

Transportation is Production

TO PROVE his fantastic "surplus value" concoction—that wages are determined by the subsistence requirements of laborers and that all production beyond that level is confiscated by capital as profits—Karl Marx had to explain the profits of those industries in which comparatively few laborers are employed.

Being a moralist rather than an economist, he invented the key to his own riddle by labelling such industries parasitic. They produce nothing. They merely aid capitalistic exploitation, are necessary to it, and therefore are supported by capitalists out of "surplus value." For him that settled the matter.

One of his "non-producing" industries is transportation. It is interesting to note the influence of Marx on conservative economic theory — to say nothing of socio-political thought—whereby not infrequently transportation is placed outside the category of production. It is all done with the technique of word-prestidigitation.

Even cursory observation of the methods of production demonstrates that transportation is an integral part of production, that to attempt to make a distinction between the two in fact, as distinguished from word distinctions, is akin to the problem of unscrambling an omelette.

The present war furnishes an excellent example of this identification of transportation with production. The object of war being to destroy the morale of an enemy people by disrupting their production, the efforts of England and Germany are being directed at each other's transportation facilities. Pipe-lines, shipping lanes and railroads are the points of attack.

To the Germans an ice-bound Danube which hinders the delivery of oil and foodstuffs from the Balkans is as much a disruption of their production as a bombed seaport is to the British. A tanker sent to the bottom of the sea and a railroad station blown into the air are military victories because of the consequent interference with the productive capacity of the enemy.

All production is movement. Greater production due to specialization is made possible only by the invention and use of more expeditious movement. The making of an automobile is the result of the transportation of materials from various parts of the world to many points of fabrication, then to an assembly plant, where the travelling conveyer belt further expedites production by spreading subdivision of labor.

Indeed, the efficiency of production is in direct ratio to the facility of movement involved. The tailor who makes the entire suit moves very little; in a modern clothing factory the finished product frequently has covered many acres and moved from floor to floor, and the production per man per hour is therefore far greater.

The organization of modern industry demonstrates that any theoretical distinction between transportation and production has no basis in fact. And the war confirms their essential integration.