

FOR-PROFIT PUBLISHING IN THE EXPLOITATION OF SCIENTIFIC WORKERS

Executive Committee of the Academy of Science and Enlightenment

1. HOW ARE SCIENTIFIC WORKERS EXPLOITED?

Scientific labor rarely leaves their laboratories and do not roam around as much. It is harder to envision them as victims of capitalist exploitation. In this letter of opinion, we will generalize the mechanism of exploitation suffered by scientific workers and imbed in it the phenomenon of for-profit scientific publishing.

For the unfamiliar reader, we must first define what we mean by exploitation. Capitalist exploitation means that the worker employed for wages produces an unpaid value during the period of employment and this surplus value is appropriated by the boss. This value is embodied in the commodities offered for consumption in the market (all the goods that surround us, from loaf of bread to mobile phones).

In order to clarify the subject, we acknowledge that in service production, if services (health, education, etc.) are offered to the market, workers working in these sectors will also be subject to the exploitation of surplus value.

To complete the framework, we also need to talk about collective labor. Today, almost no commodity is produced from the beginning to the end by a worker; it goes through many processes until it is offered for consumption in value chains. If exploitation of surplus value prevails throughout the process, then all of the collective workers are exploited in one way or another.

After these briefly made abstractions, we can embody how scientific workers are exploited in capitalist production relations under sub-headings (For more information, see: Arslan and Olpak, 2020).

a. The Exploitation of Surplus Value in Service Production

Scientific workers are often employed not only in science but also in service production, primarily education. Production in the health sector can also be given as an example of this type of relationship. If the university they work for is privately owned, or if processes such as education and health are paid for, the exploitation of wage-earning scientific workers will be inevitable.

b. As A Collective Worker

If scientific workers train professional people as faculty members and if the staff they train work in market conditions where they are exploited by internalizing the education they have received, every value they produce has the accumulated labor of faculty members and staff in it.

Also, if the system is based on exploitation, capital will always want to raise the rate of exploitation. Even if scientific workers work in the public sector, they are affected by this peculiarity of the labor regime. Their wages are kept low, their social wages (service, lodging, kindergarten, recreation facility, etc.) are taken away, they are sentenced to unqualified jobs without job security (working for project scholarships, part-time work, etc.) or performance-based compensation is imposed which is a type of the sweating system¹ commonly used in the industry and service sector.

c. Exploitation of Labor in Science

However, we still have not made clear how scientific activity, which is still seen as a divine pursuit, is the subject of exploitation.

For that, we need to take a look at a mechanism previously defined in *Matter, Dialectics and Society* (Nalçacı, 2020). For a long time, scientific workers have been strictly directed to international publishing in order to find a position and rise. How they taught, whether they were useful to the society or not, what works they produced became unimportant within the promotion criteria while the filling of their record of scientific publications increased to a vital level. Most scientific workers are alienated from their labor and work day and night to reach these criteria.

In this process, research is sent to international peer-reviewed journals indexed by corporations that are also in this field, and they are tried to be published in journals with the highest impact level. "Knowledge", which is the product of scientific workers, is thus acquired by the international circles.

¹ The sweating system increases the rate of exploitation by making the worker work harder in unit time. The most well-known example is the premium payment per piece.

But how will this information be used? The information flowing into the said international publication pool is received and used by the R&D units of the monopolies that turn them into technology products. Considering that millions of scientific workers behave similarly around the world, this heap of knowledge is filtered by R&D and used in a patent-protected innovation.

Researchers are often unaware of this process that produces added-value and, as with vaccines, while companies gain monopoly profits, they are happy to add one more publication to their record.

Scientific workers in R&D are also exploited, but at least they can see what product their labor has turned into. Millions of scientific workers are not even aware of this, their efforts have moved away from contributing to the happiness and welfare of humanity, they will be precessing in the same cycle without even knowing what the product they contribute to is.

2. WHERE DOES FOR-PROFIT SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATION FIT IN THIS PROCESS OF EXPLOITATION?

We have mentioned above how the monopolies, which have made millions of scientific workers their slaves, use the international publication mechanism. However, this critical intermediary institution also monopolizes and demands its own share from the process. Scientific publishing monopolies occupy the whole place with their publications on many different subjects and levels.

