

An Anarchist Guide to The Communist Manifesto of Marx & Engels

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The Manifesto of the Communist Party—or **Communist Manifesto (CM)**—was written in 1848, by Karl Marx, using material from Frederick Engels. It was written for the Communist League, composed of revolutionary Germans, mostly emigre workers living in London. (In those days, “party” usually meant what we would today call a “tendency” or “movement.”) It has since become a classic for socialists and communists, translated into virtually all the languages of earth. Huge movements of hundreds of thousands of workers, peasants, and others have regarded it as a foundational text, a call for human emancipation. Mass-murdering dictatorships have treated it as a holy text, while in Western capitalist democracies, it has been regarded as a Satanic tract.

The mainstream of anarchism is also socialist and communist (libertarian socialist or communist). What should anarchists make of this **Manifesto**? The revolutionary anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin and his allies developed about two decades later, in the late 1860s and early 1870s, culminating in a split in the First International. There could be no discussion of not-yet-existing revolutionary anarchism in the **CM**. It has one sentence referring to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first person to identify as an anarchist (to be discussed below). Anarchists published their own translations of the **CM** in the U.S., Britain, and Russia. (Draper 1998) It might be useful to review the **CM** from an anarchist’s viewpoint. Revolutionary anarchists tend to agree with most of its class analysis, while rejecting much of its political and economic program. (The only other review of the **CM** by an anarchist I have found is Bookchin 1998.)

While the **Manifesto** outlines basic concepts of Marx’s world view, which he maintained for the rest of his life, it was written early in his career. Engels and he had not yet gone through the 1848 European-wide revolution and its defeat, nor closely observed the 1871 Paris Commune uprising, nor participated in the First International, among various experiences. Especially, Marx had not begun his massive studies of political economy, which culminated in **Capital** and other writings. Therefore we must be careful in interpreting the **CM**, since Marx and Engels modified specific opinions over their lifetimes.

(There are many republications and translations of the **Communist Manifesto** and a great many books interpreting it. I am relying especially on annotated versions by Hal Draper [1998] and Phil Gasper [Marx & Engels 2005]. Rather than citing page numbers, I will cite the **CM**’s sections and its numbered paragraphs, using Marx & Engels 2005.)

The Main Concept

The basic theme of the Manifesto is working class revolution. There have been many who called themselves “Marxists” but did not believe in either the importance of the working class nor in revolution, yet that was the central idea of the Marxism of Marx and Engels. (Similarly the mainstream of anarchism, as it later developed, believed in working class revolution. See van der Walt & Schmidt 2009.)

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” (section I; paragraph 1) In a footnote to this passage, Engels added later that this only applied to societies after the end of “primitive communistic societies” (hunter-gatherers). There were various minority ruling classes, supported by their states, which forced a majority to toil. They squeezed a surplus from the laboring and oppressed majority. Lords and aristocrats lived off the work of slaves, serfs, artisans, tenant farmers, heavily-taxed villages, etc., who survived on the minimum their masters

left them. (Such a class analysis of social development, basing itself in relations of production and exploitation associated with different types of society, has been called “historical materialism.”)

We live under the latest form of class society: capitalism (the CM called it “bourgeois society”). Whatever there is of middle sectors, overall society is polarized “into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat.” (I; 5)

Once broken out of feudal constraints, capitalism was driven by competition and class conflict to expand and grow, to accumulate ever more profits, to concentrate and centralize its enterprises. It created the industrial revolution, more productive than ever in human history. It developed an integrated world market, connecting international humanity. Marx became positively lyrical in describing the marvels of capitalist development. “The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together....Machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture,...whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?” (I; 24)

Bourgeois commentators like such passages in the CM. They are pleased that Marx recognized the productive, industrializing, and once progressive nature of capitalism. They point out that these trends have not ceased, as we know in our globalized world of smart phones, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology.

