

## Abstract labour and the economic categories of Marx<sup>1</sup>

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The detailed elaboration of Marxist economic theory, which already several years is conducted in the Soviet Union, gave in many directions fruitful results: larger clarity of understanding, more exact formulation of the laws and positions on a series of new problems, not touched upon in pre-revolutionary Marxist literature. But every silver lining has its cloud. So too it happens, that the new attempts of "deepening" theory lead to "splitting empty abstractions into four empty parts." To their number should be, in our opinion, counted the attempt of I. Rubin to "sociologize" the concept of abstract labour, which in the latest times is repeated, slightly diluting the formulations of Rubin in an eclectic soup, by A. [Voznesenskii](#) (see his article in the journal "[Pod Znamenem Marksizma](#)", No. 12 of 1925). To subject to critique the new-found theory is all the more necessary as "Essays on the theory of value" by I. Rubin enjoys the well deserved reputation of one of the very best works on Marxism, and this leads many to the temptation to take as true the there given interpretation of the category of abstract labour and the conclusions from it, although they clearly are at variance with the formulations and views of Marx. With the present note I have in mind, with the help of the minimum necessary literature references, to prove the incompatibility of Rubin's theory, not only with the letter, but also with the spirit of the Marxist analysis of bourgeois economy, leaving for myself the right to return, if it is required, to this theme in more full "armament."

The fundamental definition of Marx, concerning the two-fold character of labour, reads: "On the one hand all labour is, speaking physiologically, an expenditure of human labour power, and in its character of identical or abstract human labour, it creates and forms the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is the expenditure of human labour power in a special form and with a definite aim, and in this, its character of concrete useful labour, it produces use values" [2](#). The new commentators consider it necessary to change or complement this definition of Marx on the basis that in its present form it contains only "physiologically defined abstract labour, valid for all forms of economy" [3](#). They proceed from the point that all categories of Marxist political economy, among this number also the category of abstract labour, must be, firstly, *social*, and secondly - *historical* concepts. Let's approach the question beginning with the "historical" point of view.

The fundamental economic categories in Marx carry a historical character - this is true. Not true, however, is the claim, that Marx operates in his study *exclusively* with such categories. In addition, the epithet "historical" has a distinct meaning in Marx, although this distinctiveness very often is ignored even by very attentive researchers. To clarify this statement we turn to Marx's "Outline of the critique of political economy", taking from it a formulation, which, on first sight, would even seem to directly contradict our point of view. At the end of the first chapter "On production" Marx writes:

"To summarize: There are characteristics (/determinations) which all stages of production have in common, and which are established as general ones by the mind; but the so-called general preconditions of all production are nothing more than abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped" [4](#). Not much before Marx points out, that "the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity - which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature - their essential difference is not forgotten."

So, for the specific understanding, for the understanding of the form of every economic epoch the general determinations are not valid precisely because they relate equally to all epochs. But does this mean that they are completely not needed to us? What does it

mean to understand the specificity of any phenomenon? It means - to show in which specific form, in which concrete configuration operate the social laws, characteristic of the given genus of phenomena. Strip, for instance, "the specifically capitalist character of both wages and surplus-value", and "before us will appear already not these forms, but merely their rudiments, which are common to all social modes of production" [5](#). To boil down the specific form to its common rudiments in theoretical form also is the task of every science, for which there would be no place, if "the form of appearance and the essence of things coincided."

Historical epochs are not separated from one another by a Chinese wall of full discriminating dissociation. They have a common ground - the production and reproduction of material life. The ignoring of this common ground Marx ridiculed, for instance, in one of his letters to Kugelmann. "The chatter about the need to prove the concept of value arises only from complete ignorance both of the subject under discussion and of the method of science. Every child knows that any nation that stopped working, not for a year, but let us say, just for a few weeks, would perish. And every child knows, too, that the amounts of products corresponding to the differing amounts of needs demand differing and quantitatively determined amounts of society's aggregate labour. It is self-evident that this necessity of the distribution of social labour in specific proportions is certainly not abolished by the specific form of social production; it can only change its form of manifestation. Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the form in which those laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labour asserts itself in a state of society in which the interconnection of social labour expresses itself as the private exchange of the individual products of labour, is precisely the exchange value of these products." [6](#)

Political economy is the science of the specific social forms, in which is realized the "exchange of matter between man and nature." To understand these forms knowledge is necessary of the basis of every economic system, common to all epochs of human history. The categories and laws, which relate to it, will carry a "super-historical" character, and, nevertheless, they are a mandatory introduction in the study of a historical economic form - for instance, capitalist production. This will be, if anything, an universal sociological determination, which forms the fundament of economic study, not the entrance in the system of political economy in the precise sense of the word. To such common determinations relates, for instance, the teaching on the production forces. That chapter of Marx's "Outline" which investigates the common rapport of production, distribution, exchange and consumption, can in this way serve as a sample of such "super-historical" analysis. To this same type relates the chapter in volume 1 of "Capital", describing the process of labour. Very clearly Marx moves on this "material-technical" point of view for more graphic depiction of the specific capitalist forms of production. Such pages, devoted to the conditions of reproduction of the basis of capital or the study of its ground, invoke the different duration of turnovers of capital. Marx notes, for instance, that also under socialist forms of economy the difference in duration of turnover - or period of production - will have great significance for the whole social system. "Under socialized as well as capitalist production, the labourers in branches of business with shorter working periods will as before withdraw products only for a short time without giving any products in return; while branches of business with long working periods continually withdraw products for a longer time before they return anything. This circumstance, then, arises from the material character of the particular labour-process, not from its social form."

In general, in "Capital" and in "Theories of surplus value" are scattered many valuable thoughts, relating, so to say, to the domain of "super-historical economy", to the domain which makes up the favorite subject of study of bourgeois economy, not able, however,

of surpassing trifle banalities. Precisely bourgeois economy compromised in the eyes of Marxists this necessary constituent element of economic theory, concentrating all attention on the general laws and erasing every border between different economic social forms of production. For this it consciously or unconsciously transfers to all epochs the categories and laws of bourgeois economy. Marxist theory set science a limiting frame, made *the forms of economic relations* the center of study. But Marxist literature after Marx very often turned to the reverse absurdity - to the full disregard of the common laws of economic life which hide behind one or other of the "forms of appearance."

