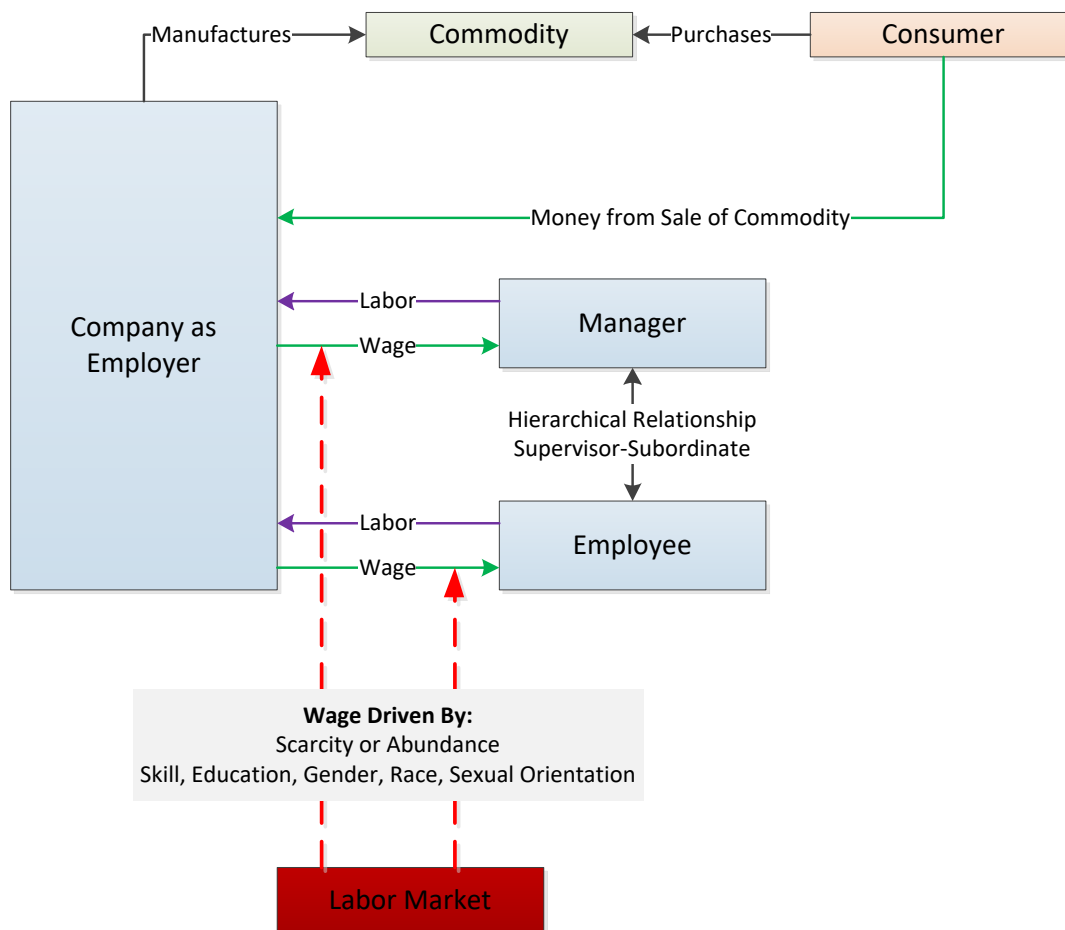


Counter-Value: A Necessary Change from Wage
A Synopsis
Marc Clifton, 2023-09-25

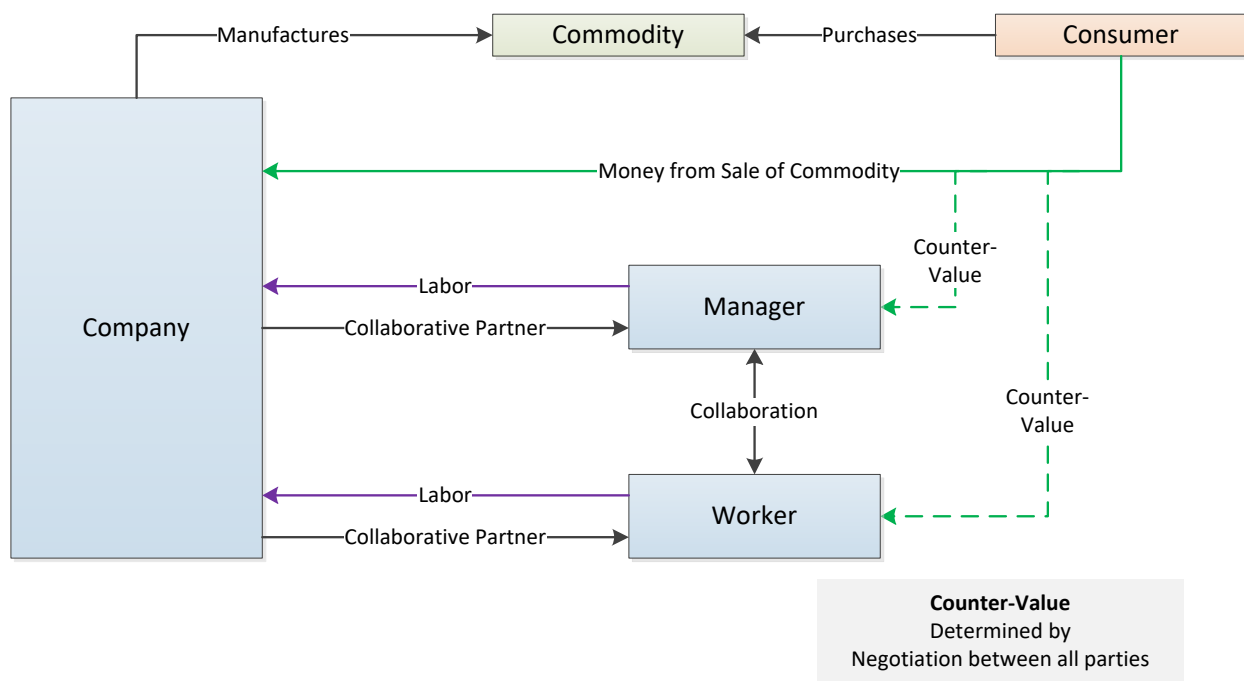
The worker and their relationship to work has changed over time, progressing from slavery to serfdom to the employer-employee hierarchical model we see in capitalism. Similarly, the wage relationship the worker has with their 'employer' has changed as well, from the minimal needs for life and reproduction in slave-labor to a barter system under serfdom and finally arriving at a labor-as-a-commodity wage model in modern day capitalism.ⁱ As the worker relationship and wage relationship progressed, (due in part to the Rights Domain addressing quality of life and human dignity or by changes made by corporations themselves, often as a result of numerous violent revolts throughout historyⁱⁱ and usually now expressed more peacefully in the form of strikes and orchestrated walk-outsⁱⁱⁱ) the rights and freedoms of the worker have also improved. Workers today often have the opportunity for promotions, job/career change, and to acquire further education, sometimes paid for by their employer. Yet throughout the history of the employer and worker-wage relationship, people (whether the slave, CEO, or blue-collar worker) are almost exclusively working 'for themselves' – meaning that they are working first and foremost to meet their own needs, regardless of how their work appears to benefit others in society.^{iv}

Example of the current wage model:



The next significant change will occur when the employer-employee relationship is replaced 1) with a collaborative partnership between management and worker and 2) the wage-for-labor relationship is changed to a counter-value agreement^v. The terms ‘employer’ and ‘employee’ will become obsolete, to be replaced perhaps with the term ‘collaborator.’^{vi} Second, the current model of a wage for one’s labor will be replaced by a negotiated ‘counter-value’ for one’s contribution to the labor (physical and spiritual -- i.e., thinking^{vii}) required in the production of a commodity. (Here we are talking about commodities produced by the Economic Domain, not the Spiritual-Cultural Domain and what is produced there, such as books, art, music, plays, lesson plans, sermons, etc. In the Spiritual-Cultural Domain, the worker receives remuneration through the free appreciation by society of they produce.