However, they do not accept Marx’s view that the further development of mass production overwhelms the limitations of private property and competitive markets. “The history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces...against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return, put on its trial...the existence of the entire bourgeois society.” (I; 27) In the repeated recessions and depressions, large amounts of commodities as well as means of production are destroyed, while workers are faced with unemployment and poverty. All this due to overproduction: too many goods have been produced to be sold; excessive wealth turns capitalist society into a pool of poverty and destitution. (There are other ways in which the capitalist drive toward accumulation threatens “the existence of the entire bourgeois society,” such as wars or ecological catastrophes. These are only implied in the CM, but raised elsewhere in Marx’s work.) A fuller analysis of why capitalism overproduces, including the tendency toward a falling rate of profit, would not be made by Marx until later.

Of all the productive forces created by the bourgeoisie, the greatest in the working class. These proletarians are not defined by the type of work they do nor by the machines they use. They are defined by their need to sell to capital their ability to labor. “A class of laborers who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, as a commodity like every other article of commerce.” (I; 30) (This was written before Marx made a distinction between the labor process and workers’ “labor power,” the commodity of their ability to do work.)

“The bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men [and women—WP] who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians.” (I; 28) “With the development of industry, the proletariat not only increase in number, it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more....The workers begin to form combinations (trade unions) against the bourgeois....” (I; 38)

This class is different from all other laboring populations in history. Unlike peasants or artisans, its men and women have no private property nor likelihood of getting any. In its working

conditions it is collective and cooperative. The goal of individual workers is not to own three feet of an assembly line or five square feet of an office. Due to the nature of modern production, any proletarian goal must be cooperative, social, and democratic. Their existence is part of a level of technology which could—for the first time in human existence—produce enough for a comfortable life for all, distributed equally, with plenty of leisure, and with toil replaced by creative labor.

Passages of the **Manifesto** indicate that capitalism will drive down the standard of living of the workers to that of biological subsistence. This is taken to support the idea that Marx had a “theory of immiseration.” Actually he was repeating the then-current orthodoxy of the political economy of David Ricardo and others. This stated that the competitive labor market must drive down the price of the workers’ labor to that of bare subsistence. Later, Marx was to modify this concept. In times of prosperity (between the depressions) wages tended to go up. Most of all, the standard price (value) of workers’ labor power depends on historical and cultural conditions. It depends on the standard of living which a nation’s working class has won through past struggle. It is a constant conflict between capital and labor.

The class conflict is reflected in the bourgeois state, which is not a neutral institution between classes. “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” (I; 12) “This sentence is doubtless the most succinctly aphoristic statement by Marx of his theory of the state.” (Draper 1998; 207) It does not say that the state is a passive puppet of the bourgeoisie; it says that its executive branch manages the bourgeoisie’s affairs. It does not deny that the state may have its own relatively autonomous interests as an institution, within its overall task of supporting capitalism. In his later political writings, Marx was to expand on these issues. As a condensed statement of the class theory of the state, anarchists may also accept the sentence. (Price 2018)

The End of the Middle Class?

Because the **CM** describes a society dividing essentially into two poles, Marx is often interpreted as predicting the end of the middle class. (This is aside from his use of “middle class” to mean the bourgeoisie. This was done then because businesspeople were historically between the feudal aristocracy and the working people.) This supposed prediction of Marx has been held as “disproved” by the huge growth of management and bureaucracy in business and government, as well as by the temporary rise to a ruling class of the bureaucracy in the former Soviet Union and other Stalinist states.

Marx did predict that “small tradespeople, shopkeepers,...handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on....” (I; 35) He saw this as a tendency, not as something about to be completed immediately. “In countries where modern civilization has become fully developed, a new class of petty bourgeois has been formed, fluctuating between proletarian and bourgeoisie....” (II13)

He expected that the growth of large scale production would require ever more middle level employees—a new middle class. “Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army, they are placed under the command of a perfect

hierarchy of officers and sergeants...” (I; 32) The old petty bourgeoisie tends “to be replaced in manufactures, agriculture, and commerce by labor overseers and stewards.” (II. 13)

In later works, Marx wrote more about the increased role of management and bureaucracy in expanding capitalist enterprises and of the increasingly autonomous bureaucracy of the national state. However, unlike Proudhon, Bakunin, and other anarchists, he never foresaw the danger of a collective bureaucracy taking state power as an agent of capital accumulation (state capitalism).

