

Marx's *Capital*,
Surplus-Value and Labour
Super-exploitation.

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Short Abstract

- At the heart of *Capital* is the distinction between absolute surplus-value and relative surplus-value.
- This paper's thesis is that labour super-exploitation is a category of surplus-value at the same ontological level as absolute surplus-value and relative surplus-value.
- Marini (1973; 1978; 1979) applied *Capital* to the conditions of the working class in underdeveloped Latin America and put labour super-exploitation at the core of his analysis, explaining the connection with Britain's informal empire industrialisation through the supply of cheap commodities.
- Marini's contribution opens the door to a necessary rethinking of *Capital* that expands its scope social-geographically to include the increased exploitation of broad strata of the international working class.
- Labour super-exploitation shares characteristics with absolute and relative surplus-value, but cannot be reduced to either. Marx recognised other methods of increasing surplus-value – labour intensity, skill, natural fertility – that he positions differently in *Capital*. In its overlong existence capitalism has employed all these methods of increasing surplus-value.

“The driving motive and determining purpose of capitalist production is the self-valorization of capital to the greatest possible extent, i.e. the greatest possible production of surplus-value, hence the greatest possible exploitation of labour-power by the capitalist.”

(Marx 1981 p449)

Ways of increasing surplus value.

- An exercise with study groups
- Identify different ways that capital can increase surplus value, write them down.
- Minute's silence

All labour processes exist in a range of dimensions

- they have a duration
- tools and raw materials are used
- the producer has a degree of skill and works with a certain intensity.
- These are not specifically capitalist attributes.

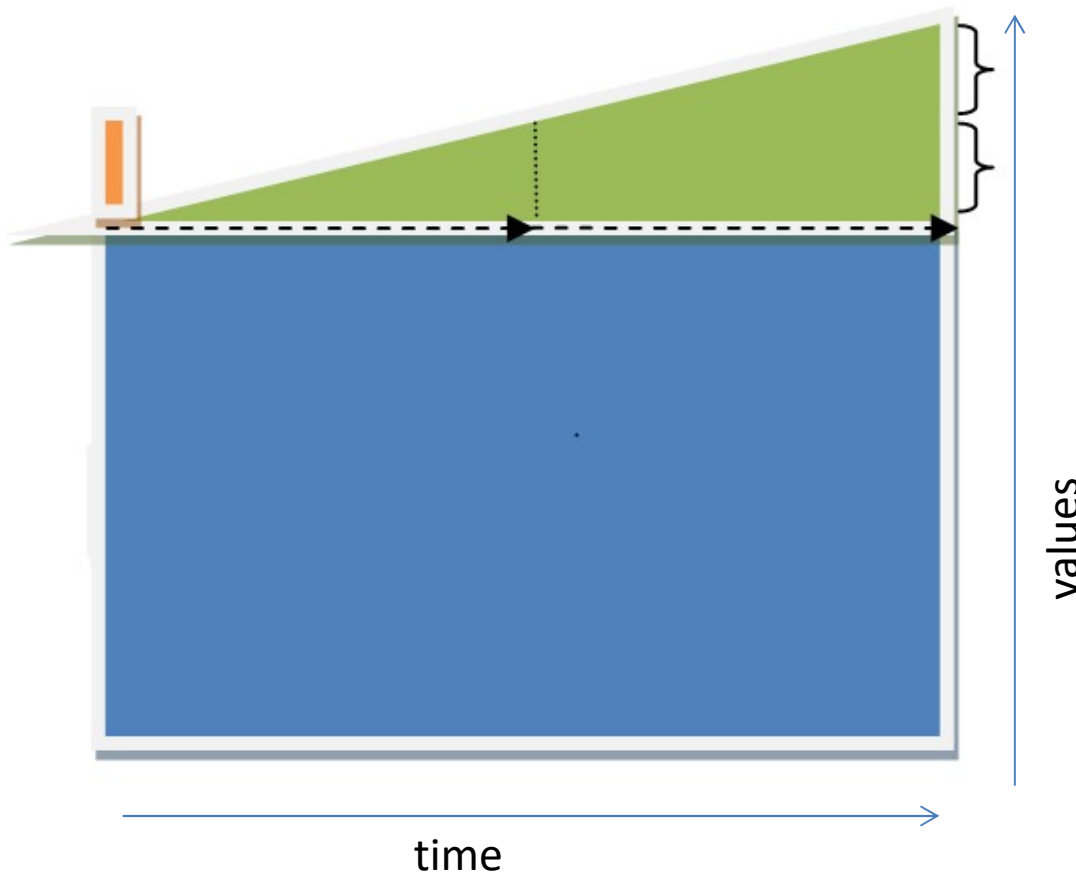
Marx identified six (arguably seven) dimensions available to capital to increase surplus value

