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Abstract

This article analyzes the public and household sectors of the economy as sites of surplus production within contemporary capitalist societies. It also shows how the coexistence of structurally distinct spheres of surplus production creates divisions among workers in the private, public, and household sectors of the economy, thus amplifying the racial, gender, and other divisions which have often in the past kept working people divided. Fueling these cross-sector divisions is the appearance that private-sector workers are paid for their labor rather than for their labor-power. Thus, this article also explores an implication of this appearance which Karl Marx, the thinker who did the most to expose it, did not himself explore.

JEL Classification: B5, D1, A1, H0

Keywords: economic surplus, feminist economics, households, neoliberalism, Marxist economics

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1. Introduction

This article analyzes the public and household sectors of the economy as structurally distinct sites of surplus production, in which public-sector workers and people performing housework add to the economic surplus. It also links the long-standing assumption that workers in these sectors do not contribute to the surplus to the mystifying appearance within capitalist societies that private-sector workers are paid for their labor rather than for the reproduction of their labor-power. The article also illustrates how the pursuit of more surplus within the capitalist sector can lead private-sector workers to cope with capitalist exploitation in ways which increase the extraction of a surplus from public sector and household workers, while also showing how this coping strategy can ironically accentuate the burden of capitalist exploitation on private-sector workers themselves.

2. The Significance of the Surplus Within the Marxist Tradition

An important contribution of Marxism to our understanding of social, historical, and economic dynamics is its concept of the surplus. Marxist (and some non-Marxist) scholars have linked the emergence of a surplus to the rise of class societies and the state as well as to the long-term advance of labor productivity (Marx 1977: 646-647; Mandel 1971: 25-28 and 39-42; Cohen 2001: 198; Himmelweit 1991: 183; Harman 2008: 22; Nolan and Lenski 1998: 150-151). These links have also allowed Marxists to interpret history as a progressive process of human liberation from scarcity, with class societies representing a necessary stage within it (Cohen 1988: vii; Cohen 2001: 207; Engels 1978: 714; Harman 2008: 26).

Because of its dynamism, capitalism enjoys a special status in this scheme for two reasons. Economic competition forces capitalists to reinvest the surplus productively (Marx

1977: 739; Wright and Rogers 2011: 43; Bonaiuti 2012: 30-32). This increases labor productivity and the surplus to levels high enough to create the potential for a classless society which would promote human well-being rather than further enrich an already affluent minority (Marx 1977: 239; Eagleton 2010: 101-102; Cohen 2001: 206).

In this narrative an important mechanism driving history forward is class struggle. The division, within class societies, between the class producing the surplus and the class receiving it gives rise to struggles over the size and disposition of this surplus (Engels 1972: 228; Bowles, Edwards, and Roosevelt 2005: 108; Shaikh 1997: 72; Himmelweit 1992: 386; Mandel 1971: 41-42). In predicting capitalism's replacement by a classless society, Marx and Engels were making two assumptions. First, viewing repeated economic crises as a sign that capitalism was becoming an obstacle to further productive development, they expected the clash between forces and relations of production to trigger revolutionary change (Marx and Engels 1978: 478; Marx 1970: 21; Marx 1978: 593; Marx 1973: 749-750; Engels 1978: 714-715). Secondly, this would happen through capitalism's simplification and sharpening of class antagonisms, as well as its facilitation of the unification and organization of workers into a force capable of ending class exploitation (Marx 1970: 21; Marx and Engels 1978).

Capitalism continues to generate economic crises but has not blocked productive development. By now, even many Marxists doubt whether capitalism will ever become an insuperable obstacle to further productive development, while other socialist and Marxist theorists view capitalist crises as integral to the way productive development occurs (Baran and Sweezy 1966: 342; Cohen 2001: 327; Heilbroner 1986: 161; Panitch and Miliband 1992: 16). So while economic crises may render capitalism more vulnerable politically by inflicting great suffering on large numbers of people, while also rendering the risks of transition to a non-

capitalist society less daunting (Panayotakis 2011: 134; Cohen 2001: 245; Wolff and Resnick 2012: 199), they will not necessarily subvert capitalism by blocking productive development. But if this assumption underlying the Marxist tradition's optimism is problematic, it becomes important to also interrogate Marxism's assumption that capitalist development will unify workers against capitalism.

Marxist and neo-Marxist scholars have to some extent theorized how capital has used race, gender, ethnicity, and so on to keep producers divided. This line of research, however, often takes for granted the traditional Marxist identification of the private capitalist workplace as the paradigmatic locus of surplus production and extraction. This article, by contrast, emphasizes the contribution to surplus production that the household and public sectors of the economy also make, while also investigating the political implications of the existence of distinct spheres of surplus production within contemporary capitalism.

