CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

General Editor: ANTHONY GIDDENS

This series aims to create a forum for debate between different theoretical and philosophical traditions in the social sciences. As well as covering broad schools of thought, the series will also concentrate upon the work of particular thinkers whose ideas have had a major impact on social science (these books appear under the sub-series title of 'Theoretical Traditions in the Social Sciences'). The series is not limited to abstract theoretical discussion – it will also include more substantive works on contemporary capitalism, the state, politics and other subject areas.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

General Editor: ANTHONY GIDDENS

Published titles

Tony Bilton, Kevin Bonnett, Philip Jones, Ken Sheard, Michelle Stanworth and Andrew Webster, *Introductory Sociology*
Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*
Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory*
Ali Rattansi, *Marx and the Division of Labour*
Gerry Rose, *Deciphering Sociological Research*
Steve Taylor, *Durkheim and the Study of Suicide*
John Urry, *The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies*

Forthcoming titles

Martin Albrow, *Weber and the Construction of Social Theory*
Clive Ashworth, Chris Dandeker and Terry Johnson, *Theoretical Sociology*
David Brown and Michael Harrison, *Industrial Sociology*
Simon Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology*
Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (intro. by Steven Lukes)
Boris Frankel, *The Modern State*
Anthony Giddens, *Between Capitalism and Socialism*
Anthony Giddens, *Sociology: A Brief but Critical Introduction*
David Held, *Bureaucracy, Democracy and Socialism*
Geoffrey Ingham, *Capitalism Divided*
Jorge Larraín, *Marxism and Ideology*
Claus Offe, *Structural Problems of the Capitalist State*
John Scott, *The Development of the British Upper Class*
John B. Thompson and David Held (eds), *Habermas: Critical Debates*

Theoretical Traditions in the Social Sciences

Published title

Barry Barnes, T. S. Kuhn and Social Science

Forthcoming titles

Ted Benton, *Althusser and the Althusserians*
David Bloor, *Wittgenstein and Social Science*
Chris Bryant, *Positivism in Social Theory*
John Forrester, *Jacques Lacan*
John Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*
Athar Hussain, *Foucault*
Bob Jessop, *Nicos Poulantzas*
Julian Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*
James Schmidt, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Social Theory*
Dennis Smith, *Barrington Moore and Historical Sociology*
Robin Williams, *Erving Goffman*

Marx and the Division of Labour

Ali Rattansi

Lecturer in Sociology

University of Leicester School of Education

M

© Ali Rattansi 1982

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1982 978-0-333-28555-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission.

First published 1982 by

THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD

London and Basingstoke

Companies and representatives throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-28556-5 ISBN 978-1-349-16829-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-16829-3

Typeset in 10/12pt Times by

ILLUSTRATED ARTS

The paperback edition of this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

For my parents

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi

PART I 'DIVISION OF LABOUR' BEFORE MARX: MATERIALS FOR A HISTORY

1 Concepts of Division of Labour	3
2 Classical Greece: The Division of Labour as Justice	5
3 Prelude to the Enlightenment	11
4 The Scottish Inquiry: The Division of Labour and Modes of Subsistence	15
5 Hegel	27
6 The Early Socialists	32
7 The Deskilling of Labour and the Factory System: Ure and Babbage	42

PART II MARX AND THE DIVISION OF LABOUR: THE EARLY WRITINGS

1 The Sources of Marxian Theory	49
2 Marx and the Abolition of the Division of Labour: Two Views or One?	51
3 A Periodisation of Marx's Views on the Division of Labour	59
4 Marx's Early Writings: The Prelude to 1844	60
5 <i>The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844</i>	67
6 The Emergence of Historical Materialism, 1845–6: A New Problematic?	72
7 <i>The German Ideology</i>	77

viii *Contents*

PART III MARX AND THE DIVISION OF LABOUR:
THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

1	A Marxian Eschatology?	89
2	<i>The Poverty of Philosophy</i> (1847)	91
3	Economic and Political Writings 1848–56	99
4	The Young and the Mature Marx: The Transition from 'Market' to 'Production'	109
5	The 1857 <i>Introduction</i> : The Problem of Production in General	116
6	Division of Labour and the Theory of Surplus Value	120

PART IV MARX AND THE DIVISION OF LABOUR:
THE ANALYSIS IN 'CAPITAL'

1	Production in General, the Labour Process and the Division of Labour	125
2	Large-Scale Production and the Duality of the Capitalist Production Process	136
3	The Capitalist Transformation of the Division of Labour	143

PART V THE ABOLITION OF THE DIVISION OF LABOUR?
MARX'S MATURE VIEW REAPPRAISED

1	The Meaning of the Abolition of the Division of Labour in the Mature Texts	163
2	The Socialism of the Mature Marx: Some Problems	180

