

The Place of the Communist Manifesto in the Elaboration of the Marxian Idea of the Post-Capitalist Society

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In the text that follows we argue that the basic Marxian ideas concerning the type of society supposed to follow the demise of capitalism are contained in the **Manifesto** in a condensed form. Accordingly, the first section offers an outline of what type of society the **Manifesto** envisages for the future as well as the conditions necessary for its appearance; while the second section relates these ideas to Marx's other texts.

I

In this paper post-capitalist society signifies what Marx calls a "society of free and associated producers" — also, indifferently, "communism" or "socialism"[1] — based on the "associated mode of production." This "union of free individuals," the crowning point of the self-emancipation of the immediate producers, where individuals are subject neither to personal dependence, as in pre-capitalism, nor to material dependence, as in commodity-capitalist society, excludes, by definition, state, private ownership of the conditions of production, commodity production and wage labour. The **Manifesto** indicates, in a condensed and concise fashion, the essential elements of the envisaged new society as well as the objective and the subjective conditions of its realization.

The new society is an "association"; the whole production being in the hands of the "associated individuals" — where the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all. The "communist mode of production and appropriation" is based on the specific production relations. Once the domination of the accumulated or dead labour over the living labour is turned upside down, the accumulated labour becomes a means of enlarging, enriching and advancing the life of the labourers. Commodity production ceases to exist, the money form and the capital form of the product of labour disappear and wage labour vanishes along with capital. The ownership relations of the new society correspond to these new relations of production. Capital is transformed into collective property, class property in the means of production disappears yielding place to social appropriation. However, this social appropriation does not affect the personal appropriation of the products of labour with a view to the reproduction of the immediate life.

As regards the conditions of realising the post-capitalist society, the **Manifesto** asserts that the proletarian revolution, indispensable for establishing the communist mode

of production and appropriation, presupposes the existence of a developed and advanced proletariat and material conditions adequate for the emancipation of the proletariat. Now, these conditions are the product of the bourgeois epoch. The bourgeoisie has destroyed the pre-capitalist relations of production based on personal dependence of the individual. It has equally destroyed the old local and national autarchy and put universal exchange in their place. At the same time the bourgeoisie cannot exist without continuously revolutionizing the material productive forces. The bourgeoisie is the unconscious carrier of industry whose own product is precisely the proletariat, the "grave diggers" of capital. The power of organisation of the proletariat marches hand in hand with industry's development. Simultaneously the bourgeoisie is forced to bring the elements of its own culture to the proletariat thereby furnishing the latter with arms against itself.

The proletariat, the historical agent of the communist revolution, is the only class facing the bourgeoisie which is truly revolutionary. Constituting the immense majority of the capitalist society, having no property and no country, the proletariat is the universal class which carries the future in its hands. Consequently the revolution led by the proletariat is the most radical revolution which not only abolishes its own mode of appropriation but also all previous modes of appropriation, which implies not only the self emancipation of the proletariat but also the emancipation of the whole humanity mediated by the communist revolution. This revolution is not at all a momentary event. It is a whole process of development of which the rise to power of the proletariat — the "conquest of democracy" — constitutes the "first step." But in course of development of this revolution public power loses its political character along with the increasing disappearance of class antagonism and of classes themselves. At the end of this trajectory the old society with its classes disappears yielding place to a free association of individuals.

II

These ideas of the **Manifesto** Marx elaborates in his different texts both before and after to this composition. This can be conveniently discussed under two headings: (1) communist revolution and its conditions and (2) nature of the communist (socialist) society.

