

The Significance of Marx's Workday System from "Changing the World" to "Changing Oneself"

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Abstract—Though philosophical ideas of Marxism advocates "interpreting the world" on the basis of practice, it attaches more importance to "changing the world" through practice. The practical materialism developed by Marx provides a great tool for humans, particularly the working class, to learn and change the world. In particular, the survival and development of the working class have provided multiple conditional paths to emancipation. Among them, time condition is a choice. The workday system proposed by Marx and Engels suggests that the 8-hour workday system is a condition for human orientation of modern civilization. From "changing the world" to "changing oneself," this paper expounds the significance of Marx and Engels's workday system from the perspective of reasonable distribution of humans' social time as well as humans' life scale and development space. Solid evidence is found to verify the idea that Marx and Engels's proposition of the workday system marks a huge step forward in the history of humans' changing the world and themselves.

Keywords—Marx; Workday system; Social time; Life scale; Development space

I. INTRODUCTION

"Philosophers are interpreting the world in different ways at an attempt to change the world." Marxist philosophical ideas "interpret the world" through practice, but more attention is paid to "changing the world" through practice. In *The German Ideology*, Marx pointed out that, "To materialists or communists, the problem lies in revolutionization of the current world as well as substantial opposition and change of things existing in the world." [1] This indicates an internal consistency between practical materialism and scientific socialism in both practice and theories. On the other hand, Marx and Engels held that the internal consistency can also be observed between "revolutionization of the current world" or "change of the current things" and "human activities or self-change." The idea of workday system developed by Marx and Engels, "once accepted by the public, will become a material power," which can help humans make a major step forward on humans' journey of changing the world and themselves. This paper explores the significance of Marx and Engels's workday system from the perspective of the social time reasonable distribution, life scale, and development space.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF MARX'S WORKDAY SYSTEM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF REASONABLE DISTRIBUTION OF HUMANS' SOCIAL TIME

Practical materialism believes that, "Time and space are the basic form of all existences." [2] Time and space are the basic existing form of all moving materials. In other words, all moving materials exist in time and space. Movement of materials makes no sense if leaving time and space. The whole material world has no limitation. As the existing form of materials, time and space are boundless. The whole world knows no bounds in space and has no end in time. However, existence and movement of specific materials are limited in time and space. For example, existence and movement of a society, particularly practice of humans, subjects of social activities, have limitations both in time and space. No matter what a person does, the night and the day last for 24 hours only. This is humans' social time, and the humans' social time should follow an autonomous and reasonably proportional distribution.

A. Significance of Marx's workday system from the perspective of the survival and development process

Seen from humans' survival and development process, social time can be generally divided into three parts, including working time, free time and rest time. According to Marx, reasonable distribution of social time should be 8 hours for working, 8 hours for free activities and 8 hours for rest. Of course, the social time distribution is for the employed. Things are different for infants, teenagers and the retired. For the sake of survival, humans should have time for working. On the other hand, development is also important to people, which necessitates free time for humans. Development of humans relies on free time. "This type of time is not directly distributed for production activities but for entertainment and recreation. With free time, humans have more options for their free activities." [3] Free time is necessary for individuals' involvement in social and political life, creative activities in technology, science and art, intelligence and physical power development, rest and recreation. In different periods of social development, the free time for different social groups is different in terms of amount and composition. In the slavery society and the feudal society, workers, including slaves and serfs, are actually deprived of the free time. Due to imbalance

of labor distribution, only the ruling class had the free time. The same situation also existed in the capitalist society. In the capitalist society, productivity experienced a dramatic improvement. In spirit of that, free time for workers was just a possibility instead of being realized. Therefore, the working class started years of struggle. To start with, they strove for shortening of workdays. Thanks to their efforts, the possibility was materialized. Free time marked a significant victory of the working class. To ensure more and more free time for every social member is one of the objectives of the communist social economy in replacing capitalism. At that time, increase of free time was realized through two ways. First, shortening of working hours, which was ensured by improvement of productivity and more balanced distribution of labor among all social members. Second, shortening of the commuting time, housework hours, time taken to take care of children and meet physical needs (sleeping, dieting, etc.) and so on. At present, against the backdrop of acceleration of production and development, the major measure to increase free time for workers is to cut the necessary time outside work and expand the scope of time for free disposal.