- but he gives them a different theoretical status in *Capital's* three volumes.
- Dimensions of surplus value in Volume 1:
 - Lengthening working day (absolute)
 - Division of labour and mechanisation (relative)
 - Intensity of labour

the other three dimensions in which capital can increase surplus value

- Skilled labour (power)
- Extractive labour
- The labourer is paid for their labour power at a rate lower than the social norm

How can the capitalist increase surplus value? Starting example



THE WORKING DAY

Depicts:

Variable capital advanced (orange);
New value created by labour as the
working day proceeds (green);
Constant value transferred (blue).

Triangle:

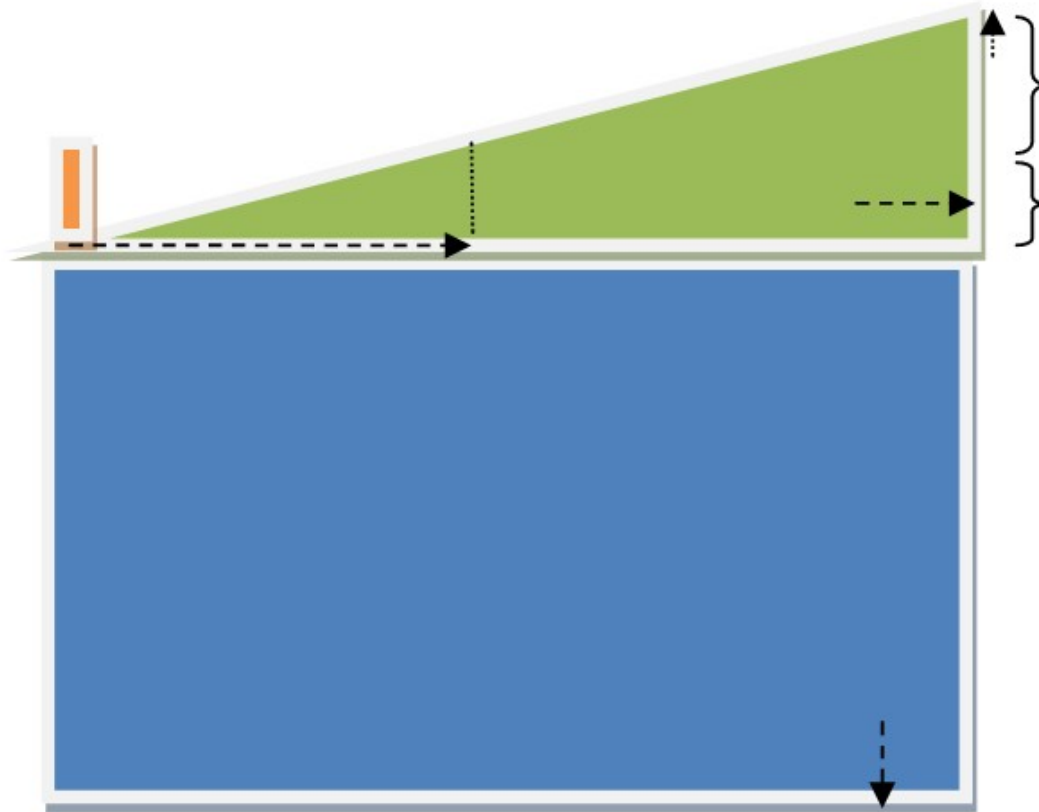
Working day, divided between
necessary labour time and surplus
labour time;