(1) The communist (proletarian) revolution, far from be-

ing a simple seizure of power by the proletariat, is a secular process. In his famous 1859 Preface, Marx speaks of the “beginning” of an “epoch of social revolution.” The period of transition between the capitalist society and the society of free and associated producers is included *within* this revolutionary process which Marx calls, in the *Gothakritik*, the “period of revolutionary transformation” during which the capitalist society is revolutionized towards communism. During this whole period the immediate producers remain proletarians (whence the “dictatorship of the proletariat”) and, as Marx insists in his critique of Bakunin, the “old organization of society does not yet disappear” (1874-75), (1973c: 630). Marx affirms the same idea in his address to the International on the Paris Commune. “The working classes know that the superseding of the economical conditions of the slavery of labour by the conditions of free and associated labour can only be a progressive work of time. They know that the present ‘spontaneous action of the natural laws of capital and landed property’ can only be superseded by the ‘spontaneous action of the laws of the social economy of free and associated labour’ in a long process of development of new conditions, as was the ‘spontaneous action of the economical laws of slavery’ and the ‘spontaneous action of the economical laws of serfdom’” (“First outline”) (Marx 1976b: 156-57).

The communist revolution has a universal character. This is because the proletariat, having no property and no country, is the expression of the dissolution of all classes and all nationalities. Moreover, because of the universal development of the productive forces (under capitalism) and the “world-historical” extension of capital — appearing as a power alien to the proletariat — the proletariat’s subjection is universal. The proletariat can exist only as a world historical (*weltgeschichtlich*) force, in the same way as communism can exist only as a world historical reality. Another fundamental aspect of the universal character of the communist revolution is that the emancipation of the proletariat, the result of the communist revolution, does not mean that the emancipation is limited to the proletariat. It is universal, human (Marx 1973a: 34; 1965: 1538).

As a consistent materialist Marx insists that if, in the society as it is, the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of circulation for a classless society do not already exist in a latent state, all attempts at exploding the society would be Don Quixotism (1953: 77).[2] Precisely it is capital which creates the material conditions of the proletarian (human) emancipation. In his different texts Marx returns again and again to one of the main themes of the *Manifesto*, namely, that the great revolutions effected by the bourgeoisie in the material productive forces along with the development of the “greatest productive force,” the proletariat, the “revolutionary class” (1965: 135), are the indispensable conditions of the emancipation of the proletariat. In this we see a veritable demonstration of the “dialectic of negativity” which Marx discerns in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.

In an earlier text addressed to the workers Marx had clearly underlined what he called the “positive side of capital”, that is, without the big industry, free competition, the world market and the corresponding means of production there would be no material resources for the emancipation of the proletariat and the creation of the new society, and he added that without these conditions the proletariat would not have taken the road of the union nor known the development which makes it capable of revolutionizing the old society as well as itself (1973b: 555). This idea is pursued in later texts. Thus Marx writes that capital, by its unceasing pretension to a universal form of wealth, pushes labour beyond the limits of the latter’s needs and thereby creates the material elements of the development of a rich individuality (1953: 23). In the same way, to the extent that it is capital’s disciplining constraint which forces the great mass of society to create surplus labour beyond its own immediate needs, capital creates culture and fulfils a social-historical function (1976a: 173). Marx in fact praises the “scientific honesty” of Ricardo against the “sentimentalists” like Sismondi — for Ricardo’s insistence on the necessity of production for production’s sake inasmuch as this latter signifies the “development of the human productive forces, that is, the development of the wealth of human nature as an end in itself (*als Selbstzweck*).” This development of the productive forces is an “absolutely necessary, practical pre-condition (of human emancipation) because without it only the penury and the necessity will be generalized and, with the need, shall also restart the struggle for necessity. On the other hand, only with this universal development of the productive forces can a



universal intercourse be posited.”

In this connection Marx observes that this development, though effected at the cost of the majority of individuals and even of the entire classes, ends by smashing this antagonism (*diesen Antagonismus durchbricht*) (1959: 107; 1973a:33) Marx underlines that this type of development, namely “the development of the general humanity at the cost of the greatest waste of the development of the individual” takes place in the epochs *preceding* “the socialist constitution of mankind” (1976a: 327),[3] that is — in the language of 1859 “Preface” — in the “pre-history of human society.” The domination of the worker by the capitalist, by violence and against the majority — writes Marx in another manuscript of the sixties — contributes to the “unlimited (*rücksichtslos* — reckless) productivity of social labour” which alone can create the material basis of a free human society (1969: 18), and in a letter: “Big industry is not only the mother of antagonism, but it is also the creator of the material and intellectual conditions necessary for resolving this antagonism” (to Kugelmann 17.3.68). As Marx writes in *Capital I*: “In history as in nature putrefaction is the laboratory of life.”[4] In his last programmatic composition addressed to the French working class Marx wrote that the material and intellectual elements of the collective form of the means of production are constituted by the development of the capitalist class itself (1965: 1538).

