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The current state of the discipline of political economy as taught in institutions of higher learning is rather trivial at best and downright dangerous at worst. The burning theoretical issues dealt with and the corresponding methodology provide a series of rationalizations which justify the existing conditions in which wage workers find themselves.

The treatment of blacks is even more deplorable. Blacks were not considered to be a legitimate subject matter for study and were thus completely ignored until the middle 1950s. The publication of Becker’s book initiated a floodtide of articles in the leading journals on the “economics of discrimination.” During Johnson’s so-called “war on poverty” another spate of books, articles, and pamphlets came off the presses in rapid-fire fashion. Financing of these publications generally came out of the very war chest which was to help blacks and other poor people. Many of these productions were either irrelevant to the issues facing black people in the United States, or they developed more efficient methods of suppressing the legitimate aspirations of blacks and the poor.

These publications, however, helped to build a reputation for a number of white scholars and their affiliated institutes. White experts on black economic problems multiplied rapidly. Private and public research grants have since been aggrandized by these experts and their institutes. The irony is that, at one such institute which receives the lion’s share of National Science Foundation grants to do research on poor people and blacks, practically no black scholar has been involved in the work. The old and time-worn excuse of former racist employers that it is difficult to attract black scholars is still used.
Preface

There does not now exist a single textbook devoted to a black political economy. Samuelson’s elementary text—the dominant standard for more than three decades—deals with blacks as an afterthought of one chapter on women and minorities. There is no alternative written by a black author which can be used as a basis for an elementary or intermediate course. This makes it difficult to develop a good course without one book of “principles” which may serve as a guide to students in this field.

This book is written with the express purpose of filling the void. It has been long in the making, beginning about four decades ago, when as an undergraduate student at a leading university, I found it necessary to pursue a series of independent studies in the economic development of black people in the United States. There was absolutely nothing in the official curriculum that was useful. In the general social science courses blacks were treated in the most trivial, if not racist, ways. The “economics” courses were totally useless as instruments for analyzing the black condition. In graduate school it was academic suicide to even suggest that a scientific treatment of any “black” economic issue could solve some of the methodological flaws in the discipline.

The actual preparation of the book developed from specific attempts during the last thirty years to bring substance and meaning to the teaching of courses in economics. At some of the predominantly black colleges I found students to be totally turned off with the standard fare. At predominantly white colleges, on the other hand, I found an inordinate amount of student anxiety if there were any departures from the standard materials. The solution was to frame the study in such a way that it encompassed the general problems of economic development of the United States, while at the same time treating the problems of black people as an important subset of the larger economy in which they are embedded.

The book is designed for serious black students of political economy. Black high schools and undergraduate students have no single text in this field that treats them as the central core of study. I hasten to admit at once that this first attempt may not be immediately usable by such students. Therefore, I am hoping that my black colleagues—those with graduate degrees in “economics” and in all of the other social sciences—will make use of the book as an important resource in their courses. I also hope that white economists will at least use the book as an alternative mode of thought about the structure and functioning of the political economy.

In the preparation of this book I relied heavily on three of my best teachers, two of whom I never met in person, and one whom I came to know on a personal level only for an extremely short period of time. Adam Smith laid the foundations for my understanding of the general nature of political economy. Karl Marx provided the more rigorous scientific foundations as well as the passionate commitment to the interests of the working classes. Finally, my everlasting gratitude must go out to the great W. E. B. Du Bois, whose analyses of the nature of human society and of the people that make it up have been unparalleled in the history of higher learning.

My wife, Elsie, deserves special mention. She has tolerated my persistent recitals of the materials in this volume for decades without complaint. I couldn’t have completed the book without her encouragement and sympathetic criticisms.

Some of my colleagues have read the manuscript and have been quite helpful in suggesting important revisions of substance and clarity. Douglas Davidson of the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta, Georgia must be singled out for my special thanks. His detailed critique has been most useful in sharpening my understanding of some of the more controversial aspects of the work.

Michael Whitter of the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica has painstakingly gone through the manuscript in a most critical way, suggesting a number of significant changes that would make the book more scientifically sound. He has my gratitude for his patience and understanding, even when I failed to take his good advice.

Robert Browne has had a greater influence on my thinking than he is probably aware of. The many years of our close personal friendship, our sharing of ideas as fellow students at a midwestern university, and our mutual tenure at the Black Economic Research Center in Harlem, New York have indeed been of inestimable advantage to me in upgrading my knowledge of the black condition in the United States and in Africa.

My students at Hampshire College have been useful as a standing forum for discussion of the materials in the book. Two of these students, however, stand above all others as critics and co-teaching
colleagues. Jon Diamond and Jae Jin Shim have been consummate undergraduates who are responsible for making many of the difficult parts of the book more communicable to serious students at all levels of training. I owe them my thanks.

A host of other colleagues have been most helpful. Their names would fill a whole volume. Needless to say, I am grateful to all of them for the contributions they have made to improve the presentation of the materials of this book. However, I must take full responsibility for whatever wrong-headed ideas and faulty conclusions are put forth in the work.

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INTRODUCTION

The central theme of the book is that black Americans are fundamentally no different from any other people. Indeed, their history reflects a pattern of economic development which is quite consistent with the changing social-economic fortunes of all peoples throughout human history. Moreover, during the last five and a half centuries those people who are now identified as black Americans have played a most decisive role in the origins of capitalism as well as the rate and geographic extent of its development in the world.

The dominant factor in their history to date has been the exploitation of their labors by an alien people under three distinct historical modes of social-economic organization – slavery, sharecropping, and wage laboring. During the interval of real time during which blacks experienced each of these three historical epochs, members of the general American working class were exploited under a different form of political economy. Thus, it has come to appear that there is some inherent "racial" character which sets black Americans apart from non-black workers in the American social setting.

Implicit throughout the book is the thesis that only an insignificant, but very powerful, number of non-blacks have been responsible for the material poverty of blacks in each of the three epochs. The other non-black members of the population, who constitute the overwhelming majority, have been, to varying degrees, used by the ruling classes as the direct subjective instruments of black exploitation; and this has been made possible as a consequence of the fundamental institutional mechanisms by which these non-blacks were made to survive. As such, these non-black workers
have been also the ready victims of labor exploitation, even if under a different type of political economy than their black counterparts.

A crucial element of the overall theme is that black people have played the most decisive role in liberating themselves in the past from slavery and from sharecropping modes of exploitation and that they will liberate themselves again in the future from the present-day wage laboring exploitative system. Liberation from any existing mode of labor exploitation is a function of that very mode of exploitation itself. Indeed, we shall argue that the intensity and extent of exploitation of the labor of black people in the production of the material means of their survival necessarily calls into play a corresponding intensity and extent of labor of black people to maintain their living status and to survive as a population. Progressive expansion in these two phases of black human effort over time ultimately generates a sufficiently explosive social force which blasts asunder the shackles of the distributive mechanisms that legitimately enforce the existing mode of black human labor exploitation. When this event occurs, the system of political economy is transformed into a new system.

The organizing principle of the book, therefore, is the analysis of the alternating phases of black human labor—the one external to the black population, resulting in the creation of the material means of survival; the other internal to the black population, resulting in the creation of the black population itself. To complete the analysis we shall have to specify the nature of the distributive mechanisms which legitimately set the preconditions under which these two phases of black human labor may take place. But the completion of each cycle of black human labor requires the existence of a social switching mechanism to restart the cycle under exactly the same social arrangements as before. We shall locate this mechanism in the process of accumulation of wealth in a form characteristic of the historical epoch in which black human labor is being generated.