It may seem, that our reasoning goes along the line of Bogdanovist theory, according to which the task of economic study begins only then when with the help of abstract analysis the external shell of phenomena can be overcome, releasing them from the particularity and "appearance" hiding the in them common economic bases (see Bogdanov's introduction to the new edition of his "General theory of capitalist economy", 4th edition of the "Course" of Bogdanov and Stepanov (1925, 306), and also the discussion on the subject of pol. economy in the pages of "Vestnik Kommunisticheskoy Akademii"). But this is only an apparent similarity. We consider, that economic theory in the real sense of the word begins precisely then when from the common laws the study moves to the analysis of the "form", and not the other way. The viewpoint of Bogdanov is the viewpoint of all bourgeois economy, making the "highest laws" the center of science. We consider it, however, from the other side, a mistake to desire to limit economic science exclusively to the domain of form and even the one specific form of capitalist-commodity production. How can one boil down the "form of appearance" of things to their rudiments, if these rudiments are unknown? [7](#).

Let's turn now to the historical categories in the real sense of the word. Don't we deal here with an actually similar sum of concepts? Can we not, for instance, consider the category of "profit", "capital", "rent", "wage labour", "commodity", etc. - to be similar to the concept of "abstract labour", "labour power"?

On this account we already find a fairly clear and exhaustive consideration in the "Outline". Every concrete economic epoch includes in it "many determinations", playing in relation to it the role of "simplest abstraction" or "category." These categories must be found by means of abstract(/generalizing) analysis, dissecting reality into its elements. When the categories are found and determined, begins the reconstruction in thought of the concrete reality from which they were first obtained [8](#). Looked at in such connection, these abstract determinations have full meaning only in such concrete situation, which represents the starting point of analysis, and must be situated in the the sequence which answers to their position in the real phenomena. However here the case is possible where a few of these categories develop not in the historical succession which conforms with their place in abstract theory. They can, for instance, precede that historical epoch in which they get more fully developed. Thus, for example, money gets its all-round meaning only in conditions of capitalism, but historically exists long before the capitalist era. To the contrary, other categories get their definition exclusively in the frame of determined social formations, like, for example, surplus value, capital, wage labour, wages, etc. "Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc. But not at all in the manner of those economists who smudge over all

historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society... Further, since bourgeois society is itself only a contradictory form of development, relations derived from earlier forms will often be found within it only in an entirely stunted form, or even travestied. For example, communal property. Although it is true, therefore, that the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society, this is to be taken only *cum grano salis*. They can contain them in a developed, or stunted, or caricatured form etc., but always with an essential difference" [9](#).

In this way, an enrollment of the basic categories of political economy, appraising commodity production, with historical disregard, does not yet solve the question about the character, about the physiognomy of every of them. Further study is necessary. One must establish, whether a given category is a new formation, is characteristic exclusively to the given social system, distorted remnants of previous epochs, or further developed elements, laying already in the preceding period. Herewith it could happen, that the historical sense of a given category will consist only in the fact that its proper economic content, having a common character for different or even for all epochs, could only in the most full image *be manifested* in the given situation. Below we'll see, that precisely to this last group the concept of abstract labour relates, which Marx in detail analyses in set out connections. Standing still at the plan of setting out the subject of political economy, Marx writes:

"The order obviously has to be, firstly the general, abstract determinants which obtain in more or less all forms of society, but in the above-explained sense, secondly the categories which make up the inner structure of bourgeois society and on which the fundamental classes rest" [10](#). And the enumeration goes further of elements of bourgeois society in the actual sense of the word.

These common abstract determinations are, on the one side, *super-historical*, relating to all epochs, on the other, - *historical*, in that only at a particular historical stage they get fully developed, appearing in *comprehensive form*. Marx relates the category of abstract labour precisely to this group. Abstract labour is not a category, constituting the internal structure of bourgeois society. It relates to all epochs, in so far as it is taken as a *concept*, but it becomes a "practical truth" only on a particular stage of historical development. Such category could be called *conditional-historical* (условно-историческим).

Rubin considers it necessary to give the concept of abstract labour another meaning. "The expenditure of human energy as such, in a physiological sense, is still not abstract labor, labor which creates value, even though this is its premise. Abstraction from the concrete forms of labor, the basic social relation among separate commodity producers, is what characterizes abstract labor" [11](#). This abstraction happens on the market, where products of labour are exchanged for others and thereby turn private into social, and concrete into abstract labour. The latter arises not in production, but in the act of exchange. The conversion of concrete into abstract labour is not a mere logical abstraction, for finding a common unit of measure, but is a spontaneous social act, really happening on the market. Where there is no market and exchange, there is also not this conversion. Then the social character of labour is expressed directly in natural or concrete form, in as much as different labours are performed by members of the aggregate social organism in the manner of a conscious distributive function. If abstract labour is considered merely as physiological expenditure of energy and thus given a super-historical character to it, then it's not understandable, in what way the non-historical category - abstract labour - can create such an historical category, as value.

So in broad terms goes the thought of Rubin, from whom Voznesenskij borrows the basic arguments, adding to them dubious props. Thus, for Voznesenskij, abstract labour, although both including in itself historical and social moments, does not stop at the same time to be physiological labour and, as such, exists already in the process of production.

It should be remarked, that the general form of Rubin's viewpoint can be met in the much earlier work of T. Grigorovich "Theory of value in Marx and Lassale", where the conception of abstract labour is given the same sense... "Labour, creating exchange value, i.e. abstract-general labour, is a product of such an economic regime, under which production is not for oneself, but for other consumers, and under which production is not only for consumption, but also for the benefit of exchange" (p. 77)[12](#).

And so, the two-fold character of labour and the category of abstract labour - are forms, inherent exclusively to commodity production. All other systems of production know only labour in its natural concrete form. Abstract labour - is an historical category.

First of all, in these expositions clarity is absent on the question of what should be understood in this case under historical category. But from the whole course of analysis it is clear that the concept "historical" bares here the narrowest meaning, i.e. abstract labour, in Rubin's opinion, is a category of commodity economy *in the same sense*, as money, value, commodity, capital, etc. Here we must note the direct break from Marx, who in his "Outline" in detailed image analyses this question. Marx describes, what complex evolution the conception of labour undertook in the mercantilists, monetarists, physiocrats, classics, when from separate aspects of labour, like commercial or agricultural, the classics went to the abstract universal conception of activity, creating wealth, or labour in general. "It might seem that all that had been achieved thereby was to discover the abstract expression for the simplest and most ancient relation in which human beings - in whatever form of society - play the role of producers. This is correct in one respect. Not in another" [13](#). And further he shows, that this simple abstraction, "which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society" (p.28). In other words, Marx relates abstract labour to the *conditional-historical categories*, to use the above-given terms. Abstract labour, labour in general, labour as physiological expenditure of muscles, nerves and so on - is a concept, going back far outside the internal organization of commodity production, a general concept. But in practice it can apply fully only under specific conditions. What are these conditions? Firstly, the possibility to generalize from concrete forms of labour, an indifferent relation to them is conceivable only on such a stage of economic development, when not one form of labour is dominant. Secondly, this presupposes such an economic order, where with the most ease individuals move from one type of labour to another, where specific labour "is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference. Not only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form."

