

communist manifesto main arguments on future society

The Communist Manifesto, penned by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, is a foundational document of communist thought, offering a searing critique of capitalist society and a vision for a future transformed by the principles of communism. While often associated with historical events, its core arguments about the fundamental changes required for a future society remain a subject of intense debate and analysis. This article delves into the main arguments presented in the Manifesto regarding the envisioned communist future, exploring its key tenets, the proposed dismantling of existing structures, and the emergence of a new social order. We will examine how the Manifesto outlines a society free from class struggle, private property, and exploitation, and what implications these arguments have for understanding historical and contemporary societal aspirations.

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The Inevitable Collapse of Capitalism and the Rise of Communism

A central tenet of the Communist Manifesto's argument on future society is the inherent instability and eventual self-destruction of capitalism. Marx and Engels posit that the capitalist mode of production, driven by the pursuit of profit, creates internal contradictions that will inevitably lead

to its downfall. They argue that capitalism's relentless drive for expansion and its tendency to create monopolies will concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a shrinking bourgeoisie, while simultaneously immiserating the vast majority of the population – the proletariat. This growing disparity, coupled with the cyclical crises of overproduction that plague capitalism, will foster widespread discontent and revolutionary consciousness among the working class. The Manifesto suggests that this process is not a matter of chance but a historical inevitability, a dialectical progression where the contradictions within capitalism will give rise to its antithesis: communism. The future society, therefore, is envisioned as emerging directly from the ashes of a decaying capitalist system, a natural evolutionary step in human history driven by material conditions and class struggle.

The argument is that capitalism, by its very nature, breeds alienation and exploitation. Workers are separated from the products of their labor and are treated as mere cogs in the machinery of production, their humanity reduced to their economic utility. This dehumanization, combined with the economic insecurity and hardship experienced by the proletariat, creates the fertile ground for revolutionary action. The Manifesto predicts that as capitalism develops, so too will the organizational capacity and revolutionary fervor of the proletariat, culminating in a social revolution that will overthrow the capitalist class. This transition is presented not as a utopian dream but as a logical consequence of historical forces, a necessary step to overcome the systemic injustices inherent in capitalism and to usher in a more equitable and rational future society.

Abolition of Private Property: The Cornerstone of Communist Society

Perhaps the most defining and controversial argument for a future communist society presented in the Manifesto is the abolition of private property. It is crucial to clarify that Marx and Engels specifically targeted bourgeois private property – the private ownership of the means of production, such as factories, land, and machinery, which allows one class to exploit another. They were not advocating for the confiscation of personal possessions like clothing or tools used for individual craft. The Manifesto argues that this form of private property is the very foundation of class division and exploitation. By concentrating ownership of the means of production in the hands of a few, capitalism enables the bourgeoisie to extract surplus value from the labor of the proletariat, creating a system of inherent inequality.

In the envisioned communist future, the abolition of private property would mean the socialization of the means of production. This would transfer ownership and control from private individuals to the community as a whole. The benefits derived from collective labor would then be distributed according to need, rather than according to the ability to own and control productive assets. This would, in theory, eliminate the basis for class

antagonism, as the fundamental conflict between owners and laborers would cease to exist. The Manifesto frames this as a liberation for the vast majority, freeing them from the yoke of economic servitude and enabling a society where labor is not a means of survival but a creative pursuit for the common good. This radical restructuring of property relations is presented as the essential precondition for building a truly egalitarian and just future society.

The Manifesto directly addresses the bourgeois fear of losing their property, arguing that under communism, "you have nothing to lose but your chains." This powerful rhetorical flourish emphasizes that the supposed "freedom" enjoyed by the bourgeoisie is built upon the unfreedom of the proletariat. The abolition of private property, in this context, is seen not as a loss but as a gain – the gain of collective control, of economic security, and of the opportunity to participate fully in society without the constraints of class hierarchy.

The Proletariat's Role in Revolution and Future Governance

The Communist Manifesto places the proletariat, the industrial working class, at the very center of the historical process that will lead to a future communist society. It argues that the proletariat is the revolutionary class par excellence, not only because it is the most oppressed and exploited class under capitalism but also because its very position in the production process allows it to develop a collective consciousness and a unified interest in overthrowing the existing system. The Manifesto highlights the increasing industrialization that concentrates workers in factories, fostering a sense of solidarity and shared grievance.

