

CIVILIZATION SEQUENCE 203
(Common-Lecture-Series)

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO
(KARL MARX & FREDERICH ENGELS)

Handout

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"ALL I KNOW IS THAT I AM NOT A MARXIST"

("Just as Marx used to say commenting on the French Marxists of the late seventies", F. ENGELS, *letter to C. Schmidt*, London, 5 August, 1890)

* "... According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase." ENGELS, in a letter to J. Bloch, 21-22 September 1890 (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968, 1: 692).

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1. Introduction:

- 1.1. A philosopher who is misunderstood & whose writings have too often been reduced to ill-digested slogans.
- 1.1.2. What during the last decade of the nineteenth century, came to be known as '*Marxism*', is essentially the concoction of Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels' thought.

2. Major Transformations during the 17th & 18th centuries that culminated in the French Revolution of 1789:

- 2.1. Major economic change was spurred by Western Europe's tremendous **population growth** during the late 18th century, extending well into the 19th century itself. Between 1750 and 1800, the populations of major countries increased between 50 and 100 percent.
- 2.1.2. In this context an outright **industrial revolution** took shape, led by Britain, which retained leadership in industrialization well past the middle of the 19th century. France, Germany, and Belgium gained ground rapidly.
- 2.1.3. Europe's **social structure** changed toward a basic division, both rural and urban, between owners and non-owners. New organization of business and labour was intimately linked to the new technologies.
- 2.1.4. **Urbanization** was a vital result of growing commercialization and new industrial technology; In these urban centres the **ideas of the Renaissance** found a wide spreading and acceptance printing press & newspapers flourished.
- 2.1.5. All these drastic changes facilitated a thorough grounding of **National States**.
- 2.1.6. The misery of the **Working-Class**: disruption of artisans models; social break-down; problems in services; working children & women; beggary; prostitution; alcoholism; suicide; insanity; illiteracy; disease, mortality and overcrowding.

3. **Socialist movements** during the 18th century:
 - 3.1. Comte Henri de Saint-Simon's (1760-1825). Everyone would have equal opportunity to rise to a social position according to his abilities. The future society would be run like a gigantic workshop, in which rule over men would be replaced by the administration of things.
 - 3.1.1. Charles Fourier (1772-1837), the utopian *phalange* as a co-operative agricultural Community bearing responsibility for the social welfare of the individual.
 - 3.1.2. Robert Owen (1771-1858), Colonies of workers.
 - 3.1.3. Francois-Noel Babeuf (1761-1797), militant communism.

4. **The age of revolution:** The events of the French Revolution & the *Napoleonic* venture in Europe helped ripening the conditions in different European lands to carry on revolutionary change. On the eve of these revolutions that Marx & Engels had published their "*Communist Manifesto*" (1848).

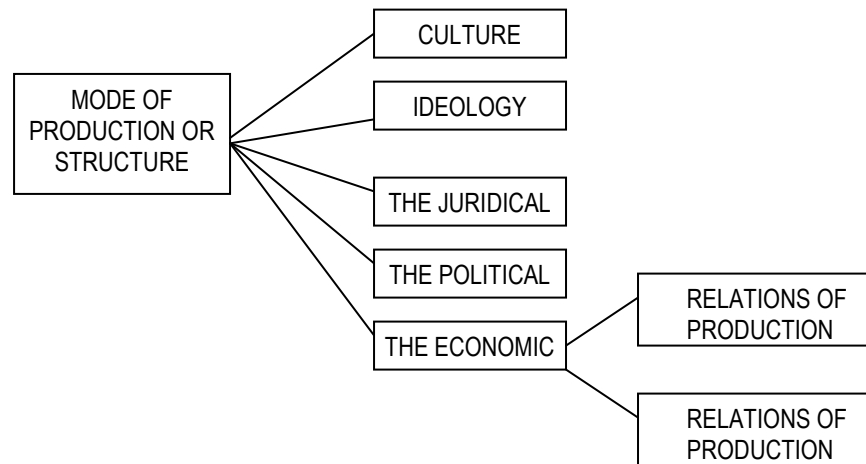
5. The impact of HEGEL (1770-1831).
 - 5.1. Karl Marx (1818-1883).
 - 5.1.2. Friedrich Engels (1820-1895).

6. **The Communist Manifesto:** a pamphlet worked out by both Marx & Engels during December 1847 & January 1848 to serve as the platform of the *Communist League*.
 - 6.1. Polemical & rhetoric nature; written under the immediate pressure of synthesizing among different, even opposing, factions in the *Communist League*.
 - 6.2. It represents the ideas of the young Marx & Engels, and it furnishes the threads of a sketch that was to be elaborated exhaustibly & in length in later works, especially Marx's books *Grundrisse & Kapital*.

