

communist manifesto on capitalism's development

The Communist Manifesto on Capitalism's Transformative Development

The Communist Manifesto, authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, remains a seminal document in understanding the trajectory and inherent contradictions of capitalist development. Far from being a mere indictment of the system, it offers a profound analysis of how capitalism, through its relentless pursuit of profit and innovation, fundamentally reshaped societies and laid the groundwork for its own eventual supersession. This article delves into the Manifesto's insightful examination of capitalism's developmental engine, exploring its revolutionary impact on industry, social relations, and the global economy. We will uncover how Marx and Engels perceived capitalism's role in dismantling feudal structures, creating a global marketplace, and generating the very forces that would ultimately challenge its dominance. Understanding the Communist Manifesto's perspective on capitalist development is crucial for grasping historical materialism and the ongoing dialogue surrounding economic systems.

- The Revolutionary Impact of the Bourgeoisie
- Capitalism's Role in Globalizing the Market
- The Creation of the Proletariat and Class Struggle
- The Contradictions Inherent in Capitalist Development
- The Manifesto's Vision of Future Social Transformation

The Communist Manifesto on Capitalism's Revolutionary Role in Societal Development

The Communist Manifesto famously begins by acknowledging the unprecedented transformative power of the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class. Marx and Engels recognized that capitalism, as a mode of production, had a profoundly revolutionary effect, unlike any previous economic system. It shattered the stagnant, tradition-bound societies of feudalism, ushering in an era of constant upheaval and progress. This section will explore how the Manifesto details this initial revolutionary phase, highlighting the destruction of old social orders and the creation of new economic realities.

The Demolition of Feudalism and the Rise of the Bourgeoisie

The Manifesto meticulously outlines how the bourgeoisie, driven by the insatiable need for expanding markets and ever-increasing production, systematically dismantled the remnants of feudalism. The old feudal and patriarchal relations were dissolved, replaced by the stark "cash payment" and "naked self-interest." The spiritual fervor of religious ecstasy, chivalrous enthusiasm, and petty-bourgeois sentimentality were, according to the authors, drowned in the "icy water of egotistical calculation." This process involved the liberation of productive forces that had been stifled under the feudal system, unleashing a dynamic economic energy that had never been witnessed before in human history.

Innovations in Production and Technology Driven by Capitalism

A core theme in the Manifesto's analysis of capitalist development is its relentless drive for innovation. The bourgeoisie, to maintain its profit margins and outcompete rivals, was compelled to constantly revolutionize the instruments of production. This meant embracing new technologies, improving manufacturing processes, and expanding the scale of production. From the steam engine and the power loom to the vast industrial enterprises that emerged, capitalism spurred an unprecedented acceleration in technological advancement. This innovation was not merely about efficiency; it was about fundamentally altering the relationship between humanity and nature, and between individuals and the means of production.

The Social and Geographic Upheaval Caused by Capitalist Expansion

The expansion of capitalism was not confined to national borders; it was inherently a globalizing force. The Manifesto describes how the bourgeoisie drew all nations, "even the most barbarian," into civilization through the rapid improvement of all means of production and the consequently easy intercourse between nations. This created a world market, breaking down local industries and creating a global interdependence. This process, while often brutal and exploitative, also led to the spread of new ideas, new technologies, and new forms of social organization, fundamentally changing the social and geographic landscape of the planet.

Capitalism's Role in Establishing a Global Market and Interconnectedness

The Communist Manifesto places significant emphasis on capitalism's role in creating a truly globalized economy. It details how the pursuit of new markets and raw materials compelled the bourgeoisie to extend its reach across continents, thereby knitting the world together in an unprecedented manner. This section will delve into the Manifesto's

observations on how capitalism fostered international trade, dependency, and the eventual homogenization of economic and cultural practices.

The Creation of a World Market

The Manifesto argues that the bourgeoisie could not exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and with them the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. This continuous revolutionizing of production led to the creation of a world market. Goods produced in one corner of the globe could now be easily transported and consumed in another, thanks to advancements in transportation and communication. This global market undermined local industries and created a new form of economic dependency, where nations became increasingly reliant on the flow of goods and capital from other, more developed capitalist centers.

The Importation of Raw Materials and Exportation of Manufactured Goods

The global expansion of capitalism was fueled by the need for raw materials and the desire to sell manufactured goods. The bourgeoisie established colonial empires and trade networks to secure access to resources like cotton, rubber, and minerals, which were then processed in factories in the industrial heartlands. The finished products were then exported back to these same regions, often to the detriment of nascent local industries. This created a pattern of unequal exchange, where the benefits of industrial production were concentrated in the hands of a few capitalist nations.