The **CM** expects that part of the bourgeoisie and those associated with it will be forced down into the proletariat, where it will “supply the proletarians with educational elements.” (II; 142) Politically, “a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands.” (II; 143) Karl Kautsky and Vladimir Lenin later claimed that intellectuals from the upper classes were essential to bring socialism to the working class—although Marx and Engels made it clear that communist revolution came from the proletariat. Probably this passage was just acknowledging the reality that a few revolutionary intellectuals from upper classes had split from their backgrounds and enriched the mass movement theoretically and practically. Marx and Engels themselves came from the bourgeoisie. (Of the “founders” of anarchism, Proudhon was originally a poor artisan, but Bakunin and Kropotkin had been Russian aristocrats.) Even so, the **Manifesto** does not recognize the danger of these ruling class “educational elements” dominating the workers’ movement and riding it to power.

The Proletariat Alone?

The Manifesto of the Communist Party may be read as saying that only the working class matters in making a revolution. “Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a genuinely revolutionary class.” (I; 44) Marx lists “the shopkeeper, the artisan” and even “the peasant” as “not revolutionary, but conservative,” even “reactionary.” (I; 45) This view was undemocratic, not to say strategically unwise, considering that at that time peasants were the majority of every European country and every other country in the world, except for Britain. Even today, peasants are a large proportion of the world’s population.

“One of the most distinctive characteristics of the **Manifesto** was its almost complete neglect of the peasantry....The view is wholly negative....The **Manifesto** reached the very end of Marx’s inattention to the peasant class. The picture changed immediately after the outbreak of the revolution in 1848...” (Draper 1998; 211)

However, there are passages which point in another direction, that the interests of the working class overlap with every other oppressed group and every other progressive issue. “All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.” (I; 49) For such reasons, “the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.” (IV; 8) In any case, the working class itself, as a class, includes members of every oppressed grouping (half being women, of all “races,” many from peasant families, immigrants from all nations, LGBT people, etc.).

Of issues which are not simply proletarian-socialist, the **Manifesto** raises the need to fight for bourgeois-democracy (liberal democracy), against the then-dominant aristocratic-bureaucratic-feudal states of Europe. Communists “labor everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.” (IV; 10) It proposes that the working class align with other classes, including the bourgeoisie, in democratic revolutions—while maintaining its political independence.

By the end of the 1848 revolution, Marx and Engels had modified their views from the **CM**. They had learned that the bourgeoisie could not be relied on even to fight for its own historical democratic program. The bourgeoisie feared what Marx had hoped for, that the bourgeois-democratic revolution might be followed by a working class revolution. Therefore it pulled back from its democratic cause and capitulated to the aristocratic-bureaucratic regimes. The proletariat itself would have to lead the struggle for democracy as part of the struggle for socialism (which Marx and Engels were to call “permanent revolution”). This required alliances with all the oppressed and exploited of every section of society.

Aside from this, the **CM** refers to the oppression of women—who are treated as commodities in the bourgeois family and as super-exploited workers in the proletarian families. It speaks of the need for children to have an integral, progressive, education, integrating appropriate labor with education.

Advocating world revolution, the **CM** opposed nationalism as an ideology or program. But the **Manifesto** advocated national liberation: “The exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to.” (II; 56) The **CM** supported the national movement of Poland, linking the class interests of the peasants with the national issue. “Among the Poles, [communists] support the party that insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation ...” (IV; 4) (Similarly the internationalist Bakunin asserted his “strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression...”—in van der Walt & Schmidt 2009; 309)

The **CM** proposes, “The bringing into cultivation of waste lands and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.” (II; 72; no. 7) “Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country by a more equitable distribution of the population over the country.” (II; 72; no. 9) This is a program of radical ecology and ecosocialism.

