

The Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx with Frederick Engels

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Introduction

The revolutionary theories of Karl Marx were born of an age of rapid technological change in the industrializing economies of Europe and North America. The Communist Manifesto written in 1848 presented Marx's view of history as a progression of the social forces embodied in serfdom and peasantry overcoming oppression by the upper classes, the bourgeoisie. Marx believed that the driving force of an individual is labor. Labor is the "essential activity", a "free and conscious activity" and is the primary route to realize the potential of the individuals "universal nature". In this respect, labor is not simply economic activity. The individual can only be free if all others are free and able to develop as "universal beings" (Lichtheim 1961).

Influenced by the idealism of German philosopher Hegel early in his education, Marx viewed history as a dialectic process where conventional ideas and realities, the established thesis, is challenged by an antithesis which are new ways of thinking. Based on ever-changing technologies and the associated effects on the economic foundations and the environment, the old world order is supplanted by the new reality in a synthesis. The synthesis becomes the new thesis, the entrenched social order. With the constant progression of history, the dialectic process begins again (Argyle 2010).

This theory fits the historical progression of Feudal Europe giving way to capitalism, the trends toward socialism during first decades of Marx's own nineteenth century, and the revolutionary fervor that was sweeping Europe at the time he and Fredric Engels wrote the Manifesto. History, according to Marx, would naturally lead to communism (Portis 2008). Much of Marx's critique of the rapidly industrializing society of the western world would be realized in the deplorable conditions of factory workers in the latter part of the 1800's. Many of the social and economic theories that formed the foundation of Marx's ideas continue in the forces that

shape society today and remain valid critiques of global industrialized society and the associated social ills and environmental degradation.

Expanding the Text

Section two of the Communist Manifesto (Marx 1888) discusses the relationship of the proletariat and communists. In describing the historical context and current conditions, the primary goal of the communists is the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the abolishment of private property. To achieve this aim the communists must organize the proletariat into a unified class and seize political power.

According to Marx, the communist were faulted for not appreciating the importance of private property as a "right" and the product of the fruits of one's labor. Marx argues that this right is withheld from the vast majority and that the bourgeois use property to subjugate the masses. Marx acknowledges that the abolishment of private property is a major complaint against communism. The opposition believes that if private property is abolished there will be no incentive for people to work. To Marx this seems contradictory because the bourgeois do not work and they have property and even though the proletarians work, they do not enjoy private property. The complaint of opponents of communism that intellectual products will be destroyed is also baseless. The disappearance of "class culture" does not mean that culture will be lost.

One of the most absurd misunderstandings is that communists seek to do away with the family. Marx acknowledges that they want to do away with exploitive familial relations where children are placed in the service of the ruling class. Control of education must be taken away from the bourgeoisie and industry must be stopped from destroying the family ties of the proletariat. Children should not be allowed to become articles of commerce. In the same way, the abolishment of nationality will make no difference to the worker. They are already alienated by the standardization of life in an industrialized society. Marx dismisses without serious discussion

the arguments against communism based on religious or other ideological grounds. Historical trends will transcend exploitation and class antagonism. Material existence is the basis of religion and philosophy. Marx gives an example of this in the glorification of property rights by the bourgeoisie.

Revolution will be realized by the proletariat becoming the ruling class. It is understandable that they have to temporarily act despotic when they forcibly take over the factors of production. When oppression by the ruling classes is eliminated, political power will become public power, class struggles will be impossible, and free association of the working classes will allow for the development of the individual and the proletariat at large.

This process will progress in a series of steps. First ownership of land will be abolished followed by the institution of a progressive income tax. The rights of inheritance and property of immigrants and rebels will be forfeited. The state will centralize communication and transportation systems under their control and will combine agriculture and manufacturing industries. Rural and urban distinctions will be eliminated and children will receive free education. This revolution is an inevitable historical process and not the result of methods and goals.

In section three of the Manifesto, Socialist and Communist Literature is reviewed and Marx compares and critiques three major classifications. The first type of literature is associated with Reactionary Socialism which is further broken down into Feudal Socialism, Petty-Bourgeois Socialism, and the German or "True" Socialism. Feudal Socialism was used as a tool of the aristocracy to regain the loyalty of the proletariat and diminish the increasing influence of the bourgeoisie. Pretending to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the poor and downtrodden, the aristocracy warns of exploitation at the hands of their new masters. They promise social reforms but the proletariat are able to see through their deception and abandon them. The aristocracy do not understand the changing social climate. Also the workers are

changed fundamentally and are now organized into a distinct class and not accepting of their advances. Furthermore, the aristocracy does not appreciate that the bourgeoisie are an outgrowth of their own feudal system. The aristocracy also uses the church to place the lower classes in a subservient role in the Feudal brand of feeble socialism.