^{viii}) Labor markets will be a thing of the past. The negotiation of the counter-value will be mandated by the Rights Domain^{ix} such that the worker negotiates, based on their specific needs and desires, a share of profit from the sale of the commodity they help to produce. For a company with thousands of workers, this negotiation might be accomplished through representatives, similar but not the same as current labor unions.^x The share of profit does not mean 100% of profit is distributed as counter-value, as excess capital is returned to the Spiritual-Cultural Domain as free gifts.^{xi}

Example of the counter-value model:



Counter-value is not received as a share of the actual *commodity* that the worker produces – after all, the worker may not have need for such a commodity, and it is also totally unrealistic in today’s manufacturing of automobiles, satellites, medical equipment, etc. Instead, counter-value is received as money, enabling the worker to exchange money for the commodities needed. How is this then different from a wage? In the wage model, labor is treated as a commodity (hence labor ‘markets’), or, looking at it from the other direction, money, when given as compensation for labor, turns the labor into a commodity. Money should only be used in the purchase of commodities^{xii}. A counter-value is instead a negotiated share of the proceeds (which is in the form of money) *from the sale of commodities*. The money received as counter-value now represents the true relationship of the profit (commodity price

minus expenses) and that of the share the worker receives, rather than the worker receiving an hourly or salary wage for their labor to produce the commodity. This decouples labor from wage; labor is no longer a commodity. The worker's labor (*not* measured in hours of work) to produce the commodity is instead coupled to the profit resulting from the *sale* of that commodity. As a result, the money the worker receives as counter-value preserves its relationship to the commodity produced; money received for labor, where the labor itself is treated as a commodity, no longer occurs.