Rather than only calling for a working class revolution, many Marxists and anarchists advocate a revolution “by the working class and its allies among all the oppressed” or some such expression. This is not counterposed to the major importance of the working class. Unlike all other oppressed groups, even the peasants, proletarians are immediately central to the workings of the capitalist economy. Their exploited labor directly produces surplus value. This becomes the profits which maintain the capitalist class, its state, and all its other institutions. The working class is central to a socialist revolution, but this includes supporting and working with every oppressed group and on every progressive issue.

The **CM** indicates that communists should participate in all the struggles of the working class. At the time this meant particularly the struggle for democracy, in which the proletariat should support petty-bourgeois forces against the aristocratic-bureaucratic states. It included the fight for labor unions, in which communists were allied with reformist workers. The communists should not hide their views but advocate them as the fulfillment of the limited struggles.

The **Manifesto** considers the relationship between the revolutionary minority and the (as yet) non-revolutionary majority (in section II). This is a necessary topic. But if the minority be-

believes that it has all the answers and knows the final truth, it will be authoritarian—and Marxism tends in that direction. Instead, a libertarian socialist approach requires dialogues between the revolutionary minority and the various views of the majority, where each learns from the other.

A basic problem of the **CM** is its telescoping of its predictions. Marx and Engels wrote as if every European country already had a proletarian majority, as if the peasants and artisans of Germany and France had already dissolved into the working class. They were sure that bourgeois-democratic revolutions in Europe would immediately be followed by working class revolutions. They saw European capitalism as dominated completely by huge enterprises. They pictured the world economy as already being closely tied together by international trade. All these were real tendencies, but by no means as near to completion as they thought.

Fifteen years after the **CM**, Marx wrote to Engels, “The easygoing delusions and the almost childish enthusiasm with which, before February 1848, we greeted the era of revolution have gone to the devil.” (in Draper 1998; 321) Compared to Marx’s time, today the proletariat is a much larger proportion of the world population and the global market is much more integrated. In many ways the **CM** is more relevant today than it was when written.

The Marxist Program

The goal is communism (or the broader term, socialism). “The theory of the communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.” (II: 13) “Capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society.” (II: 20) (But the common ownership of the means of production will not effect “personal property.”) (II: 20) “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.” (II: 74) So far, there is nothing here with which an anarchist-communist would disagree—or with which a liberal could agree! But Marx never went much beyond such generalities. He rejected developing “the best possible plan of the best possible state of society” (III: 51) or drawing “fanciful pictures of future society.” (III: 53) These were merely “castles in the air” (III: 55) rather than based in “the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.” (III: 48) All very well, but when the “material conditions” of the historical process present us with mass-murdering totalitarian states, calling themselves “socialist,” ruled by “Communist” Parties, with collectivized economies without bourgeois private property—most Marxists accepted them as being “socialist.” They did not have a clear vision of what socialism was supposed to be.

What Marx focused on was not a new society but the working class taking state power. Once the proletariat replaced the bourgeoisie in state power, it would work out its political and economic program. “The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class.” (II: 68) For Marx, this meant the workers taking over the state, which he called “to win the battle for democracy.” (II: 68) This worker-controlled government he called “the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class.” (II: 69) (The **CM** does not use the phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat.”) This sounds very democratic, but at the time he wrote it he meant that the working class would democratize the authoritarian bureaucratic-aristocratic governments that dominated Europe (thus winning “the battle for democracy”). And it would take over these democratically-modified states, by election or revolution.