In other words, free time is the time left after the necessary time (meaning the working hours) are deducted. People can arrange their free time on their own according to their educational background, income and physical condition. Though free time is exclusive to part of social members, its existence constitutes a necessary and sufficient condition of social development. Apparently, the more free time social members have at their disposal, the more time they can use to achieve all-around development during the period of free time, and the faster the social progress will be made. Rest time refers to the time excluding the legal working hours stipulated by national laws. During the period of time, social members are exempt from the obligation of working and can dispose of the time freely. It is the legal and necessary time to ensure workers' right to rest. The right to rest is a right entitled to workers in accordance with laws, and it is one of the basic rights for workers. Rest time consists of breaks in a workday, holidays on workdays and weekends.

The shorter the time a person is required to work, the higher the person's educational and training degree can be in technology and other aspects, and the higher their productivity will be. Improvement of productivity makes satisfaction of needs and shortening of working hours possible. This means that "free time—either leisure time or time used to engage in advanced activities—inevitably turns its user into another subject, and the subject participates in the direct production again. To those who are growing up, the direct production process is also a kind of training. However, to adults with rich social knowledge, the process can be defined as the process of knowledge application, experimental subject and the object-oriented science with the material creativity. To these two kinds of people, as long as workers are required to operate and freely move like that in agricultural production, the process is also physical training." [4]

B. Significance of Marx's workday system from the perspective of time distribution

Reasonable distribution of working time, rest time and free time is closely interconnected. Among them, reasonable stipulation of working time is a critical condition to ensure reasonable distribution of other types of time. The working relationship is the fundamental relationship in social and economic relationships. It is a kind of relationship related to social and economic benefits and formed during the working process of workers. The issue of working relationship is not just an economic and social issue. It can also be transformed into a political issue. Since implementation of the 8-hour workday system, workers in enterprises, public institutions, national organs, social organizations and so on can take a good rest after working hours. On the one hand, this allows the workers to alleviate their weariness, restore their physical energy, and maintain their vigorous life activities and energy for better completion of tasks and improvement of productivity or work efficiency. If the working hours are too long, workers cannot acquire adequate rest time, which will not only damage their physical health, but also increase the rate of industrial accidents, thus upsetting the production or working schedule. Moreover, free time and rest time will be inevitably occupied, leading to unreasonable distribution of social time. The imbalance of time distribution does harm rather than good to individuals, families, society and country. On the other hand, workers have more time for continued education, participation in social activities, handling of housework and children's education. All these are conducive to improvement of workers' qualities. Along with improvement of workers' qualities, the quality of workforce will also be improved, for improvement of workers' qualities indicate enrichment of workers' knowledge and upgrade of their skills as well as transformation from simple work to complex work. This is of vital significance to cope with structural and technical unemployment. Another social benefit not to ignore by implementing the 8-hour workday system is to reduce crimes, promote social harmony, and maintain social stability. All in all, implementation of the 8-hour workday system and shortening of working hours can strengthen workers' qualities, free workers from heavy tasks, and provide the prerequisite for realization of self-development and self-actualization. Besides, promotion of healthy and positive ways for entertainment, building of a competitive leisure economic system, and creation of a social environment for rapid development of the leisure industry will not only enable the leisure economy to make more contributions to development of the national economy, but also contribute to improvement of citizens' personalities, qualities and enthusiasm to participate in political activities. Finally, the whole society can achieve comprehensive development, including social stability and harmony.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF MARX'S WORKDAY SYSTEM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE SCALE AND DEVELOPMENT SPACE

Marx once pointed out, "Time is a positive existence of humans. Not only is it the life scale of humans, but also humans' development space." [5] This is Marx's time expectation of a civilized society in which free and all-around development is accessible to everyone. Such a society is one to which every human being is looking forward. However, in the capitalist society, time actually becomes the negative existence of workers. Not only is time shortened in workers' life scale because of lengthening of the working hours, but also it is limited to certain workplace in the development scale of workers.