Product as $c + (v + s)$;

These as ratios, two alternative
expressions of the rate of surplus
value s/v

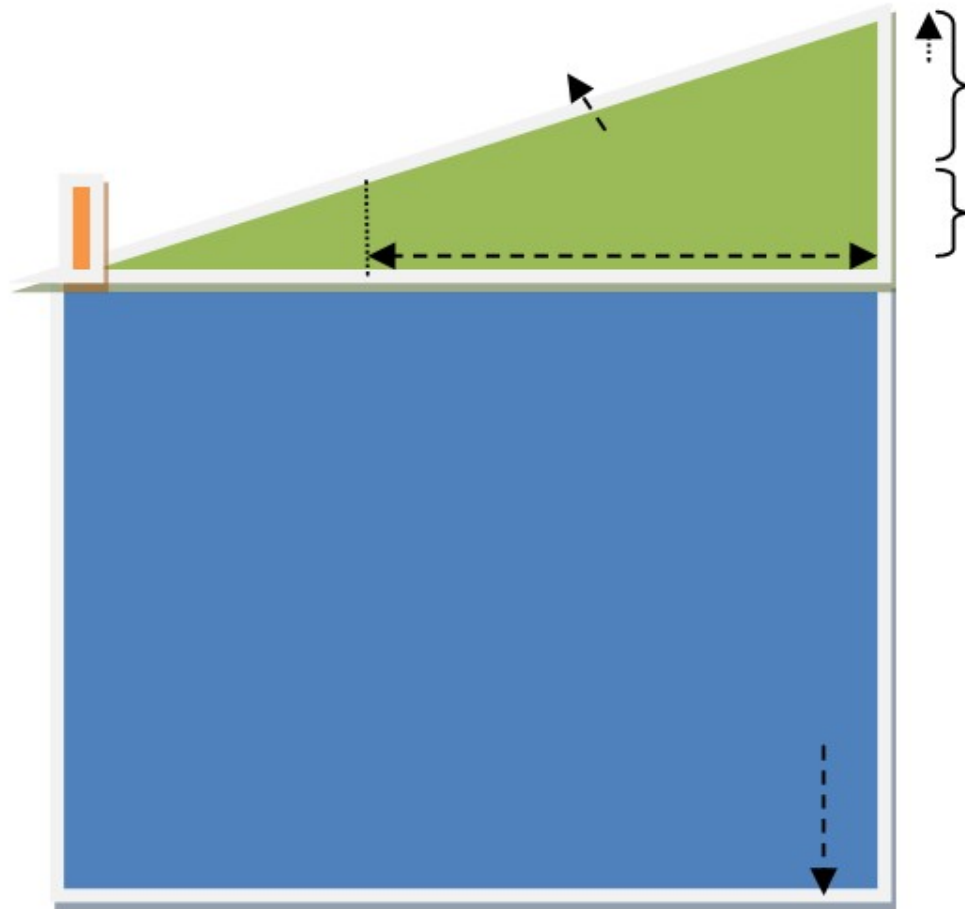
Adapted from Harvey (2006 [1982]: 130)