3. Production and Surplus Generation in the Public and Household Sectors of the Economy

The key idea behind the concept of the surplus is that the workers whose production sustains social life produce a greater output than that necessary to reproduce their own labor-power. The living standards necessary to reproduce workers' labor-power are not physiologically determined but rather the product of social struggle (Marx 1977: 275; Ferguson 2002: 134). They represent a necessary product that workers would have to generate irrespective of the social relations of production (Marx 1977: 324). In other words, this level of production would be necessary even in a classless society without an exploiting class living off the producers' work.

Marxist and neo-Marxist economists have defined this necessary product in more or less expansive ways. Unlike overly expansive definitions which include in it the output necessary to reproduce a society's current level of capital goods (Bowles, Edwards, and Roosevelt 2005: 103) and overly restrictive definitions which do not include in it any of the output required to reproduce the current level of capital goods (Wolff and Resnick 2012: 155), this article defines the necessary product in a way consistent with the key idea underlying the concept of the surplus. In particular, for the necessary product to be able to reproduce the workers' labor-power, it would have to include both the workers' customary means of subsistence (this is one part of the necessary product that all definitions agree on) and the output necessary to reproduce only the capital goods necessary to generate the producers' customary standard of living.

Expressing this line of reasoning in a formula, we can, therefore, write:

Producers' output=Necessary Product + surplus (1)

This formula does not provide as yet any information regarding the sites of surplus production. In its generality, however, it is consistent with the insistence of feminist economists that households are as much "sites of production" (di Leonardo and Lancaster 2002: 48) and a part of the economy as capitalist workplaces (Acker 2003: 20, Mutari and Figart 2003: 97, Bennholdt-Thomsen 1984). In this sense, it serves as a corrective to the treatment, by traditional economic approaches, of much of the work women perform, including most of the care given within households (Chant 2011: 181; Duggan 2011: 107; Ferguson 2002: 135; Sen and Ostlin 2011: 65; Figart, Mutari, and Power 2003: 48; Folbre 2011: 41; Folbre 2009: 312; Federici 2012: 108), as a free natural resource which does not merit being recognized as human labor (Federici 2012: 147; Mies 1986: 46 and 110; Folbre 2008: 14).

In particular, formula (1) is consistent with the feminist insistence on the economic and productive contribution of work within households because of the clear contribution of housework to the necessary product. As feminist economists have pointed out, the reproduction of the labor-power of workers in the private (and, for that matter, public and household) sector of the economy crucially depends on housework. The means of subsistence that private (and public) sector workers buy with their wages and salaries often represent no more than domestic means of production, which are only converted into the workers' customary standard of living through housework. For example, the raw steak that private- (and public-) sector workers' wages and salaries buy in the super-market cannot reproduce their labor-power until someone cooks it at home (Blumenfeld and Mann 1980: 285; Federici 2012: 96; Mutari and Figart 2003: 97; Folbre 2009: 125-126; Gardiner 1979: 182). Similarly, as Marx (1977: 275) himself recognized, the product necessary to reproduce wage workers' labor-power also includes the product necessary to raise the younger generation which will replace today's workers when they retire. While for Marx this meant that workers must be able to afford raising children, raising children requires much more than purchasing an additional set of commodities. Highly 'labor-intensive' (Federici 2012: 145-146), parenting has justly been described as "one of the most physically, intellectually, and emotionally demanding types of work" (Bowles and Edwards 1993: 183). As Nancy Folbre (2008: 11) points out, "conceiv[ing], nurur[ing], educat[ing], and launch[ing babies] into adulthood ... requires considerable time and effort as well as money." In short, if housework contributes to the necessary product, the people performing it deserve recognition as workers no less than the wage workers producing the subsistence commodities on which the reproduction of workers in all sectors of the economy also depends.

But households are not the only sites outside the private capitalist workplace to contribute to the necessary product. As Marx (1977: 276) himself recognized, the reproduction of wage workers' labor-power presupposes education and training. This requirement has, moreover, increased over time as capitalism's technological dynamism revolutionizes not just the means of production but also the labor skills that operating these means of production requires (Seccombe 1980b: 237-238 and 252). To the extent, moreover, that this education and training usually takes place in public schools and colleges (Galbraith 1999: 168 and 175-176), it follows that the public sector of the economy contributes to the necessary product. The same is true for public healthcare systems or the parts of government responsible for building and maintaining the infrastructures on which the reproduction of workers' labor-power also depends (Seccombe 1980b: 218).