"This example of labour shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity - precisely because of their abstractness - for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations" (p. 28) [14](#).

The conception of abstract labour developed fully only with commodity production, but by itself it relates to all epochs. What must be its internal content, in order to be able, though it would be only in this limited sense, to relate to all epochs? Precisely this, which Marx gives: labour, as expenditure of physiological energy in indifferent form. The definition, which Rubin gives, does not allow to transfer the category of abstract labour outside of commodity production.

If abstract labour, exists, so to say, ideally in previous to commodity production epochs, finding only in the commodity world ground for its practical manifestation, then what is its fate in the circumstance of transition from commodity to organized socialist production? Does this category disappear under socialism? The answer to this question is given by the analysis of those conditions, under which, for Marx, abstract labour gets the



significance of practical truth. We enumerated them above. Among them there is not one, which would be "abolished" in socialism. On the contrary, in socialist society they get further developed.

The absence of any specific dominant type of labour, easy transfer from one type of labour to another, loss of the connection of the labour process with determined individuals - all this occurs under socialism in its highest development. It is arrant nonsense - the "position" of A. Voznesenskij, that under socialism specialization stops. "If we take family for a society, then we say: here the labour of individual members of production becomes labour general directly in its concrete form. It does not cease being connected to determined individuality (personhood) and determined speciality." This is a fully distorted perspective of development. Let's recall, how apropos this Engels derided Dühring. "It is true that, to the mode of thought of the educated classes which Herr Dühring has inherited, it must seem monstrous that in time to come there will no longer be any professional porters or architects, and that the man who for half an hour gives instructions as an architect will also act as a porter for a period, until his activity as an architect is once again required. A fine sort of socialism that would be—perpetuating professional porters."

In this same spirit Marx and Engels state in their work "German ideology", published in the first volume of Ryazanov's "Archiv"... "In communist society... society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic." [15](#)

Of course, if Marx and Engels would voice these thoughts in our day, they would illustrate with more modern examples. But it does not change the substance of the matter.

Capitalist technique led to the point that not only for the worker the concrete content of his labour becomes indifferent, but that the very manifestations of labour in their concreteness (labour in the economic sense, as "life necessities") increasingly draw closer to one another, in as much as one after another function of human organs is substituted by the work of automates. This process gets an even more gigantic development under socialism. Hence, those economic relations, which created the soil for the separation of concrete from abstract labour under capitalism, will develop even more after its downfall. The weakening of the duality of labour will then happen not in the sense of a return to patriachism, to the attachment of people by determined specialities, but in the sense of drawing more and more close the forms of concrete labour, transforming them in an uniform process of expenditure of energy under the supervision on the working machine. Outside this process labour changes into a simple "play of life forces", to which economic categories in the true sense already do not relate. "Labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want" [16](#).

Rubin utilizes for the proof of his theory the chapter on commodity fetishism, where Marx, counter-poses commodity production to other forms of production, to clarify the characteristic particularity of the organization of labour in the epoch of commodity production. From this chapter he endeavors to make the following conclusion: under all other economic forms (in patriarchal order, in feudalism, in society of free associated producers), every determined work, every concrete form of labour is at the same time also directly social labour, but in commodity production labour can find its social character, only by taking the form of its opposite - abstract labour. Abstract labour is there the fundamental specific category of commodity production. Let's verify.

In every consciously organized social economy labour is social already in its direct concrete form. That is true. In commodity production it becomes social through turning in abstract labour. That is also true. But is it true, that for this reason the category of

abstract labour becomes superfluous in all other forms of production, besides a commodity one? That would be so if abstract labour would only have such an assignment, which is imputed to it, if its whole role would boil down to give determined forms of labour the character of social labour, in conditions of commodity production. But the issue is that even in those economic forms, where concrete labour emerges directly in social quality, where it does not need the curved mirror of reified relations and abstract categories, the function of abstract labour is absolutely necessary, in as much as the issue is about the calculation of social labour energy. The calculation can happen only with indifferent, i.e. abstract counting units. In the same chapter on commodity fetishism Marx with full determination shows, that all mystifications of commodity production happen not at all from the change of concrete in abstract labour, but from the reified expression of this abstraction. About what is the issue in that chapter? About commodity fetishism. Marx clearly and distinctly shows, that neither in concrete labour, nor in abstract labour, as such, there is any mystique, any mysteriousness at all. "So far as it (a commodity) is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour... The mystical character of commodities does not originate, therefore, in their use value. Just as little does it proceed from the nature of the determining factors of value (i.e. abstract labour. *I.D.*). For, in the first place, however varied the useful kinds of labour, or productive activities, may be, it is a physiological fact, that they are functions of the human organism, and that each such function, whatever may be its nature or form, is essentially the expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles, etc. Secondly, with regard to that which forms the ground-work for the quantitative determination of value, namely, the duration of that expenditure, or the quantity of labour, it is quite clear that there is a palpable difference between its quantity and quality. In all states of society, the labour time that it costs to produce the means of subsistence, must necessarily be an object of interest to mankind, though not of equal interest in different stages of development. And lastly, from the moment that men in any way work for one another, their labour assumes a social form."

Whence, then, arises the enigmatical character of the product of labour, so soon as it assumes the form of commodities? Clearly from this form itself. The equality of all sorts of human labour is expressed objectively by their products all being equally values; the measure of the expenditure of labour power by the duration of that expenditure, takes the form of the quantity of value of the products of labour; and finally the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products [17](#).

So, not in abstract labour, which makes up the "content determining value", must one search the particularity of commodity production, not in the equality or equalization of different human work and not in the measurement of these works's labour time, nor is it the very social connection of producers, but exclusively in this, that all these definitions get a reified expression. Other social forms do not have the need for this roundabout, "there is no necessity for labour and its products to assume a fantastic form different from their reality. They take the shape, in the transactions of society, of services in kind and payments in kind. Here the particular and natural form of labour, and not, as in a society based on production of commodities, its general abstract form is the immediate social form of labour. Compulsory labour is just as properly measured by time, as commodity-producing labour; but every serf knows that what he expends in the service of his lord, is a definite quantity of his own personal labour power."

In commodity production the private labour of independent producers turns social on the market, firstly, because, its products take the form of commodities, and, secondly, because thanks to this mutual equating of commodities and only through equating takes

place this generalization(/abstraction) from concrete particular labour, changing concrete in abstract labour. Through abstraction from the concrete form through the mediation of the category of abstract labour there exists the social connection. In organized forms of production the social connection exists, *as a pre-given fact*. Labour in the very beginning emerges as social, and not private labour, the product must not transform into a commodity in order to get a social claim; it is a social product with the first moment of its existence. Therefore also labour is here social labour already in its particular concrete forms, not needing for this any sort of transformation and generalization. From this would follow such a chain of conclusions: in organized society there are no *commodities*, but only *products*. There is no *private* labour, but only *social* labour, the work of the conscious organs of the social whole. There is no *abstract* labour, but only *concrete* labour.