lengthen the working day



Note: Does not change the value of the commodity

Increase labour productivity

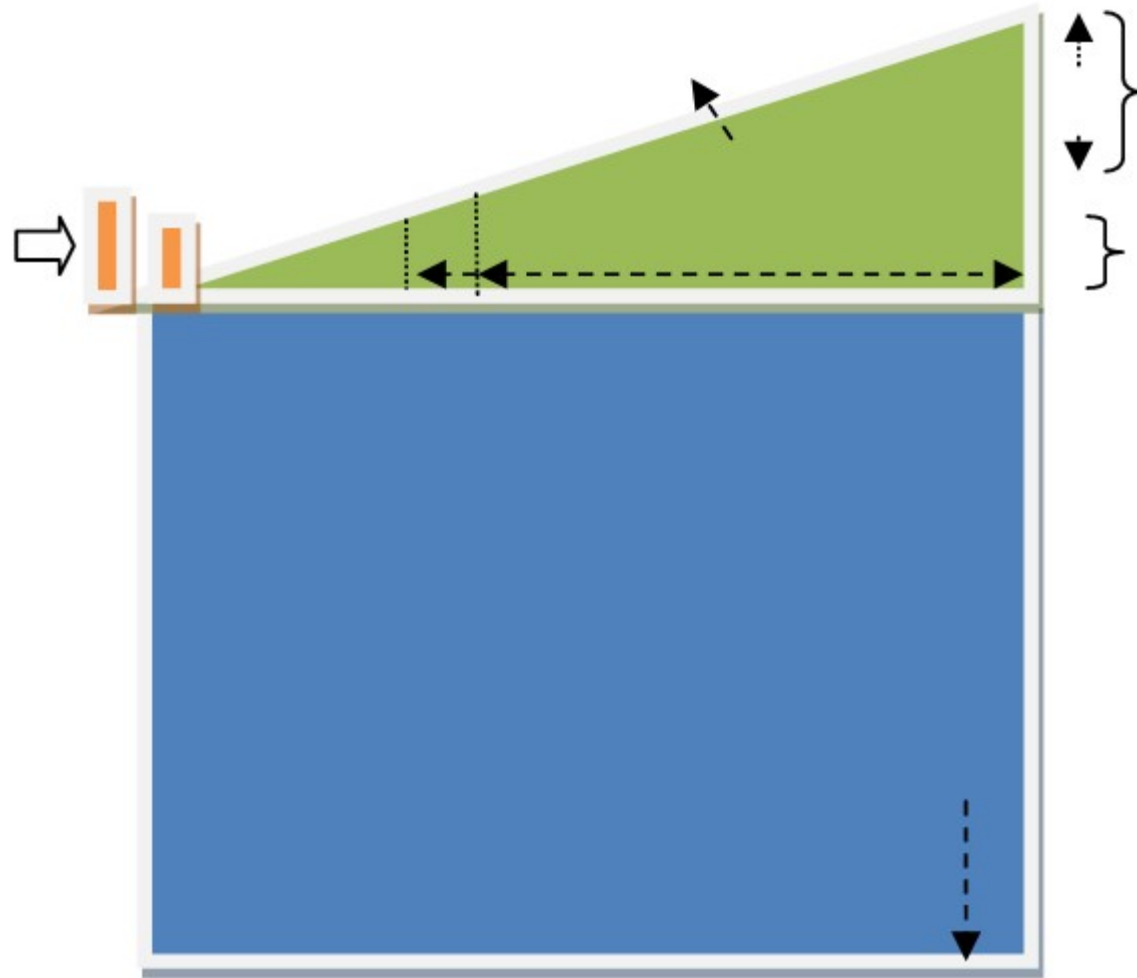


Does have an effect on commodity value, expands production decreases individual commodity value