Until recently, these publication monopolies earned income by selling their journals to university libraries. Universities, on the other hand, could only subscribe to some of these publications and present them to university members, depending on their financial strength. In these conditions, some publications remained inaccessible to many scientific workers. However, it is necessary to read all previous research on a subject in order for the new research to be written as a paper.

Here, “publication pirates”, the most well-known of whom is Alexandra Elbakyan (Altınışık, Öztarhan, Güneş, 2021), stepped in. The articles in the journals of the publication monopolies protected by the capitalist system were accessed with special software and delivered to scientific workers free of charge.

According to the system, this action was theft and it faced judicial processes. In our opinion, it was as it should be, that is, all publications should be offered to scientific workers free of charge. This knowledge was already socially produced by them.

Thereupon, the publication monopolies resorted to a diabolical method: “If the academic career of these workers, who are slaves of the technology monopolies,

has completely come down to international publications, then they should pay for their articles published in a scientific journal.”

Most of the publication monopolies got rid of the printing press and paper money and switched to open access, that is, they opened their journals that were published digitally for free to the public, but they began to demand a large amount of money from the authors per article.

Thus, scientific workers, who were subjected to the sweating system in this process and eventually exploited by tech companies, also started to pay for their articles to be published with a part of their own wages (if they have a fee, of course).

ublication monopolies sometimes demanded money to start the editorial process or to publish a paper after the review process or sometimes to publish it earlier, or to have it go through their own English proofreading.

In some cases, researchers try to cover the money requested by the journal to publish their papers by including it in the expense items of their projects. But this is also not acceptable. After all, the money for the project comes mostly from the taxes paid by the working people in that nation. It is absurd to transfer funds from the state budget to this task, only to supply the monopolies that see the working people of a nation as a market for their patent-protected products with information.

3. WHAT TO DO AGAINST FOR-PROFIT SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING?

First of all, it should be noted that even if all scientific publications are free and open access, as long as the existence of monopolies producing technology is preserved, the exploitation of scientific workers and the worsening of their living conditions will not end with each passing day.

In addition, it would be naive to think that publication monopolies and journal editors act impartially and objectively against giant corporations in the fields of weapons, drugs and vaccines or telecommunications.

On the other hand, it is necessary to fight against the corrosive and irrational existence of for-profit publication. This struggle must have both national and international pillars because exploitation is a cross-border process.

It will be noticed immediately that the main point is the connection of scientific publishing with capital. Publishing needs to be removed from a for-profit cycle and expropriated.

This will open the door to a discussion that is not easy. Will state-sponsored publishing be impartial? How will publishing left to national states reconcile with the

transnational nature of science production?

All this provides a useful mental exercise.

Today, it is not easy for a scientific worker confined to her/his laboratory to imagine the possibility of many nation-states that have ensured public ownership under the rule of the working class, to form a world state by coming together. This may be understandable for those who know the leaps and rapid changes in history, but the majority who do not have the opportunity to acquire this method will not find any positive traces when they look around. We are surrounded by a deep darkness, imperialist rivalry, militarization leading to war.

So, let's do an exercise based on the concrete:

Let's take an institutional look at the United Nations (UN), which represents 193 nations in the world today. Yes, the UN is often under the hegemony of the powerful states of the imperialist order. Nevertheless, it stands before us as the most concrete example of a united world state.

Let's say, if there were open access journals under the UN in all fields of science and all working people had the right to access these publications free of charge...

We recognize the difficulties of this discussion, but we must discuss it.

BAA is starting a process to create a discussion platform on this issue.

To begin with, we will open the following draft for discussion at the national and international levels:

Stop for-profit scientific publishing

We the academies of science, institutions for scientific specialization, trade unions organizing scientific workers, trade associations, political parties and circles, popular science magazines and individuals with the signatures below:

Oppose fees being charged for the publication of research results laboriously obtained by scientists. It is especially unacceptable that young scientific workers looking for a desirable position are being cornered by scientific publishing monopolies which sell impact factor.

Science must be done for the benefit of all humanity and without for-profit organizations, and its results must be shared with the public.

From now on, we are going to

1. *Create an international platform of discussion and action for the worldwide administration of free of charge peer-reviewed journals using public resources and for guaranteeing the independence of editorial processes from monopolies.*
2. *Call our members to not render any editing or refereeing services for such journals.*
3. *Encourage our members/institutions we are members of to opt for scientific journals that do not charge for publishing.*

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