(2) We arrive now at the nature of the of the new society, as envisaged by Marx. Communism is the real reappropriation of the human essence by the human and for the human, a complete return of the individual to oneself as a social and human being, a return which is realized while conserving all the wealth of the preceding development. The entire movement of history is the real process of its birth, it is also the movement of its own becoming, understood and conceived as such (*die begriffne und gewusste Bewegung seines Werdens*) (1966: 99).

Freed from material and personal dependence, the members of the new society, freely associated and masters of their own social movement, are universally developed individuals whose social relations are subject to their own collective control as personal and common relations (1953: 79; 1962: 92-93). Replacing the “false community” which confronted the individuals as an autonomous power in the “pre-history of human society,” there arises in the Association the “true community” whose members are universally developed “social individuals” (1966: 252-53; 1953: 79).

Corresponding to the new associated mode of production there is now a new mode of appropriation. After the demise of *class property* — that is, “private property” in its fundamental sense — there appears the social appropriation of the means of production. Let us add that the (workers’) state property over the means of production is not yet the *social appropriation* over the means of production. While it is possible to abolish individual or corpo-

rate private property juridically, it is impossible to “abolish” juridically *class property*, which continues to exist till the possessing classes disappear. A mode of production (appropriation) cannot be decreed away (*wegdekretieren*) (1962: 16). It is only at the end of the “period of revolutionary transformation,” when the associated mode of production has replaced the old mode of production, when political power has ceased to exist, that private property in the fundamental sense of class property disappears yielding place to the collective appropriation by whole society. It is in this sense that the **Manifesto** speaks of the “abolition of class property” (*Aufhören des Klasseigentums*). The same idea reappears in Marx’s address on the commune. Contrary to all the earlier forms of appropriation, where the latter’s character was limited, the collective appropriation by the producers has a total character inasmuch as the dispossession of the producers in capitalism is total, and, secondly, the development of the productive forces under capitalism has attained a universal character such that they can only be appropriated globally by the entire society (1973a: 67; 1953: 387; 1976a: 148).

As regards the exchange relations of the new society, both the material exchanges (*Stoffwechsel*) of human beings with nature and the social exchanges among individuals — which are independent of any specific mode of production — continue to operate in the Association. Nevertheless, there are qualitative changes. As regards the first type of exchange, the associated producers regulate rationally their material exchanges with nature spending minimum force and in the conditions most worthy of and most conforming to their human nature (Marx 1964: 828). As to the second type, in the associated mode of production where the labour of the individual is posited from the start as social labour, the product of labour ceases to take commodity form, this form of “all-sided alienation.” The old society’s exchange of products taking the form of exchange values yields place to the “free exchanges of activities” among the social individuals, determined uniquely by needs and collective ends (Marx 1958: 54; 1953: 77, 78). Naturally, in the new society the allocation of resources among the different productive branches as well as distribution of products among social individuals cease to be mediated by the commodity from the product of labour. In a word, “within the cooperative society based on the collective ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products” (**Gothakritik**).

We thus conclude that the essential ideas concerning the society of free and associated producers — the post-capitalist society — as well as the conditions of its realisation, elaborated by Marx in his writings of different periods, are already found in the **Manifesto** in a condensed form.

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Notes

1. The distinction socialism-communism, absent in Marx, is of later vintage and was made familiar by Lenin.
2. The occurrence of 'Don Quixotism' in the name of socialist revolution in the twentieth century has been a telling confirmation of Marx's prognosis.
3. In English in the text.
4. This sentence appears only in the French version (1965: 955). About three decades earlier, in his Anti-Proudhon, Marx had written: "It is the bad side (in its struggle with the good side) which produces the movement that makes history" (1965: 89).

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