# LABOR AND FREEDOM BY EUGENE V DEBS

The book *History, Labor, and Freedom: Themes from Marx,* is a collection of philosophical papers. It was compiled by the philosopher Gerald Cohen and was published in 1988. The book provides some societal insight by looking at the adverse effects of what the power given to humans to produce has affected other people: exploitation, reduced dignity, and mass lack of freedom to others. Additionally, he debunks the belief that libertarianism as an idea advances freedom by replying to most of the criticism leveled against him in his previous book, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*. The book is a Marxist philosophy since most of its contents reveal heavy influence from Marx’s ideologies. The book, which is a sequel to Cohen’s Karl Marx’s Theory of History, delves into historical materialism.

The volume that is divided into three parts: part 1, part 2 and part 3 each deals with specific topics that depict a clear train of thoughts that makes it easy for the reader to connect the ideas. Part one of the book espouses a great substance of historical materialism by explaining what it is, defending it, and providing the influencers. In this part, the author explains how man has managed to produce to deal with the problem of material and social lack. However, it reveals that man’s production efforts have not come quickly; it has succeeded at the expense of exploitation of others and humiliation[[1]](#footnote-0).

Part two of the book offers its criticism and revision of historical materialism. Besides, the labor theory of value is explored with Gerald highlighting the reservations held with this particular theory, and opens the readers into how best to view the theory. Part 3 discusses capitalism, labor, and freedom in an in-depth manner. The issues of the conditions under which workers in contemporary class society is well handled. The book further discusses the labor theory of value and explains more on the matter of exploitation with a large emphasis on the nature of the contemporary unfreedom and exploitation. In this section, more on the influence of capitalism on labor is discussed[[2]](#footnote-1).

The negative effects of the rise of capitalism have seen workers suffer at the hands of the people who are in control of most of the resources, an aspect of the increased materialism. The fight for universal equality is indeed not a new topic; most societies have remained divided along social classes due to the poor distribution of resources, for example, where one holds more resources than the other, inequality will arise. One factor that has led to this unfortunate economic scenario is the rapid rise of the politics of America in the era. Resource power coupled with political rise have led to the disturbing trend of labor exploitation with those being exploited having to be subjected.[[3]](#footnote-2)

Often, unfreedom of the masses is what is said to have led to the exploitation of people. In this collection of articles, the author defends the contentious issue of historical materialism. In essence, the books asserts that there is an undeniable link between historical materialism, labor, and freedom. The concept of historical materialism, which states that material possessions have an impact on one’s social class. The period of industrialization in America was a period of great reform for the nation as it affected many other sphered of the country. Accordingly, one area was the labor section where Americans have had to deal with the problem of inequality of labor especially of foreign persons immigrating to the nation for a long time. The book by Gerald Cohen continues to be relevant in these modern times just as it was in the past period in which it was written. The issues of unfreedom of Labor explained in the book continue to be manifested in modern times especially along the lines of race and gender just as they were in the previous times[[4]](#footnote-3). Matters of modern slavery exhibited in issues like poor working conditions, human trafficking, and low remuneration are just one of the examples of how the literature continues to be relevant in current times.

There is a growing need to challenge work relations that lead to exploitation which consequently, impact the freedom of the affected persons. The normalcy with which different forms of exploitation continue to happen necessitates that more attention is given to efforts of curbing it. Labor and freedom are two fully compatible topics. Consequently, Gerald Cohen’s literature covers the matters of the current issues that are being experienced in modern America; an indication that the future is not as unpredictable as it seemingly is portrayed in many instances. In fact, Jean Paul Sartre said “if human beings were not free, there would be no need of them being liberated.”

## Bibliography

Cohen, G. A. *History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes from Marx*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002.

1. Cohen, G. A. *History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes from Marx*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Cohen, G. A. *History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes from Marx*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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