However this erected scheme could be adopted as a whole only in the case that the real concepts of "commodity", "private", "abstract" were located in an uniform *symmetrical* position to the other series of definitions, "product", "social", "concrete". Meanwhile, these antitheses are not equivalent. That the categories "commodity", "private" labour disappear, once only the market production ceases - this is understood by itself. This follows from the very definitions. We name commodities products of labour, going for exchange. Once there is no exchange, there are no commodities. We name private labour the labour of independent, autonomous producers. If we liquidate their autonomy, if they turn into direct subordinate organs of the whole, then thereby disappears the category of private labour. To the concept of *abstract* labour now likewise is tried to give such a meaning, which would lead to the destruction of this category with the transition to other forms of production. This follows from the point that the *social* character of labour, which in market production is expressed with the help of abstraction, in organized society emerges directly.

Such a mechanical exposition about symmetric laws represents, however, the purely arbitrary construction of the new commentators. In Marx it is not. In his polemics with Gray on the question of the direct measurement of the value of commodities without the help of money, Marx wrote: "Commodities are the direct products of isolated independent individual kinds of labour, and through their alienation in the course of individual exchange they must prove that they are general social labour, in other words, on the basis of commodity production, labour becomes social labour only as a result of the universal alienation of individual kinds of labour. But as Gray presupposes that the labour-time contained in commodities is *immediately social* labour-time, he presupposes that it is communal labour-time or labour-time of directly associated individuals. In that case, it would indeed be impossible for a specific commodity, such as gold or silver, to confront other commodities as the incarnation of universal labour and exchange-value would not be turned into price; but neither would use-value be turned into exchange-value and the product into a commodity, and thus the very basis of bourgeois production would be abolished.<sup>18</sup>" It's easy to note, that in this in brief but clear counter-position of commodity and socialist production, is missing exactly that link, to which Rubin clung: the antithesis of concrete and abstract labour, although it is emphasized that in socialist society labour needs no intermediary links of exchange and alienation, to become social labour.

Abstraction in relation to labour is necessary not only to turn private forms of labour into the qualitatively indifferent category of social labour. It's necessary also both for the summation and for the accounting of the labour process in any society, which, as Marx underlines, always is interested in the amount of expended labour time. Rubin himself in another chapter of his work speaks of the equalization of different forms of labour to one another as well as of equalization of things, for instance, from the point of view of their relative utility (in socialist production). The difference between socialist and commodity



production consists only in this, that in commodity society the equalization of labour is possible exclusively through masked forms of comparison of products of labour, like commodities, whereas in socialist society these two acts are completely independent from one another. This is the aptly captured difference. But in what form must this equalization of labour happen? The comparison of labour, expressed in various concrete forms, is possible only through their reduction to one standard. A. Voznesenskij says, that "concrete labour can magnificently be measured precisely in its concrete form. In relation to this was not left any doubt by the observation of Marx in § 4, ch.1, vol. 1 of "Capital", when he investigates feudal production, in particular, family peasant production." In these notes of Marx there is not what A. Voznesenskij found there, who simply doesn't understand about what the issue is. "Concrete labour can be measured in concrete form." But what, in substance does such measurement mean? To measure - means count an *amount*. The amount of labour must be expressed in determined *units*. If Voznesenskij takes for such unit any concrete thing, like the product of concrete labour, then in the count it will play not the role of a thing, as such, but of an index of the determined amount of labour energy [19](#). The very attempt to measure with the help of given things the amount of labour of other industries would result in comrade A. Voznesenskij's complete unawareness of the fetishism of the money form, of bringing it in this completely unexpected way into socialist society. The attempt to turn away from abstract labour leads... to commodity fetishism, such is the fate of excessive "deepening" of concepts. The measure of labour in any production system exists for Marx in nothing other than *labour time*, under the help of which must happen also for Rubin the equalization of different forms of labour to one another. Here is what Marx says about socialist production. "After the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, but still retaining social production, the determination of value continues to prevail in the sense that the regulation of labour-time and the distribution of social labour among the various production groups, ultimately the book-keeping encompassing all this, become more essential than ever" [20](#). Characterizing the social relations in the first phase of communist society, Marx writes: "the social working day consists of the sum of the individual hours of work; the individual labor time of the individual producer is the part of the social working day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such-and-such an amount of labor (after deducting his labor for the common funds); and with this certificate, he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labor cost! The same amount of labor which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another. Here, obviously, the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities, as far as this is exchange of equal values. Content and form are changed, because under the altered circumstances no one can give anything except his labor, and because, on the other hand, nothing can pass to the ownership of individuals, except individual means of consumption. But as far as the distribution of the latter among the individual producers is concerned, the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity equivalents: a given amount of labor in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labor in another form [21](#)."

In the second phase of communism these "birthmarks" disappear, and communist society leaves the womb of capitalism, in as much as the issue is about principles of distribution. But there remains, however, another necessity - the correct distribution of labour between different branches and comparison of costs and results inside every factory. Without quantitative account of labour here organized production is not possible. But which labour here is being accounted? Labour in general, as determined form of productive energy, regardless of the form of its manifestation. If Rubin and Voznesenskij consider this labour abstract labour, they must make a special third category for it, because it is inconceivable to account concrete labour with abstract units. The very concept of accounting means generalizing from any quality. Arithmetic is the abstract science of numbers.

But to us will be replied so: the fact that concrete labour can be considered from the quantitative side, does not yet make it abstract labour. The process of accounting is a generalizing operation. But the generalizing here exists only in contemplated form. Real life is not concerned with these abstractions, but with the concrete forms of labour and the determinations of consumption goods. On the contrary, in commodity production the process of generalization from the concrete property of labour and things is a real act, of everyday and every hour taking place on the market. Here is that abstraction, laying in the very objective nature of exchange, and which generates the category of abstract labour.

What, however, role is fulfilled by this "objectivized" abstraction? The role of regulator of social production. Does this economic necessity disappear under socialism? No, on the contrary, regulation only under socialism gets an all-sided character. Regulation assumes the accounting of labour, the calculation abstracting from concrete property and quality. If the regulation of labour - is an economic necessity under socialism (and under every other form of production, in as much people always were interested in the amount spent of existing labour on production resources), then in such a system of measuring the necessity continues of generalizing from concrete labour. Abstraction in those conditions - is not a luxury, not an empty game of fantasy, but a life requirement. In commodity society it takes place spontaneously and through the mediation of things, in organized society - consciously. But from this its qualitative nature does not derive. The difference is only in this, that under socialism "principle and practice are no longer at loggerheads, while the exchange of equivalents in commodity exchange exists only on the average and not in the individual case" (Critique of the Gotha Programme).

