21.5 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: The Communist Manifesto

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of the social and political philosophy of Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engles (1820–1895). Their writings shaped socialist movements throughout Europe, as well as revolutions around the world. The Communist Manifesto (1848) was meant to inspire all workers to unite in common cause.

Source: From Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei (text of 1848; later clarifications by Engels are in parentheses). Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1955, pp. 5–50, passim. Translated by Henry A. Myers.

CONFRONTATION BETWEEN CAPITALISM AND COMMUNISM

A specter is passing through Europe—the specter of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have joined in a holy crusade against this specter: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French radicals and German police. . .

Bourgeoisie and Proletarians

The whole (written) history of society up to now has been the history of class struggles. . .

    Modern bourgeois society, rising from the ruins of feudal society, did not do away with class antagonisms. It only substituted new classes, new conditions of oppression and new forms of struggle for the old ones.

    Our period, however, the bourgeois period, is distinguished by the fact that it has simplified class antagonisms. All society is splitting more and more into two great hostile camps, into two large classes opposing each other directly: bourgeoisie and proletariat. . .

    Large-scale industry established the world market for which the discovery of America had prepared the way. The world market has given unlimited development to commerce, navigation, and overland communication. This has had a reciprocal effect on the expansion of industry: the bourgeoisie has developed, increased its funds for investment, and forced all the classes left over from the Middle Ages into obscurity to the same extent that commerce, shipping, and railroad construction have expanded.

    We can thus see how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long chain of developments, a series of revolutions in the way production and trade have been carried on.

    Each of these stages in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by corresponding political progress (of that class). The bourgeoisie—as an oppressed class under the domination of feudal lords, as an armed and self-governing association in free cities, here in control of an independent urban republic, there serving as a monarchy’s tax-paying Third Estate—served to balance the power of the nobility in semi-feudal or absolute monarchies with the growth of hand-tool industry and generally became the mainstay of the large monarchies. Finally, with the establishment of large industry and the world market the bourgeoisie conquered exclusive political domination for itself in modern states with representative governments. Those holding authority in modern states are only a committee looking out for the common class interests of the bourgeoisie.

    The bourgeoisie has played a highly revolutionary role in history.

    Wherever the bourgeoisie has taken over, it has destroyed all feudal, patriarchal, or idyllic relationships. It has relentlessly broken all those bright, multicolored feudal ties which bound men to their natural leaders, leaving no ties between men and man except naked interest, the bond of “cash payment” devoid of all feeling. It has drowned the holy ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, and even of top middle-class sentimentality in the ice-cold water of egoistical calculation. It has reduced personal importance to exchange value and substituted one single unscrupulous freedom for countless hard-earned and chartered freedoms. In a word, it has replaced exploitation veiled in religious and political illusions with open, shameless, direct and brutal exploitation.

    The bourgeoisie has torn away the halo from every occupation regarded up to now with respect or awe. It has turned the physician, the attorney, the poet and the scientist into its own hired hands.

    The bourgeoisie has ripped the ever so sentimental veil from family relationships and reduced them to purely monetary relations. . .
By rapidly improving all instruments of production and by making communication infinitely easier, the bourgeoisie drags all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it levels all Chinese walls to the ground and with which it forces the most fervent hatred of barbarians for foreigners to give way. It compels all nations to adopt bourgeois methods of production if they want to survive. It forces them to introduce so-called civilization among themselves, that is, to become bourgeois. In short, the bourgeoisie creates a world in its own image.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the countryside to the rule of the city. It has raised enormous cities, greatly increasing the urban population numerically in relation to the rural one, and has thus rescued a significant part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. As it has made the countryside dependent on the city, it has also made barbarian and semi-barbarian peoples dependent on civilized peoples, agricultural populations on bourgeois ones, and the Orient on the Occident.

During its class domination of scarcely one hundred years the bourgeoisie has created more colossal means of production and greater quantities of productive forces than have all past generations together. Subduing forces of nature, introducing machinery, steam navigation, railroads, and telegraphy, applying chemistry to industry and agriculture, clearing whole continents for cultivation, making rivers navigable, conjuring up whole populations to order—as if they were raising them out of the ground—what earlier century could have dreamed that such forces of production were asleep in the womb of associated labor?...

The weapons with which the bourgeoisie destroyed feudalism are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. The bourgeoisie, however, has not only forged the weapons of its own destruction but has also produced the men who will bear these weapons against them: the modern workers—the proletarians.

To the same extent to which the bourgeoisie—that is, capital—develops, the proletariat, the modern working class, also develops. Proletarians live only as long as they can find work, and they find work only as long as their work increases capital. These workers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity like any other article of commerce and are therefore exposed to all the uncertainties of competition and to all the fluctuations of the market.

**Proletarians and Communists**

What is the relationship of the Communists to the proletarians in general?

The Communists are no particular party to be contrasted with other workers’ parties. They have no interests separate from the whole proletariat. They do not want to shape the proletarian movement in accordance with any special (sectarian) principles. The Communists are distinguished from the rest of the proletarian parties only by the fact that, on one hand, they strongly emphasize the common interests of the world proletariat independent of nationality considerations in the different national struggles of the proletarians and, on the other hand, they always represent the interests of the total movement in the different stages of development which the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie goes through.