(To clarify the issue, revolutionary anarchists might also say that they are for the working class—and its allies—taking power. This is in the sense of overturning the capitalist class and its states, and replacing them with other institutions—such as federations of workplace councils, popular committees, and voluntary associations. But they are not for *taking state power*, that is, not for setting up a new bureaucratic-military elite agency over the rest of society. They are for the self-organization of the proletariat and all oppressed people.)

At the end of section II, the **CM** lays out a ten point transitional program to be carried out by the proletariat once it takes state power. Twenty five years later, Engels wrote in a preface that “the general principles laid down in this **Manifesto** are, on the whole, as correct as ever...[but] no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed...” (Marx & Engels 2005; 118–9) Despite this caveat, the basic approach of the **Manifesto**’s program would continue to dominate Marxism: “The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state...” (II: 69)

This includes: “5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the state...6. Centralization 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...8. Equal liability of all to labor. Establishment of industrial armies...” (II; 72)

The **CM** predicts that this centralized state economy will lead to the end of the state! “When...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...is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.” (II; 73) This is also described as “the conversion of the functions of the state into a mere superintendence of production...” (II: 54) The repressive, class-dominated, state will supposedly evolve into a benevolent “public power” which is a centralized “vast association” in whose hands “all production has been concentrated.”

It should be clear what is being proposed here. The democratic, worker-controlled, state, supposedly “the proletariat organized as the ruling class”, will take over the whole economy and concentrate it all. On the way to becoming a classless “public power,” it will include forced labor for everyone in its industrial armies. How long could it be expected to remain democratic? How much will it promote “the free development of each”? How would the conscripted workers democratically control the state organizers and effect the overall plans? Suppose workers went on strike; would they be forced back to work by some recreated police force? Wouldn’t the managers become the new state-capitalist masters, with a drive to accumulate profits and power?

In later prefaces, Marx and Engels made only one important change in the **Manifesto**. Referring to the experience of the 1871 Paris Commune, Engels quoted Marx’s **The Civil War in France** as saying that the existing states cannot be democratized and taken over by the working class. They were developed to serve a minority ruling class and, in essence, that is all they can do. The bourgeois states must be overturned and replaced by other institutions, such as the ultra-democratic Commune. “One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.’” (Marx & Engels 2005; 119)

In principle, revolutionary anarchists agree with this (without further examination of the Paris Commune). However, it is somewhat difficult to know what Marx and Engels meant by it. Immediately after the defeat of the Commune, they fought to make every national branch of the First International support a workers’ electoral party. They demanded that all branches support

parties that sought to get elected to state power. It was this policy (which seems to contradict the above “one thing” that was “proved by the Commune”) which led to the split in the International between Marx and the anarchists. (Price 2017) Marx and Engels even stated, repeatedly, that in a few countries it was possible for the workers to take power peacefully through elections; they named Britain, the U.S., and France. (Although they added that this would provoke counterrevolutionary rebellions and civil wars; so even this was not likely to be a peaceful revolution).

In any case, even having an ultra-democratic commune at the top of a centralized and nationalized (and inevitably bureaucratic) economy would not prevent the rise of authoritarianism, class division, and state capitalism.

Years later, Peter Kropotkin wrote that in the anarchist program, “voluntary associations...would...substitute themselves for the State in all its functions. They would represent an interwoven network...for all possible purposes: production, consumption, and exchange,...mutual protection, defense of the territory, and so on.” (Kropotkin 2002; 284) These would include federated worker-managed industries, consumer cooperatives, agri-industrial communes, as well as democratic popular militias (an armed people) so long as deemed necessary for “mutual protection [and] defense of the territory.”

“The anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the State all the main sources of economic life—the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on—as also the management of all the main branches of industry, in addition to all the functions already accumulated in its hands...would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism.” (same; 286) This was written in 1905, after the **Communist Manifesto** but before the experience of state-capitalism in the Soviet Union.