In this way, not only labour in the epoch of commodity economy, but also all labour of people, producing in society, "all socially determined individual production" characterizes, for Marx, the dual character of labour. The distinction consists only in the following. In commodity production this duality of labour acquires practical demonstration in the process of exchange. On the other side, in commodity society concrete useful labour emerges directly, as private labour. Social labour it becomes only through things, through commodity exchange, which simultaneously converts concrete labour in its opposite. On the contrary, in all other economic forms both concrete and abstract labour are only two sides of the same social labour. Concrete labour is social labour in the sense that it satisfies in particular form a *particular social requirement* in the quality of a specific division of social labour. Abstract labour is social labour in the sense that with it is expressed the social character of equated heterogeneous work. Further, from the objective point of view concrete labour also in conditions of commodity economy likewise is social labour. This is expressed in the point that the product of labour must be useful, must satisfy a social demand. "The twofold social character of the labour of the individual appears to him, when singularly reflected in his brain, (only) under those forms which it (this social character) takes on in every-day practice by the exchange of products. In this way, the character that his own labour possesses of being socially useful takes the form of the condition, that the product must be not only useful, but useful for others, and the social character that his particular labour has of being the equal of all other particular kinds of labour, takes the form that all the physically different articles that are the products of labour - have one common quality, viz., that of having value" [22](#). Here we have the reply as well to the second reproach which was directed at the address of the physiological definition of abstract labour, - the reproach that such definition does not give the social character of labour. In the opinion of Rubin, the counter-position of concrete and abstract labour is not a counter-position of genus and species concepts, but the analysis of "labor from two standpoints: the material-technical and the social. The concept of abstract labor expresses the characteristics of the social organization of labor in a commodity-capitalist society" [23](#).

Such an approach to the question is, in our opinion, incorrect. Both definitions of labour, as concrete, and as abstract, *already contain the preceding social character of labour*. In the beginning of his "Outline" Marx writes: "To begin with, the question under discussion is *material production*. Individuals producing in a society, and hence the socially determined production of individuals, is of course the point of departure." Concrete labour is not at all only a material-technical category. Rubin himself, in another place says, referring to Marx, that in every other society, but a commodity one, the social character of labour is expressed in its directly natural form. Therefore it, in those conditions, becomes a category with *social* content. But also in commodity production concrete labour only in appearance, only subjectively for the producer is a material-technical category, of private labour. From the point of view of the whole process of reproduction it emerges as socially determined labour, because on society depends the character and direction of private useful work. In as much as concrete labour splits into forms and subforms together with the progress of the social division of labour, and in as much the latter is a social fact, then also concrete labour thereby acquires a social character. Yes otherwise it also could not be, because the concepts of "concrete" and "abstract" relate not to different things, but to one and the same thing, to social labour, which is given, as the primary matter of production life.

Together with this is resolved also the question about the social character of abstract labour. Abstract labour is social labour, taken from the point of view simple, homogeneous human energy, taken not in the diversity of its function, manifestations and results, but in the uniformity of its physiological process. But society is not an organism in the deep physiological sense of the word. The expenditure of physiological energy can happen socially not directly, but through individuals, as its members, emerging consciously (in organized society), or unconsciously (in a commodity one), as organs of the social whole. The reduction of abstract labour to a simple, impersonal, though also carried out by individual persons, expenditure of physiological energy - that also is the highest expression of the social character of labour, regardless of the fact that in appearance it represents to oneself a *naturalistic category*. "Physiology" in the given case is a pseudonym of depersonalized, absolute equality of all forms of human labour, the equality of all producers, taken, as such, i.e. in the simple quality of conductors of social energy. What more social content can one demand from economic categories? [24](#)

But, perhaps, here abstract labour is charged with another requirement? Perhaps, here under social content is understood a content, adequate for any specific social relations and varying together with them?

This brings us to the question about the historical character of abstract labour, and here remains only to repeat our consideration about the historical categories in general.

Let's stand now before the third objection against the physiological conception of abstract labour. "It is not possible to reconcile a physiological concept of abstract labor with the historical character of the value which it creates. The physiological expenditure of energy as such is the same for all epochs and, one might say, this energy created value in all epochs. We arrive at the crudest interpretation of the theory of value, one which sharply contradicts Marx's theory." [25](#) And in another place: "The accepted conception of abstract labor as labour expenditure in the physiological sense of the word, inevitably is a naturalistic interpretation of Marx's theory of value." [26](#)

First of all, absolutely nothing justifies the argument, that a historical category needs to arise only from another historical category. After all in the final light every historical form of production has its fundament in the eternal relation between man and nature, the forces of production, given by nature, and labour, "which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature - human labor power" (Critique of the Gotha Programme). This labour and this labour power are the sources of every development and, hence, every historical category. He who claims, that historical categories can be

generated only by other likewise historical categories, leaves out of sight, that a category is in general only *the form of appearance* of ahistorical laws, as Marx recalled in the by us cited letter to Kugelman. Concerning the special question on the correlation between value and abstract labour, then the argument here basically is about a simple misunderstanding of the word "create", to which is attached a deep materialist sense. Thus, Rubin writes: "Only by the firm establishment of this concept of abstract labour, we correctly understand the fundamental position of the marxist theory of value, stating, that labour "creates" value. On first sight this position prompts a whole series of questions and problems. Labour, labour activity is nothing physical, belonging to the world of phenomena of nature. If this labour creates value, it's clear, the latter represents a sort of property of a thing as such, as an object of nature" [27](#). All these problems stem not from taking abstract labour in the physiological sense, but from taking the word "create" in the vulgar physical sense. Meanwhile, Rubin himself puts this word in quotes, feeling, that this term must be understood differently. Value is created by abstract labour in the sense, that it assumes the form of value of a product of labour. "Exchange value is a definite social manner of expressing the amount of labour bestowed upon an object" (Marx) - and that is all. It's clear, that the mode of expression can and must carry a historical character, whereas that which serves as the subject expressed, does not depend on the evolution of social form. There is not any difficulty or contradiction here, if we only give things their real meaning.

Meanwhile, if we hold on to the definition of Rubin - and here we move to the positive part of his theory - then it's necessary to come inevitably to the conclusion, that not abstract labour creates value, but, on the contrary, the category of value creates the category of abstract labour. In Rubin there are several different and almost always muddled definitions of abstract labour. Let's give some of them. "Abstraction from the concrete forms of labor, as the basic social relation among separate commodity producers, is what characterizes abstract labor" (p. 102). (Abstraction... is abstract labour - not an entirely intelligible definition). "Abstract labour emerges only in the real act of market exchange. Physiological equability(/equalization) of different forms of human labour exist always and by itself represent a fact, indifferent for the social forms of production. But the equability of different forms of labour, created in commodity production by the process of exchange, the equability between labours, spent in different branches of production, the flowing of labour from one branch to another branch, so to say, the aspiration of all labour reservoirs of society toward an equal level, - this is a social phenomenon, inherent to commodity production and finds its expression with the concept of abstract labour" (p. 103).