The Spread of Bourgeois Civilization and its Consequences

According to the Manifesto, the bourgeoisie, in its quest for markets, carries its material and ideological influence to all corners of the globe. It "creates a world after its own image." This "bourgeois civilization" brought with it not only new technologies and modes of production but also new social relations, new ideologies, and new forms of governance. While this often involved the imposition of foreign systems and the subjugation of indigenous cultures, it also undeniably led to a greater degree of interconnectedness and the sharing of ideas on a global scale.

The Communist Manifesto on the Genesis of the Proletariat and Class Struggle

A central tenet of the Communist Manifesto's analysis of capitalist development is its creation of a new class: the proletariat, or the industrial working class. This section will explore how capitalism, in its drive to centralize production and maximize efficiency, simultaneously concentrated large numbers of workers into urban centers, thereby creating

the material conditions for collective action and the intensification of class struggle.

The Formation of the Industrial Working Class

The Manifesto posits that as capitalism developed, it progressively destroyed the old artisanal and peasant classes. Skilled craftsmen were replaced by less skilled factory workers operating machinery. Peasants were driven from the land by enclosure movements and the growth of commercial agriculture, seeking employment in the burgeoning industrial cities. This process concentrated a vast and growing population of laborers who possessed no ownership of the means of production, their only asset being their labor power, which they had to sell to the bourgeoisie to survive.

The Concentration of Labor in Factories and Urban Centers

The factory system, a hallmark of capitalist development, required the congregation of workers in large industrial establishments. This concentration of labor in factories also led to the growth of large urban centers, where workers lived in close proximity. This proximity, while often leading to squalid living conditions, also facilitated the exchange of ideas, the development of shared grievances, and the organization of collective resistance. The shared experience of exploitation in the workplace and difficult living conditions in the cities fostered a sense of class consciousness among the proletariat.

The Escalation of Class Struggle as an Inherent Feature of Capitalism

The Communist Manifesto famously declares that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." In the context of capitalism, this struggle is primarily between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The Manifesto argues that as capitalism develops, this class struggle intensifies. The proletariat, initially fragmented and individualistic, gradually recognizes its common interests and begins to organize. This organization takes various forms, from local trade unions to broader political movements, all aimed at challenging the exploitative nature of capitalist production relations.

The Role of the Proletariat as the Revolutionary Class

Marx and Engels identified the proletariat as the unique revolutionary class within capitalist society. Unlike previous oppressed classes, the proletariat, they argued, owned nothing and had nothing to lose but its chains. Its very position within the capitalist system, as the producers of wealth who received only a fraction of its value, made it the most potent force for radical change. The Manifesto envisioned the proletariat, through its growing numbers and increasing organization, eventually overthrowing the bourgeoisie and establishing a new, classless society.

The Communist Manifesto on the Inherent Contradictions and Crises of Capitalist Development

Beyond its transformative power, the Communist Manifesto also meticulously analyzes the internal contradictions and cyclical crises that are, in the authors' view, inherent to capitalist development. This section will explore how the pursuit of profit, the drive for accumulation, and the anarchic nature of production lead to recurring economic downturns and social instability.

The Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall

While not explicitly detailed in the Manifesto as a distinct section, the underlying logic points to the concept of the falling rate of profit, a key Marxist economic theory. As capitalism advances, investment in machinery and technology (constant capital) increases relative to investment in labor power (variable capital). Since surplus value, the source of profit, is generated by labor, this shift, in theory, leads to a tendency for the rate of profit to fall, necessitating ever-greater exploitation or new markets to counteract this trend.

The Phenomenon of Overproduction and Economic Crises

One of the most striking observations in the Manifesto regarding capitalist development is its propensity for crises of overproduction. The anarchy of capitalist production, where production is driven by the pursuit of individual profit rather than social need, leads to situations where more goods are produced than can be consumed at profitable prices. This results in periodic economic downturns characterized by factory closures, mass unemployment, and the destruction of capital. The Manifesto describes these crises as "epidemics of over-production" that reveal the absurdity of the existing system, where the means of subsistence are destroyed precisely because there is too much of them.

The Growing Inequality and Polarization of Wealth

The Manifesto argues that capitalist development inherently leads to a widening gap between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. While the capitalists accumulate vast wealth through the exploitation of labor, the working class often experiences stagnant or declining real wages and increasingly precarious living conditions. This growing inequality and polarization of wealth are seen as fundamental contradictions that fuel social unrest and the demand for fundamental change. The concentration of capital in fewer hands, while the masses of proletariat remain dependent and impoverished, is a recurring theme.

