

# *An Introduction to the Communist Manifesto*

**An introduction and a short summary of the Communist Manifesto authored by Karl Marx and Frederic Engels in 1847.**

*Paul Varghese*

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## **Introduction**

“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 Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies”

The Communist manifesto begins with the significant statement that Communism has already taken root on the soil of Europe, and that the established powers of the continent are already (in 1848) straining every nerve to device ways and means of increasing it.

Its first thesis is that since communism is by now acknowledged to be a power to be reckoned with, the Communists of all Europe should now get together and make their views public. The occasion of the Manifesto, was in fact such a conference in London, when it was published in the English, French, German, Italian, and Flemish and Danish languages.

## **I. Bourgeois and Proletarians**

*Thesis:* The history of all existing societies is the history of class struggles.

In every epoch of history, there is a gradation of society into ranks or classes. In the middle ages, for example, there were the feudal lords, vassals, guild masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs etc., with further gradation within each class.

Our epoch is the epoch of the bourgeois, the class of modern capitalists, or owners of social production, and employers of wage-labor, a class that sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, and grew fat by industrialization and colonization. In this epoch the class struggle has been

greatly simplified. There are only two great classes directly facing each other-- Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. Industry is the tool of the middle class to come to power. Its coming to power marked the end of all the old class distinctions and established a new principle of life-- naked self-interest. It has sacrificed all the other freedoms of life in favor of one single freedom-- Free Trade. In place of the old exploitation veiled by religions and political illusions, it has substituted a naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. It has brought down all the old haloed professions to the level of ordinary wage-earning servants including physician, lawyer and priest. Even the family had been made into a money relation.

“The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere”

“The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.”

They urbanize the country. It agglomerates population and centralizes the means of production, thus centralizing property ownership and political power too in the process. Independent and loosely connected states and provinces become integrated to form single units.

But modern bourgeois society, which has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all the preceding generations together, now finds itself no longer able to control the powers it has conjured up. Overproduction is one of these terrific factors that came up in society periodically like a famine or an epidemic. The conditions of the bourgeois society became too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them.

How does the bourgeoisie get over the crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of production forces, and on the other, by the conquest of new markets and by the more thorough exploitation of the old markets.

In proportion as capital develops, the modern working class also develops. These laborers are a commodity who must sell themselves piecemeal and are hence exposed to all the vicissitudes of a competitive market. The cost of production of a commodity determines its price in the long run, and similarly the cost of a laborer is dependent on the barest minimum for his subsistence and propagation.

The Proletariat keeps growing as labor becomes less and less skilled owing to the advent of machinery. Women join the labor force. The lower strata of the bourgeoisie themselves, unable to bear the competition of wealthier capitalists sink gradually into the proletariat.

The Proletariat also goes through various stages of development. First the struggle is directed against machinery itself which has deprived the laborer of the dignity of his profession. But they are an incoherent mass scattered all over the country and if there is any union in any area it is sponsored by the capitalist for the own ends.

But as it grows, it feels its own strength more. Machinery abolishes all distinction between laborers by more or less flattening out the wage scale. Slowly they begin to form trade unions. There are occasional riots. The struggle is directed more against the bourgeoisie now.

Industrial Trade Unions get organized as communication develops and the class struggle becomes no longer an isolated phenomenon. In spite of the threat of competition among the workers themselves, the organization grows stronger further, mightier. They even get legislative enactments in their favour.

The bourgeoisie meanwhile has to face keen competition among themselves, with the aristocracy and also with the bourgeoisie of other lands. They appeal to the proletariat for help in these cases, the latter becoming stronger in the process of helping the former.

At this point, the dissolution in the old society has reached a crisis and a section of the bourgeoisie that has comprehended the nature of the historical movement goes over to the proletariat. Of all the groups that struggle against the bourgeoisie, only the proletariat is revolutionary because all the other groups are merely trying to conserve themselves, and are hence reactionary. The “social scum” that does not form part of the proletariat are for the most parts, the bribed tools of reactionary intrigue. The proletariat on the other hand has no interest in conserving any of the values of the bourgeoisie, including their law, morality and religion. Their mission therefore is clearly destructive.

So far in history all previous movements have been movements of minorities. The proletariat movement is the only movement in the interest of the immense majority. When this huge lower stratum of present society raises itself up, it cannot but throw off the whole super strata.

This raising itself is at first a national phenomenon in each country – but it is inevitable. Bourgeois society has not been able to maintain even the minimum for the slavish existence for its under-dogs. Hence the existence of the bourgeois is no longer comparable with the existence of the society. “Its fall and victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

## II. Proletarians and Communists

What is the relationship of the Communist to the Proletariat as a whole?

The communists are distinguished from other working class parties only in that it is independent of all nationality, and that they represent the interests of the working class movement as a whole. They are, for that reason, that section of the working class which pushes all others in every country; they understand the line of march, the conditions and the ultimate general results of the movement.

“The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat”

The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property – it is in this sense that the theory of the Communists can be summed up in the single phase-- Abolition of private property. We Communists do not desire to abolish the right of personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man’s own labor, but bourgeois private property is not acquired as the fruit of a man’s own labor.