These themes and organizing principles suggest that we are essentially dealing with issues in social reproduction. Black human labor is the crucial activity; the simultaneous but sequential destruction and creation of black people and the means of black human survival are the intermediary outcomes; net reproduction of the black population is the final material outcome.

Existing studies in black political economy have generally been compendiums of factual information on employment, income differentials, poverty, educational attainment, rampant racism within the general white population, government social programs, national political participation, and a host of otherwise unrelated phenomena. Our basic theme of black population reproduction should enable us to better organize the data in a more consistent manner than heretofore.

The major objective of the book is the construction of a theoretical framework for explaining the mechanisms by which the black population of the United States reproduces itself as a black population. Who they are today and what survival strategies keep breath in their bodies are consequences of a set of historical forces which generated them out of some primordial earth matter about three million years ago, propelled them through many and varied social-economic formations, and finally solidified their present defining characteristics as well as their physical location within the bowels of the most powerful capitalist nation that the world has ever known.

The methodology of political economy is quite appropriate to the task at hand. On our view, the central focus of political economy is the social reproduction of a human population. This contrasts with individual reproduction in the sense that it is the maintenance of the population as a population (and not as a mere collection of individuals) with all its important characteristics remaining intact.

The act of individual reproduction—the birthing of babies out of the sexual synthesis of adult male and female people—is a necessary condition for social reproduction to occur; but it is not a sufficient condition. Social reproduction encompasses much more. It entails the complex set of interrelations that link the individual members of the human population, one to another, in stable and regularly recurring bonds of co-operative existence.

At the very instant of birth, the social dimensions of the new baby’s existence become evident. It is at once the offspring of two adult members of the population; thus it forms a link in the past history of its progenitors. It is also at once an integral member of a family; as such, it partakes immediately in all those activities which make for the reproduction of that family as an integral member of its population group. Finally, it plays a fundamental role as replacement for some member of the population outside of its own family structure who succumbed to death, or it serves as
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raw material fodder out of which the physical substrata of the population are formed, or it constitutes a net addition to the surviving population as a whole. One live birth therefore gets intertwined in the creation of the fundamental elements of the population, in the decay or death of those same elements of the population, and in the future survival and growth of that population.

In the ensuing years after birth this newborn baby must be reared to full adulthood; it must be "socialized"; it must be wrought and forged into a form that is peculiar to the population as a whole. It must have impressed into its subconscious mind a common language, religion, art, literature, music, mythology. Recreational events, religious rites, formal schooling, informal instruction, political activity, theatrical performances, etc. are some of the instrumentalities used in this regard. Needless to say, the production and consumption of its food supply and other material means of its survival are important aspects of the socialization process. A baby does not live by bread alone; but neither can it survive without it.

The standard academic fare in political economy tends to concentrate on the distribution of the material means of the people's survival. Usually, some lip-service is given over to discussions of the production of the material means of survival. In any case, other aspects of social reproduction are usually ignored, under the pitiful excuse that "they will be held constant for purposes of the analysis." In our study of black people, however, we cannot afford to hold anything constant. The influences which have operated on them have been total. If, in this work, we merely skim the surface of some of the important aspects of black people's social reproduction it will not be because we have deliberately ignored them; responsibility for such omission will be due to our own lack of competence to deal scientifically with the detailed workings of certain reproductive activities traditionally dealt with by social scientists outside the realm of political economy.

Throughout their history, the lot of black Americans has been dictated by the interests of an alien marauder. Their will has been bludgeoned and coerced under some of the most vicious forms of human exploitation ever inflicted upon one people by another. The consequent expenditure of their labor and their bodies and their souls, in desperate attempts to be liberated from the shackles of oppression and to survive as a distinctive black population, is without parallel in world history. Their material poverty has been a vivid memorial of its opposite - the extraordinary quantity of material wealth which their labors have produced and which has been stolen from them throughout the ages. This poverty has also been a visible manifestation of the intensity and agony of their labors in the production and rearing of their children to full adulthood. The relatively large number of black babies necessarily given birth by them, the correspondingly large number of dead black bodies that are necessary to serve as raw material fodder out of which the physical substrata of the black population are created, and the relatively small number of black survivors which results from these two preceding events are dramatic testimonials to the extent and agony of black social reproduction.

The underlying theme of the book is that the black experience has been an essential link in the events which have dominated the world from the middle of the fifteenth century to the present. It has been a most important factor in the origins and development of capitalism in Western Europe and its offshoots in North America. As such, the appropriate framework for explaining the otherwise complex aspects of black social reproduction is the same framework which explains the origin and development of capitalism in the world. The book is structured in such a way as to illuminate the main theme.

The main contribution of this work to an understanding of political economy is the conception of human labor as two continuous, synchronized, and complementary alternating phases of the most fundamental activity that drives the political economy. The literature acknowledges the role of only one phase of human labor - that which we shall refer to throughout this work as External Labor. This is the phase of human labor which uses up (consumes) human energy (and consequently, human beings themselves) in the process of creation of non-human material products. In this work we shall include in the analysis the other, complementary, phase of human labor - that which we shall refer to as Internal Labor. This phase of human labor uses up (consumes) food and other material products in the process of creation of human energy (and consequently, the human carriers of that energy).

On our formulation, the social reproduction of the population
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tion

 involves the unified and continuous performance of both phases of labor. The preconditions for their operation are to be found in the simultaneous and continuing operation of two distributive processes. These latter provide the conduits through which people are distributed from the Internal Labor Process where they are created to the External Labor Process where they are used; and through which material goods are distributed from the External Labor Process where they are created to the Internal Labor Process where they are used. Finally, we bring our analysis to bear on the characteristic process of wealth accumulation which functions as the natural terminus to the complete cycle of labor; but it also functions as the social switching process which restarts the new cycle of labor under the very same conditions as the previous cycle of labor. This process thus insures the continuation of the political economy as the same genre of its origins.

Chapter 1 develops a general model of political economy. It describes the major components and activities which typify any political economy which now exists or has existed in the world. This chapter is quite fundamental to the whole work; it sets the organizational structure of each of the subsequent chapters of the book.

Chapter 2 derives a set of criteria from the general model of Chapter 1 that enables us to describe all the special types of political economies which now exist in the real world or which have existed in the past. This chapter is still of a general mold. It does not discuss any specific people. Nevertheless, it is the essential link with the empirical data. Indeed, it enables us to classify all the peoples of the world into a relatively small subset of types of political economies. Thus, a basis is established for the analysis of any one of these people, including black American people.

Chapter 3 makes use of the models of Chapter 2 by concentrating on a specific people – black Americans – from their origins on earth. It establishes that from such beginnings to the present day they have undergone at least four historical eras in their development; that is to say, four of the special types of political economies identified in Chapter 2 will systematically organize the essential facts of their historical development. Communal beginnings on the continent of Africa up through the middle of the fifteenth century; slave existence from the middle of the fifteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century; feudal sharecropping existence from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the seventh decade of the twentieth century; wage laboring existence from the middle of the seventh decade of the twentieth century to the present – these exhaust their history. The chapter therefore formulates the proper study of black Americans in terms of these four special types of political economies and the nature of the special conditions peculiar to each. A very important aspect of this formulation concerns the persistence of black people throughout all four eras as a people distinguishable from other peoples.