This definition too is awkward ("the striving of reservoirs toward an equal level"). But it is above all patently erroneous. To begin with: to say, that "the equalization of different forms of labour, created in commodity production in the process of exchange", is a phenomenon, inherent only to commodity economy - means to say nothing. By itself it's understood, that there, where there's no exchange, there's no commodity production. The other affirmation, that the aspiration of labour to equal levels, the striving to equalization etc. is typical only of commodity production, obviously is untrue. Among other things, Rubin uses here the term "social" in the sense, analogous with the term "market" or "commodity" production. Such usage of the term is far from accepted.

Finally, it should be noted here, that for Rubin abstract labour emerges only "in the act of market exchange", and, hence, before exchange does not exist.

Further on Rubin even more emphasizes this position, indicating, that the equalization of labour in commodity society happens not directly, "but through exchange, not in the process of production. The concept of abstract labor expresses the specific historical form of equalization of labor."

Rubin thinks, that, "only by the firm establishment of this conception of abstract labour, we can correctly understand the fundamental position of the marxist theory of value." In what consists this correct understanding? In this: ..."If abstract labour is understood socially, the expression of the social form of organisation of labour in commodity production," then "this abstract labour, in other words the commodity form of production, also creates the value of the products of labour, i.e. that property of them, which is the result of the given social (commodity) form of production, but attributed to the things... *Not labour as such, but only the organisation in the given social (commodity) form creates value.* Thus, and only thus, should be understood the position, that abstract labour creates value" (p. 109). However, if in this consists the whole result of the lengthy exposition, then in vain our author has spent so much effort. That, what he here "proved", is also not at all the required proof. Indeed: we here arrived to the point that the concept of abstract labour is completely blurred in mist, *being identified with the concept of commodity production as a whole*, after which it doesn't take any trouble to prove, that precisely commodity production creates value. Who did not know this? The theoretical excursus turned out to be in the full sense fruitless. Further attempts of the author to get out of the difficulties only increase the confusion. The interrelation between abstract labour and value he further develops in the following way: "The relations between abstract labor and value cannot be thought of as relations between physical causes and physical effects. Labour - that is abstract labour, is the production relation between private commodity-owners, connected through exchange. Value - is the material expression of that production relation. Labour and value are connected between each other like the production relation of people and its material(/reified) form... Such precise sense, as was already shown, has the expression of Marx that value is "reified," "materialized", "congealed" labour. Value is the reified expression of the specific social properties of labour, and precisely, the organisation of it on the basis of the independently operating production of private commodity-owners and their connections in exchange." (p. 110).

The more words, the less sense. To say "labour... is a production relation" - is the same as to say "production - that is production relation", i.e. nonsense. Labour is then the ground, on which is build the relation, but labour and labour relation - are the same thing. That value is "reified" labour - this is true, but this must be understood in the same sense like the expression "labour creates value", i.e. not in the physical, but in the figurative sense, namely: labour gets its material(/reified) expression in things, representing the *labour relation*.

But worst of all is that all the by us cited definitions of abstract labour lead to the inevitable conclusion: not labour creates value, but on the contrary. In fact: abstract labour emerges only in exchange. But exchange is before all else an exchange of *things*, equalizing one to another. The process of this exchange also is the process deriving value, as the relation between producers. The category of abstract labour in the rubinist conception is the *result* of the whole process, and not its starting point. Things, in this way, get in the scheme of Rubin a rather peculiar sequence, and the whole labour theory of value gets a metaphysical character.

The content of all the by us cited attempts at defining abstract labour - if only there was any content in them - leads in Rubin to *splitting empty abstractions into four*. This is not only a generalization from the concrete properties of labour, this - *is an abstraction from labour, as impersonal physiological activity, an abstraction from an abstract concept*. For Rubin physiologically universal labour - is only a prerequisite of abstract labour, but not the same labour, just as the concrete form of labour - is a prerequisite for the deduction of physiological labour. In this way, not only value, but also abstract labour does not include in itself a single atom of matter. The concept of labour is finally lost and replaced by a perfectly sterile, vague and confused social-economic excursus at the end of which



we arrive at the conclusion, that abstract labour - is not labour, but only the known form of its organisation. For what is this Haarspalterei necessary? We already above dismantled its "social-historical" motives. But Rubin underpins the necessity of such definition with two more arguments. He believes, that only the by him given definition of abstract labour gives the possibility, firstly, to install an exact distinction of the concepts "labour" and "labour power", and, secondly, to grasp the meaning of the marxist position, that labour by itself does not have value.

"Only from this viewpoint, - Rubin says, - we elucidate the sharp difference which Marx installed between labour, as creator of value, and labour power. It would be completely useless to construe these two concepts, as two real objects, distinguished by their natural properties. This is precisely the treatment of Buch: "Labour - is the process of the transformation of potential energy of our body into mechanical work... *Labour power* - is the stock of potential energy of our organism, not yet transformed into mechanical labour". Such mechanical position completely distorts Marx. "Labour" and "labour power" are not different objects of the external world, but different social characteristics of labour, different "Formbestimmtheiten." Abstract labour, creating value, - this is the expression of commodity society, as the aggregate of autonomous private households, connecting production relations by exchange. Wage labour or labour power - this is the expression of labour, separated from the means of production, opposed to it and incorporated with them in the form of an employee contract between capitalists and workers" (p. 111). We gave these lines amply in order to show in all clarity the inevitable distortion of marxist categories, if they are forcibly squeezed in the rubinist "social-historical scheme." Rubin effectively erases here every border between "labour" and "labour power", taken, as phenomena of the external world. The attempt to separate them he beforehand announces hopeless, though he justifies with nothing his unappealable verdict. Meanwhile, the formulation, which we find in Marx, does not leave any doubt on this account: "That which it (political economy. *I.D.*) calls value of labour, is in fact the value of labour-power, *as it exists in the personality of the labourer, which is as different from its function, labour, as a machine is from the work it performs*" (Capital. vol. 1, [ch. on wage](#)). It seems that a clearer expression is not possible. For Marx, the distinction between labour power and labour lays exactly in the real world and is erased in the conditions of capitalist production, where all phenomena take perverse form. In Rubin there is the diametrically contrary view: in the external world labour power and labour - are one and the same. They exclusively become distinct viewed under the angle of commodity-capitalist production. Here is an irreconcilable contradiction with Marx [28](#).