4. From Capitalist Mystification to the Denial of Households' and the Public Sector's Economic Contribution

The reduction of the requirements for reproducing workers' labor-power to the subsistence commodities purchased by wage workers arguably represents an insufficient emancipation, on the part of Marxist theory, from the ideological mystifications that capitalism systematically generates. Marx attacked these mystifications through his distinction between labor and labor-power (Mandel 1977: 50; Marx 1977: 270; Seccombe 1980a: 82). This distinction allowed him to explain the existence of exploitation in an economic system seemingly based on equality, freedom and the presumably mutually beneficial contractual agreements between capitalist employers and their workers (Marx 1977: 280).

Marx pointed out that wages did not represent compensation for the labor workers performed but the market price of the commodified labor-power they sold. It was the difference between their output and the output represented by the subsistence commodities that they could buy with their wage which enabled capitalists to extract a surplus (Marx 1977: 300-301). This difference is, however, much less obvious to workers and capitalists than the fact that workers get paid more, the more hours they work. As a result, the capitalist wage system, along with the capitalist division of labor which makes it impossible to compare the quantity of output workers produce to the quantity of the entirely different subsistence goods they purchase with their wage (Roemer 1988: 46-47), creates the appearance that workers are compensated for their labor rather than being exploited (Marx 1977: 675).

But there is another side to this appearance. In suggesting that capitalists pay for their worker's labor rather than for their labor-power, this appearance also leads workers to conclude that their wages are a reward for their own efforts. Marx's distinction between the worker's labor and the labor-power s/he sells in the market has the potential to pierce through this ideological perception. However, Marx (1977: 274-276) does not explore this potential when he equates necessary labor to the labor necessary to produce the subsistence commodities workers purchase (Seccombe 1980a: 82). This definition makes it seem as if private-sector workers are entirely self-supporting, since it hides the extent to which the reproduction of their labor-power depends on household and public-sector workers. Thus, it encourages private-sector workers to view themselves as 'supporting' workers in the other sectors of the economy, whenever part of their wage is used to finance the contribution of those other workers

So the belief that workers outside the private sector are supported by workers within it is fueled by the appearance that the latter are paid for their labor. For example, this appearance

obscures the fact that, in societies where one-‘breadwinner’ households may be the norm, the wage breadwinners receive is determined by the cost of reproducing all contributors to the reproduction of this breadwinner’s labor-power (Seccombe 1980a: 82; Curtis 1980: 111). In other words, the wage does not reward the breadwinners for their labor but reflects the requirements of reproducing not just the breadwinners themselves but also their homemaker partners whose work allows the breadwinners to continue selling their labor-power.

Moreover, by suggesting to sole breadwinners that their wage is rightfully theirs, the appearance that wage workers are rewarded for their labor also legitimizes their control of family income (Seccombe 1980a: 82; Gardiner 1979: 183). The reproduction of their labor-power may be as dependent on the work performed by the full-time homemaker as the reproduction of the homemaker’s labor-power depends on the breadwinner’s earnings (Mies 1986: 160). However, the appearance that these earnings reward the breadwinner’s labor creates the appearance that the breadwinner ‘supports’ their home-making partner.

The ideological effects of this appearance, moreover, persist even as two-breadwinner households become prevalent even outside the low-income and racialized groups, which had always been less able to survive on one income (Amott and Matthaei 1991: 95-96, 100-101, and 351). In view of the historically gendered nature of the sole breadwinner model, which, with the exception of one-parent households, defined the husband/father as the breadwinner and the wife/mother as the homemaker, one of that model’s legacies is the sexist interpretation of women’s paid work as merely supplementing that of the ‘main’ breadwinner, who is often still assumed to be their male partner (Elson and Pearson 2011: 213; Levin 2003: 156; Shulman 2003: 211; Peterson 2003: 281; Chodorow 1979: 90; Miles 1990: 136). This ideological belief has long justified the discrimination and gender wage gap that women continued to face, even

after their participation in paid work increased dramatically (Albelda and Tilly 2002: 266; Wakabayashi 2017; Folbre 2009: 295; Charles and Grusky 2007: 327-329; Stacey 2002: 93-94; MacLean 2002: 190; Miles 1990: 241).