Black people in the United States today come in all the colors of peoples in all the lands of the earth. In order to identify them one has to invoke the facts of their origin on the African continent, their being hunted and conquered and shipped involuntarily across the Atlantic in the holds of the slavers' ships, their being impressed against their natural will into the generation of slave labor in the Americas, their liberation from slavery and their simultaneous impoundment into a class of sharecropping labor, and finally their freedom from the sharecropping system and their simultaneous capture to perform wage labor.

An important consideration in the special cases of black social reproduction is that they have simulated, in a sequential fashion, all but one of the special cases of political economy which have been empirically observed in world history. Thus, it is our hope that the study of black social reproduction will enhance our understanding of the basic principles of political economies in general.

Chapters 4 to 7 develop detailed analyses of each of the four historical eras in black social reproduction. Chapter 4 describes their origins in Africa. It attempts to isolate the reasons why the European marauders were able to destroy the African communal and other pre-capitalist societies and enslave the victims.

Chapter 5 considers the black slaving operations in Africa and across the Atlantic, as well as the black slave labor system in North America, as major factors in the rise and development of Western European and United States capitalism.

Chapter 6 analyzes the black sharecropping system in the southern United States as an important factor in the accumulation of capital wealth, primarily in the northern United States.

Chapter 7 develops a detailed analysis of the black wage labor system throughout the United States and its essential role in providing massive doses of unpaid labor which are materialized as
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capital wealth in the hands of non-black captains of industry. At the same time, blacks continue to subsist in abject material poverty.

Finally, Chapter 8 attempts to bring together some lessons from the rest of the book to project the future dimensions of black social reproduction.

The book combines a series of methodological tools. It makes use of existence postulates about people, material things, and operational processes which bind the people and the material in ways peculiar to the framework of a particular set of the social reproductive relationships. Certainly, these postulates are quite amenable to empirical refutation. Existing statistical and other observational tools can be invoked in this regard.

We also make use of analytic models explicitly or implicitly stated in Chapter 1. Naturally, some of the more interesting empirical implications of these models are assumed to be true whenever the data to document them are not in hand. The conclusions arrived at on this basis are also subject to empirical refutation.

Finally, we make “novel” interpretations of otherwise widely accepted data. Such interpretations flow naturally from our own analytic models. Much controversy and criticism may be generated by this methodological tactic. Yet, it is precisely such a response that may lead to a revival of interest and study of areas of understanding that heretofore have been closed to further scientific scrutiny by the capitalist academic community.

For those who have an abiding interest in the significance of the black American condition, it is hoped that the work will be found to be of more than passing usefulness.

1 The general nature of political economy

The modern literature produced in mainstream academic institutions has banished the concept of “political economy” into oblivion. Only the so-called radical economists use the concept; but even these rebels exhibit no fundamental differences from their more traditional colleagues.

The concept of “political economy” was used in the pioneering and synthesizing work of the “founding father.” Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations is the first comprehensive treatise which laid the basis for the discipline. Most of the so-called British classical economists from the middle of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century continued to make use of the concept in the Smithian sense to guide their studies.

The publication of Alfred Marshall’s Principles in the last decade of the nineteenth century marked the degeneration of the concept of political economy into the notion of “economics.” This new version of the discipline removed itself from the larger dynamics of fundamental social processes and became a study of “the allocation of scarce resources among alternative uses.” In capitalist society allocation is accomplished through the instrumentality of market institutions. Thus, the central focus of economics shifted to detailed studies of market forces.

Now, it is obvious that one cannot allocate what does not already exist. It therefore follows that the new formulation ignored the problems of creation of the material means of the people’s survival; the creation of the people themselves who are simultaneously subjects, objects, and result of economic activity; the formation and accumulation of material wealth; the transformation of the economy from one form into another; the special roles of
The general nature of political economy

different classes; the role of the political state in maintaining the existing system of political economy; and the nature of impacts of foreign contacts on the domestic economic outcomes.

To be sure, some modicum of effort is given to these topics. However, the human drama is utterly missing. The beginning student becomes overwhelmed with a very sophisticated mathematical and logical apparatus, involving a highly specialized vocabulary, with conclusions stated as precise theorems and laws and principles which must be the envy of the physical scientists.

From the middle of the fourth decade of the twentieth century John Maynard Keynes’s General Theory shifted emphasis from the role of individuals in market transactions to the strategic function of the political state in driving the economy. The new emphasis was now placed on private capital accumulation, stimulated by public expenditures, taxation, and debt-making in a suitably managed monetary environment.

The class basis of capitalist society was ignored in this new paradigm. Each individual was conceived to be part of a group of savers, or investors, or money speculators. Roles overlap, so that an individual could be a member of two groups or of all three groups at any given moment in time. Similarly, the individual could conceivably move in and out of the various groups over time.

Each group, as a whole, was subject to certain mystical psychological tendencies – propensity to save, propensity to invest, propensity to convert assets into money. Operating in conjunction with these restraints, the political state then pursued fiscal and monetary actions designed to bring about certain predetermined economic results. Expanding national production of material goods under conditions of full employment of human and other resources in a regime of stable prices could now be guaranteed by the deliberate actions of the political state. The “New Deal” was a monument to this type of economic reasoning.

In recent years the spectacle of rapidly rising prices, rising unemployment of human and other resources, and stagnating national output of material goods occurring simultaneously has called the Keynesian paradigm into question. But Marshall and Keynes have merged in recent years. The modern academic courses and textbooks now divide up the discipline into “micro” and “macro” analysis. The former is Marshall; the latter is Keynes. And the peculiar merger has come about through a branch of the discipline which calls itself “monetary theory.”

We cannot generate a programme of study of political economy from the current academic tradition of “economics.” We shall try to revert to the classics in order to outline what we believe to be a more fruitful approach toward an understanding of social reality. Our major concern in this work is with black Americans. The traditional view is quite sterile in illuminating the problems of these people. In a more insidious way, the current doctrines have played a not insignificant part in suppressing the aspirations of blacks. Indeed, these doctrines have provided a systematic body of rationalizations which absolve the main enemies of black people of any responsibility for their overt and covert sins. On the other hand, these same rationalizations have placed the onus for the sorry conditions which black people suffer on black people themselves. Explicitly or implicitly, racist doctrines are the results of this body of distortions which pervade the thinking of most Americans and which are skillfully articulated by the educated elite in the land.

In opposition to these views, we proceed to the task of defining what we mean by political economy, so that the remainder of our work will have some measure of systematic guidance. Our formulation will rely heavily on the work of Adam Smith.

The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes. . . .

According therefore, as this produce . . . bears a greater or smaller proportion to the number of those who are to consume it, the nation will be better or worse supplied with all the necessaries and conveniences for which it has occasion.

These two short paragraphs contain the basic outline of Smith's conception of political economy. Three fundamental sets of activities by the people are implied. The annual labor of the people creates the material means of their survival. The annual consumption of the material means of survival creates (keeps alive) the people. Finally, the maintenance of a stable relationship between the number of people and the quantity of the material means of survival made available to them for their personal consumption creates wealth.
The general nature of political economy

Smith was also concerned with the origins and development of the capitalist economic system. The historical material of Book III, as well as his comparisons of mercantile capitalism with the so-called agricultural systems in Book IV, gives an indication of his concern with the dynamics of change from one type of system to another.

