

Karl Marx: The German Ideology & The Communist Manifesto

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The Communist Manifesto:

Bourgeoisie:

- The Manifesto begins by addressing the issue of class antagonism. Marx writes, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." Throughout history we see the oppressor and oppressed in constant opposition to each other. This fight is sometimes hidden and sometimes open.
- However, each time the fight ends in either a revolutionary reconstruction of society or in the classes' common ruin.
- In earlier ages, we saw society arranged into complicated class structures. For example, in medieval times there were feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices and serfs.
- Modern bourgeois society sprouted from the ruins of feudal society. This society has class antagonisms as well, but it is also unique: class antagonisms have become simplified, as society increasingly splits into two rival camps--Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.
- The Manifesto then shows how the modern bourgeoisie is the product of several revolutions in the mode of production and of exchange.
- The development of the bourgeoisie began in the earliest towns, and gained momentum with the Age of Exploration.
- Feudal guilds couldn't provide for increasing markets, and the manufacturing middle class took its place. However, markets kept growing and demand kept increasing, and manufacture couldn't keep up. This led to the Industrial Revolution. Manufacture was replaced by "Modern Industry," and the industrial middle class was replaced by "industrial millionaires," the modern bourgeois.
- With these developments, the bourgeoisie have become powerful, and have pushed medieval classes into the background.
- The development of the bourgeoisie as a class was accompanied by a series of political developments. With the development of Modern Industry and the world-market, the bourgeoisie has gained exclusive political sway. The State serves solely the bourgeoisie's interests.
- Historically, the bourgeoisie has played a quite revolutionary role. Whenever it has gained power, it has put to an end all "feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations." It has eliminated the relationships that bound people to their superiors, and now all remaining relations between men are characterized by self-interest alone.
- Religious fervor, chivalry and sentimentalism have all been sacrificed. Personal worth is

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- RELIGIOUS fervor, chivalry and sentimentalism have all been sacrificed. Personal worth is now measured by exchange value, and the only freedom is that of Free Trade.
- Thus, exploitation that used to be veiled by religious and political "illusions" is now direct, brutal and blatant. The bourgeoisie has changed all occupations into wage-laboring professions, even those that were previously honored, such as that of the doctor. Similarly family relations have lost their veil of sentimentality and have been reduced to pure monetary relations.
- In the past, industrial classes required the conservation of old modes of production in order to survive. The bourgeoisie are unique in that they cannot continue to exist without revolutionizing the instruments of production.
- This implies revolutionizing the relations of production, and with it, all of the relations in society. Thus, the unique uncertainties and disturbances of the modern age have forced Man to face his real condition in life, and his true relations with others.
- Because the bourgeoisie needs a constantly expanding market, it settles and establishes connections all over the globe.
- Production and consumption have taken on a cosmopolitan character in every country. This is true both for materials and for intellectual production, as national sovereignty and isolationism becomes less and less possible to sustain.
- The bourgeoisie draws even the most barbaric nations into civilization and compels all nations to adopt its mode of production. It "creates a world after its own image." All become dependent on the bourgeoisie. It has also increased political centralization.
- Thus, we see that the means of production and of exchange, which serve as the basis of the bourgeoisie, originated in feudal society.
- At a certain stage, however, the feudal relations ceased to be compatible with the developing productive forces. Thus the "fetters" of the feudal system had to be "burst asunder," and they were. Free competition replaced the old system, and the bourgeoisie rose to power.
- Marx then says that a similar movement is underway at the present moment. Modern bourgeois society is in the process of turning on itself. Modern productive forces are revolting against the modern conditions of production.
- Commercial crises, due, ironically, to *over*-production, are threatening the existence of bourgeois society. Productive forces are now fettered by bourgeois society, and these crises represent this tension.
- Yet in attempting to remedy these crises, the bourgeoisie simply cause new and more extensive crises to emerge, and diminish their ability to prevent future ones. Thus, the weapons by which the bourgeoisie overcame feudalism are now being turned on the bourgeoisie themselves.

