

Does Value Exist?

BY F. J. McNEEY.

IN his letter in the Clarion of March 2nd Comrade Thompson wants to know if value is a "property of a commodity? If so, is it a physical property? And if it is a property, but not physical, must it not therefore be a 'metaphysical property' and as such be ruled out of scientific consideration?" Then, after explaining at some length that Marx had a purely metaphysical conception of value he tells us that: "The labor theory of value fits only that pre-capitalist epoch from which it arose." He further informs us that he has "rigidly boycotted the notion of value—not merely the labor theory, but any theory of value," and that he has "shown that the concept of value is both metaphysical and unnecessary." All of which is equal to saying that in his opinion value no longer exists.

With regard to the questions, they are too metaphysical for me to answer just at present. Damned if I know whether value is a property of a commodity or not. But some time when I get around to it I am going to attempt to prove that the concept of labor is both "metaphysical and unnecessary." That it is "purely psychological," a "mere shadow" and a mental hallucination. If I can demonstrate this theory successfully, without encroaching too much on the "Christian Science" philosophy, then it ought to be easy to prove that value does not exist. However, I am a little doubtful of my ability to pull the stunt off.

If Marx meant that the socially necessary labor crystallized in a commodity which determines its value was "an abstract sort of labor that is never performed in reality," he sure as hell did have a "purely metaphysical" conception of value. But I don't think that was his conception of value at all. How in hades could Marx get the idea that "labor that is never performed in reality" is socially necessary labor? The fact that any person can arrive at such a conclusion from reading Marx proves my contention that his method of presentation is vague and complicated, and difficult to understand. I have pointed out before, that socially necessary labor is merely a generalization of all labor actually performed. Surely there is nothing metaphysical about that.

Let us examine this abstract labor that seems to cause so much confusion. Any person who has ever performed any labor surely knows what concrete labor is. Now all concrete labor is more or less specialized, each worker performs a certain kind of labor, skilled or unskilled. But these various kinds of labor do not manifest themselves separately in commodities. When we speak of the labor crystallized in a commodity as abstract labor we mean, in the first place, that it is social labor, that is, a generalization of all the different kinds of labor required for the production of the commodity. In the second place, we mean that we don't know how much of this social labor is crystallized in any given article, or unit of a commodity. In the third place, we mean that it is crystallized labor. In other words, far from being "labor that is never performed in reality" it is labor that has already been performed, weeks, months, and some of it perhaps years ago. These are some of the reasons why we refer to the labor crystallized in a commodity as abstract labor. There may be others, but these are enough to illustrate the point. No doubt, the proposition may seem complicated, but so is the whole process of production and distribution in modern society. However, there is nothing metaphysical about it at all. It would be good practice for our budding economists in the Socialist movement, to learn to reason these things out for themselves, instead of trying to explain everything by what Marx said somewhere in "Capital."

If labor was value in the "pre-capitalist epoch" it is value today, and it always will be value as long as there is any such thing as value. And if it is not value today it never was value, and it never will be value. It is obvious that labor produces all wealth

at the present time, just as it did in the pre-capitalist epoch and, therefore, value cannot change its nature, nor evolve itself out of existence, just because the social order has changed. The very fact that a person can be cheated in a trade is conclusive proof that value exists. If there was nothing to value except the price that a person pays for an article, that is, if "the value of a thing is as much as it will bring," as some economists claim, then it would be impossible for a person to be cheated at all, because no matter what price was paid for a thing that would be its value, and all any man can expect is value for his money. The same argument applies when we consider the stunts pulled off by horse thieves and pickpockets. The only charge that is ever made against any of these boys is that he helps himself to something of value and forgets to leave anything of value in exchange for it. Now if there is no such thing as value, in other words if "the concept of value is both metaphysical and unnecessary," surely it is unjust to accuse a man of crime just because he happens to pick up something that has no value, even if he has forgotten to leave some other valueless thing in its place.