	<i>Notes and References</i>	199
	<i>Bibliography</i>	225
	<i>Index</i>	235

Acknowledgements

This book is a condensed and revised version of a Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Cambridge in 1978. I am greatly indebted to Anthony Giddens for supervising the original work and for his continuing encouragement and guidance. I have also learnt much from other friends, and for giving so generously of their time, and for sharing their ideas with me, I would especially like to thank Mehmet Dikerdem, Norman Geras, John Hoffman, Terry Johnson, Gavin Mackenzie, Graham Murdock, Doug Smith, Hillel Steiner, Dominic Strinati and Sallie Westwood, to whom I owe much more besides. I am also very grateful to Gerry Bernbaum for his encouragement and support and to Dorothy Brydges for converting a series of illegible manuscripts into impeccable typescripts.

January 1981

M.A.R.

Introduction

This book is primarily about Marx's theorisation of the division of labour, and his analysis of its historical forms. Despite the recent growth of Marx scholarship of a very high order, a general resurgence of interest in Marxist ideas and, more specifically, something of a rediscovery of the concept of division of labour itself, this subject has not in fact received adequate treatment. I hope that this book will therefore rectify a notable anomaly in the secondary literature on Marx. And although this is a point that will obviously emerge in the pages to come, it is worth remarking at this stage that notwithstanding the absence of detailed discussions by commentators on Marx's thought, the concept of division of labour does play a very significant role in his work and merits the extended treatment I have sought to provide in this work.

However, the discussion of Marx presented here is not intended as a simple exercise in exegesis and synthesis, a pulling together of quotations to yield a unified, transparent discourse; recent debates have decisively established the existence of important transformations in Marx's thinking as well as the radically unfinished nature of his intellectual project. Although controversy continues to rage over the precise character of these changes and absences, it is clear that they can no longer be glossed over and I hope to show that this is as much the case for his conceptualisation of the division of labour as it is for other elements of his discourse. Thus I have endeavoured to document important discontinuities and ambiguities in his theorisation, although not without attention to some important recurrences. In addition, I have attempted to indicate the existence of serious limitations in Marx's views which continue to bedevil and hamper contemporary Marxist discussions of the division of labour.

This is particularly the case when the analysis of the division of labour is considered in relation to the closely implicated subject of exchange, a theme I shall remark upon in more detail in this introduction. Before doing so, however, it is appropriate to add an explanation concerning the mode of entry into the central discussion of Marx and the division of labour.

I have chosen to analyse Marx's conception of the division of labour through a consideration of one significant interpretational issue: the idea of the abolition of the division of labour. That Marx believed throughout his life in the necessity and possibility of the abolition of the division of labour *tout court* is taken as a cardinal principle in two rather different traditions of Marx interpretation, one largely hostile and the other mainly sympathetic to Marx. Both rely primarily upon accentuating relatively unambiguous propositions in his early works, for example the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*, where Marx insists upon the complete dissolution of the division of labour as a central organising principle for future society. The first school uses these statements to demonstrate the essentially utopian, indeed religious nature of Marxian socialism and thus to discredit the whole movement. The second, sometimes forged in opposition to and in justified criticism of the bureaucratic brutality of the Soviet Union, deploys Marx's early pronouncements to hold out what it sees as a humane and libertarian vision still capable of generating political commitment, although rendering Marxism vulnerable to the charge of utopianism. Ironically, neither in scholarly nor in political discussion has the question of Marx's continuing belief in the abolition of the division of labour been given any serious, sustained treatment. I have therefore sought to organise much of my own discussion around this issue, and I have attempted to secure the thesis that Marx's mature thought on this subject cannot be assimilated to the romantic, almost visionary passages to be found in some of the early writings. At the same time, the book incorporates a general interpretation of Marx's intellectual development which is employed to explain the transformation in his views on the abolition of the division of labour.

No interpretation of Marx can hope to be definitive. It is to be expected that the thesis I am advancing will generate debate and criticism, although if it establishes the necessity for a serious discussion of what Marxian socialism entails, and if it undermines the

strongly held but crippling view that such discussions are utopian, that they should be postponed until some more appropriate future time, then this book will have fulfilled some of the author's primary intentions. Those Marxists who are convinced by the interpretation of Marx offered here will be able to shed a variety of beliefs which some of them have long been uncomfortable about defending, while those hostile to Marx will, I hope, find it more difficult to caricature and dismiss his thought as essentially eschatological.

This is an appropriate point at which to say something about the vexed question of the relationship between Marx and Engels. For a long time now opinion has been divided about the precise nature of the convergences and disagreements – overt or implicit – between the two collaborators.¹ However, it is my belief that in matters of historical, social and economic analysis there are no differences between Marx and Engels fundamental enough to necessitate separate treatment in a book on their conception of the division of labour. Thus, while I have written primarily about Marx, I have often referred to works by Engels either for clarification or for additional material where this has been necessary. On the other hand, I have not hesitated in pointing to a significant discursive divergence between the two authors on the question of the abolition of scarcity in their mature texts.