A similar argument applies to the relationship between private-sector workers and their public sector counterparts. The appearance that the former are paid for their labor obscures the implications of the fact that the reproduction of their labor-power is as dependent on the work of public sector teachers, nurses, doctors and so on, as the reproduction of the labor-power of the latter is dependent on the subsistence commodities they can purchase thanks to salaries, which are, in part, financed by the taxes that private-sector workers (among others) pay. In particular, the portion of private-sector workers' taxes used to pay public sector workers who contribute to the necessary product is likely to be experienced by private-sector workers as the government taking from them money they earned through their labor to 'support' public-sector workers who are often portrayed by corporate media, austerity-dispensing politicians and neoliberal ideologues as lazy, incompetent and pampered parasites (Weiner 2018: 3; Abramovitz 2012: 35; Pollin and Thompson 2011: 24; Moody 2011: 222; Fabricant 2011: 236). Thus, the appearance that private-sector workers are paid for their labor also obscures the fact that the portion of these workers' taxes used to pay public school teachers, doctors, nurses and so on, is comparable to the portion of the worker's wages which is spent on subsistence commodities. Just as the latter pays for the food necessary to reproduce the private-sector worker's labor-power, so does the former provide educational and health services which have the same effect. Reinforcing this appearance, of course, is the centuries-old portrayal, by political economy and mainstream economics, of the state as living off the wealth produced in the private sector (Mazzucato 2018: 239-41; Folbre 2008: 174).

In this sense, the long-standing view of the public sector as parasitically growing at the expense of the private sector is an ideological mystification inseparable from the appearance of wages as compensation for labor. In short, both the invidious contrast between the public and private sectors of the economy and the ideological justification of gender discrimination on the grounds that women working for pay merely supplement the income earned by their male partners are directly connected to the mystifications generated by the wage form.

5. Austerity and Surplus Production Across the Economy

One implication of this discussion is that both the workers' output and the necessary product in Formula (1) above are generated through housework and public sector activities as well as in the private sector. And just as private-sector workers produce a larger output than the portion of the output they can purchase with their wage, so can we not preclude workers in the public sector or households producing a larger output than that necessary to reproduce their own labor-power. In other words, the possibility that, alongside a private-sector surplus, workers in capitalist societies also generate a public-sector as well as a household surplus must be considered. This point can be illustrated by reference to the struggles over austerity, following the onset of the global capitalist crisis a little more than ten years ago.

Although (and because) economic crises can have a negative effect on capitalist profit, they often facilitate economic restructuring designed to increase the surplus extracted from workers. This can happen not just through rising levels of unemployment, which increase workers' insecurity and make it harder for them to organize and fight for wages that keep up with productivity increases (Kolko 1999: 292; Marx 1977: 785-86; Sweezy 1970: 90). It can also result from the use of economic crisis, unemployment, and the consequent weakening of the

labor movement as an opportunity to speed up work and attack labor rights (Amott and Matthaei 1991: 128-30). A prime example of this dynamic during the most recent capitalist crisis have been countries in the European periphery, such as Greece, which have seen drastic attacks on hard-won labor rights and working-class standards of living (Miller 2015: 47; Panayotakis 2011: 2-3 and 92).

This is as true of public-sector workers as it is of their private-sector counterparts. Attacks on labor rights and wages are not confined to the private sector. In the United States, for example, public-sector workers have been the central focus of assaults on labor and collective bargaining rights, precisely because public sector unions now represent the last stronghold of a seriously weakened labor movement (Abramovitz 2012: 35; Panayotakis 2011: 91; Fabricant 2011: 236).

Since Formula (1) can be rewritten as

Surplus=Producers' output – Necessary product (2),

these attacks affect the surplus extracted from producers through their effect both on producers' output and on the necessary product. As far as producers' output is concerned, attacks on labor rights and unions make it easier for employers to increase production by accelerating the pace of work and ratcheting up the effort expected of workers. Meanwhile, such attacks, in combination with high levels of unemployment, make it harder for workers to resist those moves, all the more so as these moves to deregulate the labor market are often falsely presented as a cure to unemployment and economic crisis (Panayotakis 2014: 11).

At the same time, the attacks on the standard of living of private- and public-sector workers by austerity policies the world over also reduce the necessary product by redefining the

standard of living socially deemed necessary to reproduce workers' labor-power. Thus, for example, the reduction in the real (or even nominal) value of wages and salaries means that private- and public-sector workers can lay claim to a smaller portion of the output produced in the capitalist sector of the economy.

At the same time, public sector austerity can reduce the necessary product in yet another way. Through public sector layoffs and intentional personnel attrition when older teachers, doctors, nurses, and other public-sector workers retire, austerity often leads to understaffing which distributes the public-sector work necessary to reproduce socially available labor-power among a shrinking number of workers (Albo and Evans 2010: 291; Clawson 2013: 30; Konczal 2014: 83-84; Kroll 2013: 42; Miller 2015: 47, Lav 2014: 52-3, Pashkoff 2014: 59). This reduces the necessary product because the public sector output necessary, for example, to keep workers educated and healthy will require the monetary compensation of fewer public-sector workers. In short, austerity can reduce the necessary product by reducing both the compensation of individual workers and the number of public-sector workers compensated for helping to reproduce socially available labor-power.