The revolution, as envisioned, is not merely a spontaneous uprising but a deliberate and organized struggle led by the proletariat. Once the bourgeoisie is overthrown, the Manifesto outlines a transitional phase, often referred to as the "dictatorship of the proletariat." This is not intended as a totalitarian regime in the modern sense, but rather as a period where the working class, as the new ruling class, would wield political power to dismantle the remnants of the capitalist system, suppress counter-revolutionary forces, and establish the foundations for a communist society. This transitional governance would be characterized by democratic control by the working class, ensuring that the revolution's gains are consolidated and that the move towards a classless society is irreversible.

Key functions during this transitional period would include the expropriation of the means of production and their centralization under the control of the proletariat. This would lay the groundwork for the economic reorganization necessary for communism. The Manifesto emphasizes that the proletariat, by virtue of its historical mission, is best equipped to lead society away from

exploitation and towards a more humane and rational organization of production and distribution.

Transforming Social Relations and the Family Unit

Beyond economic and political structures, the Communist Manifesto argues for a profound transformation of social relations, including the abolition of the traditional bourgeois family. Marx and Engels contend that the bourgeois family, as it exists under capitalism, is not a natural or universal institution but a product of the economic conditions of the time. They argue that it is based on, and reinforces, bourgeois property relations and the exploitation of family members. The Manifesto famously states that communists do not intend to abolish the family altogether, but rather to abolish the bourgeois family.

The critique is directed at the family's role in perpetuating private property, inheritance, and the bourgeois ideology of individualism and self-interest. They suggest that in a communist society, where the means of production are collectively owned, the economic dependence of women on men within the family would diminish. Furthermore, they criticize the mercenary nature of many bourgeois marriages, which they see as akin to business partnerships rather than unions based on genuine affection. The Manifesto anticipates a future where relationships are based on mutual respect and love, free from the economic pressures and societal expectations that shape the bourgeois family.

The Manifesto also touches upon the communist view of children. They argue that under capitalism, children are often seen as mere instruments of labor or as property to be passed down through inheritance. In a communist society, children would be raised communally, educated and nurtured by society as a whole, rather than being the exclusive responsibility of individual families. This communal upbringing is seen as crucial for fostering a sense of collective responsibility and eradicating the bourgeois notions of private ownership and favoritism within the family structure. This argument, while often controversial, underscores the Manifesto's vision of a society where all social institutions are reoriented towards the collective good.

The Withering Away of the State

A crucial, yet often misunderstood, argument in the Communist Manifesto regarding the future society is the eventual "withering away of the state." Marx and Engels viewed the state, in its current form, as an instrument of class oppression, serving the interests of the ruling class – in capitalism,

the bourgeoisie. They argued that the state exists to maintain the existing property relations and to suppress any challenge to bourgeois dominance. Therefore, the state is intrinsically linked to the existence of class divisions.

In the transitional phase following the proletarian revolution (the dictatorship of the proletariat), the state would still be necessary as a tool for the working class to consolidate its power, suppress opposition, and manage the transition to communism. However, as the class antagonisms gradually disappear, and as private property is abolished and replaced by collective ownership, the need for a coercive state apparatus would also diminish. The Manifesto posits that once a classless society is achieved, where the fundamental conflicts that necessitate state intervention are resolved, the state would no longer have a purpose and would gradually fade away.

This "withering away" does not imply a sudden disappearance, but rather a process of obsolescence. The functions currently performed by the state, such as maintaining order, organizing production, and managing social affairs, would, in a communist society, be carried out by the community itself through self-governance and collective administration. The idea is that in a society where everyone contributes to the common good and where exploitation is absent, the need for specialized, coercive institutions to manage societal relations would become superfluous. This concept is central to the Manifesto's vision of a truly free and self-governing society, unburdened by the mechanisms of state power.

Economic and Social Reorganization in a Communist Future

The Communist Manifesto outlines a radical reorganization of economic and social life in the future communist society, moving away from capitalist production and distribution methods. The core principle is the abolition of wage labor as it exists under capitalism, where workers sell their labor power for a wage, and the surplus value generated is appropriated by the capitalist. In a communist future, labor would be performed for the benefit of society as a whole, and the fruits of this labor would be distributed according to need.