But not for this reason, of course, should Rubin's viewpoint be rejected. The point is that the theory of Rubin leads straightly to a depiction of the value of labour power, as the pay for labour, i.e. to *the confusion of the nature of the worker's wage with its outward false appearance*, against which Marx sent the sharpest arrows of his critique. If the worker's wage is the pay for labour, then the entire theory of exploitation is suspended in the air. The viewpoint of Rubin is a return to classical economy, which in fact did not differentiate the concepts "labour" and "labour power" and precisely therefore could not go beyond the range of bourgeois ideology. "The social-historical specificity" of abstract labour leads us, in this way, further and further away from genuine marxism. We already don't speak about the point that the attempt to give a "social" characteristic to the concept of labour power belongs to the same type of inventions, as the many definitions of abstract labour, which we cited above. Labour power without further ado is renamed hired labour, now then, and wage labour without specific difficulty(/labour) can be defined, as a social historical category, inherent to capitalist production. That which would have to be shown, namely - whether "labour power" and "wage labour" are synonyms, Rubin leaves without any proof. With such logic of course anything can be proven.

Meanwhile, labour power, for marx, is the power which "exists in the personality of the labourer." In another place Marx says: "Labor - is itself *the manifestation of one of the forces of nature, human labor power*" (Critique of the Gotha programme). The concept of labour power Marx applies in connection with the characteristics of corvee labour: "Every serf knows that what he expends in the service of his lord, is a definite quantity of his own personal labour power."

The definition of labour power which Rubin gives, relates to labour power, *turned into commodity*, i.e. to the specific social form of its existence in the frame of capitalist society. But in that case this definition is a simple tautology. When labour power takes on the quality "commodity", it thus already represents capitalist relations of production.

Little more fortunate is the other definition of labour power, which Rubin gives a few lines beneath (he is not at all stingy on definitions). "Labour power expresses the production relation between workers and capitalists, connecting them through the exchange of things" (exchange of money for labour power) (p. 112). Hence, here again labour power is not considered in general, but in the determined form of *commodity*.

But in order to become *commodity*, labour power first of all must be a "thing", i.e. an object of *the external world*. Precisely this fact also permits it to have *value*, because value is an inherent "thing" in social exchange. And from this same point of view "labour" has no value, because it is not a *object* of exchange, is not a *thing*, but only a function of a "thing" - labour power.

The same also Rubin says, though he pierces the correct definition through a heap of by himself piled obstacles and contradictions. "Labour, as social-production connection, finds its expression in the reified form of value, but is not itself a "thing", "value". From this it is understandable, that "labour" (more exact socially organised labour in commodity form) creates value, but itself has no value. Wage labour or labour power (more exact, labour in its classic contrast to capital) emerges in commodity form, has value, but doesn't create it" (p. 112). Here again the incorrect formulation: "labour= production relation", labour power= wage labour, that leads to the ridiculous and putrid position - wage labour doesn't create value (?!). But if this shagginess is dropped, then remains the correct conclusion: labour is not a "thing", labour power is a "thing." From this comes their different relation to value. But from this already follows, that between labour and labour power there is a *fundamental distinction*, laying in their *objective nature*. Why was it necessary to make a fuss, erasing between them every border, in order then to rebuild it again? The effort(/labour), spent on this research, not only has not any value, but, very likely, also does not create it.

The "theory" of Voznesenskij, which combines Rubin with Marx, cramming into the category of abstract labour all possible definitions, is not worth specially standing still before. In Rubin the attempt to "sociologize" the concept of abstract labour has the character of internal consistency, that brings it to the absurd. In Voznesenskii - ordinary eclecticism, representing not any theoretical interest.

We showed, that the position of Rubin does not ensue from the character of the marxist categories and in substance of its parts contradicts, both in letter and in spirit, the content which Marx put into his definitions. Before us now remains in conclusion to resolve the last question: is not the theory of Rubin correct in substance next to marxist theory? Perhaps there is enough ground in order to build the basic definitions of political economy on the scheme, laid out by Rubin, disregarding the point that it does not accord with Marx. To this question could be given a positive answer only on one condition: if the categories of Rubin would help us better to understand reality than the categories of Marx, to better understand the mechanism of commodity-capitalist production. But the point is that exactly this demand they do not fulfill.

To what lead the attempts of Rubin? Briefly said, they lead to the commitment *to drive out from the subject of political economy every living matter*, to deprive the theoretical system of marxism of its material fundament. If abstract labour - is not labour in the physiological sense, if labour power - is not an object of the real external world, if all this - is an incorporeal "sociologized" abstraction, an impalpable "relation" of "commodity society" - at best, then, it follows, these categories place in *the same series* the remaining categories of bourgeois economy, like profit, interest, capital, classes etc. But indeed then disappears every objective support for scientific study of bourgeois society. In fact: the task of economic science must consists in reducing the specific capitalist *forms of appearance* of the laws of social "production life" to these same laws, in order to let "appear" through abstract analysis, the inner side of the economic fabric, blurred, masked by contradictory forms of capitalist production. The basic categories of this economy, like capital, profit, etc. represent economic phenomena in a false form, in a curved mirror. In order to expose this fetishism of superficial phenomena, study itself must in all cases possess the tools and categories not in fetishised order, it must in its abstract analysis place itself *outside the categories of bourgeois production*. Otherwise it itself will be in their captivity, as this also happened with the classical school, to the best of its representatives - Ricardo. But where lays that ground, leading us from the border of the bourgeois worldview? *This - is the viewpoint of labour in its universal sense*. To what boils down the marxist analysis of bourgeois society? It shows, that profit does not grow from capital, or rent or land, that capital and value - are not the property of things, as such, that money too is not the shining appearance, for which it is held, that all this - are only forms of appearance of universal abstract labour, the *primary matter*, from which is forged social production, classes and their numerous relations. On this fundament is build the whole theory of surplus value, the whole theory of exploitation. Only the condensation of all social-economic relations to labour can expose the mystification of bourgeois economic form, and that is the merit Marx attributed before all else to the classical school, although it could not realize the whole theoretical task to its necessary end. "It is the great merit of classical economy to have destroyed this false appearance and illusion, this mutual independence and ossification of the various social elements of wealth, this personification of things and conversion of production relations into entities, this religion of everyday life. It did so by reducing interest to a portion of profit, and rent to the surplus above average profit, so that both of them converge in surplus-value; and by representing the process of circulation as a mere metamorphosis of forms, and finally reducing value and surplus-value of commodities to labour in the direct production process." ("Capital", vol. 3, part 2). If to us now is replied, that also that "labour", to which we boil down, as to a cornerstone, all phenomena of commodity-capitalist production, is also not labour in the actual sense of the word, but only the form of the same commodity production, then the structure hangs in space, and theory rotates in a closed circle of "social-historical" categories, like a squirrel in a wheel. The whole scheme gets the character of the famous explanation: the earth on whales, the whales on water, the water on earth. To this inevitably must lead the exorbitant zeal in sociologizing concepts, the "expulsion of matter" from economic study. This is a step back from the materialist method of Marx to the side of that fetishism of economic relations, which Rubin very succesfully debunks in other parts of his book.