The role of the political state was crucial in Smith's formulation. In Book V he postulated the fundamental role of the state as the preservation of private property.

But avarice and ambition in the rich, in the poor the hatred of labour and the love of present ease and enjoyment, are the passions which prompt to invade property, passions much more steady in their operation, and much more universal in their influence. Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality. . . . The affluence of the rich excites the indignation of the poor, who are often both driven by want, and prompted by envy, to invade his possessions. It is only under the shelter of the civil magistrate that the owner of that valuable property ... can sleep a single night in security.

We shall make use of Smith’s conception. However, we shall reinterpet his material in the light of what we have come to know in the more than two centuries which have elapsed since the publication of his book. We shall include in the definition what we believe to be a minimum number of elements, so that we retain some flexibility in its application to the real world. We define the science of political economy as the study of “a human population undergoing the act of social reproduction, over a protracted period of time, under a set of rules promulgated and enforced by a political state, within a bounded geographical domain.”

This definition suggests that there are at least six parameters, taken together as a unity, which form the basis for a complete description of a political economy in the real world. These parameters are (a) the geographical space within which the political economy functions, (b) the human population whose social reproduction is the underlying motive force of the political economy, (c) the institutional mechanisms which are the instrumentalities of social reproduction, (d) the historical period during which the people are being reproduced, (e) the political state which oversees the political economy, and (f) the geographical domains outside of the political economy in question.

The geographical domain

The bounded region on the face of the earth within which the people are reproduced is the material site, the base of operations, of the political economy. The region also sets a physical limit to the potential number of economies which may be functioning at any given time. If, for example, we assume that there is a quantum area of earth space necessary for the existence of a political economy, then the potential number of political economies is the physical dimensions of the earth, divided by such a quantum area. This is a crucial observation. The larger the area encompassed by one or more political economies, the smaller is the actual number of political economies throughout the world relative to the potential number capable of existence.

The pristine earth – land, ocean, atmosphere, rivers, lakes, etc. – is the primordial matter out of which both human people and their material means of survival are created. At a more fundamental level, it is the continuously recurring acts of creation, out of earth matter, of human babies and their food supply that form the necessary activities of every conceivable political economy. As such, the geographical domain sets the physical possibilities for the political economy. The climate, weather patterns, physical topography, ocean access, rivers, minerals, soil chemistry, forests, mountains, animals, plants, etc. – all of these things provide the basis for both quantity and form of human and material resources which can be created within the political economy.

We have witnessed throughout history the activities of some people embarking on missions of conquest, slavery, colonization, economic imperialism in order to appropriate for themselves the geographical domains of others. The Western European countries provide a good case in point. For centuries they plundered the earth and its people for their own benefit. Today they do it in more subtle ways through capitalist economic machinations; so that a good part of the earth’s population remains in material poverty while a relatively small segment of the people of the northern hemisphere subsists in relative material ease.
The general nature of political economy

In any case, the geographical factor is quite important. It is not only the physical space in which people must operate; it is indeed more significantly the material substratum of the people as well as of their means of survival.

The people

The people constitute the key factor in all political economies. They are the major actors, the subjective elements in the social drama. It is their conscious will that enables them to carry out the essential activities of the system.

The predicate of every political economy is labor. The people drive the system by consciously generating labor, by expending their bodies and souls and energies upon the materials — both human and non-human — of the earth. Thus human labor is the critical activity within the political economy.

The people are also, partly, the objective elements of the political economy. One form of their laboring activity operates upon themselves. The act of consuming the material means of their survival is a necessary part of the mechanisms which ensure their continuity as a people over time.

Finally, the people are, partly, the resulting elements of the system of political economy. It is their reproduction which is the ultimate end of the process.

In summary, the people are subjects, objects and results within the political economy. They are the *dramatis personae* in the social dynamic. They consciously perform the essential acts of laboring upon non-human materials as well as upon themselves. The end result is the reproduction of both the material means of their survival and of themselves.

We shall hereafter refer to the people as the human population. As such, the existence of the people is manifested as an organic whole, as a social entity. While the population is made up of individual human beings, nevertheless it is the existence and interconnections of the individual persons as a cohesive group that are of moment. The population must have a long history of social intercourse in the given geographical domain. Each individual member of the group will expire and vanish from the face of the earth anywhere from zero to one hundred years from birth. On the other hand, the human population transcends individual lives and continues to survive for hundreds or even thousands of years. It is this protracted existence as a distinctive population, independent of the individual members who make it up, that defines the people.

An important consideration is that the people must have a common history as a people apart from all other people. They must have reproduced themselves as themselves throughout their common historical existence. This implies a continuous process of yielding up their individual existences to the primacy of family relationships. At this level of their being they merge in sexual union and other interpersonal bondings to generate offspring of their own physical human genre and to maintain their lives and social characteristics from birth to full adulthood.

But in the continuing historical drama, under the imperatives of certain social formations, they may even have to yield up the family mode of existence to the primacy of the clan, or the tribe, or the class, or the nation, or the international community. This, of course, will depend upon the rules under which they nurture and grow and socialize their young into the mysteries of their population group.

Commonly accepted modes of communication, education, religion, literature, art, music, politics, recreation, and all other necessary techniques of transforming new babies into members of a distinctive population are the forces at work here. The history of the people *qua* distinctive people is the study which informs this aspect of the political economy. The unique origin, current status, development, transformation, and final outcome are the essential parameters which provide us with a basis for identifying the people within a political economy.

The existence of a political economy presupposes some quantum of people. Precisely what this number is cannot be determined apart from empirical observations of the real world. Fictional accounts tell us of a "Robinson" political economy. But even this individual-based situation didn't last very long. Man Friday soon appeared on the scene. In any case, short of migration into the Robinsonian world from the outside his economy has no future.

Robinson, Adam-Eve, family, clan, tribe, nation, groups of nations in some sort of federation, international community have all been actually observed or have been created in the imagination.
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In any case, some set of stable interrelations which join the people in a reproductive mode must persist and must actively function from day to day. Moreover, reproduction entails creating the people anew with all of their physical and social characteristics remaining intact. Reproduction also means that the people persist as a living entity beyond the ravages of time. Once we admit of a limit to the life-span of individuals, we must readily postulate a process of procreation, of birthing of new members to replace those who attain the limiting years of life or those who expire from other causes.

A set of institutions that provide for the reproduction of the people, subject to the constraints of the geographical domain in which they operate, must therefore exist.

Institutional mechanisms of social reproduction

Empirical observations over a wide range of political economies throughout the ages suggest emphatically that certain institutional relationships among the members of the population are absolutely necessary. Indeed, each individual member of the population must be created, must be brought into existence for the first time, by already existing members of that same population. Simultaneously, every already existing member — those who directly participate in creating new members as well as all the others — of that population must be maintained in an active, living status.

In order that these events may take place, every last individual member of the population must daily consume, ingest into herself/himself, a set of non-human earth materials called food. This implies that the food must exist in hand prior to its consumption. Once consumed, the food disappears; but each person’s living status is maintained.

The process of consuming the food supply will surely come to an end so soon as that food supply is exhausted. Hence, it follows that there must be a process in daily operation which creates a new stock of food. This is accomplished by the exertion of human effort — the using up of the people’s bodies and souls and energies — upon non-human earth matter. This implies that the people must exist prior to their being used up. Once used up, the people expire; but a new supply of food is created.

