

Marx, The Communist Manifesto

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203-228, 241.

The theoretical conclusions of communism do not come from general ideas/principles discovered by abstract reasoning, but from understanding the “actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.”

Thesis: Economic changes (e.g. new means of production) lead to great shifts in economic structure of a society, and thereby the social structure.

Example: The shift from feudal society to free competition/capitalism.

New means of production → more efficient production of already existing goods and the production of new goods → change in the way goods are produced and distributed → Feudal society falls because it cannot accommodate the economic changes (209).

- Division of labor not by trade but within each workshop.
- Class antagonisms remain, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (204).

Who are the bourgeoisie?

- Owners of capital.

Who are the proletariat?

- Laborers, working for a wage.

Bourgeois society is the society of capitalism, of free competition.

Free competition drives political and social change

Bourgeois society re-creates the world in its own image.

- The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all nations into civilization, and forces them to adopt bourgeois ways.

What happens to people in a bourgeois society?

- Self-alienation constituted by alienation from the product, the activity of production, and other people (refer to the Economico-Philosophical Manuscripts).
- Forced to submit to the bourgeoisie outside of work as well: the landlord, the shopkeeper, etc.

Bourgeois society leads to its own undoing

Capitalism creates a) the weapons for its own undoing and b) the men to arm those weapons.

As for (a):

Capitalism's efficiency → overproduction → destroy productive forces, conquer new markets, or further exploit old ones.

- But this can only last so long, and it only delays the inevitable.
- Crucially, the same thing that happened to feudalism will happen to the capitalist society.

As for (b):

Capitalism's allowance of free competition → centralization of power/power in the hands of the few (capital owners) → grown proletariat population → increased competition among laborers → cheaper labor → poverty of the workers (211, 217)

- Capitalism thus produces its own grave-diggers.

Proposed solution: Form unions to fight for workers.

Objection: Unions cannot solve the problem of alienation; slaves can be better taken care of, but they are still slaves. Thus, unions do not go far enough: “The real fruit of their [the proletarians] battle lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers.”

1. If the proletariat is to succeed they cannot simply destroy the means of production (machines); they must overthrow the conditions of the system that exploits them.
2. The system that enslaves them is the system of private property.
3. Thus, they must abolish private property.

Consider the motive for such a revolution: “All that we want to do away with is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the laborer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it” (220).

Objection: *But you want to abolish property!? Are you crazy!?!?*

Response: Relax: it happened before and it will happen again. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of communism; property relations change with every revolution, e.g. the French Revolution abolished feudal property in favor of bourgeois property. *Communism is not the abolition of property, but rather of bourgeois property* (219).

- Bourgeois property is the last form of property based on class antagonism, on the exploitation of the many by the few. Thus, communism is after the abolition of private property. That is, bourgeoisie property = private property.

Objection: You want to abolish the right of personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man’s own labor, which property is alleged to be the groundwork of all personal freedom, activity and independence.

Response: Modern industry has already done away with all that; the artisan has been replaced by the factory, and the laborer now only creates capital for the bourgeoisie (219).

Let us re-conceive, or rather, accurately conceive, of capital

Capital is a collective product in the sense that it requires all members of society to move it. Thus, capital is not a personal, but a social power (220).

- When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character.

Objection: But what of free trade? Free buying and selling?

Response: “Free trade, free buying and selling” are only notions that make sense when compared with the feudal system, not with the communist system, for the communist party seeks the abolition of buying and selling, of the bourgeois conditions of production (221).

What is the Communist Party?

Communists are distinguished by 1) pointing out and bringing to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independent of all nationality, and 2) represent the interests of the movement as a whole, no matter the stage at which the society is.

- Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labor of others by means of such appropriation” (222).
- “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (228).
- In bourgeois society, living labor is but a means to increase accumulated labor. In communist society, accumulated labor is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the laborer.