The Alienation of Labor Under Capitalism

The Manifesto also touches upon the concept of alienation, where the worker becomes estranged from the product of their labor, the process of labor itself, their own human nature, and their fellow human beings. Under capitalism, labor is not an end in itself but a means to an end – the accumulation of profit for the capitalist. This can lead to a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and dehumanization for the worker, further contributing to the inherent contradictions and discontents of the system.

The Communist Manifesto's Vision of Future Social Transformation

While the Communist Manifesto is primarily an analysis of capitalist development, it also outlines the ultimate historical role of the proletariat in transcending capitalism and ushering in a new, communist society. This section will explore the Manifesto's vision of this transition and the characteristics of a society free from capitalist exploitation.

The Proletariat's Role in Seizing Political Power

The Manifesto asserts that the proletariat must first constitute itself as the ruling class, waging the democratic struggle. This involves the proletariat using its growing numerical strength and organizational capacity to capture political power. This seizure of power is seen as a necessary step to dismantle the existing capitalist state apparatus, which the Manifesto views as an instrument of bourgeois class rule.

Measures for the Transition to Communism

Following the seizure of political power, the Manifesto proposes a series of measures that would be implemented to transition from capitalism to communism. These measures, though presented as general principles rather than a rigid blueprint, include:

- Abolition of the right 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.
- Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
- Centralization of the means of communication and 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 work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
- Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries, gradually bringing about the 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 were intended to dismantle the foundations of private property and capitalist exploitation, paving the way for a society where the means of production are collectively owned and controlled.

The Abolition of Class Distinctions and Exploitation

The ultimate goal of the communist revolution, as envisioned in the Manifesto, is the abolition of all class distinctions and the eradication of exploitation. In a communist society, the exploitation of man by man would cease, and the free development of each would be the condition for the free development of all. The antagonisms between different social classes would disappear, leading to a society of abundance and universal well-being.

The Withering Away of the State

In the final stages of communist development, the Manifesto suggests that the state, as an instrument of class oppression, would "wither away." As class antagonisms disappear and society becomes more self-governing, the need for a coercive apparatus would diminish. This would lead to a stateless, classless society where administration of things replaces the government of persons.

Conclusion: The Enduring Relevance of the Communist Manifesto on Capitalist Development

The Communist Manifesto's profound analysis of capitalist development continues to resonate today, offering a framework for understanding the inherent dynamism, contradictions, and societal impacts of this economic system. Marx and Engels brilliantly captured capitalism's revolutionary power to transform production, globalize markets, and create new social classes, most notably the proletariat. They also keenly identified the recurring crises of overproduction, growing inequality, and the alienating effects of capitalist labor. The Manifesto's detailed exploration of these aspects provides critical insights into the very mechanisms that drive capitalist progress and, simultaneously, sow

the seeds of its potential transformation. Understanding the Communist Manifesto on capitalism's development is not merely an academic exercise; it is a crucial step in comprehending the historical forces that have shaped our world and continue to influence contemporary economic and social debates.

Frequently Asked Questions

How does the Communist Manifesto analyze capitalism's inherent drive for constant revolutionizing of production?

The Manifesto famously states that capitalism "uninterruptedly revolutionizes the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole society." It highlights how the bourgeoisie, in its pursuit of profit, is forced to constantly innovate and expand, leading to rapid technological advancement and the globalization of markets, which in turn displaces old industries and social structures.

What does the Communist Manifesto argue about capitalism's role in creating a globalized world?

The Manifesto argues that capitalism, driven by the need for new markets and raw materials, inevitably breaks down national barriers. It describes how the bourgeoisie "has established the globe-trotting of all peoples, for all need, and for all interdependence of the nations." This globalization, while creating wealth and interconnectedness, also exposes the exploitative nature of capitalist relations on a worldwide scale.

How does the Communist Manifesto describe the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat under capitalism?

The Manifesto posits that capitalism's development creates a fundamental class struggle between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (the wage laborers). The bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat by paying them less than the value their labor creates, leading to alienation and immiseration for the working class.

According to the Communist Manifesto, what are the 'crises' of capitalism that arise from its development?

The Manifesto argues that capitalism's unchecked development leads to recurring crises of overproduction. The system's ability to produce more goods than the market can absorb, coupled with the declining purchasing power of the proletariat, results in economic downturns, unemployment, and social instability.

