

Karl Marx

Helpful Summaries and Context for *The Communist Manifesto*

Definitive quotes from Marx:

Communism (from the end of chapter two, which we didn't read, but an excerpt of which is provided as a postscript on this handout):

“When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

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.”

Proletariat:

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 piecemeal, 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 (6).

Bourgeoisie:

181-developed definition: Controls the means of production and in doing so, demean the human character of the laborers. They are capitalists, the putting of capital and market gains ahead of all else. Creates a world after its own image. The empowered minority.

Marxists.org definition: The class of people in bourgeois society who own the social means of production as their Private Property, i.e., as capital.

Intellectual Context for Marx

Historical Materialism and the Break from idealism

In Marx you have a break from the idealism of Hegel, where history is thought of primarily as an unfolding of consciousness, into what Marx called “historical materialism,” where you have a material/economic substructure and the superstructure of culture/society/politics that rests in the substructure of the economy. In *The German Ideology* Marx lays out his critique fairly clearly:

“In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from *real, active men*, and on the basis of their *real* life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development...” (154)

“Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.”
(p155)

Thus history is grounded in the material, which is woven through with human thought and ideals, rather than in the unfolding of ideals apart from or above the material world of real life. This provides a basis for the “means of production” argument in the *Manifesto*, as we must primarily involve ourselves in the material production of things rather than in the ideologies that derive from them.

Marx provides four premises of human history that lead to his critique of the modes of production:

- 1) **First Premise:** For there to be history, there have to be humans (*German Ideology* 149) and therefore humans must produce the means to satisfy their needs, or what Marx calls the “production of material life,” namely “Eating/Drinking/Habitation/Clothing...” The first historical act is thus the production of the *means to satisfy these needs*, aka...the “production of material life.”
- 2) **Second Premise:** The satisfaction of the first need leads to *new needs*. Without this, there’d be no history because things would be stagnant. This gives history an inherent dynamism.
- 3) **Third Premise:** Procreation. Humans must make other humans in order to make history.
- 4) **Fourth Premise:** Humans enter into social relations with each other. As we produce to fulfill new needs and as we procreate, we are engaged in *social relations*. In order to survive, we are engaged in both transforming nature, but also in creating social structures, new social arrangements, or what Marx will conceptualize as *modes of production!*

Postscript:

Helpful contextual excerpts from the end of chapter two of *The Communist Manifesto*

from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>

But let us have done with the bourgeois objections to Communism.

We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, *i.e.*, of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.

These measures will, of course, be different in different countries.

Nevertheless, in most advanced countries, the following will be pretty generally applicable.

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 rights 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 work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equitable distribution of the populace 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.

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