Now, neither of these two activities can take place over a long period of time unless they are joined together as a unity. The one uses up the food supply, but does not create food. Food must be produced, therefore, from the other process. Similarly, the latter process uses up the people, but does not create people. The people must be produced, therefore, from the former process. Two unifying activities are implied. One supplies food, from the process which produces food, to the process that uses up food; the other supplies people, from the process which creates people, to the process that uses up people.

Finally, there must be a set of activities which operates periodically to accumulate the “excess” people, or the “excess” food, or both. “Excess” refers to the difference between the quantity produced and the quantity consumed within a relevant time period. This set of activities determines the path of development of the political economy, and therefore links its past to its present and to its future.

These considerations give us a fairly precise way of describing in more detail the fundamental nature of the essential institutional mechanisms which determine the process of social reproduction of the population. We shall refer to these as (a) Internal Labor Process, (b) External Labor Process, (c) Process of Distribution of the human population from the Internal Labor Process to the External Labor Process, (d) Process of Distribution of food from the External Labor Process to the Internal Labor Process, (e) Process of Accumulation of Wealth.

The Internal Labor Process

In every conceivable type of human society the survival and growth of the population depend upon the consumption by the people of a food supply. Day in and day out, with relentless regularity, they must ingest into their bodies a certain quantity of food, without which they would soon succumb. Food is the elixir of life, a special subset of the material means of the people’s survival. It is capable of being transformed by people into human energy. It is indeed the activity of synthesizing the food with their bodily structures — bones, muscles, skin, nerves, glands, blood, flesh — that fuels the
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people with the latent fires that convert them into living agents of labor.

The act of food consumption is the using up, the destruction, of that food supply. Simultaneously, however, this act is also the creation of human energy in the selfsame people who consumed the food. Creative destruction is at play here. Food is destroyed; in a simultaneous sequence, human energy is created. “Transformation” is the key concept. Part of the food which is transformed into human energy may potentially solidify into the bodily structures of the existing members of the population, or into the bodily structures of new additions to the human population. The remaining “free” human energy may be lost to inertia. We shall hereafter refer to this activity as the Internal Labor Process. It is a labor process inasmuch as it is carried out by human agents. It requires the expenditure of human effort, consciously directed by human beings themselves. It is Internal Labor inasmuch as it is performed on the people themselves. The results of that labor therefore inhere in the people, become an essential characteristic of their very being.

That this process is capable of creating new people should be no mystery. Human energy cannot be created independently of the carriers of that energy. Production of human energy in the existing members of the population maintains them in a living status; production of human energies in the form of a baby crop is an essential condition for the continuity of the population beyond the lifetimes of its individual members.

The family is the fundamental unit of activity within the Internal Labor Process. Such a family is conceived to be a social unit, consisting of at least two adult people, of opposite gender, occupying a common household, co-operatively engaged in the daily consumption of a common food supply, and otherwise co-operatively pursuing the maintenance of their lives. Others may be a part of the family structure. Children who issue from the sexual union between the two original adults, other adults, and other children by “adoption” may enter into the family fold in varying numbers. The key condition is that they all share the common household and the common food supply.

In the language of the mathematician the independent variable in the Internal Labor Process is the family’s food supply. Food must be available in the family’s household prior to its consumption. But since food is not produced within the Internal Labor Process, the family’s food supply is determined by conditions outside the Internal Labor Process itself. We must emphasize that these conditions may or may not be determined outside the family. We must keep a distinction here between the family as social organization, as potential agent of Internal Labor, on the one hand; and Internal Labor Process as a set of institutional activities carried out by the family. It is a distinction between subject and predicate, between the agency carrying out the activity and the activity itself.

There is a very important subjective element of the Internal Labor Process. This process cannot function unless the people marshall their will consciously to carry out the act of Internal Labor. This conscious will manifests itself in the “intensity” with which that labor is carried out. The “intensity” factor thus becomes another important independent variable. However, it differs from the food variable in that it is determined inside the Internal Labor Process itself. It is the conscious exercise of the people’s will that is at issue here. It should be noted that in some societies that will may be the free expression of the people. Still, in other societies that will may be bent and coerced and otherwise controlled by outside forces or outside people. Yet, in all cases it is still the conscious acquiescence of the people which establishes the degree of intensity of Internal Labor.

The result to be achieved is the production of a certain quantity of human energy. Human energy produced is therefore the dependent variable. Since human energy is carried by people, we shall assume that the quantity of human energy produced by a family is directly proportional to the number of family members, including currently born babies.

Let us define the intensity of Internal Labor as the ratio of the number of family members to the quantity of food available to them for consumption. Stated another way, the definition of intensity of Internal Labor is the multiplicative inverse of the food consumption per capita. It therefore follows that for any two families with the same quantity of food available, the larger family exerts a greater degree of intensity of Internal Labor. Similarly, for two families with equal number of members, the family with the lesser quantity of food available for consumption exerts a greater degree of intensity of Internal Labor. The upshot of all this is that those families who are blessed with substantial amounts of food...
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on a per capita basis need not exert nearly as much intensity of Internal Labor as those unfortunate families with a pittance of food available to each member.

In summary, it is in the Internal Labor Process that the human population creates itself anew each year. By consuming its food supply it is enabled to maintain the living status of its existing members. But in doing so, it must inevitably create a new baby crop each year. The new babies serve as replacements for those existing members of the population who succumb to death; thus the size of the human population is maintained. In addition, the new babies may also be the basis for growth of the population. Finally, some of these babies may never form a part of the surviving population; they may indeed succumb to forces outside of the Internal Labor Process itself.

Births of babies, nurturing them, amusing them, educating them, politicizing them, mystifying them, moralizing them, socializing them, inculcating into them the mysteries of their peoplehood, rearing them to adulthood—all of these activities are integral parts of the Internal Labor Process.

Internal Labor Process is the beginning ground of the human population. It generates the basis for the surviving population at any given moment in time. It collapses the events of a whole century of population formation into conditions which define the population of the current year. Indeed, the sum total of babies born over the previous one hundred years is the potential population of the current year. Thus, the number of live births during the current year represents the addition to the potential population during the current year. A “law of population production” is therefore embedded in the temporal pattern of annual live births among the various families which make up the human population.

Such a pattern of births can only be known from empirical observations. However, we may still postulate that it can be approximated by two components—a cycle and a time trend. The cycle accounts for the simple replacement of some underlying base year population; the trend accounts for possible annual growth in the potential population.

Babies are born directly into families. The annual total of live births within the Internal Labor Process is therefore the sum total of births within all families. The current distribution of the surviving population among families (denoted by number of members) reflects the surviving residue of the distribution of births. It also reflects the surviving residue of the distribution of human energy produced. Finally, it also reflects the distribution of the quantity of food made available to the various families for their personal consumption. But the surviving population is only a subset of the potential population. The missing component is the number of people who succumb to the ravages of death outside of the Internal Labor Process.

As we have seen, one of the preconditions for the operation of the Internal Labor Process is the existence in the hands of each family of a stock of food. The potential quantity of food in existence within the political economy is the total quantity produced in the current year. The production of the food supply therefore constitutes an important institutional mechanism for social reproduction. We now turn to an examination of the way in which food is produced within the political economy.