Not merely a theoretical possibility, such outcomes have often resulted from the wave of austerity following the most recent global capitalist crisis. In Britain, austerity “means that public-sector workers are working longer and harder, due to job cutbacks, for less pay, and for a pension that is actually going to be worth less” (Pashkoff 2014: 59). Similarly, if even more dramatically, the ‘structural reforms’ imposed on the countries most hit by the Eurozone crisis “included severe cuts in government spending, cutbacks in jobless benefits, health care spending, mass layoffs, pay cuts and eviscerated pensions for government employees, and tax hikes” (Miller 2015: 47). As for the United States, the mass layoffs that state and local governments

implemented in response to the global economic crisis have meant that, by 2014, “there [we]re 705,000 fewer public workers since the recession started—the greatest decline since the Great Depression” (Konczal 2014: 83-84). Even before that crisis however, austerity had been the lot of public higher education in the United States for decades. In the California public higher education system, for example, “[a]s faculty members deal with larger class sizes, more papers to read, and more tests to grade, their pay has failed to keep pace” (Kroll 2013: 42). The fact that such changes cannot but “lower the quality of education” (Clawson 2013: 30) also means, however, that overworking the workers in understaffed public colleges and other public institutions cannot always fully make up for the reduction in their numbers. When this occurs and the educational, healthcare, and other public sector services decline, all workers’ labor-power becomes devalued, as the output deemed necessary for its reproduction becomes redefined downwards.

Thus, austerity policies can (and often do) increase the difference between the output of public-sector workers and the portion of the output devoted to the reproduction of their labor-power. In other words, austerity policies highlight the fact that there is no reason to assume that public-sector workers providing educational and healthcare services or building and maintaining crucial infrastructures do not produce an output exceeding the output deemed necessary to reproduce their own labor-power. On the contrary, their long-standing (and ideological) portrayal as parasitical to the private sector increases their vulnerability to campaigns, such as these unleashed in a number of countries in recent years, which seek to increase the surplus extracted from them by demonizing them and falsely presenting them as a lazy elite which enjoys a high standard of living at the expense of hard-working taxpayers.

Austerity policies, however, also illustrate how housework can become an integral element in the production of a surplus. To begin with, austerity policies and economic crises which reduce working-class incomes also reduce the ability of working-class households to meet their customary material needs through the purchase of commodities. This is especially the case for racialized and immigrant groups, which are both adversely affected by capitalism's segmented labor markets and especially vulnerable to the rising levels of unemployment which austerity policies and capitalist economic crises generate (Acker 2003: 17; Amott and Matthaei 1991: 26 and 318, Kolko 1999: 282).

As a result, working-class households often compensate for their reduced purchasing power by increasing housework (Briskin 1980: 159; Elson 2011: 298; Fox 1980: 187; Gardiner 1979: 187; Lebowitz 1997: 234; Seccombe 1980b: 230). Instead, for example, of eating out or purchasing prepared meals and cleaning services, households can produce such services within the household. Similarly, Elson (2011: 298) reports, "producing more goods for home consumption" was one of the 'household coping strategies' revealed by "[a] nationally representative survey conducted by the Indonesian statistical office ... after the onset of the [Asian financial] crisis" in the late 1990s. Given the gender-stratified nature of contemporary capitalist societies, such a strategy places a disproportionate burden of austerity on women, who still perform a disproportionate share of housework (Bartky 1997: 290).

Analyzing this possibility using Formula (2) illustrates the contribution that households can make to the production of a surplus. Individual workers in the private sector can continue to produce the same amount of output (or may even, as a result of the economic insecurity that rising levels of unemployment imply, have to increase that output) even as the portion of the private sector's output they can lay claim to declines. If working-class families attempt to make

up for this development by increasing the amount of housework, the decline in the household's standard of living might be averted or mitigated. In other words, the necessary product might not decline. However, this outcome would only become possible by increasing the total output generated by workers within the household. In other words, the difference between the total output the producers generated in the private and household sectors, on one side, and the portion of that output used to reproduce their labor-power would increase, thus also increasing the surplus extracted from them.