### *Capital-Wage labor antagonism*

Capital is a collective product, set in motion by the united action of many members of a society. It is therefore not a personal, but a social power. So when this power which belongs to many members of society is converted into the property of all members, it does not lose its character of personal property. It merely loses its class character.

Wage labor on the other hand, gets merely just enough to continue his existence – a minimum wage. In bourgeois society the surplus of the laborers’ produce is used merely to command more labor and so on. It is this vicious circle that we want to do away with – not the surplus labor as such, but its use to save the ends of the ruling class. In Communist society the surplus will be used to widen, enrich and promote the existence of the laborer.

### *Bourgeoisie’s objections*

This means the abolition of individuality – yes, bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence, and bourgeois freedom. The freedom of buying and selling has any meaning only in comparison with the restricted selling and buying of the Middle ages. In Communism, we abolish buying and selling as much. All the other freedom that you are talking about are freedom of the bourgeoisie – freedom that are denied to 9/10 of the humanity. We plan to destroy the individual, the bourgeoisie individual, who stands in the way of the masses of humanity.

You say, abolition of private property will lead to universal laziness. If that were true, bourgeois society ought to have gone to the dogs long ago; for those who work get nothing, and those who get anything do nothing.

Your culture, your family, your education, your law-- everything is merely the projection of the will of your class, and we expect all of it to vanish with the vanishing capital; your clap – trap about the family and education is so much nonsense, for under the present system they are being asunder anyway.

You accuse us with trying to establish the community of women. Well, what do you have in your bourgeois society? Your wives to you are merely tools of production. You use the wives of your proletarians as prostitutes, besides you seduce each other's wives. We are merely expressing your hypocrisy and establishing an openly legalized community of women in place of your concealed one.

You accuse us of abolishing country and nationality. Yes we plead guilty. When exploitation of man by man disappears, exploitation of nation by nation must also disappear.

Your religious and philosophical charges against Communism do not even merit an answer. Christianity won its victory over ancient religions because they were rotten. Rationalist ideas won the victory over Christianity in the 18th century for the same reason. Each successful idea was the tool of the victorious class. Communism being radical, departs from all traditional ideas.

So all your bourgeois objections to Communism are without any basis.

So the first step in the working class revolution is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class; to win the battle of democracy. Then the proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest by degrees, all capital from the bourgeois, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state and then to increase the total of productive forces.

It might be necessary in the beginning to use some despotic methods for this purpose. These methods will be different in different countries. In the most advanced countries the following will be pretty generally applicable:-

1. Abolition of property in land and use of all land rents for public purposes
2. Heavy graduated income tax
3. Abolition of all rights of inheritance
4. Confiscation of property of all emigrants and rebels
5. Centralized national state banking
6. Centralized state owned communication
7. Extension of state owned production machinery

8. equal liability of all to labor -- industrial armies
9. Gradual abolition of distinction between town and country by more equal population distribution and integration of agriculture with manufacturing industries
10. Free education for all children.

When class distinctions finally disappear, political power, which is the organized power of one class to oppress another will also disappear.

### **III. Socialist and Communist Literature**

#### *1. Reactionary Socialism*

##### a) Feudal Socialism

Socialism has its origin in the feudal aristocracy that succumbed to the bourgeois, and used the working class as a tool to lampoon the new boss and to whisper in his ears sinister prophecies of impending doom. Its real motive was vengeance and vexation at its own loss of status. The aristocracy, in order to rally the people to them waived the proletarian alms bag in front for a banner. "Christian socialism is but the Holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart burnings of the aristocrat.

##### b) Petty Bourgeois Socialism

This is a socialism brought up by the lower strata of the bourgeois who find themselves constantly hurled into the proletariat and have to continuously struggle to keep themselves in the middle class. Sismondi was the head of this school. It is correct in its evaluation of the contemporary economic system, but its positive aims are reactionary and utopian.

##### c) German Socialism

A form of literary socialism which philosophized on the French revolutionary ideas-- a pedantic emasculation of socialism and communism masquerading under the name of "true" socialism.

#### *2. Conservative or Bourgeois Socialism*

A part of the Bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances; in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this class belong the hole and corner reformers of every imaginable kind. They wish for a bourgeois without a proletariat.

Bourgeois Socialism attained adequate expression when and only when it becomes a mere figure of speech. Free Trade – for the working class. Protective duties-- for the benefit of the working class. Prison Reform-- for the benefit of the working class. In other words, bourgeois – for the benefit of the working class

### *3. Critical Utopian socialism and Communism*

Critical Utopian Socialism of the Owenite-Fourier type does not recognize the class struggle or other inevitable historical forces but tries to make society conform to a certain pattern invented by them. They appeal to society as a whole and not to any one class in particular. They reject all revolutionary actions, they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means. They propose the abolition of class antagonism without recognizing their existence – again reducing their philosophy to systematic pedantry.

### **IV. Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties**

The Communists ally themselves temporarily with any opposition party whose present program is in accord with Communist objectives. In other words, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

“Workers of all lands, unite!”