The External Labor Process

In all societies throughout the ages the human population must devote some of its time to the production of food. Even in the Garden of Eden, which abounds in the largesse of the deity, poor Adam must spend some time gathering up the fruit. Tilling the soil, fishing the rivers, hunting wild animals, gathering up the fruits of the forests, raising domesticated animals—all of these activities constitute some of the more elementary ways in which humans procure their food supply. Other more elaborate and sophisticated food production activities are possible. Nevertheless, the production of food can be described in a quite general way that applies to all social organizations.

In a fundamental sense the production of food is accomplished by the exertion of human effort against non-human earth matter. The end result is the creation of food, itself a special form of non-human earth matter. What we have here is the using up of human energy, external to the humans themselves, and the simultaneous creation of a food supply. Creative destruction is in operation. Human energies and, consequently, the human carriers of those energies, are destroyed. At the same time, however, a new stock of food is created. In sum, the process is one in which the human
population is transformed into food. This simple activity stands as one of the critical mechanisms for social reproduction.

We shall hereafter refer to this process as the External Labor Process. It is a labor process inasmuch as it is an activity carried out by human people. It is external inasmuch as the people perform the labor activity upon earth matter external to humans. The resulting food produced is thus congealed human External Labor, or what amounts to the same thing, human beings materialized in a special non-human form.

The unit of activity within the External Labor Process differs in different types of social order. In some cases it may involve the entire population upon the virgin land. At the other extreme it may involve one or a few individuals in a business firm. In general, however, the unit of activity is a group, consisting of individuals, working upon the land or upon non-human products of the land, with the conscious aim of creating a food supply.

The process obviously cannot take place without the prior existence of the people, flushed with living energies. But External Labor uses people; it does not create them. Hence, the number of people engaged in External Labor must come from outside the External Labor Process.

The number engaged is the independent variable. However, once involved in the process, nothing can happen unless and until each individual consciously exercises her/his will to produce the food. It is true that the people may be subject to varying degrees of duress; nevertheless, it is still the conscious acquiescence of their will to the tasks at hand that makes External Labor possible.

The conscious exercise of will manifests itself in the “intensity” of External Labor. The “intensity” factor thus becomes a second independent variable in the External Labor Process.

It is obvious that the two independent variables are not independent of each other. Indeed, one is the “number” of people; the other is the conscious will of those same people.

The dependent variable is the quantity of food to be produced. Let us define the intensity of External Labor as the ratio of the quantity of food produced to the number of people directly engaged in producing it. That is to say, intensity of External Labor is food production per capita. It then follows that if the same quantity of food is produced by two different units of External Labor, then the unit with the lesser number of people is subject to a greater degree of intensity of External Labor than the unit with the larger number of people. Similarly, if two different units of External Labor engage the same number of people, then the one which produces the larger quantity of food is subject to a greater degree of intensity of External Labor than the one which produces the smaller quantity of food.

We cannot know what quantity of food will be produced in each unit of External Labor without specific empirical observations. Nevertheless, we can postulate that on the level of the entire political economy, the total quantity of food produced must supply the requirements of the Internal Labor Process. This means that it must be directly proportional to the number of people in the surviving human population. But some of the food must also replace the quantity of the existing stocks used up directly in the production of the current food supply. Finally, some may provide for growth in the existing stocks.

At the level of the unit of External Labor we shall assume that similar circumstances prevail. The distribution of food production among these units closely mirrors the distribution of people engaged in its production. Departures from the mirror image are brought about by the effects of the distribution of intensity of External Labor, as well as the distribution of the rate of growth in food production.

The general law of production of the potential food supply may be conceived to consist of two components – a cycle and a time trend. The cycle will account for the continued annual replacement of some base year stock of food; the trend will account for possible growth over time.

We must emphasize the fact that the External Labor Process not only produces the food supply but it does this by using up human energy. As such, it consumes the human population. External Labor Process is therefore the “killing ground” of the human population. The social reproduction of the human population therefore also depends upon the quantity and intensity of External Labor. The specific toll in human lives exacted by the ravages of External Labor is thus one of the more critical factors which must be derived from our empirical studies.

Internal Labor is the bearning ground of the human population. It creates the human baby crops. Over the course of a century, these babies form the age distribution structure of the potential
human population during the last year of that century. External Labor, on the other hand, is the killing ground of the human population. Over the course of a century, the dead victims form the temporal distribution of the decayed elements of the potential human population. Finally, the combined effect of the two phases of human labor, enshrined in the distributions of the potential population and the decayed population, is the current age distribution of the surviving human population.

The classical literature in political economy concentrated most of its attention on the External Labor Process. It is obviously quite important, but it certainly cannot function for very long unless it is continuously furnished with fresh supplies of laborers, sated with vital human energies. We must therefore proceed to the task of describing the social mechanism which supplies the human agents of External Labor.

Distribution of human population from Internal Labor Process to External Labor Process

Our characterization of the two aspects of human labor indicates their essentially complementary nature. Each one depends upon the other if it is to operate for any length of time. Each produces the specific earth materials which the other uses as an integral part of its activities. At the same time, neither produces the materials which it uses. The unity of Internal Labor and External Labor is therefore a necessary condition for the effective operation of either one singly, or of both together. This implies the existence of a set of social mechanisms to forge that unity.

The unity must take place in two ways. One set of institutions must provide for transferring food from the External Labor Process, where it is created, to the Internal Labor Process, where it is used. Another set of institutions must provide for transferring people from the Internal Labor Process, where they are created, to the External Labor Process, where they are used. We shall refer to these institutional mechanisms as Distribution Processes.

In order that people will in fact leave the Internal Labor Process for the External Labor Process, it is convenient to postulate the existence of a set of forces in the latter process which operates with effective impact to attract the requisite number of people. A little reflection will convince us that such a force is inherent in the number of people actually performing External Labor.

We must recall that External Labor cannot begin without a certain number of people already on hand. As the labor activity proceeds, the laboring people are simultaneously being used up. As a matter of fact, we can measure the inherent period in the cycle of External Labor by the interval of time it takes for the initial stock of people to reduce down to zero. The attractive force of the External Labor Process can therefore be assumed to be inversely proportional to the number of people generating External Labor at a given point in time. Put another way, the magnitude of the attractive force of External Labor upon the people in the Internal Labor Process is directly proportional to the time expired in the cycle of External Labor. This is a necessary condition for maintaining the level and continuity of External Labor.

At the same time, the level of resistance of the people within the Internal Labor Process to the attractions of External Labor must be sufficiently weak so as to be overcome. We shall argue that the extent of the resistance within the Internal Labor Process is directly proportional to the quantity of food within the Internal Labor Process.

We may recall that the Internal Labor Process cannot begin unless there is already on hand a certain stock of food. The inherent period in the cycle of Internal Labor is measured by the interval of time it takes for the initial stock of food to reduce down to zero. In other words, the magnitude of the resistance of the people within the Internal Labor Process to the forces of attraction from the External Labor Process is indirectly proportional to the time expired in the cycle of Internal Labor. That is to say, resistance is greatest at the start of the cycle of Internal Labor, when the initial stock of food is untouched; resistance is totally collapsed at the end of the Internal Labor period, when the initial stock of food has been completely used up.