Determinism and Morality

Marx is often accused of advocating a mechanical, stagist, view of history, a rigid teleological determinism: first slavery, then feudalism, then capitalism, then the lower stage of communism (socialism), and finally, automatically, full communism—like a slinky toy going down stairs. While the **CM** indicates that human development, since early classless society, has been a series of exploitative class systems, it does not lay out any such inevitable pattern. In their preface to an 1882 Russian edition of the **CM**, Marx and Engels discussed whether Russia would have to go through the same stages as Western Europe. Could its “primeval common ownership of land pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership” without going through a capitalist stage? (Marx & Engels 2005; 120). They declared that if a Russian revolution were to ignite a European proletarian revolution, then this was possible—a non-determinist answer.

Near the beginning of the **Manifesto**, it declares that class conflicts in every society “each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.” (I; 2) (They were referring to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire.) Draper interprets this as meaning that bourgeois “society is faced with the alternatives later tagged [by Rosa Luxemburg—WP] ‘socialism or barbarism’—either a revolution that remakes society or the collapse of the old order to a lower level.” (Draper 1998; 200) He also quotes Engels as later writing that capitalism faced “ruin or revolution.” (same) (The same basic idea was expressed by Murray Bookchin as “anarchism or annihilation.”)

Yet the last line of section I declares of the bourgeoisie, “Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.” (I; 53) In their preface to the Russian edition, Marx and Engels summarized, “The **Communist Manifesto** had as its object the proclamation of the inevitably impending dissolution of modern bourgeois property.” (Marx & Engels 2005; 120)

So which is it? A possible choice between two very different outcomes (“revolutionary reconstruction” or “common ruin;” “socialism or barbarism”) or an “inevitable” outcome of proletarian revolution? Draper denied that “Marx believed in some sort of metaphysical ‘inevitability of socialism,’ according to which socialist victory is...fatefully predestined....” (Draper 1998; 200) Gasper calls the **CM**’s final declaration “a rhetorical flourish” to cheer on the workers. (Marx & Engels 2005; 57) But the sentence in the preface to the Russian edition seems to rule that out.

Before World War I, the mainstream of social-democratic orthodox Marxism interpreted Marxism in a mechanically deterministic fashion. So did the later Stalinist version of Marxism. Today most Marxists take a more flexible view. It would be hard to insist that a proletarian revolution will definitely, inevitably, happen before capitalism destroys industrial civilization with a nuclear war or with climate collapse. While this is what revolutionaries work for, it simply cannot be known. At best we can say that there are tendencies pushing toward a socialist revolution, identified in great part by Marx, as well as tendencies resisting it. As for what Marx “really meant,” perhaps he was confused and contradicted himself. (Peter Kropotkin also believed in the inevitability of anarchist-communist revolution.)

If revolution is inevitable, then it is something which happens to people, not which they do. But if there are alternative possible outcomes, then people have to make a choice. The issue is not only a socio-economic analysis but one of moral choice. This insight is lacking in the **Communist Manifesto**. Undoubtedly, Marx and Engels were driven by ideals and values, but this does not appear in their system. Nowhere in the **CM** (nor anywhere else in their writings over the years) did they say that people *should*, morally, be for socialism or that communism is a good goal. Instead they sneered at those socialists who raised moral values as the basis for socialism (in section III). Undoubtedly they were right to reject those whose socialism was rooted solely in abstract morality without an objective, materialistic, analysis of how capitalism develops. They also countered the bourgeois critics of communism, who often raised ethical objections (in section II). Here they were correct in exposing the hypocrisy behind the moralism of the bourgeoisie—as amoral and cynical a class as has ever existed. Yet that did not require a silence on ethics.

Their case for communism could have been much stronger. They could have clearly rooted it in the interaction between humanistic values and objective developments, as expressed in the revolutionary movements among the working class and all oppressed. (Kropotkin sought to demonstrate an evolutionary base for a naturalistic ethics.) Instead, their nonmoral perspective only laid the basis for accepting Stalinist authoritarianism. The Russian dictatorship had its flaws, many said, but it had to be accepted as “really existing socialism,” after all.