One of the most frequently cited proposals in the Manifesto for the transitional period is a list of measures designed to gradually dismantle capitalist structures. These include:

- Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.

- A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
- Abolition of all rights of inheritance.
- Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
- Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
- Centralisation of the means of communication and of transport in the hands of the State.
- 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.
- Equal liability of all to labour. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
- Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population over the country.
- Public and free education for all children. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, &c.

These measures, presented as transitional steps, point towards a planned economy where production is organized to meet the needs of society, rather than for private profit. The Manifesto envisions a society where the vast productive forces unleashed by capitalism would be harnessed for the common good, leading to an abundance of resources and the elimination of poverty and scarcity. The social reorganization would involve fostering a sense of collective identity and responsibility, moving away from the individualism and competition inherent in capitalist societies.

Addressing Criticisms and Misconceptions of Communist Society

Throughout the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels preemptively address common criticisms and misconceptions leveled against their vision for a future communist society. One of the most persistent criticisms is that communism would stifle individual creativity and lead to a monotonous, conformist society. The authors counter this by arguing that it is precisely capitalism, with its alienation of labor and its emphasis on profit, that stifles true individual expression. They suggest that in a communist society, freed from the drudgery of exploitative labor and economic insecurity,

individuals would have the opportunity to develop their full potential in diverse fields, pursuing activities out of genuine interest and for the benefit of all.

Another significant criticism they tackle is the accusation that communists seek to abolish all personal property and that people will be forced to live in communal dwellings and share spouses. As previously discussed, the Manifesto clarifies that they aim to abolish bourgeois private property – the ownership of the means of production – not personal belongings. They argue that the bourgeois morality, which they see as hypocrisy, preaches communal property and living when it comes to the proletariat, but fiercely defends private property for the bourgeoisie. The vision of communal living is presented as a positive liberation from the constraints of the bourgeois family and its property-based relationships.

Furthermore, the Manifesto addresses the charge that communism abolishes truth, morality, and religion. Marx and Engels argue that these concepts are not absolute but are products of specific historical and social conditions, often serving to legitimize the ruling class's power. They believe that in a classless society, new forms of morality and social understanding would emerge, based on genuine human solidarity and a shared commitment to the common good, rather than on religious dogma or bourgeois ideology. The critique is not of morality or truth itself, but of how these are distorted and manipulated within a class-divided society.

Conclusion: The Enduring Relevance of the Manifesto's Arguments on Future Society

The Communist Manifesto remains a pivotal text for understanding radical social and economic critiques, and its arguments on future society continue to provoke thought and inspire movements. The core tenets, including the critique of capitalism's inherent contradictions, the abolition of private property as the means of production, the revolutionary role of the proletariat, the transformation of social relations, and the eventual withering away of the state, present a comprehensive vision for a society fundamentally different from the one they observed. While the historical implementations of communism have been met with significant challenges and criticisms, the intellectual legacy of the Manifesto lies in its incisive analysis of inequality, exploitation, and alienation that persists in various forms today.

The Manifesto's enduring relevance stems from its ability to articulate a critique of power structures and its bold proposals for a more equitable future society. Whether one agrees with its conclusions or not, the questions it raises about class, labor, property, and the nature of societal organization remain central to contemporary discussions on economic justice and social progress. Understanding the main arguments of the Communist

Manifesto on future society offers a critical lens through which to examine the underlying dynamics of power and economics in our world, prompting reflection on the aspirations and possibilities for human society beyond existing paradigms.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the Communist Manifesto argue will be the primary characteristic of the future society after the abolition of private property?

The Communist Manifesto argues that the primary characteristic of the future society will be the abolition of private property in the means of production, leading to a classless society where the means of production are owned communally and operated for the benefit of all.

How does the Communist Manifesto envision the role of the state in the future communist society?

While the Manifesto suggests a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as a transitional phase to suppress bourgeois resistance, it ultimately envisions the eventual 'withering away' of the state in a fully communist society. The state, as an instrument of class oppression, would become unnecessary in a classless society.

What does the Manifesto mean by the 'association of all in place of the old class divisions' in the future society?

This phrase signifies the end of distinct social classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat) and the emergence of a society where all individuals are part of a unified community, working together for the common good. Class antagonisms and their associated conflicts would be eradicated.

How does the Communist Manifesto address the concept of labor and work in its vision of the future?