There is, however, another way that austerity policies can fuel the strategy of compensating for reduced living standards through additional work performed within households. One of the features of austerity policies, both in their most recent and in previous incarnations, such as the structural adjustment programs imposed throughout the global South, is the attack on public services, including childcare, education and healthcare (Panayotakis 2011: 84-85; Federici 2012: 103; Nisonoff 2011: 205; Pollin 2013: 86; Secombe 1980b: 256). Here again, working-class families have often made up for these services by taking on much of the work formerly performed within the public sector (Abramovitz 2012: 34; Fraser 2016: 104; Petchesky 1979: 381; Secombe 1980b: 257; Weinbaum and Bridges 1979: 197). As Diane Elson (2017: 55) reports, “[r]esearch in a number of countries suggests that cuts to public expenditures have increased women’s unpaid work, especially for low-income women, as these women produce caregiving services formerly provided by the public sector.”

Thus, members of working-class households may continue to generate the same (or even an increased) amount of output in their capacity as private- or public-sector workers, even as their defense of their customary standard of living requires them to increase the services they produce at home. Thus, austerity on the public sector can, through slightly different channels,

produce the same effect as the attack on working people's wages and salaries, namely to increase the surplus working-families are forced to produce.

6. The Existence of Structurally Distinct Spheres of Production and Capitalism's Generation of Divisions Among Workers

This discussion illustrates how workers outside the private sector can be forced to add to the surplus. It also points, however, to the possibility of divisions between workers in the different sectors. In this respect, this discussion adds to, while being capable of encompassing within its framework, analyses, by radical and progressive scholars, of capital's long-standing use of racial and gender differences to increase profit by keeping workers divided (Amott and Matthaei 1991: 112; Harvey 2005: 168; Tabb 2012: 57; Wright and Rogers 2011: 249-50). Such analyses have explained the persistence of racial and gender discrimination (Amott and Matthaei 1991: 340; Bendick, Jackson, and Reinoso 2000; Elson and Pearson 2011: 217; Kroll 2012: 53; Lewchuk 2003: 69-69; Weinberger 2003: 173) against the neoclassical expectation that capitalist competition would erode discriminatory practices (Michaels 2010: 9; Mutari and Figart 2003: 152; Schwarz-Miller and Talley 2003). In particular, progressive and radical economists have argued that the addition to capitalist profits from discriminatory practices that facilitate exploitation by keeping workers divided often outweighs the cost of economic inefficiency that such practices entail (Panayotakis 2011: 59; Bowles and Edwards 1993: 218-20; Hahnel 2002: 251-52).

Although focused on private-sector workers, this argument is certainly consistent with the analytical frame implicit in Formula (2). In particular, racial, gender, and other forms of

discrimination can increase the surplus extracted from workers through their impact on both private-sector workers' output and on the product deemed socially necessary for their reproduction. Contributing to this impact, moreover, are both the effects that discrimination has on the groups subjected to it and the effects of discrimination on working people as a whole.

One possible effect of racial, gender, and other forms of discrimination is that women and members of racialized and oppressed groups may have to perform at a much higher level than their white male peers to be recognized and keep their job (Dymski 1997: 342-343). In other words, racial, gender, and other forms of discrimination can force workers subjected to them to produce a higher output and, thus, a higher surplus than their male white peers.

But racism and sexism can also increase the surplus extracted from workers subjected to them through their effect on the product deemed necessary for the reproduction of those workers' labor-power. One example is the sexist ideology, mentioned earlier, which defines the income of women in the paid labor force as merely 'supplementary' to that of their male partners, thus justifying the practice of paying female workers less than their male peers. Thus, the social definition of the product necessary to reproduce different workers' labor-power does not have to be uniform (Lebowitz 1997: 239) but can entrench existing racial, gender and other divisions.

Another example of this dynamic is the great divide between workers in the global North and their counterparts in the global South (Panayotakis 2011: 75; Milanovic 2005: 140), which can be traced back to the links between capitalist development and colonialism as well as to the use of racist ideologies to justify colonial expansion by many of the now-affluent countries in the global North (Ahmad and Karrar 2015: 55; Panayotakis 2011: 79; Bagchi 2005: 232 and 245; Desai 2013: 32). This history helps to explain the paradoxical fact, noted by Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson (2011: 212-13), that workers in the global South employed by transnational giants

earn much less than their peers in the global North despite levels of productivity “higher ... than th[ose] achieved in developed countries.” Phenomena like this point to the contribution of colonialism’s ideological and economic legacy on the social definition of the consumption levels necessary to reproduce workers in the global South. Amplifying colonialism’s ideological impact is, of course, the fact that a large proportion of the industrial proletariat emerging in the global South are women (Federici 2012: 66; Kolko 1999: 283), who also have to contend with sexist definitions of the monetary compensation necessary to reproduce their labor-power.