To describe these events in terms of attractive forces and resisting forces gives an air of mechanical unreality to the underlying dynamics of what is actually taking place. The general character of these forces is manifested in the concept of “property.” This concept gives rise at once to the notion that people must be categorized in at least two distinct roles – those who own the Internal Labor Process and those who own the External Labor Process.
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Forces of attraction and repulsion are then nothing more than special forms in which human will is exercised in the transfer of people from the Internal Labor Process to the External Labor Process. It is indeed the people who own the External Labor Process who actively seek out and otherwise induce, coerce, cajole, and entice people to enter on External Labor. Similarly, it is the people who own the Internal Labor Process who must consciously acquiesce to their opposite colleagues and thereby actually provide the requisite number of live bodies required by the External Labor Process.

On a more fundamental level, the Process of Distribution of the people from the Internal Labor Process to the External Labor Process is the social mechanism which provides for the ceding of property in the human person by those who own the Internal Labor Process. At the same time, it is also the acquisition of proprietorship over human persons by those who own the External Labor Process. The same property — a certain number of people, who have been ceded by one group — is acquired by another group. In a dialectical sense, property rights in the people have been abrogated; simultaneously, property rights in the people have been re instituted. This is the fundamental role of the Process of Distribution of people from the Internal Labor Process to the External Labor Process.

Distribution of food from External Labor Process to Internal Labor Process

We now know that the other link in joining the two labor processes together is a social mechanism which transfers food from the External Labor Process, in which it is created, to the Internal Labor Process, in which it is used. We shall postulate the existence of a set of forces in the latter process which operates to attract the requisite quantity of food. We also assume that such a force is inherent in the quantity of food actually being consumed in the Internal Labor Process.

As Internal Labor proceeds, the initial stock of food which it must have on hand to start the operations is simultaneously being used up. A measure of the inherent period in the cycle of Internal Labor is the interval of time it takes for the initial stock of food to reduce down to zero. The attractive force of Internal Labor can therefore be assumed to be inversely proportional to the quantity of food effectively undergoing Internal Labor at a given moment in time. Put another way, the attractive force is directly proportional to the time expired in the cycle of Internal Labor. This is a necessary condition for maintaining the level and continuity of Internal Labor.

At the same time, the level of resistance of the food within the External Labor Process to the attractions of Internal Labor must be sufficiently weakened so as to be overcome. We shall argue that the extent of the resistance within the External Labor Process is directly proportional to the number of people performing External Labor.

We must recall that External Labor cannot begin unless there is on hand a certain initial number of people. The inherent period within which such labor takes place is measured by the interval of time it takes for the initial stock of people to reduce down to zero. In other words, the magnitude of the resistance of food within the External Labor Process to the forces of attraction of the Internal Labor Process is indirectly proportional to the time expired in the cycle of External Labor. That is to say, resistance is greatest at the start of the cycle of External Labor, when the initial number of people is untouched; resistance totally collapses at the end of the cycle of External Labor, when the initial number of people has been totally used up.

These attracting and resisting forces are manifestations of two categories of people consciously interacting under property relationships. It is the people who own the Internal Labor Process who consciously offer the inducements to get possession of the food supply. At the same time, it is the people who own the External Labor Process whose resistance must be overcome. What we have here is fundamentally the institutional norms under which those who own the External Labor Process cede their property rights in food. At the same time, those who own the Internal Labor Process acquire property rights in food.

The terms of the cession and acquisition of property are such that the underlying forces of attraction and resistance must be equal in some sense. This must be so inasmuch as it is precisely the same food which has been ceded by one group of people and acquired by another group. We also have here the dialectical
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process of abrogation of property rights in food; simultaneously, property rights in the same food have been reinstated. This is the fundamental role of the Process of Distribution of food from the External Labor Process to the Internal Labor Process.

The two distribution processes, functioning simultaneously, lay the basis for the unity of the two labor processes. As such, most of the conditions for the perpetual generation of labor are in hand. However, the conditions established thus far tell us how the labor processes can carry out, in ever recurring cycles, a set of activities at some pre-established level and intensity. Nothing has been said about the possibility of moving beyond the levels of the initial cycle.

At the end of each cycle of labor, certain results ensue. A certain number of people has been produced in the Internal Labor Process; at the same time another number of people has been used up in the External Labor Process. Similarly, a certain quantity of food has been produced in the External Labor Process; at the same time another quantity of food has been used up in the Internal Labor Process. As a consequence, there is some “excess” (positive, negative, or zero) of people and food over and beyond their initial levels. These excesses, in conjunction with their initial stocks, must be put back into the same relationships which define the mechanisms of social reproduction within the political economy.

The specific quantities of these “excesses,” and the peculiar way in which they are recombined to reproduce the defining characteristics of the political economy are the roles of the Process of Accumulation of Wealth.

Process of Accumulation of Wealth

The fact that wealth pervades all manner of human society gives it a sort of intuitive understanding by practically everyone. Its presence is highly visible in the ostentatious display of ownership and consumption of material goods by those whom we think of as being wealthy. In contrast, the miserable and depraved conditions of those who are without it manifest its opposite in poverty. Thus, every schoolchild knows at once who is wealthy and who is poor. By inference, wealth comes to be known by its visible effects.

Yet, a general definition of wealth is quite missing from the literature of political economy. It is usually associated with non-human earth materials – money, houses, factories, silks, precious metals, animal herds, stores of consumables, etc. On occasion, it is associated with persons in the form of slaves.

We shall postulate in this work that wealth is in essence “the material synthesis of the human population and its food supply, bound together in a combined producing and consuming mode, in such a way as to preserve the characteristics of the political economy in which it is created.”

It is a “social” concept, inasmuch as its function is indelibly tied to the very nature of the political economy. It is the key variable in defining the rules of the game.

At this stage of generality we cannot specify the exact form of the synthesis. Nevertheless, the possibilities are limited in types, if not in variety of actual forms. Since it is a synthesis of the human population and its food supply, the general form the synthesis takes has to be a combination of its elements – human population and food. Now, there are four general forms possible on the basis of such a combination – (a) a simple collection of the human population and its food supply, (b) the human population only, (c) the food supply only, and (d) a combination of the human population and the food supply in a form that is distinct from any of the two elements – human population, food – of the synthesis.

The last form mentioned above is quite interesting. It has the potential for distinguishing a wide variety of sub-forms. Four such sub-forms are readily identified – (1) both human-like and food-like, (2) human-like only, (3) food-like only, (4) neither human-like nor food-like. We have apparently opened up a Pandora’s box. Nevertheless, once we recall that there is one dominant form that defines the characteristics of the political economy, the problem becomes more manageable.

The “synthesis” may be conceived of as a quantitative concept, inasmuch as “quantities” of the elements enter into its definition. On the other hand, the synthesis is a qualitative concept, inasmuch as it has a specific material form. We shall postulate in this work that the qualitative aspect – the specific form it assumes – is strictly a function of the ratio of the quantities of the elements which go to make it up. In other words, it is the long-term stable quantitative relationship between the human population and its food supply which defines the form of wealth in the political economy.
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The quantitative magnitude of the elements of wealth springs from the resulting effects of the two labor processes and the two distribution processes.

Internal and External Labor, once joined, are two different phases of the same activity. One phase is internally directed onto the human population itself; the other phase is directed outside of the human population onto the earth. The single labor activity manifested in two opposing, but complementary, phases - Internal and External - is indeed the pulsating heartbeat of the human population in its continuous quest for survival. External Labor produces the non-human material means of the people’s survival. Internal Labor uses these materials to create the people. Both phases of the laboring activity are generated by the same human population. The common, but alternating, magnitude of each labor phase is the effort required to burst asunder the shackles of property relations which bind the people to their food supply.