Anarchism and Marxism

As mentioned, **the Manifesto of the Communist Party** does refer to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. He was the first to declare himself an “anarchist,” although the **CM** does not refer to this. Section III, “Socialist and Communist Literature,” has a subsection on what it calls “Conserva-

tive or Bourgeois Socialism.” Here it says, “We may cite Proudhon’s *Philosophie de la Misere* [Philosophy of Poverty] as an example of this form.” (III; 37)

Apparently, “bourgeois socialism” seeks “to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society.” (III; 36) “The socialistic bourgeoisie ... wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat....Bourgeois socialism develops...into various more or less complete systems....It but requires that the proletariat should remain within the bounds of existing society, but should cast away all its hateful ideas concerning the bourgeoisie.” (III; 39)

This is an extremely distorted view of Proudhon’s opinions. (For a balanced and insightful summary of his views, including a criticism of Marx’s portrayal of them, see McKay 2011.) Proudhon’s “more or less complete system” (called “mutualism”) proposed a stateless version of what today we would call “market socialism.” There would continue to be small workshops and artisans, competing on the market. Larger enterprises would be democratically run by those working in them. Peasants would “possess” the land they farmed. Overall coordination would be through a nonprofit association, essentially a national credit union. There would be neither a profit-making bourgeoisie nor a wage-earning proletariat.

While not capitalist, this program had elements of capitalism: a market, competition, and a sort-of private property. Proudhon proposed to achieve it by gradual and peaceful growth within capitalist society. He was a reformist, opposing revolution or even strikes. These elements were abandoned by revolutionary anarchists, including Bakunin and Kropotkin, who further developed the ideas of Proudhon. They favored a collective, cooperative, and communal vision (possibly influenced by Marxism). But they continued important ideas raised by Proudhon: decentralization, federalism, direct democracy, anti-statism, anti-electoralism, and, above all, workers’ self-management of industry. These concepts were and remain central to revolutionary anarchist-socialism. They do not appear in the **Manifesto**.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, many ideas are still true and even valuable in the **Communist Manifesto**. These include the class analysis of capitalist society and understanding it as polarized between two fundamental classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Even as the bourgeoisie has created great technological and scientific wonders, it has led the world toward terrible disasters: economic decline, increased inequality, wars (including the threat of nuclear war), ecological catastrophes (including virulent plagues and looming climate collapse)—along with many forms of oppression and suffering. “The bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society.” (I; 52)

Instead, the proletariat, the modern working class in all its variegated aspects, needs to overturn and replace the capitalist class, its state, and its other institutions. It has the necessary potential power and strategic location at the heart of capitalism. But to do this, it must ally with all the oppressed in society and raise every issue possible, something on which the **Manifesto** is ambiguous.

The **CM** was written early in the political careers and studies of Marx and Engels. They underestimated the resilience of capitalism and overestimated the nearness of revolution. This especially comes out in an apparent certainty in the imminent coming of proletarian revolution.

But just as they were wrong then, in the short term, so we today would be wrong to believe in the inevitability of the failure of socialism or of the survivability of capitalist society.

Yet Marx's positive program has to be rejected. While meant to create a socialist democracy, it is a program for state capitalism. Socialism/communism should be an "association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." That cannot be built by using a bureaucratic-military socially-alienated institution standing over the rest of society—that is, a state. This is true whether it is a bourgeois-democratic state mastered through elections or a new state replacing the old one through revolution. A centralized and nationalized economy, even in the hands of the most democratic state (let alone a one-party dictatorship) can only result in further oppression, suffering, inefficiency, rebellion, and repression. As Kropotkin (among other anarchists) warned, "State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism."

Marx and Engels wrote in their 1872 preface, "The **Manifesto** has become a historical document." (Marx & Engels 2005; 119) **The Manifesto of the Communist Party** remains a classical statement of revolutionary proletarian socialism. As such it is still well worth reading by anarchists and others, and thinking about, but never uncritically.

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