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EDITORIAL

## SKELTON ON MARX'S LAW OF VALUE—III.

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**T**HE third buttress, with which Prof. Skelton wisely found it necessary to prop up his labyrinthian refutation of Marx's law of value, and, the sling of Fact being thrown around it, will now be torn down, so as to clear the field of its vision-distorting influence, is the allegation: "Next Marx brings in by a side door the factor of utility previously disregarded. 'Nothing can have value,' he declares, 'without being an object of utility.'" (p. 117)

There can be no mistaking the presentation made of the Marxian method by this passage. The paragraph immediately preceding the one with which the passage opens, and from which it is here reproduced, starts with saying that "Marx begins his demonstration" by arguing that the magnitude of value contained in a commodity is measured by the quantity of human labor embodied in it. The statement, immediately following that paragraph, emphasizes the paragraph, and the paragraph emphasizes the statement. The words and their arrangement can mean nothing else than that Marx first ignored the use-value or utility feature of commodities, and, after having presented the exchange value feature of commodities, and finding the same limping, then "brings in by a side door the utility previously disregarded."

There is nothing like "chucking a bluff" boldly. Even a well posted Marxist is temporarily disconcerted, especially if he supposes he is dealing with a scientist, precise in his utterances, accurate in his statements. The passage makes reference to a footnote. The eye glances down to that and sees itself referred to "*Capital*, I, pp. 2-7." That is very much the beginning of *Capital*. Nevertheless, recollections of *Capital* are at variance even with "p. 7," however early in the work "p. 7" must be. The inquirer takes up *Capital*; and what does he find?

He finds that Prof. Skelton has recklessly misstated the fact.

The first paragraph of *Capital*, only four and a half lines long, roughly sketches the appearance of capitalist society as an immense accumulation of commodities. Immediately after that short introductory paragraph, follow the following three:

“A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference. Neither are we here concerned to know how the object satisfies these wants, whether directly as means of subsistence, or indirectly as means of production.

“Every useful thing, as iron, paper, etc., may be looked at from the two points of view of quality and quantity. It is an assemblage of many properties, and may therefore be of use in various ways. To discover the various uses of things is the work of history. So also is the establishment of socially-recognized standards of measure for the quantities of these useful objects. The diversity of these measures has its origin partly in the diverse nature of the objects to be measured, partly in convention.

“The utility of a thing makes it a use-value. But this utility is not a thing of air. Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity. A commodity, such as iron, corn, or a diamond, is therefore, so far as it is a material thing, a use-value, something useful. This property of a commodity is independent of the amount of labor required to appropriate its useful qualities. When treating of use-value, we always assume to be dealing with definite quantities, such as dozens of watches, yards of linen, or tons of iron. The use-values of commodities furnish the material for a special study, that of the commercial knowledge of commodities. Use-values become a reality only by use or consumption: they also constitute the substance of all wealth, whatever may be the social form of that wealth. In the form of society we are about to consider, they are, in addition, the material depositories of exchange value.”

There are three more facts to be established in order fully to grasp the architectural nature of this third buttress of Prof. Skelton's:

1. Prof. Skelton's foot-notes refer to the Humboldt edition of *Capital*. The Professor refers to “pp. 2–7” in substantiation of his allegation that, after Marx had explained his theory of exchange-value, he then “brings in by a side door the factor of utility previously disregarded.” Page 2 in the Humboldt edition begins AFTER the first and second paragraphs quoted above from *Capital*, that is, AFTER the

first, second and third paragraphs with which the work begins. In other words, the foot-note, excludes two, and that the first two paragraphs, with which Marx elaborates the point that, “in the first place,” a commodity is a use-value.

2. Marx takes up exchange value in the eight paragraphs that immediately follow his elucidation of use-value.

3. The sentence quoted by Prof. Skelton in evidence that Marx “brings in by a side door the factor of utility previously disregarded,” to wit, “Nothing can have value without being an object of utility,” etc.,—that sentence is the last one in the series of paragraphs in which, having first considered utility, or use-value, and having thereupon considered exchange value, Marx then makes the synthesis of the two lines of reasoning.

Accordingly—

1. So far from having “previously disregarded” the factor of utility, Marx gave that factor first place;

2. So far from bringing in “by a side door” the factor of utility, Marx brings it in the frontest of front doors; and

3. So far from having first considered exchange value, the first time the term appears in *Capital* is as the closing words of the last of the four first paragraphs of *Capital*, that is, the last of the three paragraphs with which *Capital* virtually opens, and in which the utility factor of commodities was considered.

It may be asked, Are these facts of any, or of importance enough to make a point of them? As a preliminary answer we would meet the question with another, to wit, “If of no importance why did Prof. Skelton falsify the facts?” The next article, removing the next buttress, will, together with the ruins of the other buttresses, reveal the necessity of the falsification in Prof. Skelton’s architectural scheme to “refute” Marx.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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