The two Distribution Processes operate as a unity to bind the people to their food supply in a specific way. One process dictates the conditions under which they may have the opportunity to produce their food supply; the other process dictates the quantity of food the people may receive for their personal consumption. The binding force represented by the unity of these two distribution processes is an indication of the form of property relations endemic to the system of political economy. It is precisely this force which the two labor processes attempt to destroy, because they establish impediments to the people’s ability to freely produce and consume their food supply.

The quantity of food produced is a measure of the quantity of input of the External Labor Process. The quantity of food distributed to the Internal Labor Process is a measure of the output of the External Labor Process. The difference between the two is potentially the gross accumulation of External Labor in the form of food.

Similarly, the quantity of the population produced is a measure of input of the Internal Labor Process. The number of people distributed to the External Labor Process is a measure of the output of the Internal Labor Process. The difference between the two is potentially the gross accumulation of Internal Labor in the form of people.

Wealth Accumulation, first and foremost, requires the actual success in generating gross accumulations of Internal and External Labor. Secondly, and of signal importance, a certain portion of the accumulated Internal Labor must be joined with a certain portion of accumulated External Labor in the precise way in which the initial stocks of food and people were distributed to their respective labor processes. This second act is the reproduction of the two distribution processes. Thus, the conditions for reproduction of the two labor processes are set. In this way, the Accumulation of Wealth insures the continuity of the same type of political economy into the future.

It must be emphasized that Wealth Accumulation is not done in the abstract. Indeed, it must be carried out by the exercise of the conscious will of people acting in the role of wealth accumulators. These wealth owners have the onus of preserving the form of their wealth while, at the same time, striving to increase its magnitude. Just as important, is the necessity for continuous control over the Wealth Accumulation Process by the wealth owners. Hence, the wealth relationships manifested in the operation of the two labor processes and the two distribution processes must be ever repeated again and again for prolonged periods of time, in such a way that the form of wealth is preserved and the wealth owners are reproduced as wealth owners.

The Wealth Accumulation Process is the creative activity which reproduces the system of political economy. But the system qua system has to be managed. The rules of the game must be abided by. And the power to monitor the behavior of the active agents and to enforce the rules of distribution, labor, and wealth accumulation must reside in some institution within the system of political economy. Indeed, such an institution is the Political State.

The Political State

The Political State is a very important institution which operates in all political economies. It is the institution charged with the function of establishing and enforcing the rules of operation of the political economy. Its power is absolute over all the human members of the population. It garners unto itself a monopoly of force and violence to be used as its own dictates demand.

As an institution it must function in compliance with the will of
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human agents. Its primary function is to protect the property rights of members of the population in the ownership of the material elements of the society. Thus, it must issue rules which legitimize the operations of the two labor processes, the two distribution processes, and the wealth accumulating process.

To carry out its mission it must organize and use resources, both people as well as food. But it must function within the very rules it establishes, while at the same time standing above these rules as final arbiter in matters under dispute. It is easy to infer that the organizational apparatus (government bureaucracy) through which it functions will simulate the activities of the two labor processes, the two distribution processes, and the wealth accumulating process.

Since it is the main instrument for insuring the continued reproduction of wealth in its characteristic form, it may be viewed as wealth personified. Put another way, those who control this institution, as distinct from those who function within it, are the personifications of wealth. The state, therefore, may be viewed as the institution which impresses the binding force upon the system. It is the synthesizing agent which keeps the two labor processes joined together in opposing, but complementary, roles. It thus insures that the system functions as a living organism. The extent of the binding force is to be sought in the enforcement of the rules of distribution.

The specific character of the state and the degree of complexity with which it organizes an apparatus (government bureaucracy) to carry out its mission are both determined by the specific type of society over which it presides.

The outside world

It is not enough to peek inside a given political economy in isolation from the world context in which it functions. It certainly influences the outcomes of world events and, in turn, is influenced by the geographic domains outside its own borders. The extent of these joint influences depends upon the degree to which the political economy in question is in active contacts with its outside neighbors. Peaceable interactions through trade or cultural exchanges may characterize the nature of the outside influences. On the other hand,

there may be warlike intercourse such as conquest, colonization, enslavement, economic imperialism, etc., which are also possible. In any event, any or all of these connections will have a decisive effect on the operations and outcomes of the political economy.

Finally, there remains the possibility that one or a few outside political economies monopolize the overwhelming part of the earth's surface as their peculiar geographic domain. This means that the space available to the economy in question becomes somewhat restricted. Furthermore, the impacts of the outside economies on the oxygen in the atmosphere, on the quantity of sunlight reaching the earth's surface, on the quantity and quality of rainfall, on the purity of the ocean fisheries, etc., could be devastating.

The concept of time in political economies

All political economies are suffused with human labor. As an activity, labor takes place over an interval of time; it has a specific duration. But human labor has two forms, two essentially connected phases – Internal and External. The unified operation of these two sequentially connected phases of the same activity implies an inherent labor period. Within such a period both phases of labor, both distribution processes which unite them, and the Wealth Accumulation Process which restarts the cycle of reproduction are all consummated at some standard quantum of operations. The notion of time as a repetitive cycle of labor is the concept which corresponds to this type of event. This is the notion of "periodic time."

Once the cycle of reproduction is started, another concept of time emerges. This is the passage of days, or years, or decades, or centuries during which the nature of the social reproductive process undergoes no qualitative change, although it may undergo quantitative change. During such an interval of time the people are reproduced as the same genre from which they sprang at the beginning of the interval; the institutions of social reproduction function precisely the same way throughout the interval; and the political state maintains its basic characteristics. These events define the concept of "historical time."

Still another concept of time is associated with the clock or calendar, in so far as it is commonly designated and recognized by
The general nature of political economy

people in all geographical domains of the earth. This is the concept of "real time." It is indeed the barometer of correspondence between events in a particular political economy and all the others outside its geographic area.

Real time is obviously the most general concept. Historical time is applicable to all people in every geographic domain experiencing the same type of political economy. Periodic time is applicable to one human population within a given geographic domain. What is important in making these distinctions is that at a particular moment in real time, people in different geographic domains may be undergoing quite different historical epochs. It is also possible that people in different geographic domains who are experiencing the same historical epoch may have quite different periodic times in the generation of their labor.

As cases in point, on May 1, 1982 the United States and the Soviet Union were undergoing different historical epochs; the former was in a capitalist era, while the latter was in a socialist era. Similarly, on that date the two geographically distinct peoples of Great Britain and of Japan were both existing in a capitalist epoch, but were apparently subject to different periodicities in their labor cycles. The Japanese would seem to have a more quickened pace in the completion of the two phases of their labor cycle.

These temporal distinctions will prove to be rather important when we try to observe events in the real world. In any case, they should be appreciated when studying the black condition in the United States. They will help us to unravel what appears to be an otherwise complex pattern of economic development of these blacks as they traversed the ocean sea and survived within the bowels of the larger United States political economies as a distinctive people under the historical epochs of slavery, sharecropping, and wage laboring.

Political economies in the real world

The description which we have thus far given of the general nature of political economy is just that — very general indeed. Nowhere in the world today, nor in the past, can one empirically identify a political economy which exhibits these descriptive features in an obvious way. The reason for this is quite simple; principles of