The result of these two changes, a collaborative manager/supervisor-worker relationship and a negotiated counter-value that meets the worker's needs and desires, will result in a dramatic shift in the worker's relationship to their work. Whether a blue-collar worker or CEO, whether inserting a screw into a product all day or coming up with improvements to quality and production, every worker will now be working on commodities that serve the needs of society rather than working for oneself to meet one's own needs.^{xiii} Each worker, no matter how rote or creative their work, will recognize that the work they are doing is meaningful both for their coworkers (a "coworker" being defined as peers, managers, and CEO's) and in meeting the needs of society. This results in the worker standing in free relationship to their labor.^{xiv} This will also eliminate the class disparity that occurs do the imbalance between worker pay and management/executive pay.^{xv,xvi}

Questions remain, however. Can a worker truly be satisfied with their 'inserting a screw into a product' simply knowing that their labor benefits their coworkers and society?^{xvii} This seems like it would be a valid question in the realm of the worker's psychological needs. If workers are objectively to be treated as equals, is this sufficient to overcome the subjective stigma of doing 'menial labor?' Can all labor, and therefore all laborers, be viewed with equality? Can the prejudices (also see implicit bias^{xviii}) of a Harvard lawyer be overcome in relation to the secretary with a High School diploma? Can the doctor see the nurse as an equal? Can the CEO see the janitor as an equal? Can our natural tendency to compare ourselves to others^{xix} be overcome so that we do not look up or down at other people's skills, social connections, speech mannerisms, dress style, education, and work (to name a few examples) and even more importantly, not view ourselves as less in comparison to others? Further human soul/spirit development would appear to be necessary, particularly around the issue of prejudice, to learn how to stand in equal relationship to other human beings.

ⁱ Steiner, R., *Basic Issues of the Social Question*, Lecture I, GA 23: "This phenomenon, which is thought to be the consequence of economic factors alone, is a very salient feature of the social question. It is a process which follows a direct line of development from ancient slavery through the serfdom of the middle ages and up to the modern proletariat... In antiquity there were slaves. The whole person was sold like a commodity. Somewhat less of him, but a substantial part of the human being nonetheless, was incorporated into the economic process by serfdom. Capitalism is the force which persists in giving a commodity nature to a portion of the human being: his labour power." -- https://rsarchive.org/Books/GA023/English/SCR2001/GA023_c01.html

ⁱⁱ For example, the 2023 French pension reform unrest, which in some cases were peaceful and in other cases "gave way to instances of violence and rioting" and clashes between police and protestors. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_French_pension_reform_unrest

ⁱⁱⁱ For example the United Autoworkers Union striking in Sept 2023 across 20 states. <https://apnews.com/article/uaw-ford-stellantis-general-motors-strike-labor-4132aa222c9a4456415af480d6fafa98>

^{iv} Steiner, R., *The Temple Legend*, GA 93, Part I, Lecture 10: "There are many people who, to all appearances, are not working for themselves; and yet, in reality, they are. A lawyer, for example, is to all intents and purposes working for his clients. Part of his work may well be selfless, but the real question is one of earning his living."

^v Steiner, R. GA 189, *The Social Question as a Question of Consciousness, Lecture V*, "The right relationship will come about only when the decision is not concerned about payment [wage] but about the way in which employer and employed share in the results produced." <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/19190302p01.html>

^{vi} Translation by Richard Masters. Masters, R. (2022) *Rudolf Steiner and Social Reform*, pp 166-167 of Steiner, R. 'Betriebsrate und Sozialisierung' ['Works councils and socialisation'], "The greatest value is to be placed now on grasping at last the actual concept of work. For in reality a work giver who does not himself collaborate does not belong at all the enterprise, but is actually a parasite on the work"

^{vii} For Steiner, thinking when "not merely acting as a mirror reflecting external phenomena" is an experience of the world, albeit not usually a conscious experience. "Thinking can be understood only when it is seen as a power in man which, in its own essential nature, does not belong to the external physical world at all. On the contrary in its own being and nature it belongs to the spiritual world. We already experience the spiritual world, though not consciously, when we really think; i.e., when our thinking is not merely acting as a mirror reflecting external phenomena. When we are engaged in real thinking then we have the possibility to experience ourselves as thinkers. If man becomes conscious of himself within thinking he knows himself to be in a world that exists beyond birth and death. Few people are aware of it, but nothing is more certain than when man thinks, he is then active as a spiritual being." GA 176, *The Karma of Materialism, Lecture I*, <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA176/English/AP1985/19170731p01.html>

^{viii} Steiner, R. (1977) *Towards Social Renewal*. (p. 114), "Everything necessary for the maintenance of the spiritual organization, including remuneration, will come to it through the free appreciation of the individuals who participate in the social organism."