The Communists are thus really the most committed part of workers' parties of all countries, the part which continually drives them further; their understanding of theory gives them insight into the conditions, the course, and the general outcomes of the proletarian movement in advance of the remaining mass of the proletariat.

The most immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of bourgeois domination, and conquest of political power by the proletariat.

On this subject, the Communists can sum up their theory in one phrase: abolition of private property.

We Communists have been accused of wanting to abolish that property which has been personally acquired through the owner's own efforts, property which is supposed to be the basis of all personal freedom, activity, and independence.

Property which has been worked for—acquired through the owner's own efforts! Are you talking about the property of the petty bourgeoisie or that of the small farmers which preceded bourgeois property? We don't need to abolish that: the development of industry has been abolishing it and is abolishing it every day.

Or are you talking about modern bourgeois private property?

Now, does the proletarian's work for wages create any property for him? In no way. It creates capital, i.e., property, which exploits wage labor and which can increase only under the condition that it produces a fresh supply of labor for wages, in order to exploit it in turn. Property in its current form is based on the antagonism of capital and wage labor. Let us observe the nature of this antagonism:

To be a capitalist means to occupy not only a purely personal but also a social position in production. Capital is a community product and can be put into motion only through the common activity of many members, indeed, in the final analysis, only through the common activity of all members of society.
Capital is thus not a personal force, but rather social power. When capital is thus transformed into property belonging in common to all members of the community, personal property is not being changed into social property. Only the social character of property is changed. It loses its class character. . . .

In bourgeois society, living labor is only a means for increasing stored labor. In Communist society, stored labor is only a means for expanding, enriching, and improving the way workers live.

In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society, capital is individual and personal while the active individual person is dependent and depersonalized.

And the bourgeoisie calls the abolition of this relationship the abolition of individuality and freedom! And they are right. It is a question to be sure, of abolishing bourgeois individuality, independence, and freedom. . . .

Elimination of the family! Even the greatest radicals are horrified over this shameful intention of the Communists. What is the basis of the present-day family, the bourgeois family? Capital, private gain. In its completely developed form, it exists only for the bourgeoisie; however, it requires two complements to maintain it: deprivation of proletarian family life and public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will naturally disappear with the disappearance of these complements to it, and both complements will disappear when capital disappears. . . .

All bourgeois sayings about family and education, about intimate relations of trust between parents and children, are becoming all the more disgusting as all family ties are torn apart for the proletarians by the development of big industry and their children are transformed into simple articles of trade and labor.

“But you Communists want to introduce the practice of holding women in common!” the whole bourgeoisie shouts back in chorus.

The bourgeois sees in his wife only an instrument of production. He hears that instruments of production are to be utilized for the common good, and naturally he can think of nothing other than that the fate of being common property will also fall to women.

He does not suspect that the real aim is to eliminate the position of women as mere instruments of production.

By the way, nothing is more ridiculous than the highly moral indignation of our bourgeois over the alleged official “community of women” of the Communists. The Communists do not need to introduce the community of women; it has almost always existed.

Our bourgeois men, not satisfied with the fact that the wives and daughters of their proletarians are at their disposal, to say nothing of public prostitution, take great pleasure in alternately seducing each others’ wives.

Bourgeois marriage is in reality a community of married women. The most Communists can be accused of is a desire to introduce an official and open community of women, to take the place of a hypocritically concealed one. It goes without saying that with the abolition of the prevailing system of production the community of women arising from it, i.e., legal and illegal prostitution, will disappear.

Communists are further accused of wanting to abolish the fatherland and nationality.

Workers have no fatherland. We cannot take from them what they do not have. When the proletariat first takes over political rule and raises itself to the (leading) class of the nation, the proletariat will be constituting itself as the nation. It will then be “national” itself, although not at all in the bourgeois sense.

More and more national differences and antagonisms are disappearing already among the peoples due to the development of the bourgeoisie, freedom of trade, the world market, the uniformity of industrial production, and the living conditions corresponding with it.

Proletarian dominance will erase them even more. United action, among the civilized countries at least, is one of the basic preconditions for liberating the proletariat.

To the extent that the exploitation of one individual by another is eliminated, the exploitation of one nation by another will be eliminated.

The hostile stance of nations towards each other will disappear as the antagonism of classes inside the nation disappears.

The charges against Communism raised on religious, philosophical and ideological grounds in general do not deserve extensive discussion.

Does it require deep insight to grasp that when human living conditions—and with them social existences and relationships—change, their images, views, and concepts, in a word, their consciousness, will change as well?

What does the history of ideas prove other than that the output of the human mind changes itself to fit changes in material production? The ruling ideas of a period have always been only the ideas of the ruling class. . . .
Part 21: Reaction, Reform, and Revolt

In short, the Communists support every movement everywhere against existing social and political conditions. In all these movements, they emphasize the property issue, regardless of how pronounced or faintly developed it is perceived to be, as the fundamental issue of the movement.

Finally, the Communists work everywhere for mutual understanding and support among the democratic parties of all countries.

The Communists scorn any concealment of their views and intentions. They declare openly that their goals can be reached only through the violent overthrow of all social structures which have existed previously. Let the ruling classes tremble at the prospect of a Communist Revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose from it but their chains. They have a world to win.

Proletarians of all countries unite!

**Question:**
1. Marx and Engels say there have always been class antagonisms. Why do they believe that the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is different from previous class antagonism?