Proletariat:

- As the bourgeoisie developed, so did the proletariat, and it is the proletariat who will eventually destroy the bourgeoisie. The proletarians live only as long as they can find work and they can find work only as long as their labor increases capital.

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- They are a commodity, and are vulnerable to all the fluctuations of the market. Due to the development of machines and the division of labor, the proletarian's work has lost all "charm;" the proletarian is simply an appendage of a machine.
- Furthermore, as his work becomes more repulsive, his wage only decreases. Marx describes the worker as a soldier, and as a slave. Distinctions of age and sex are becoming less important as all people are simply instruments of labor.
- Furthermore, no sooner does the worker get his wages from his exploitative boss, then he is exploited by other bourgeoisie, such as his landlord.
- The lower strata of the middle class, such as tradespeople, gradually sink into the proletariat. This is due to the fact that they lack sufficient capital, and the fact that technology has rendered their specialized skills no longer useful.
- The Manifesto then describes the past history of the proletariat. As soon as this class was created it began to struggle with the bourgeoisie.
- This struggle originally involved the individual laborer, and later groups of workers, rebelling against the bourgeois that directly exploited them. These workers hoped to revive the medieval status of the worker.
- At this point, the workers were still disorganized, divided by geography and by competition with one another. Furthermore, when they did form unions, they were under the influence of the bourgeois, and actually served to further the objectives of the bourgeoisie.
- However, with the modern development of industry, the proletariat increased in number, and became stronger and more concentrated.
- Furthermore, distinctions among laborers began to dissolve, as all shared equally low wages and equally unsure livelihoods. At this point, workers began to form trade unions and other associations, a process in which they are still engaged at the time of the Manifesto's writing.
- The proletariat is further helped in its unification by the increased means of communication made possible by modern industry, allowing for the struggles to take on national character. While the organization of the proletariat into a class is continually destroyed by competition among workers, each time it rises again stronger.
- Furthermore, as other classes try to use the proletarians to forward political their own ends, they give them tools to fight the bourgeoisie.
- Marx explains that the only class today that is really revolutionary is the proletariat. All of the other classes that fight the bourgeoisie--such as the shopkeeper--are conservative, fighting to preserve their existence. Among the proletariat, however, the Old Society is already past preservation.
- "Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests."
- Historically, the proletariat are also unique. In the past, when a class got the upper hand, it tried to subject all of society to its own mode of appropriation. However, the proletariat lacks any property of their own to retain or expand.
- Rather, they must destroy all ways of securing private property at all. Another unique characteristic of the proletariat is that, while past movements were started by minorities, the

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characteristic of the proletariat is that, while past movements were started by minorities, the proletariat is a vast majority, and are acting in the interest of that majority.

- The proletarians' struggle is first and foremost a national struggle. Marx writes that he has traced the proletariat's development through a veiled civil war, up to the point of open revolution and the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie.
- Until now, every society has been based on class oppression. In order for a class to be able to be oppressed, however, its slavish existence must be sustainable, held steady: in contrast, laborers in modern industrial society are continually suffering a *deterioration* of their status as they become poorer and poorer.
- The bourgeoisie are thus unfit to rule, because they cannot guarantee "an existence to its slave within its slavery." Thus, with the development of Modern Industry, the bourgeoisie produces "its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."

