

Title: A Value-Oriented distinction between Productive and unproductive labour

Author: Sergio Cámara Izquierdo: Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Abstract

The distinction between productive and unproductive labour is one of the most controversial aspects of the labour theory of value. Proof of it, it is the prolific and continuing literature on the subject in the last decades. In spite of this, the debate is still inconclusive and the views on the distinction vary considerably. In this paper, we offer a new “position” in this distinction, using two opposing approaches to the matter, one defended by Shaikh and Tonak and the other by Laibman. The first authors ground their argument in the concept of the productive labour in general and support the need for an “extensive” classification of unproductive labour. On the other hand, Laibman finds that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour is ill-founded, so the distinction should be abandoned. However different both approaches may seem, we argue that both are founded on a use-value criterion, one to support the distinction and one to reject it. This criterion, which relies heavily on features non-specific to the capitalist mode of production, is, in our opinion, inappropriate for the analysis. In contrast, we offer a distinction between productive and unproductive labour based on criteria specifically capitalist. In this approach, the relevance of the analysis is placed in the production of value rather than in the production of use-value. As a conclusion, we draw some implications of this approach for the empirical investigation of the capitalist economies