But capitalist profitability also benefits from the effects that discrimination has on the working class as a whole. By fueling resentments and divisions which obstruct working-class unity, racial, gender and other forms of discrimination can increase the surplus extracted from all workers both by increasing the output workers have to produce and by depressing the living standards socially deemed necessary for their reproduction. Indeed, lack of working-class unity makes it more difficult both to resist production speed-ups and to effectively pursue permanent wage increases, which can redefine the necessary product upwards (Panayotakis 2011: 59; Bowles and Edwards 1993: 218-20; Hahnel 2002: 251-52; Tabb 2012: 57; Wright and Rogers 2011: 249-50).

While consistent with the findings of previous attempts to understand divisions among private-sector workers, this article’s approach also highlights the divisions among producers that result from the existence of structurally distinct sites of surplus production. This structural feature of capitalist societies creates the possibility of producers in one sector of the economy seeking, when faced with pressures to produce higher levels of surplus, to shift that pressure onto producers in other sectors. Thus, instead of joining forces against the intensification of exploitation across the board that austerity and capitalist restructuring often entail, workers in the

various sectors of the economy can often find themselves squabbling over the distribution of the rising burdens imposed on them (Offe 1985: 2).

Illustrating this possibility is the link between capitalist restructuring and the embrace, even by segments of the working class, of neoliberal attacks on ‘high taxes’ and the public sector. The capitalist restructuring since the post-war ‘golden age’ of capitalism came to an end in the 1970s has led, in various affluent countries like the U.S, to the loss of many well-paying, unionized industrial jobs, their replacement by much lower-paid and more precarious service jobs, and a stagnation of working-class wages more generally (Bluestone and Harrison 1999; Mazzucato 2018: 113-114; Stacey 2002: 93). In other words, industrial restructuring meant that private-sector wages and salaries did not keep up with rising productivity levels (Fraad 2008: 26; Hacker 2019: 54; Jones 2010: 14; Mazzucato 2018: xiii; Wright and Rogers 2011: 156-58). With the labor movement in decline as a result of neoliberal globalization, capital mobility, and deindustrialization (Levine 2015: 86-87; Yates 2009: 189-190), neoliberal attacks on big government and high taxes seduced segments of the working class, which, through lower taxes, hoped to mitigate the income losses inflicted on them (Brenner 2002: 342-43; O’Connor 1997: 318). Unfortunately, however, most of the benefits of neoliberal tax cuts have accrued to corporations and the very wealthy (Panayotakis 2013: 18; Moody 2011: 222). Moreover, this coping strategy has fueled public sector austerity, which only promised to mitigate the intensified exploitation of private-sector workers by increasing the surplus public-sector workers had to produce.

The segments of the working class most receptive to this strategy have been male white workers, who benefited the most from labor protections and benefits which the post-war model of ‘controlled capitalism’ denied many female and black workers (Amott and Matthaiei 1991:

129-130 and 170-171; Fraser 2016: 110; Piven 2014: 23, Van Arsdale 2013: 94; Steger and Roy 2010: 7; Zweig 2017: 34). Faced with both staggering job losses in the relatively well-paid manufacturing sector and with the emergence of movements against gender and racial discrimination, many of these workers became receptive to the conservative fusion of calls for a small state with a cultural backlash against the social equality demanded by new social movements (Aronowitz 1992: 436; Brenner 2002: 340-41 and 343; Wright and Rogers 2011: 391). Predictably, upon achieving power, the new conservative coalition turned not just against the movements fighting race and gender discrimination but also against the union movement that had powered male white workers into such economic prosperity as they briefly enjoyed during capitalism's post-war 'golden age' (Abramovitz 2002: 226; King 2003: 230; Steger and Roy 2010: 7). Indeed, the anti-labor decisions of conservative leaders, like Ronald Reagan, reversed "many of [the labor movement's] hard-won gains" by "let[ting] business...know that it was okay to 'go after' the trade unions" (Abramovitz 2002: 226). In so doing, they also highlighted how counterproductive, even for private-sector workers, it is to seek to mitigate their own exploitation by joining the small-tax, austerity bandwagon.