Proletarians and Communists:

- The Manifesto then discusses the relationship of the Communists to the proletarians. The immediate aim of the Communists is the "formation of the proletariat into a class, [the] overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, [and the] conquest of political power by the proletariat." The Communists' theory simply describes a historical movement underway at this very moment. This includes the abolition of private property.
- Marx says that Communists have been "reproached" for desiring to abolish the "right" of acquiring private property through the fruits of one's labor. However, he points out, laborers do not acquire any property through their labor.
- Rather, the "property" or capital they produce serves to exploit them. This property, controlled by the bourgeoisie, represents a social--not a personal--power.
- Changing it into common property does not abolish property as a right, but merely changes its *social* character, by eliminating its class character. In a Communist society, then, labor will exist for the sake of the laborer, not for the sake of producing bourgeois-controlled property.
- This goal of communism challenges *bourgeois* freedom, and this is why the bourgeois condemn the Communist philosophy. Marx writes, "You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population."
- Despite what the bourgeois claim, Communism doesn't keep people from appropriating the products of labor. Rather, it keeps them from subjugating others in the process of this appropriation.
- The Manifesto then addresses some objections to Communism. Many dissenters maintain that no one will work if private property is abolished. However, by this logic, bourgeois society should have been overcome with laziness long ago.
- In reality, it is presently the case that those who work don't acquire anything, and those who acquire things don't work. Other opponents hold that Communism will destroy all intellectual products.

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- However, this reflects a bourgeois misunderstanding. The disappearance of "class culture" is not the same thing as the disappearance of all culture.
- Marx moves to the arguments against the "infamous" Communist proposal of abolishing the family. He says the modern family is based on capital and private gain. Thus he writes, the Communists "plead guilty" to wanting to do away with present familial relations, in that they want to stop the exploitation of children by their parents.
- Similarly, they do not want to altogether abolish the education of children, but simply to free it from the control of the ruling class.
- Marx complains that the bourgeois "clap-trap" about family and education is particularly "disgusting" as Industry increasingly destroys the family ties of the proletarians; thus it renders family and education as means for the transformation of children into articles of commerce.
- Communists are also criticized for their desire to abolish country and nationality. Marx replies that workingmen have no country; and we can't take from them what they don't have.
- National differences and antagonisms lose significance as industrialization increasingly standardizes life.
- Marx then says that those charges against Communism based on religion, philosophy, or ideology "are not deserving of serious examination." Man's consciousness changes with the conditions of his material existence. "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class."
- In response to the claim that there are certain universal ideas, such as that of Justice, that have transcended the vicissitudes of history, Marx replies that this universality is only an apparent one, reflecting an overriding history of exploitation and class antagonism.
- The Communist revolution is a radical rupture in traditional property relations. It should be no surprise that it is accompanied by radical changes in traditional ideas.
- We see then that the first step in the working class' revolution is to make the proletariat the ruling class. It will use its political power to seize all capital from the bourgeoisie and to centralize all instruments of production under the auspices of the State.
- Of course, in the beginning this will not be possible without "despotic inroads on the right of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production."
- Probable steps in the revolution will include: the abolition of ownership of land; the institution of a heavy progressive or graduated income tax; the abolition of all inheritance rights; the confiscation of emigrants' and rebels' property, making all people liable to labor; State centralization of credit; State centralization of communication and transportation; State appropriation of factories, the gradual combination of agriculture and manufacturing industries, the elimination of the distinctions between town and country, and the establishment of free education for children.
- When class distinctions have disappeared, public power will lose its political character. This is because political power is nothing more than "the organized power of one class for oppressing another."

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- When the proletariat eliminate the old conditions for production, they will render class antagonism impossible, and thereby eliminate their own class supremacy.
- Bourgeois society will be replaced by an "association" in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

Socialist and Communist Literature:

- **The first subset is Reactionary Socialism.** Reactionary Socialists include the **Feudal Socialists, the Petty-Bourgeois Socialists, and the German, or "True" Socialists**; all of these groups fight against the rise of the bourgeoisie and modern Industry, without realizing the historical process the bourgeoisie represent.
- **Feudal Socialists** were French and English aristocrats who wrote against modern bourgeois society. However, their chief complaint about the bourgeois was that it creates a revolutionary proletariat that will uproot the old order of society.
- Thus, they objected to the bourgeoisie because they were a threat to their way of life.
- **The Petty- Bourgeois Socialists** were a class that saw it would eventually lose its separate status and become part of the proletariat. Marx concedes that the Petty- Bourgeois publications successfully showed the contradictions of the conditions of modern production.
- However, their suggested alternatives to this contradictory system were either to restore the old means of production and exchange, or to push the modern means of production and exchange into the framework of old property relations.
- Thus, **this socialism is "reactionary and Utopian"** and can't accept the facts of history. Third there is **German, or "True" Socialism.** These German thinkers adopted some French socialist and Communist ideas, without realizing that Germany did not share the same social conditions as France.
- As contemplated by the German thinkers, the French ideas lost all practical significance and were "emasculated." These socialists supported the aristocracy and feudal institutions against the rising bourgeoisie, forgetting that the rise of the bourgeoisie is a necessary historical step.
- The "true" socialists support the interests of the petty- bourgeoisie, and thus support the status quo. They even reject class struggles. Marx claims that almost all of the so-called Communist and Socialist literature in Germany at this time are in fact of this character.
- **The second subset of Socialism is Conservative, or Bourgeois, Socialism.** This subset reflects the desires of a segment of the bourgeois to redress social grievances, in order to guarantee the continued existence of bourgeois society.
- Followers of this idea include "economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, [and] hole-and-corner reformers of every kind."
- They want the advantages of the social conditions generated by Modern Industry, without the struggles and dangers that necessarily accompany them. "They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat."
- These bourgeoisie believe that the best society is the society in which they have power; the

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want the proletariat to keep its weak role, but to stop hating the dominant bourgeoisie.

- **A second form of this kind of Socialism** recognizes the fact that only changes in economic relations could help the proletariat. However, the upholders of this kind of socialism do not accept that such changes necessarily entail a destruction of the relations of production.
- Rather, they wish to make administrative reforms, which simply decrease the cost and amount of administrative work for the bourgeois government.
- **The third subset is Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism.** This subset originated with the first attempts of the proletariat to achieve their own ends. The attempts were reactionary, and the proletariat had not yet reached the maturity and economic conditions necessary for emancipation.
- These socialists therefore looked for new social laws to create the material conditions necessary to free the proletariat.
- Their writings are important because they attacked every principle of existing society, and are thus useful for enlightening the working class.
- However, they are of a Utopian character: although their vision did reflect authentic proletariat "yearnings" to reconstruct society, it was ultimately a "fantastic" vision, providing no basis for practical action.
- Thus the Critical-Utopian Socialists become less significant as the modern class struggle takes shape; lacking practical significance, their "fantastic" attacks lose theoretical justification.
- Thus, while the founders were in many ways revolutionaries, their followers are mere reactionaries. They oppose political action by the proletariat.

Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties

- The Manifesto concludes with a discussion about the role of the Communists as they work with other parties. The Communists fight for the immediate aims of workers, but always in the context of the entire Communist movement.
- Thus, they work with those political parties that will forward the ends of Communism, even if it involves working with the bourgeoisie.
- However, they never stop trying to instill in the working class a recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, and to help them gain the weapons to eventually overthrow the bourgeoisie.
- Thus, "the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things."
- They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by forcibly overthrowing all existing social conditions.
- The Manifesto ends with this rallying cry: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!"

The German Ideology:

<http://marxisttheory.org/historical-materialism/>

- Marx agreed with the fact that history had some kind of progression

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- He also agreed that there are several distinct stages in the history of humanity. Although, not determined by our relation to the idea of freedom or rationality
- He was specifically interested in a secular, atheistic and materialist vision of history. Nothing to do with the deeds of great men, not a world spirit, not the acts of God, but of humanity's labours to build civilisations within certain historical conditions.
- Relocating the agency of change away from the spiritual world and firmly into the minds and hands of humanity places an unbridgeable gulf between these theories and any kind of religion or theology.
- Like other enlightenment thinkers, the recent developments in science and knowledge were an inspiration to try and understand the whole of human progress and how it connected together.
- The notion of what history is and how to understand it was central to Marx's writings.
- An analysis of human history and the contradictions of the prevailing socio-economic relations demonstrate why we ended up as we did.
- Hegel saw history as the continuous movement of reason and human free will, but Marx saw it differently.
- Human history is an active one, not based on mental labour or simple the progress of an idea like reason or liberty, but the active work of humanity producing and making, either slaves, as peasants, or as workers, and their struggles against the other part of humanity which oppressed them and benefited from their labour.
- Here we see humans not in their historical forms yet (as peasants or wage labourers or monarchs) but simply as human - Marx starts from the highest level of abstraction. Then he moves to the importance of human relationships to each other and to nature and to what degree humans are distinguishable from nature.
- The production of the means of subsistence requires labour, and this is the distinguishing feature of the scientific socialist, rational model that is being proposed.

All work, No play

- Labour is the essential component of humanity, it is what really defines us because it is how we change nature to our will, how we shape the environment and build communities.
- Labour leads to production, and then to relations of production which emerge from these specific modes of production.
- There is no real surplus within primitive hunter gather societies. Members of this society live a hand-to-mouth existence. There is no real cultural or intellectual labour possible.
- These forms of societies are sometimes referred to as **primitive communist societies** because, even though there was a division of labour, everyone was equal in as much as there was no concept of property or an established hierarchy beyond the most rudimentary social structures that emerge in any collective of people.
- Once productive techniques and skills developed by using tools or learning to herd rather than simply hunt animals, more is produced than can be immediately consumed.
- This surplus that arises because of quick production becomes the source of a struggle for control. - This is how the early kings and emperors of the very first societies in the

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Mesopotamian region emerged, quickly followed by class structures in regions that became Iran, the Indus Valley, and modern day China.

- The emergence of "class society" is the beginning of real history according to Marx. - Kings, empires, battles become the standard points of historical reference, we move from cave-dwellers or "cavemen" into towns and cities.
- We produce things like pots, pans, clothes, and increasingly elaborate social institutions and structures such as laws and education.
- This, in turn, allows for the construction of everything from irrigation to housing.
- Then, Marx goes on to talk about not just the existence of classes, but of a struggle between the classes as the basis for the development of society.
- Classes have antagonistic interests to each other - they emerge in competition. They fight over the extent of surplus that is controlled in any society.

The State is Violence

- This is why as class society emerges, so does the state - a social structure created to establish and maintain order in a world where exploitation by the many of the few is the norm.
- States are fundamentally bodies of armed men and women who defend property relations of the ruling class. All the laws and social customs that emerge from that are in fact only the expression of this more specific role.
- The state is consolidated violence - and the threat of violence on behalf of those in power.
- In Marxism, the notion of the universal is displaced from the state to the class struggle and the emancipation of humanity occurs not solely through reason but a revolution which overthrows the minority rulers.
- Marx concentrates most of his research on the social and economic developments from feudalism to capitalism and saw how the capitalist (bourgeois) class emerged within feudal society as a property owning class, starting with merchants or small scale manufacturers and so on.
- Once this class took power, they proceeded to re-organize the political and legal system in its image, and began to turn the peasants who had formed the workforce under the old system, into modern workers.
- This was a brutal act: throwing peasants off the land and forcing them into cities which were overcrowded and dirty to work in low paid dangerous jobs with long hours.
- The proletariat existed in embryo already, in workshops in European cities, as landless city dwellers, apprentices and craftsmen, but they were not a significant/important part of the population in terms of social weight or role for that matter.
- The capitalists made the working class, and the working class, through its labour, produced the capital and profit that sustains the ruling, capitalist class.
- So this is class as it exists within social order, this is the economic form of society which produces a certain content, the social relations (which because of private property and class relations), which are specific to that society (although some can be 'left over' from previous societies until they are incorporated into the new classes).

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Cultures and Ideas