A. *Reflection on significance of the workday system considering the social attribute of free time*

In the opinion of Marx, time, in spite of its natural form, will get rid of its singular natural attribute, once human activities are combined with time. Marx believed, "Working time exists as a subject or a form of activity. Considering the exchangeable characteristic (the property of being a commodity) of working time, there are both quantitative and qualitative regulations on it. This means working time differs both qualitatively and quantitatively. It is by no means the general working time. The inconsistency between the working time as the subject and the general working time which decides the value of exchange is just like the inconsistency between the special product and the working time as the object." [6] This indicates, apart from rest time, there are two other types of time. One is the working time which is necessary to survival of society. It is used to measure humans' abstract labor without any difference. The other is the subject's free time. Because of different degrees of subject's freedom, the subject's free time has different qualitative regulations under different forms of society and economy. Marx once pointed out the general significance of working time, thinking that the working time has dual functions, "The planned social distribution of working time can modulate the proportion between different labor functions and different needs. On the other hand, working time is a measure of individual contribution in joint work outcome and a scale of the proportion of individual consumable part in the joint product." [7] This implicates that, as a measure and consumption scale, working time can help adjust total social production and living materials for individuals. As to free time, it can be defined as the ethical value, which endows time with personalized development.

B. *Reflection on significance of the workday system considering the development space of free time*

To save working time equals to increase free time. The more developed the social productivity is, the more free time the society can take out from the necessary working time. Free time can provide the space for humans' spiritual development. Only when people have adequate free time can they give full play to their interests, hobbies, and potential. Qualitative improvement and quantitative increase of free time marks expansion of the free space for humans. With strengthening of humans' subjectivity in creation, the essence of works as humans is constantly verified. "Relying on the time and

creation methods provided for everyone, humans can seek further development in the field of art, science and so on." [8] In the future ideal society, the production goal of the natural economy with all-around development of humans' abilities and occupation of the free time as the value orientation is the specific use value. Humans participate in production activities for the sake of survival. The direct purpose of commodity economy is abstract value exchange. Production activities are organized to create fortune and wealth. In the future society made up of free individuals, the top priority of production is ability development of humans. Communism is to secure free and all-around development for every person. In a communist society, "humans are not committed to self-reproduction in some aspect but achievement of all-around development." [9] All-around development of humans' ability should be based on adequate time for free disposal. The more the time is available for disposal, the more likely the humans can achieve free and all-around development. Therefore, the economy targeted at ability development can be defined as economy aiming at production and occupation of free time. Just as Marx once said, "Free time is the time after the working time to meet absolutely necessary needs is deducted (it varies in different development periods of productivity). Hence, as long as there is surplus labor, the surplus products can be created. The purpose is to eliminate the relationship between necessary labor and surplus labor. In this way, the surplus product will be demonstrated as the necessary product. Finally, the material production can leave surplus time for individuals' involvement in other activities." [10] In this sense, Marx defined free time as the maximal productivity. In revealing the relationship among working time, productivity and free time, Marx wrote, "To save time equals to increase the free time. All-around development of individuals reacts upon productivity as the maximum productivity." [11]

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of earthshaking changes happening to the current world, Marx's exposition on workdays has not yet been outdated. As an important part of the classical work, *Capital*, the workday system has provided a tool for the human society, particularly the working class, to transform the world and point out a direction for the human society to march towards civilization. Just as Marx said, "At the other shore of the realm of necessity, humans' ability, which constitutes the purpose, is given into full play. This marks the start of the kingdom of freedom in the real sense."

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