The Petty-Bourgeois Socialists, similar to the aristocrats, were precursors to the bourgeoisie and could not survive the social pressures of an environment dominated by class struggle. These small proprietors and local officials, caught between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, are eventually replaced with agents of the bourgeoisie. This branch of socialism caught in the middle, naturally sides with the lower classes primarily because the proletariat are stronger in numbers. Their primary aim is to return to the pre-industrial production system of guilds and less complex means of exchange. They are more technical and specific in their criticism of bourgeois excess, exploitation, and hypocrisy. In addition to restoring guilds, their system of socialism promotes a return to the lord and serf relationships in agriculture.

German, or "True" Socialism is the final classification within the Reactionary Socialism section of the Communist Literature part of the Manifesto. Improving on the French socialist tradition, German writers looked deeper into the historical roots of socialism and adapted it to the social conditions in Germany, thus clarifying the philosophical basis of the movement. In the rewrite, however, they failed to frame the struggle as a class conflict and in doing so betrayed the fundamental cause. Professing "eternal truths" appealed intellectually to the public, however the results were publications with positions against the movement toward Communism.

The second major Communist and Socialist Literature division is Conservative, or Bourgeois Socialism. This group makes up what would today be considered the "non-profit" sector of community organizers, humanitarian groups, and special interest fringe groups that work within the bourgeois power structure. In outward appearances, they promote the welfare of the proletariat, however in reality they work to keep them within the control of the bourgeoisie

and encourage them to abandon their revolutionary tendencies. As would be expected, the conservative bourgeois socialists promote maintaining the status quo for the benefit of the ruling class in the political relationship. Improvement in the livelihood of the proletariat in economic terms is the best way to reform.

Concluding the Communist and Socialist Literature section is Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism. This form of literature was formed early in the class struggle when the proletariat was only beginning to emerge as an organized mature force. The socialist and communist only address broad social problems and do not recognize the problem as a struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. Their social reforms contain elements that try to remedy a broad range of social ills from various causes, and because the class struggle is not viewed as a historical inevitability, they try to promote reforms that minimize class antagonisms. Some of their proposals target major social problems and are revolutionary in their nature, however their objectives are utopian rather than revolutionary.

The fourth and final section to the Communist Manifesto explains the position of the communist in relation to the various existing organized opposition parties. This section is an enumeration of the political groups existent at the time of the writing of the Manifesto and gives brief distinguishing characteristics of each based on the particular political situation in the country. Marx stresses the urgency of the class struggle and immediacy that conditions warrant: the complete overthrow of the existing social and political order. Before he concludes with his famous call for all workers to unite, Marx declares that the communist revolt is open and the aims to liberate the working class are clear. The ruling classes have reason to be afraid of the movement because the workers have nothing to lose.

Other Themes

Much of the support for Marxist philosophy lies in the rejection of postmodernism and the wholesale rejection of metanarratives. There seems to be a contradiction in the rejection of such political instruments, while narrow in their worldview and ideology, they may be powerful tools for combating some of our serious social injustices and global problems. In the themes in this section use the Marxism metanarrative to frame their argument that modern capitalism, with multinational corporations separated from state control, are bringing utter ruin to our ecosystems and social systems of developing countries. They argue that global capitalism itself is a metanarrative promoting the singular truth of economic growth and consumerism.

Marx writes in the Manifesto that the socioeconomic landscape has experienced repeated upheaval and revolutions as the world has grown more complex in the means of production and the associated financial systems needed to support it. The opening of America and other new markets around the world was the catalyst that transformed the feudal world into the markets dominated by manufacturing. Traditional guilds could not keep up with the demand for goods and modern manufacturing methods gave way to modern industrial centers and world markets. The political systems became dominated by the moneyed industrial powers and the state served their interests.

With the coming of the modern industrial age, traditional patriarchic relationships between lord and master were destroyed. In the new economic system characterized by free trade, relationships are defined in terms of monetary value and even family relationships have devolved into impersonal economic terms. Because of the need for growth, traditional modes of production are transformed along with all of societies relationships. Because of these uncertainties and disturbances, people must face the realities of the new industrial age.

Expanding markets and globalization have created conditions that threaten national sovereignty over production and consumption in both goods and intellectual property. The

bourgeoisie have brought industrialization to undeveloped civilizations previously isolated and secured their dependency. Recent trends evident in the cycle of expansion and contraction of industrial activity are creating tensions in the new global society. These commercial crises pose a threat to the bourgeoisie because the disruption, which causes the bourgeoisie to clash with one another, cannot be sustained. The bourgeoisie and proletariat emerge from the disruption stripped of ideology, where self-interest is the dominating motivation.

In the Manifesto, the class struggles between the bourgeois leaders of industrialized society and those among the ranks of the working classes are a direct development of the opening of new global markets in America and the Far East. New technologies such as the steam engine and improvements in transportation and communication are controlled by the wealthy industrialist and used as a means to increase their capital. In such a system, work and products of the traditional artisans and craft workers are eliminated because they cannot compete with mass produced industrial goods. Even professions such as engineers, doctors, are absorbed into the capitalization of the labor force. The constant upheaval and turmoil caused by the advance of technology prevents the proletariat from being able to establish stability in their lives and any semblance of social order and organization that would form the foundation of prosperity and happiness.