## Notes

1. The name of the article discussed. Ed. (Chapter 14 in the [Essays on Marx's Theory of Value](#). Some passages which Dashkovskij quotes and criticizes were apparently dropped or altered by Rubin in subsequent editions. The third edition of Rubin's Essays, on which the English translation was based, appeared in 1928. The 4th edition dates from 1930. In appendix nr. 2 (p. 240-54) Rubin gave a reply to Dashkovskij's critique. *Translator's note*)

2. Capital, vol.1, Bazarov-Stepanov translation, p. 13.

3. If the definition of abstract labour consists only in this, then why did both Marx and Engels give this category such a big significance? - asks Voznesenskij. That labour produces, on the one side, useful things, and, on the other side, is an expenditure of human energy - could such a truism be considered a scientific discovery? We answer this perplexed question, with another question. Every economy assumes, on the one side, means of production, and on the other - labour power. This is also a truism. Does it follow from this, that the teaching of Marx about the organic composition of capital is not worth a button? The whole question at issue is what usage Marx made from these "truisms", which were known still in ancient times and, nevertheless, remained out of the field of sight of the most perspective theoreticians of the classical school.

4. K. Marx, Outline of the critique of political economy (p.13 in the 1923 "Moskovskij Rabochij" publication)  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm>

5. Capital, vol.3, part 2 (p. 415 of Bazarov-Stepanov, 1923)  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch50.htm>

6. Letters of K. Marx and F. Engels, (p.176-7, 1923 "Moskovskij Rabochij")  
[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68\\_07\\_11.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68_07_11.htm)

7. An interesting consideration apropos this we find in one of Engels's letters. "By economic relations, - Engels writes, - ... we understand the way in which human beings in a definite society produce their necessities of life and exchange the products among themselves (in so far as division of labor exists). Consequently the whole technique of production and transportation is therein included. ... Under economic relations are included further, the geographical foundations upon which they develop and exist" etc. (Engels to Borgius)  
[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894/letters/94\\_01\\_25a.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894/letters/94_01_25a.htm) In order to understand these words it's necessary, however, to keep in mind, that Engels here replied in a broad way to a question about the "basis" and "superstructure" of every society. From this point of view the economic basis must include in itself all these elements. Furthermore, Engels at the end of the letter stipulates, that he does not consider all of his formulations sufficiently clear. For all that the importance of these "super-historical" elements of economic study are not subject to doubt.

8. The classical school of political economy carried out fundamentally the first part of theoretical work, selecting from concrete reality the simplest concepts. Marx could therefore begin his analysis directly with this point, to which his forerunners brought theory - with the simplest determinations of "commodity", "labour" etc. From this certain of the modern Marxists draw the conclusion, that in general there is no need in scientific study to proceed from concrete reality.

9. "Outline of", p.28-29

10. "Outline of", p.-29.

11. I. Rubin. Essays on Marx's theory of value, second edition, p. 102  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/rubin/value/ch14.htm>

12. Published together with Hilferding's first version of Finance capital in "Marx-Studien. Band 3": Die Wertlehre bei Marx und Lassalle von [Tatiyana Grigorovich](#), Wien 1910, the history of a scientific misunderstanding (Russian edition 1923). (Tatiana Pisterman)

13. "Outline of", p. 28

14. Z. Tseitlin makes an interesting note drawing together the method of Marx with the method of natural science, making a parallel between Marx's teaching on abstract labour and the teaching on the atom. The concept "atom" relates to all epochs of scientific history, just like the concept "labour" - to all periods of social history. The atom, like labour has a "double substance." Nevertheless, science could develop until the discovery of the atom only to a definite stage of scientific history, through the analysis of "complex concrete phenomena in which the atom represents a general evenly distributed category. In the primitive nebula, as also in primitive society the atom and labour although both were general categories, but, on the other side, stipulated this or that individual configuration." With the further development of the solar system the diversity augments of the combinations, of chemical connections, in which the atom emerges, as a general category. The atom more and more de-individualizes "in practice." Scientific activity of man from its side contributes to the multiplication of the number of combinations of chemical elements." "Without a doubt the power of man over the forces of nature reaches such a degree, that the atom, like labour, becomes "indifferent," i.e. can obtain any combination for any goals." The atom is an historical category in the sense that only in that stadium of scientific development, when matter changes into a complex concreteness, the general character of this category emerges most clearly. See more detailed consideration in Z. Tseitlin. Science and hypothesis. p. 171-73.

15. Archiv K. Marx and F. Engels, book 1, p. 223.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>

16. Marx, Critique of the Gotha programme.

17. Capital, vol.1, p. 39.

18. "Outline of", p. 94. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/ch02b.htm>

19. This is how Marx characterizes the count of labour through the amount of produced commodities: "It is not, therefore, a question of measuring the value of the piece by the working-time incorporated in it, but on the contrary, of measuring the working-time the labourer has expended by the number of pieces he has produced. In time-wages, the labour is measured by its immediate duration; in piece wages, by the quantity of products in which the labour has embodied itself during a given time." (Capital, vol.1, p. 534).

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch21.htm>

20. Capital, vol. 3, p. 389 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch49.htm>

21. Marx, Critique of the Gotha programme <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>

22. Capital, vol.1, p. 41.

23. I. Rubin, Essays, p. 100.

24. In A. Voznesenskij this thought is expressed in vulgar-materialist form. He writes: "Abstract labour - that is not individual labour, but social labour. That is not labour of any individual, any person; it represents by itself social energy, the energy of society as a whole." Unfortunately nobody has yet discovered in society, as such, muscles and a nervous system, with which it could expend "without individuals" its energy.



[25.](#) Rubin, Essays, p. 100.

[26.](#) Ibid., p. 108.

[27.](#) Ibid., p. 107.

[28.](#) Here are more extracts, evidence of the fact that Marx distinguished labour power and labour, as objects of the external world.

Quote:

"The actual movement of wages presents phenomena which seem to prove that not the value of labour-power is paid, but the value of its function, of labour itself... 1.) Change of wages with the changing length of the working-day. One might as well conclude that not the value of a machine is paid, but that of its working, because it costs more to hire a machine for a week than for a day." (Capital, vol. 1, ch. 18). (ch.19 in English on MIA)

Quote:

"Creation of value is transformation of labour-power into labour. Labour-power itself is energy transferred to a human organism by means of nourishing matter." (Capital, vol. 1, ch.7). (ch.9 in English on MIA)