How does the Communist Manifesto view the 'productive forces' unleashed by capitalism?

The Manifesto acknowledges that capitalism has unleashed unprecedented productive forces, creating more wealth and goods than any previous mode of production. However, it argues that these immense productive forces are ultimately constrained by the capitalist relations of production, which prevent their equitable distribution and lead to the crises mentioned earlier.

What does the Communist Manifesto predict will be the ultimate consequence of capitalism's continued development?

The Manifesto predicts that capitalism's inherent contradictions and crises will ultimately lead to its downfall. It suggests that the proletariat, organized and awakened by the exploitative conditions of capitalism, will eventually rise up and overthrow the bourgeoisie, ushering in a communist society where the means of production are owned collectively.

How does the Communist Manifesto critique capitalism's tendency to commodify everything?

The Manifesto famously states that the bourgeoisie "has resolved the personal worth of a man into an exchange value, and in place of the numberless infeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom of Free Trade." It critiques capitalism's tendency to reduce all human relationships and values to monetary transactions, undermining genuine social bonds and individual dignity.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to a communist perspective on capitalism's development, with descriptions:

1.

The Communist Manifesto

This foundational text by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels provides a scathing critique of capitalism, tracing its historical development and inherent contradictions. It argues that capitalism, while revolutionary in its own right, inevitably generates class struggle between the bourgeoisie (owners of capital) and the proletariat (workers). The authors predict capitalism's eventual downfall and replacement by communism, driven by the proletariat's revolutionary action.

2.

Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1

Karl Marx's magnum opus delves deeply into the inner workings of capitalism, dissecting concepts like commodity, value, labor, and surplus value. It meticulously explains how capitalists extract profit through the exploitation of labor, arguing that this inherent exploitative mechanism fuels capital accumulation and economic crises. This volume lays the theoretical groundwork for understanding the dynamic and often brutal nature of capitalist expansion.

3.

Capitalism and Freedom

While written by a staunch free-market economist, Milton Friedman's work is crucial for understanding the opposing viewpoint against which communist critiques are often framed. Friedman champions capitalism as the most effective system for individual liberty and economic prosperity, arguing that government intervention stifles innovation and individual choice. Examining this perspective highlights the core disagreements on the role of the state and the inherent fairness of market mechanisms.

4.

Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism

Vladimir Lenin's influential pamphlet applies Marxist theory to the context of early 20th-century global economics, arguing that capitalism's inherent drive for profit necessitates expansion into foreign territories. He describes how monopolies and financial capital lead to the division of the world among imperial powers, intensifying exploitation and leading to inevitable conflict. This work connects capitalist development directly to colonial expansion and global inequality.

5.

The Condition of the Working Class in England

Friedrich Engels' detailed account offers a vivid, firsthand observation of the harsh realities faced by the proletariat under early industrial capitalism. He meticulously documents the appalling living and working conditions, the degradation of workers' lives, and the social consequences of rapid industrialization. This book provides empirical evidence for many of the theoretical critiques leveled against capitalism by Marx and Engels.

6.

The Accumulation of Capital

Rosa Luxemburg's significant contribution to Marxist thought analyzes the process by which capitalism requires non-capitalist environments to expand and absorb surplus production. She argues that capitalism cannot sustain itself solely within its own system, needing to continually conquer pre-capitalist societies and markets for its own reproduction. This book highlights the link between capitalism's global reach and its inherently expansionist nature.

7.

The Great Transformation

Karl Polanyi's historical analysis examines the rise of market society and its profound impact on social and economic life. He argues that the commodification of land, labor, and money, central to capitalist development, was a violent and disruptive process that undermined traditional social structures. Polanyi posits that this "fictional commodification" leads to societal backlash and attempts to re-embed the economy within social relations.

8.

The Theory of the Leisure Class

Thorstein Veblen's sociological critique of capitalism focuses on the conspicuous consumption and social stratification that emerges with economic prosperity. He analyzes the behavior of the wealthy elite, arguing that their spending is not driven by need but by a desire to demonstrate status and social superiority. This work offers a cultural and behavioral perspective on the consequences of capitalist development and wealth accumulation.

9.

Capitalism: A User's Guide

This modern overview by economist Ha-Joon Chang explores the historical evolution and various forms of capitalism, offering a nuanced perspective that often challenges conventional wisdom. While not strictly a communist text, it critically examines the assumptions of neoliberal capitalism and advocates for more interventionist policies to ensure fairer outcomes. Chang's work provides a contemporary lens through which to consider the ongoing development and challenges of the capitalist system.

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