^{ix} Masters, R. *Rudolf Steiner and Social Reform*, p 170, "...Steiner proposes the sharing approach be something workers are entitled to by right. The manager / worker relationship is not a purchase / sale relationship in the economic domain; it is a rights relationship. And within this rights relationship, the right to a sharing of proceeds approach would ideally prevail."

^x Masters, R., (2022) *Rudolf Steiner and Social Reform*, (p. 370), "Although somewhat akin to a trade union, such representation would operate within a more collaborative context than the adversarial ones of which Steiner despairs."

^{xi} Steiner, R. (1972) *World Economy*. Rudolf Steiner Press; 3rd edition, Lecture 11, (p. 147): "The Capital must not be allowed to become congested. Hence at the place where the spiritual life is most highly evolved in the forming of Capital (this "place" is of course spread out throughout the entire economic realm) the excess of Capital which has been acquired must not be allowed to flow into the land, where it would become dammed up. Provision must be made for the elimination of the excess Capital. The Capital must not be allowed to become congested in the land. That is to say, at an earlier stage in the process, the congestion must be prevented by the free gift, to spiritual institutions, of the excess which has been acquired. Only what I described as a kind of 'seed' must be allowed to pass on. It is here that the concept of 'free gift' confronts us inevitably; there must be free gifts."

^{xii} Steiner, R. (1977) *Towards Social Renewal*. (p. 72), "In reality, I can only give money for the products of labor."

^{xiii} Steiner, R. (1972) *World Economy*. Rudolf Steiner Press; 3rd edition, Lecture 3: "To work for others is to work out of a sense of social needs."

^{xiv} Steiner, R. *The Social Question and Theosophy*, part of GA 86d, Lecture given on 26 October 1905, Berlin, "If I base my labor on consumer demand, with regard to what humanity needs, I stand in a free relation to labor, and my work is a sacrifice for humanity. Then I will work with all my powers, because I love humanity and want to place my capacities at its disposal. That has to be possible, and is possible only when one's living is separated from one's labor. And that is going to happen in the future. No one will be the owner of the products of labor. People must be educated for voluntary work, one for all and all for one. Everyone has to act accordingly. If you were to found a small community today in which everyone throws all one's income into a common bank account and everyone works at whatever he can do, then one's living is not dependent on what work one can do, but rather this living is effected out of the common consumption. This brings about a greater freedom than the coordination of pay with production does. If that happens, we will gain a direction which corresponds with needs." -- <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA068d/English/Singles/19051026p02.html>

^{xv} Masters, R., (2022) *Rudolf Steiner and Social Reform*, (p. 370), "...since Steiner emphasizes all come to the table as free and equal collaborators, not as workers and work givers, then workers might have to agree to management's share just as much as management would have to agree that of workers."

^{xvi} From the Abstract, *The Forgotten Working Class: A Call to Action Based upon a Repeated Cross-Sectional Examination of the Relationships Among Social Class, Financial Satisfaction, and Exhaustion*, "Results suggest a growing disparity between working-class and middle/upper-class employees, with working-class employees reporting lower levels of financial satisfaction and higher levels of work exhaustion compared to middle/upper-class employees. Moreover, these discrepancies have increased over time, suggesting that this population of employees has indeed been forgotten." --

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10596011221099797?icid=int.sj-abstract.citing-articles.314>

^{xvii} Steiner, R., *The Social Future*, GA 332a, Lecture 3, "It must come to pass that even the man who is working in the most remote corner at a single screw for some great machine need not put his whole self into the contemplation of the screw, but it must come about that he can carry into his workshop the feelings which he entertains for his fellow-men, that when he leaves his workshop he finds the same feelings, that he has a living insight into his connection with human society, that he can work even without actual pleasure in his production, because he feels he is a worthy member in the circle of his fellow-men." --

<https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA332a/English/AP1945/19191026p01.html>

^{xviii} *Implicit bias*, American Psychological Association, "Implicit bias, also known as implicit prejudice or implicit attitude, is a negative attitude, of which one is not consciously aware, against a specific social group. Implicit bias is thought to be shaped by experience and based on learned associations between particular qualities and social categories, including race and/or gender. Individuals' perceptions and behaviors can be influenced by the implicit biases they hold, even if they are unaware they hold such biases. Implicit bias is an aspect of implicit social cognition: the phenomenon that perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes can operate prior to conscious intention or endorsement." -- <https://www.apa.org/topics/implicit-bias>

^{xix} <https://wp.nyu.edu/mind/2021/02/27/why-do-we-compare-ourselves-to-others/>