More generally, the actual (as opposed to the promised) effects of neoliberal tax cuts show that the beneficiaries from the surplus generated by public-sector workers depends on the power of and struggles between different classes and social groups. In democratic societies the receiver of this surplus are the democratically elected governments, which, ideally, make the benefits from this surplus (for example, better education, healthcare, and infrastructures, as well as lower taxes) available to all citizens. In capitalist 'democracies,' however, the situation is more complex, since capital's control over investment and the economy also provides it with disproportionate control over political outcomes (Bowles, Edwards, and Roosevelt 2005: 519-

523). Capital's undemocratic power, in this respect, is amplified by the fact that, as the recent Eurozone crisis reminds us, governments' operations depend not just on taxes but also on global financial markets. This constellation of factors means that the intensification of public-sector workers' exploitation often does more to enrich corporations and the very wealthy (through the skewed tax cuts this intensification of exploitation makes possible) than to benefit average citizens. In other words, the existence of structurally distinct sites of surplus production may lend credence to the assumption that private-sector workers stand to benefit from the intensification of the exploitation faced by their public-sector counterparts. Moreover, this assumption is often nurtured through capitalists' ability "to devote portions of their surplus to sustaining ... the cultural organizations that originate and/or disseminate theories, religions, and other ways of understanding how the world works that serve their interests" (Wolff 2012: 150). But just as capital's control of the surplus can make this assumption seem plausible, so can it ensure that actual political outcomes often prove this assumption to be an ideological illusion. In this respect, ideological campaigns which have blamed budget deficits caused by low corporate taxes and other corporate hand-outs on supposedly 'unsustainable' wages and benefits of public-sector workers in Wisconsin and elsewhere are just one recent example of this dynamic (Moody 2011: 223).

Moreover, as our earlier discussion of the implications of public sector austerity for housework indicates, the support of segments of the working class for neoliberalism's promise to cut taxes also represents an attempt to mitigate their heightened exploitation in the private (or, even public) sector of the economy by increasing the surplus produced, especially by women, within households. Neoliberalism's pressure on women to produce more surplus has often been amplified by 'welfare' reforms which have forced low-income women to look for paid

employment if they want to retain the often meager benefits they receive. By increasing competition in the low-wage end of the labor market, such reforms have also had the effect of depressing wages and increasing exploitation in the private sector (Abramovitz 2002: 218-20 and 225; Albelda and Tilly 2003: 269 and 271; Folbre 2008: 146; Hays 2007: 188). And as labor markets in contemporary capitalist economies are often segmented along racial and gender lines, the intensification of exploitation of low-wage workers disproportionately affects female workers as well as workers belonging to racialized or other oppressed groups.

In addition, by disproportionately targeting female-headed households, the adoption by welfare ‘reforms’ of the workfare requirement devalues women’s caring labor (Abramovitz 2002: 222; Folbre and Nelson 2003: 121). The welfare rights movement, which, gaining inspiration from the Civil Rights Movement, has defended low-income families’ access to welfare support, can be interpreted as, in part, a movement demanding official recognition of women’s caring labor as valuable work that deserves to be rewarded (Amott and Matthaei 1991: 314; Federici 2012: 6-7, 43, and 98). Thus, the workfare requirement reflects not just neoliberalism’s opposition to government support for the poor (as opposed to government support for corporations and wealthy, which neoliberals have often supported—Panayotakis 2010: 12; Crouch 2013: 220; George 2001: 12; Harvey 2005: 188; Jackson 2017: 189; Wright and Rogers 2011: 392) but also its backlash against the social gains of new social movements in the post-Civil Rights era.

Thus, the way some private-sector workers have sought to mitigate the effects of rising exploitation has increased the surplus produced by and extracted from public sector and (primarily female) household workers. Interestingly, however, the very same attacks which have increased the surplus extracted from the latter have often produced further effects in the private

sector, which counter the benefits from lower taxes that segments of the squeezed working class hoped to reap when they joined the neoliberal coalition.

7. Conclusion

As the analysis above indicates, understanding the processes that keep workers divided also requires taking into account the implications of the existence of structurally distinct sites of surplus production within contemporary capitalist societies. This structural feature of capitalist societies builds on and interacts with the racial, gender, and other social divisions and hierarchies that progressive economists have discussed in their explanations of the dynamics which often prevent workers from joining forces against capital.

In addition, this structural feature of capitalist societies also adds a twist to the appearance that private-sector workers are paid for their labor rather than for the reproduction of their labor-power. This twist adds to the difficulty of building unity among workers. Indeed, the mystifying appearance that private-sector workers are paid for their labor inclines them to believe that they support public-sector and household workers. In reality, of course, the latter contribute as much to the reproduction of private-sector workers' labor-power as private-sector workers do to the reproduction of the labor-power of workers within the other two sectors. In this sense, theoretical recognition of the distinct sectors of surplus production within contemporary capitalism helps us understand why capitalist development has not, as Marx and Engels (1978) optimistically expected, unified workers. It also represents, however, a necessary first step towards making Marx and Engels' expectation a reality by helping workers,

irrespective of gender, race or the sector(s) of the economy they are active in, unite against neoliberalism's relentless attempt to increase the surplus extracted from them.

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