The Manifesto anticipates a future where labor is transformed from a tool of exploitation and drudgery into a means of self-fulfillment and social contribution. With the abolition of wage labor and the pursuit of profit, work would be directed towards meeting societal needs and individual development.

What is the Communist Manifesto's view on the future of family and education?

The Manifesto argues that under communism, traditional bourgeois family structures, based on capital and private gain, would disappear. Education would also be transformed, becoming a collective responsibility, with its aim being to train individuals as fully developed human beings for the benefit of society.

According to the Communist Manifesto, what will be the fate of national boundaries and differences in a future communist world?

The Manifesto suggests that as the power of the bourgeoisie and the forces of production develop, national differences and antagonisms will diminish. It foresees an international, universalist movement of the proletariat, leading to the eventual transcendence of national boundaries and the creation of a global community.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to the main arguments of the Communist Manifesto on future society, with descriptions:

1.

The Unfolding of History: From Feudalism to Communism

This book explores the historical materialist interpretation of societal evolution, detailing how the Communist Manifesto argues that each historical epoch inherently contains the seeds of its own destruction and the emergence of a new one. It traces the progression from feudalism, through capitalism, to the anticipated socialist and communist stages, emphasizing the role of class struggle in driving these transformations. The narrative highlights the Manifesto's belief in an inevitable march towards a classless society.

2.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat: A Transitional State

This title delves into the Communist Manifesto's concept of a transitional phase where the working class seizes state power to dismantle the remnants of bourgeois society. It examines how this "dictatorship" is envisioned not as an oppressive regime, but as a tool to suppress counter-revolutionary forces and reorganize economic and social structures. The book discusses the

theoretical underpinnings of this necessary, albeit temporary, state apparatus.

3.

Abolition of Private Property: Collective Ownership and Production

This work focuses on the Manifesto's central demand for the abolition of private property in the means of production, arguing it's the cornerstone of capitalist exploitation. It explores the envisioned future where land, factories, and all instruments of wealth creation are owned collectively by society. The book analyzes how this shift would purportedly eliminate class distinctions and lead to a more equitable distribution of resources and labor.

4.

The Withering Away of the State: A Stateless Utopia

This book examines the ultimate aim of communist theory as presented in the Manifesto: the complete disappearance of the state. It argues that once class antagonisms cease to exist and a society of abundance is achieved, the need for coercive state apparatuses will vanish. The narrative explores the philosophical underpinnings of a stateless society where individuals govern themselves through communal association and mutual understanding.

5.

The End of Alienation: Reclaiming Human Potential

This title addresses the Manifesto's critique of capitalist alienation, where workers are separated from the products of their labor, the process of labor, their fellow workers, and their own species-being. It explores how a communist society, by ending private property and exploitative labor, would allow individuals to engage in fulfilling and meaningful work. The book discusses the potential for human flourishing and creativity unleashed in such a future.

6.

Classless Society: Equality and the Common Good

This work centers on the Manifesto's vision of a society devoid of social classes and the inherent inequalities they create. It examines how the abolition of private property and the means of production would eradicate the division between oppressors and oppressed. The book discusses the emphasis on the common good and the collective well-being of all members of society in this envisioned future.

7.

Global Revolution: The International Struggle of the Proletariat

This book investigates the Communist Manifesto's call for an international workers' revolution, famously stating "Working Men of All Countries, Unite!" It explores the argument that capitalism is a global system, and therefore, its overthrow must also be a global undertaking. The narrative highlights the Manifesto's belief that national divisions are a product of bourgeois rule and will be overcome by a united international proletariat.

8.

The Transformation of Family and Culture: New Social Relations

This title delves into the Manifesto's predictions regarding the fundamental changes in family structures and cultural norms under communism. It explores the argument that bourgeois marriage and family are based on economic exploitation and will evolve into more egalitarian and freely chosen associations. The book discusses how traditional societal institutions would be reshaped to reflect the new classless and egalitarian reality.

9.

From Each According to His Ability, To Each According to His Need: The Principle of Distribution

This book focuses on the famous principle articulated as the ultimate goal of communist society, where resources are distributed based on individual needs rather than contributions or class status. It explains how this principle represents a radical departure from capitalist modes of distribution, aiming to ensure the well-being of all citizens. The narrative explores the ethical and practical implications of such a system.

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