In Vol 1, two aspects – enhancing labour individual capital, social value

Effect on value of labour power – given set of use values

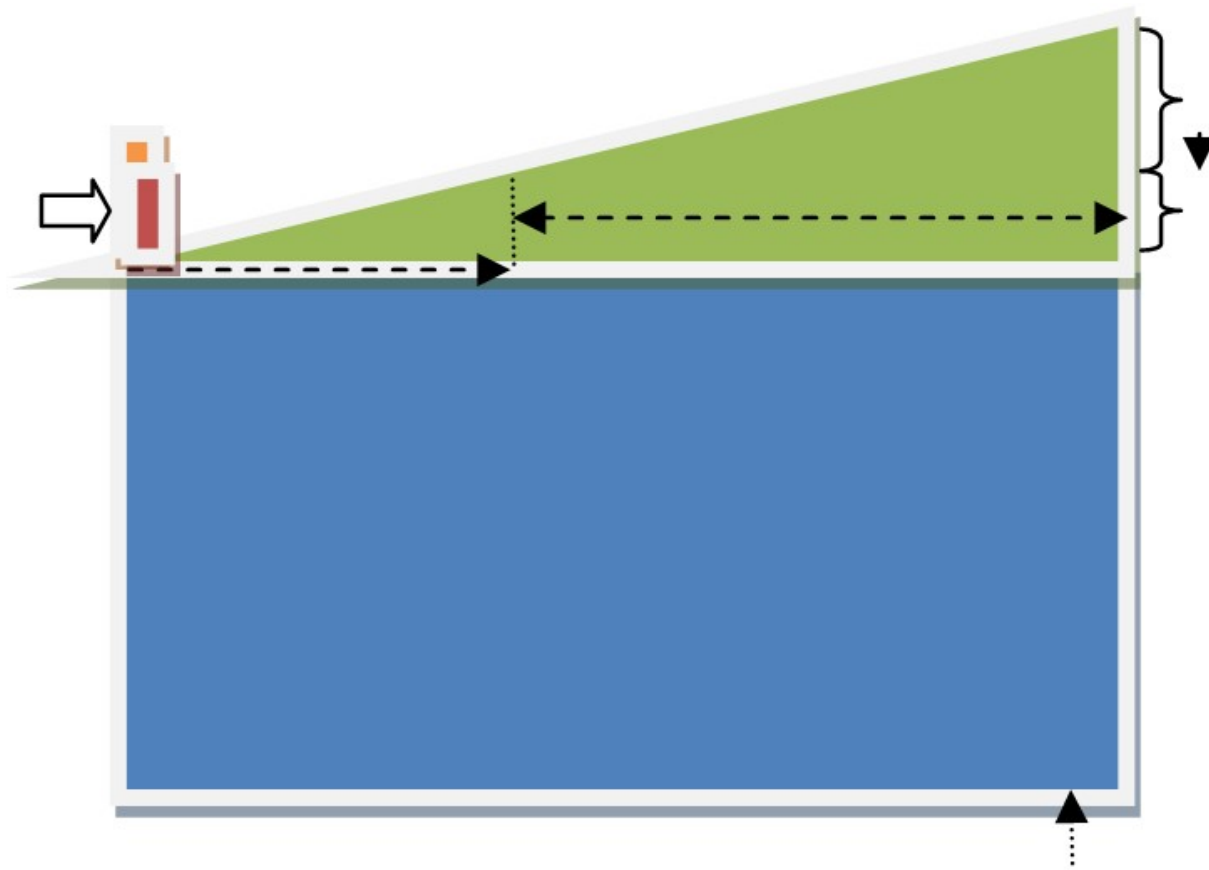
insofar as commodity consumed by workers, on
the value of labour power and general rate of
exploitation



5 methods to increase labour productivity

- Skill of labourer (effect on price of labour power)
- Better organisation of production (manufacture)
- Technical improvement (modern industry)
- Intensity of labour activity
- More favourable conditions e.g. specific yield use values from nature

Decrease wages (less variable capital)



Extra surplus value

- All of the above methods are adopted to increase surplus value
- Extra (excess, extraordinary) surplus value does not pertain to one method but can be gained in each, separately or combined
- Combined: low wages, intense work
- Transformation to surplus profits (temporary or longer ?)

The effect labour super-exploitation on commodity value

- No effect on 'simple value'
- Simple value has been converted to price of production to take account of different sector norm value compositions
- price of production = cost price + general rate of profit
- Insofar as this holds, further modification to price of production (potentially either element)
 - 'free access' price of production = lower cost price + general rate of profit
 - 'closed' price of production = lower cost price + 'monopoly' rate of profit

Observations

The category of extra surplus value deriving from lower wages is part of the definition of the capitalist mode of production at the same ontological level as absolute surplus value and relative surplus value

The drive to imperialist and other oppressive forms of labour exploitation are inherent to the capitalist mode of production

We celebrate *Capital* by taking it
forward.