7. What about **CLASS**?
 - 7.1. Unfortunately, Marx nowhere offers a systematic analysis of the concept of class. It might seem that Marx, usually, uses a two-class model consisting of bourgeoisie & proletariat, but this model is not static and was liable - in Marx's different writings - to contain different divisions and sub-divisions (see, e.g., *Communist Manifesto*, 10-16).
 - 7.2. Only in capitalism is it possible for a group to qualify as class on all the criteria discussed under 7.1. It is in this sense that Marx refers to class as a 'product of the bourgeoisie'.
 - 7.3. 'Words are like bats: one can see in them both birds and mice'. It is dangerous, to mix up the aim of Marx's research & pre-occupations with the tasks and language he uses in order to reach a simplified or a simplistic understanding.

8. **Historical Materialism:** "Nature works *dialectically* and not metaphysically; that she does not move in the eternal oneness of a perpetually recurring circle, but goes through a real historical evolution". Marx's history is materialistic (E. Balibar): i. because it constitutes itself on an empirically verifiable causality; ii. it entails snatching history from the clutches of teleology; iii. materialism is presented here as a critique of idealist (abstract, speculative,) representations or illusions which mask, mystify and repress the determining reality of the labor of individuals & and social production (economic structure of society).
 - 8.1. The formation of the rate of profit as a determining economic category is neither a mechanical law independent of human activity, nor the direct product of this activity (cf., Engels' comment proceeded with an * at the top of the fly-sheet). Hence the 'metaphor' of

BASE & SUPERSTRUCTURE does not entail a linear relation (cause & effect), but is to be understood as a changing 'structural model' = (F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*):



9. **Dialectic:** dialectics considers things in their movements and changes, interrelations and interactions. Everything is in continual process of becoming and ceasing to be, in which nothing is permanent but everything changes and is eventually superseded. All things contain contradictory sides or aspects, whose tension or conflict is the driving force of change and eventually transforms or dissolves them.
- 9.1. **Laws of dialectic** (philosophy of internal relations):
 - i. Transformation of quantity to quality.
 - ii. Mutual penetration of polar opposites.
 - iii. Development through contradiction.
 - iv. Spiral form of development.
10. **Political economy:**
Marx's critique of classical political economy - Adam Smith (1723-1790), Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), & his great precursor, David Ricardo (1772-1823).
- 10.1. "labour is the workers own life activity, the manifestation of his own life. And this life activity he sells to another person in order to secure the necessary means of subsistence." Marx, Karl: "Wage n Labour and Capital," (*Selected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1977), 1/153.
- 10.2. **Surplus-Value:** "Marx's most important discovery in economics." If the value of the labor power of the worker - i.e., what it cost to keep him and his family alive and capable of working - was \$5 a day; & if these \$5 require him to work 3 hours a day, then, if he works 8 hours, the remaining 5 hours would yield Surplus-value.
- 10.3. **Alienation:** tantamount to self-alienation, since "alienated labour alienates 1) nature from man, & 2) man from himself, his own active function, his vital activity, & 3) it also alienates the species from man; it turns his species-life into a means towards his individual life"
- 10.4. **Fetishism of commodities** or Capitalism in *disguise*: refers to people's misconception of the products of labor once they enter exchange. "Interrelations due to the world market, its conjuncture, movement of market prices, periods of credit, industrial and commercial cycles, alternations of prosperity and crisis appear to [people] as overwhelming natural laws that irresistibly enforce their will on them, and confront them as blind necessity." (Marx)
11. The **Dictatorship of the Proletariat:** Marx # the horrifying utopia of the totalitarian "Communist" regimes = PARTY & STATE CAPITALISM

* Relying mainly on:

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[World Market or Global Market]

“Big industry universalised competition, established means of communication and the modern world market, subordinated trade to itself, transformed all capital into industrial capital, and thus produced the rapid circulation (development of the financial system) and the centralisation of capital. By universal competition it forced all individuals to strain their energy to the utmost. It destroyed as far as possible ideology, religion, morality, etc. and where it could not do this, made them into a palpable lie. It produced world history for the first time, insofar as it made all civilised nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of their wants on the whole world, thus destroying the former natural exclusiveness of separate nations. It made natural science subservient to capital and took from the division of labour the last semblance of its natural character. It destroyed natural growth in general, as far as this is possible while labour exists, and resolved all natural relationships into money relationships. In the place of naturally grown towns it created the modern, large industrial cities which have sprung up overnight. Wherever it penetrated, it destroyed the crafts and all earlier stages of industry. It completed the victory of the commercial town over the countryside. [Its first premise] was the automatic system. [Its development] produced a mass of productive forces, for which private [property] became just as much a fetter as the guild had been for manufacture and the small, rural workshop for the developing craft. These productive forces received under the system of private property a one-sided development only, and became for the majority destructive forces; moreover, a great multitude of such forces could find no application at all within this system. Generally speaking, big industry created everywhere the same relations between the classes of society, and thus destroyed the peculiar individuality of the various nationalities. And finally, while the bourgeoisie of each nation still retained separate national interests, big industry created a class, which in all nations has the same interest and with which nationality is already dead; a class which is really rid of all the old world and at the same time stands pitted against it.”

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels: *The German Ideology*, ed. Christopher J. Arthur. (New York: International Publishers, 1989), 24.