It seems to me that Comrade Thompson has rather a metaphysical and exaggerated conception of monopoly prices. While it may be necessary to keep the price of a commodity produced under monopoly conditions above its value in order to pay the average rate of profit on the total capital invested, it does not follow that the monopoly price will be much above the value of the same commodity produced outside the monopoly by less efficient methods. Even if no such competition existed it would very soon make its appearance, and on a large scale, if the price of the commodity was very much above its value as represented by the amount of labor necessary to produce it by less efficient methods and machinery. The very life of a monopoly depends on keeping the price of its commodity low enough to crowd out most of the competition. This can be done even when the price of the commodity is considered above its value as produced under monopoly conditions, due to the high degree of efficiency in monopoly production. It is a good idea for Socialists to read the fallacies of Marx as they are explained by some of our foremost professors of economics, but their conclusions should always be taken with a little grain of salt.

The Pathway of Science

BY KATHERINE SMITH

THE inhibitions placed upon youth in the past which precluded the expression of their opinions, like many other ideas have given way to the advance of science. "Children should be seen and not heard" is no longer an accepted adage. Youth refuses to be silenced and to accept passively whatever emanates from the public rostrums. Instead they actively criticize the theories of religion and philosophy and measure them up in the cold white light of scientific facts. Especially are they interested in the efforts to harmonize religion and science. If in harmony why all the talk?

That there is a certain relationship is true enough as there exists a relativity among all things, but to understand that relationship requires some little knowledge of evolution, both social and organic.

Science has been developed in the necessities of capitalism for raw material and markets. In so doing it has come in conflict with prevailing concepts of religion. As both are essential to the capitalistic scheme of things there arises the need of harmonizing them in some way.

Religion is a matter of unquestioned faith in what we do not understand of natural forces. It has

always been surrounded with mystery, so that the greater the mystery the greater the faith necessary in the devotee. Different concepts of religion and morality have prevailed at different periods of the world's history. From the voodooism of the primitive savage to the most modern aspects of religion is but a difference in degree of superstition. According to the knowledge obtained of natural forces and the uses to which that knowledge is put in subjugating one class in society to the economic domination of another can be ascribed the ideals of religion and morality prevailing in society at any given time. For instance—when the early merchant capitalists were hampered by the restrictions on trade placed upon them by the landed interests they did not hesitate to attack the then generally prevailing concepts of religion common in Europe and Asia Minor as exemplified in both the Greek and Roman churches, the greatest of the landed interests, and what is known as Mohammedism in the one instance and at a little later date Lutherism or Protestantism in the other were the result, religions which did not interfere with the newer economic interests. Now that the exigencies of industrial capital make science indispensable religion must again be made to conform, and old doctrines previously proclaimed as inspired must give way to newer ideas more in harmony with present day demands of capitalism.

When sufficient knowledge has been acquired by any group faith in what had been considered unknowable gives place to speculation and then religion merges into philosophy. When speculation advances to the stage of investigation, what had previously been philosophical theories when substantiated become scientific facts. When science develops it negates philosophy in the same manner in which philosophy had negated religion. To that extent only are religion and science related, the metaphysicians to the contrary notwithstanding. Indeed, Emmanuel Kant, the greatest of metaphysicians, proclaimed that "there can be no science of metaphysics."

Those who would "Back to Kaut" would be going back indeed. For there is no future progress except through science only.

"WORLD WORKERS' EDUCATION"

This is a booklet embodying the report of the second International Conference on Workers' Education held at Oxford, from August 15th to 17th, 1924. Published by the International Federation of Trade Unions. Price, 50 cents. Obtainable from the Publication Department of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, 172 McLaren Street, Ottawa, Ont., Canada and from all booksellers.

This booklet contains a full report of the sessions of the Conference, together with the special addresses on various aspects of Workers' Education delivered at the Conference, photo of delegates. It also contains a summarized report on the activities of the bodies engaged in workers' education in Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Luxemburg, Palestine, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States, together with a list of names and addresses of workers' educational bodies in these countries and others which did not send in reports. The book is therefore not only interesting reading, but also forms a hand-book to the Workers' Education Movement, such as has never hitherto appeared, and it is a convincing proof of the ever-increasing importance in all countries of the educational side of the Trade Union Movement.

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