

## Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels – The Communist Manifesto

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Introduction – Vladimir Pozner.

The contest [...] between the “democratic” world, symbolized by the United States, and the “Communist” world, embodied by the U.S.S.R., was in fact not a struggle between democracy and communism; it was a struggle between two forms of ownership: private and state. State ownership lost. It might even be said that the struggle was between two forms of capitalism – bourgeois capitalism and state capitalism, with the former proving to be stronger. (XVI)

In a very interesting article on Karl Marx published in the November 25, 1991, issue of *The Wall Street Journal* the author asks: “Can Marx, who sometimes did suggest imposing the new order by force, be blamed for Communist totalitarianism? Can a visionary be held responsible for his followers' actions many years later? ... would the Man who gave the Sermon on the Mount really have favored the Spanish Inquisition?” The question begs a negative answer. But I would even argue that the question does not really address the issue properly. First of all, while Marx did call for the use of force to impose the new order, his reasoning had nothing to do with totalitarianism. He felt certain that the ruling class would never relinquish its grip on power/property without a struggle. Was he wrong? I don't think so. Even a most recent example serves to confirm Marx's view, that of Allende's election to power in Chile and his subsequent overthrow by counterrevolutionary forces supported by the C.I.A. The change to a Socialist form of government in Chile happened through the ballot box, but the ruling class did not accept being democratically voted out of power and used force to overthrow the legitimate government, murder the president, and then kill thousands of his supporters while instituting the most oppressive form of government: a military dictatorship. Second of all, the question is not about whether Marx can or should be held responsible for the action of his followers; the question is, can Marx be held responsible for those who used his name while completely disregarding his most basic principles? (XVIII-XIX)

One should not look to Marx for guidance as to the workings of a Socialist economy. He had very little to say about that subject. His forte was capitalism. So, indeed, there is much to “rethink” about Socialist economies – especially considering that, as I pointed out earlier, they have never existed. What collapsed in Eastern Europe was not the system of public ownership [...] but the system of state ownership. Finally, Marx did not foresee the dictatorial potential of the state because in the society that he envisaged, the state could not be dictatorial, for it would not have any ownership and its power would be derived from those who did in fact own the means of production: the people. What Marx did not foresee and what might be called “a huge mistake” was that self-styled Marxists would make use of his teachings for their own ends, distorting them beyond recognition in the process. (XIX-XX)

Look at the Declaration of Independence, written well before Marx was born. It tells us that all people are endowed with certain inalienable rights and (please pay attention) *among them* are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. “Among them” means that there are other inalienable rights. These, it seems to me, might be formulated in the following way: All people are endowed with certain inalienable rights, that of life, liberty and whatever else a person needs in order to pursue happiness. In

other words, a decent livelihood. (XX)

Where Marx differs from Thomas Jefferson and most other thinkers was in his certainty that a decent livelihood (the pursuit of happiness was not possible without two basic elements: political equality and economic equality. Political equality applies to a society where the people are governed by their own consent with the voice of their own government – something that cannot exist without universal suffrage. Some have more power than others, namely, those who are elected to office. But all are politically equal in the sense of being able to elect or be elected. Political equality is democracy, and democracy is not egalitarian. Economic equality is socialism, that is to say, a system by which a decent livelihood is secured for all. This does not mean identical wages for one and all, but it does mean sufficient subsistence for one and all to enjoy the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness. In short, socialism is a society where some have more, some have less, but there are no have-nots, a system that could be called nonegalitarian equality. That is the society Marx predicted would follow capitalism because capitalism was not and is not capable of creating a “decent livelihood” for all. Capitalism gives neither political nor economic equality to the people. The number of have-nots in all capitalist societies is quite high – and these are both economic and political have-nots. The reason for that, according to Marx, is the private ownership of the means of production. (XX-XXI)

There were many things Marx did not foresee, among them, the ability of the capitalist system to reform itself by incorporating a whole series of socialistic elements – such as paid vacations, worker compensation, social security – measures specifically designed to help the poor. However, let it be said that all of these measures and a host of others were never a given, they were all the result of a continued struggle on the part of the working people; blood was shed, many were killed, many more thrown in jail before the ruling classes realized *it was in their interest* to grant these rights, that it was either that or a revolt. Most of those measures came into being as a result of the Russian Revolution, which was initially Socialist in character. It frightened the daylights out of the capitalist world: Better to give the workers something than risk an uprising. That was a flexible response Marx had not anticipated. No doubt, he made other mistakes – such as predicting, although rather vaguely, that the workers would become more and more miserable and more likely to revolt, or that “the working men have no country.” There is no doubt that part of what Marx wrote in the mid-nineteenth century does not apply to the present day. But that in no way detracts from two principally important issues.

First, that the demise of the U.S.S.R. And of the so-called Socialist camp has absolutely nothing to do with Marx, Marxism, or communism.

Second, that the specter of communism is really not a specter at all, it is an idea, and outlook – and it is as alive today as in 1848, when Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto*. “Communism,” they wrote, “deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labor of others by means of such appropriation.” (XXI-XXII)

## **MANIFESTO OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY**

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe

have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies. (13)

## **I. BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIANS**

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. (13)

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. (16)

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, *i.e.*, capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piece-meal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and of the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of the machinery, etc. (20-21)

The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex. (21)

But every class struggle is a political struggle. (23)

The essential condition for the existence, and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. (26)

## **II. PROLETARIANS AND COMMUNISTS**

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of waste-lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal liability of all to labour. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population over the country.
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, &c., &c.

### **III. SOCIALIST AND COMMUNIST LITERATURE**

The Socialist and Communist literature of France, a literature that originated under the pressure of a bourgeoisie in power, and that was the expression of the struggle against this power, was introduced into Germany at a time when the bourgeoisie, in that country, had just begun its contest with feudal absolutism.

German philosophers, would-be philosophers, and *beaux esprits*, eagerly seized on this literature, only forgetting that when these writings immigrated from France into Germany, French social conditions had not immigrated along with them. In contact with German social conditions, this French literature lost all its immediate practical significance, and assumed a purely literary aspect. Thus, to the German philosophers of the eighteenth century, the demands of the first French Revolution were nothing more than the demands of "Practical Reason" in general, and the utterance of the will of the revolutionary French bourgeoisie signified in their eyes the law of pure Will, or Will as it was bound to be, or true human Will generally.

### **IV. POSITION OF THE COMMUNISTS IN RELATION TO THE VARIOUS EXISTING OPPOSITION PARTIES**

**WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**