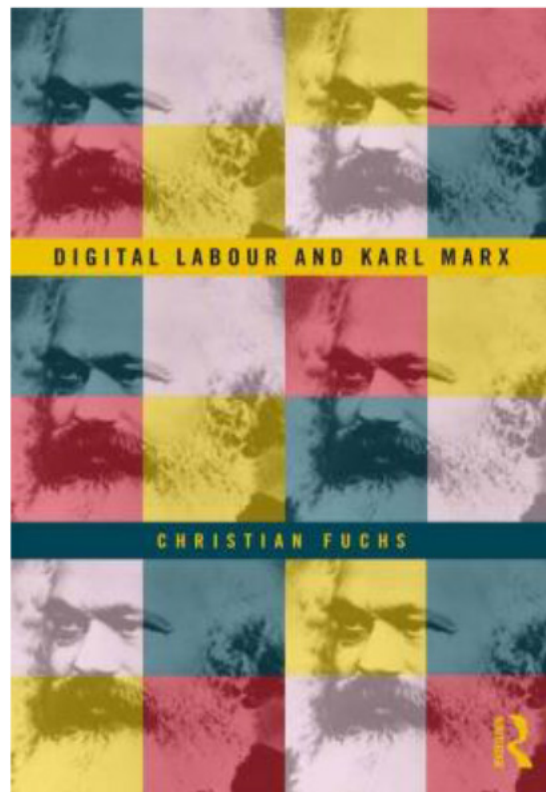


# Changing Context of Labour from Agro + Industrial Society to Knowledge Society



## Digital Labour and Karl Marx,

By

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An agrarian or agricultural society is one relying for its subsistence on the cultivation of crops through the use of plows and animals. The first agrarian societies arose approximately 5000 to 6,000 years ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt while slightly later in China and India. From the time when agrarian societies first emerged until the present day, the majority of persons who have ever lived have done so according to the agrarian way of life. This is the primitive form of human society. In this society, the *working force* is envisaged as that part of the population which is economically dynamic, though in that time the working force nearly covered the entire population. The low level of technology required the

participation of almost entire population in the common tasks of producing goods and services necessary for subsistence. With the growth of a market economy in due course of economic development, the working force gradually became separable from the entire population. The working force may thus be reckoned as a function of the socioeconomic structure of society.

On the other hand, the industrial revolution spanned over a period from 1750 to 1850 where changes in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, transportation, and technology had a profound effect on the social, economic and cultural conditions of the times. It began in the United Kingdom, and then subsequently spread throughout Western Europe, North America, Japan, and eventually the rest of the world. It marked a major turning point in history; almost every aspect of daily life was influenced in some way. Most notably, average income and population began to exhibit unprecedented sustained growth. In the two centuries following 1800, the world's average per

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capita income increased over tenfold, while the world's population increased over six fold. In the words of Nobel Prize winner Robert E. Lucas, Jr., "For the first time in history, the living standards of the masses of ordinary people have begun to undergo sustained growth ... Nothing remotely like this economic behavior has happened before". Starting in the later part of the 18th century, there began a transition from manual labour and draft-animal-based economy towards machine-based manufacturing. It started with the mechanization of the textile industries, the development of iron-making techniques and the increased use of refined coal. The society gradually shaped into a new form that exhibits an extended division of labour and a reliance on large-scale production using power-driven machinery. In sociology, industrial society refers to a society driven by the use of technology to enable mass production, supporting a large population with a high capacity for division of labour.

