “social thing”; the social stage when products circulate as “commodities” as a consequence of a new and previously established form of life; in short, the social stage that necessarily excludes from the category of “commodities” all such things as “virgin soil,” “natural meadows,” the “honor of women,” the “conscience of magistrates,” these not being the product of social labor, but mist which the Böehm-Bawerks and Skeltons require in order to cover up the tracks of their reasoning—mist which scientific economics dispel.

In Homeric mythology it was the giant-beautiful deities of Olympus whom mists were made to conceal from profane eyes. In Bourgeois mythology the mists are used to conceal the bourgeois' hand in Labor's pockets—a necessary bit of necromancy, we have called it in this series a buttress, to give color to the myth that, not Labor, but Idleness is the source of value.

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