Modern Marxists see these ills of capitalism as a force in increasing poverty levels in the developing world. In a leading Latin American journal of the Left, Alel Dupuy (1998) characterized the current post-modern, post-cold war, relationship between the core industrial countries and the peripheral developing countries in Latin America as detriments to establishing a just society based on socialist doctrine. Postmodernism tends to minimize the importance of class in capitalist society and globalization has resulted in the perpetuation of under development and dependency of Latin American societies.

Marx specifically warned against this trend in the Manifesto stating that "old-established national industries have been destroyed [and] in place of the numberless and feasible chartered freedoms, [capitalism] has set up that single unconscionable freedom -- Free Trade". According to Dupuy, management, information, and financial functions of international corporations are still concentrated in the core industrial countries as well as the consumption of the goods themselves. Rather than the standard of living increasing in the developing Latin American and other developing countries around the world, the gap in wealth and income is becoming wider. In the global market the meta-narrative of capitalism reigns supreme and is unaffected by the post-modern celebration of multiculturalism and the development of Free-trade agreements.

"Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers" are Marx's recognition of the environmental and ecological degradation caused by exploitation and capitalist greed. Arran Gare in his book *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (1995) also argues that economic stewardship on a global scale needs a grand narrative and rejects post-modernism. According to Gare "loss of credibility of grand narratives is essentially a loss of belief in progress". Marx, Gare argues, recognized the harm that the growth capitalism can cause in resource depletion and pollution: "What Marxist environmentalism reveals is the virtual impossibility of solving environmental problems through simple devices proposed by the environmental economists".

Marxists today are quick to point to third world countries having to deplete their resources and destroy their environments to benefit the western capitalist societies. Regulations in developed countries shift polluting industries overseas. Fundamentally, piecemeal solutions by states or industries in the developed world cannot solve the global environmental crisis. Given their need to maintain growth, their consumer-oriented economies are built on planned obsolescence. Gare makes a valid point that the demands of western consumer society is

virtually insatiable and that advertising promotes a society that consumes symbols rather than products.

Schnaiberg (1980) sees the struggle between the environmental movement and capitalist production as dialectic and uses Marx's thesis, synthesis, and antithesis framework to analyze the social impacts of the "treadmill of production". According to Schnaiberg, Marx did not foresee the adaptability of capitalists in modern industrial society. Capital in a consumer oriented society depends on labor to be the consumers of the products of production. The capital formation forces, promoting an expansion of production, has formed an alliance with labor who benefit from jobs, increased wages, improved standard of living. In this alliance, the state benefits by increased tax revenues which can be used to meet the needs of both labor and capital. Society experiences some problems in this relationship while on the treadmill. The business cycle provides periodic upsets where labor becomes displaced and industries close because of increased competition or changes in consumer preferences. Environmental and natural disasters threaten the human health and economic livelihood of entire regions and on a global scale.

Marx was an early environmentalist. His views in the Manifesto condemn the excesses of capitalism in spoiling the urban landscape, destruction of the land through intensive agricultural practices, and wasteful natural resource use. In extending the societal-environmental dialectic, the economic synthesis will continue to degrade the environment with production concerns having their way and powers of the state in subservient roles. As serious environmental and natural disasters occur, industry and government will appear to deal with the situation with the primary aim to minimize the economic impact of the environmental destruction with a promise of better environmental stewardship in the future based on conservation and sustainability. The immediate environmental damage is mitigated and the issue fades from the public consciousness.

The basic paradox of economic growth over the health of the environment remains as the dominate force in society. In the United States and much of the developed world, industry has

co-opted the environmental movement. Industry can be seen as leaders in sustainability, but these measures are short-term, disjointed, and incremental and do not address global environmental issues and issues involving social justice in the developing world.

With the human capacity to manipulate and destroy the natural environment, the focus has changed from concern from impacts based on population alone. We have come to realize that countries with low levels of population can have greater impact through higher levels of consumption. If humans, through ingenuity and innovation, are able to overcome and solve our ecological and environmental problems an optimistic view of the future is offered. Humans, impacted by their environment are able to adjust to the constraints imposed by the environmental conditions (Schnaiberg 1980).

Concluding Statements

If the eternal optimism of global capitalism is unstoppable, and the optimistic view of the infinite capability of the human race to overcome obstacles is true, then we have to argue that at some point in the not so distant future, the global growth model will be self-limiting. (Schnaiberg 1980, Amin 1996). For example, if global warming is true and rising sea levels and changing crop patterns cause population displacement on a global scale, then the human race along with the global industrial complex will have to come up with solutions (Wright 2005). For example, part of the solution may lie in rethinking the personal property model. Reorganized global markets would require a new global social contract. Amin (1996) argues that the Left is ill equipped to provide any alternatives to globalization. He proposes that global growth model and the trend toward increased globalization will progress naturally to global socialism.

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