In the midst of the industrial revolution, in 1818, the German philosopher and political theorist Karl Marx was born. In his masterpiece, *Das Kapital*, in *Critique of Political Economy* (1867), Marx proposed that the motivating force of capitalism is in the exploitation of labor, whose unpaid work is the ultimate source of surplus value. Marx's theories about society, economics, politics etc. i.e. Marxism asserts that human societies develop through class struggle. In capitalist society this struggle is manifested through the conflict between the ruling classes (known as the bourgeoisie) that control the means of production and the working classes (known as the proletariat) that enable these means by selling their labour power in return for wages. This model of society-labour-production relationship was formulated in the context of industrial society at first, when the farmers gradually diverted their role to labours and left fields with ploughs to shift towards factories and machines. The story of labour exploitation got a new dimension in the industrial society from its traditional agrarian counterpart. The Marxism as is known today is based on this labour exploitation of industrial society. In his book entitled *Digital labour and Karl Marx*, Christian Fuchs started with a story of an enslaved miner of Republic of Congo, who extracts minerals that are needed for the manufacture of laptops and mobile phones, the essential screws and nuts of today's knowledge society. When he comes back the soldiers grab even the last grain at gunpoint leaving nothing to buy food. The very beginning of the book signals the usefulness of some neo-Marxism for information and knowledge society. The class-conflict between labour-force and ruling class is still there.

In Introduction, the author analyzed the contextuality of Marx in current times. The graphical analysis of number of term hits of Marxism in SSCI shows slight decreasing trend (Figure 1.1) though the average number shows an increasing trend

(Figure 1.2). In Part I, Chapter 2, Karl Marx's theory is analyzed and in Chapter 3, the role played by Marx in contemporary cultural studies is discussed. In Chapter 4, the author discussed the interactive phases between critical political economy and media communication. Dallas Smythe's concepts of audience labour and audience commodity are discussed and Marx's theory is blended with Smythe's works to conceive the concept of digital labour. In Chapter 5, the author put a question, whether we live in an information society and/or a capitalist society? This is in tune with Theodor W Adorno's question in 1968, whether people lived in late capitalism or an industrial society? The author said the contemporary society as an information society according to the state of its forces of production. In contrast, it is a capitalist society in its relation of production. Production takes place till date for the sake of profit but to achieve this knowledge and information technology tools are used.

In Part II, Chapter 6, the author presented the work of miners who extract the resources out of which our daily used digital media tools are made. The studies show that digital media is connected to digital slavery and the slaves who extract these minerals have never owned a computer, laptop or mobile phone. Digital slavery is a hard reality of today's contemporary society that confronts capitalism with information and knowledge society. In Chapter 7, the author tells the story of people who create our every day information technology amenities. The story of working conditions at Foxconn, China, one of the world's largest ICT manufacturing and assemblage companies is stated here. It is remarked as a story of exploitation and imperialism that is inscribed into the phones, computers, screens and laptops that we use every day for talking, writing, listening and watching. The Chapter 8 discussed a new form of imperialism, where Western capitalism benefits from the exploitation of Indian labour. The author opined that a Marxist analysis of India is very important today. Western capital acts as "moneyocracy" that plunders India and other countries in the global south. This plunder takes on a specific form. The Indian software industry has become a new imperialistic division of labour of the global ICT industry. Thus Indians do not get advantage of the new elements of information society that exist in Indian software sector. The R&D institutions and IITs of India play also a leading role by indulging regular brain drain on mass scale that is on hike every year. In Chapter 9 the story of Silicon Valley is told. The author showed that the Silicon Valley is not the valley where the American Dream comes true, but the valley of exploitation and environmental injustice. In Chapter 10, the case studies from different call centers are presented. In Chapter 11, the digital labour issues associated with corporate social media are discussed.

In Part III, the conclusions are presented in a systematic way. In Chapter 12 the emergence of a new social class and its

different roles and functions are discussed. This new social class is emerged from the social networking media. In Chapter 13, digital labour keywords are listed that is a helpful tool for the students and researchers in this area. Throughout the book the very question is reflected, i.e. how the concept of labour is changing from industrial society to post-industrial society and again from post-industrial regime to information and knowledge-based society. How labour works today in Internet, Facebook, Google, Youtube, Twitter etc.? The author seeks answers by theorizing labour concepts in the context of ICT industry and through various global case studies in Congo, China and India. A clear outline of the nature of exploitation of the human labour by corporate social media and various digital media is picturesquely manifested here. This is a very important and comprehensive tool to

understand neo-Marxism or neo-Socialism in the context of ICT industry in today's knowledge-based information society. The overall presentation of data and graphical analysis are very helpful to understand the theorizations of study.

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