Historically, discussions of the division of labour have almost always been tied to analyses of exchange, and Marx's discourse is no exception. The idea of the abolition of the division of labour in his thought is closely allied to the idea of the elimination of relations of exchange and the production of commodities, and quite properly forms an important element of this book. In this context I have tried to secure three main theses: first, that Marx continued to espouse throughout his life a belief in the necessity and possibility of the abolition of exchange relations; second, that in so far as much of Marx's argument here rests upon presuppositions concerning the abolition of scarcity, his thought must be judged unsatisfactory; and third, that the experience of 'state socialist' societies is acutely relevant here and further reinforces the theorem that Marx's views on the abolition of exchange relations and commodity production stand in need of revision.

The last of these propositions is liable to prove especially contentious and the form of argument which sustains it merits some preliminary elaboration. While there are of course several different

standpoints both within and outside Marxism concerning the relevance of existing state socialist systems for the validity of Marx's work, there are three – often combined in a single discourse – which my discussion particularly seeks to undermine. One tends to regard analyses of exchange relations and the market in state socialist societies as essentially technical matters best left to specialist economists; a second takes the view that because the origins of these social formations lie in conditions far removed from those envisaged by Marx, nothing that happens in, say, eastern Europe, carries any significance for the substantive propositions embodied in his vision of socialism; the third suggests that only a comprehensive implementation of Marx's (unrevised) vision will liberate these societies, although some changes, especially the abolition of relations of exchange and the division of labour, will have to await the further development of the forces of production. Each of these propositions contains more than a grain of truth, but each if adopted as it stands is highly misleading and constitutes an obstacle to the development of Marxist thought. Again, my intention in the last section of the book is to open up this area for serious discussion away from the forum of specialised economics and Soviet studies journals on the one hand, and the dogma of Marxist political pamphleteering on the other.

The exploration of Marx's theorisation of the division of labour is preceded by a brief consideration of pre-Marxian conceptions. I cannot emphasise too strongly that this first section does not attempt to provide a comprehensive history of concepts of division of labour before Marx; it is merely an outline in which I have tried to set out some of the main developments which together comprise the intellectual backdrop against which Marx's own theorisation must be understood. The account I offer also suffers from other limitations which can only be remedied by another sort of project: it necessarily contains little specification of the social and political conditions of existence of differing conceptions of the division of labour and it gives to individual authors a privileged status which a more theoretical history might be inclined to deny. My purpose in providing these 'materials for a history', which is all they are, is two-fold: to rescue them from the obscurity of specialist papers which only consider special aspects of the subject, and to detach them from histories of economic thought which usually fail to provide connected discussions of differing conceptions of the division of labour and, moreover, unduly restrict the discourse to so-called

'economic' relevance. In contrast I have attempted to demonstrate the interpenetration of 'division of labour' with much broader themes, especially those of forms of property, the determination and historical evolution of successive socio-economic formations, and conceptions of the 'just' social order. Inevitably, this has led to selective emphases which to some extent are the obverse of those found in the standard histories of economic thought: for example, the account offered here contains little on conceptions of productive and unproductive labour, which a more comprehensive study would need to elucidate.

I have not thought it appropriate in this book to discuss recent analyses of the capitalist division of labour and labour process in any detail.² Much of the research being undertaken in this area is of exceptional interest, but to have given it the consideration it merits would have meant writing an additional book. Nevertheless, two sets of remarks are perhaps in order here. Note, first, the endemic confusion in the usage of 'division of labour' in these texts: although it has become obligatory to distinguish between the 'technical' and the 'social' division of labour, the meaning of these concepts varies considerably between texts, while the relationship between 'division of labour' and other relevant concepts, such as 'relations of production' and 'mode of production', is rarely clarified.³ Second, as Burawoy has pointed out, there has been a tendency in this type of research to operate with a theorisation in which the essence of the capital relationship permeates the entire social formation, in turn producing misleadingly reductionist forms of analysis.⁴ *Marx and the Division of Labour* will, I hope, serve to remedy both types of discursive limitation: the first, because it specifies some of the confusions underlying Marx's own conceptualisation of the division of labour and thus lays bare the roots of many contemporary obscurities; the second, because the book documents the existence of an alternative, non-reductionist discourse in the original texts, and which Marx himself deploys in his mature analysis of the division of labour and its historical forms.

Note to the reader. Although the sections within each part of the book begin on fresh pages, they are not separate chapters but part of a more interconnected argument and should be read as such.