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What is Marxian Communism? Limning the Post-Revolutionary Utopia By Implication

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WHAT IS MARXIAN COMMUNISM? LIMNING THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY
UTOPIA BY IMPLICATION

by

Teodora Blejeru

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Political Science)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to discover the facts of Marxian communism by implication. By analyzing the works of Marx, this project outlines the contradictions within capitalism and explains how these problems will be solved within Marxian communism. This project explains historical materialism and how it can be used to explain Marxian communism as not only the end of history, but as the end of class antagonisms. It also aims to explain why twentieth century communist regimes cannot be considered truthful examples of Marxian communism. After the introductory chapter, the thesis analyzes *The Communist Manifesto*, *The German Ideology*, and *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in order to paint a full picture of Marx's post-revolutionary utopia. By the end of this thesis, the reader should be clear what Marx's conception of communism is and understand why it has never been achieved.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Communism is not looked upon kindly. Why should it be? We have all heard first-hand accounts of people who have feared their governments and prayed for the fall of communism in their country. We know that the Soviet Union was seen as a cruel place, with millions of people suffering under the leadership of Joseph Stalin. While questions remain, some evidence suggests that around 9.8 million people perished in famine or at the hands of the Great Terror in the 1930s.¹ Surely, a reasonable regime would never lead to so many victims. Chairman Mao Zedong of China caused the deaths of about 15 to 30 million people during the famine that resulted from the Great Leap Forward.² The pain and suffering felt by the people who lived through these experiences should not be forgotten. Communism as is seen in a historical lens has killed, abused, and traumatized many. People all throughout Eastern Europe, Asia, South America, and beyond have had to endure horrors at the hands of self-proclaimed followers of Marx.

I want to suggest that these people died and suffered not because of Marx's teachings, but despite them. Regimes that have claimed Marx as their ideological god have missed the point entirely. Theirs are not only false claims of fidelity to Marxian communism, but deceitful rhetorics used in highly damaging ways. As Erich Fromm states,

“it is one of the peculiar ironies of history that there are no limits to the misunderstanding and distortion of theories, even in an age when there is unlimited access

¹ Rosefield, S. (1996). Stalinism in Post-Communist Perspective: New Evidence on Killings, Forced Labour and Economic Growth in the 1930s. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48(6), 959–987. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/152635>.

² Bernstein, T. P. (2006). Mao Zedong and the Famine of 1959-1960: A Study in Wilfulness. *The China Quarterly*, 186, 421–445. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20192620>.

to the sources; there is no more drastic example of this phenomenon than what has happened to the theory of Karl Marx...”³

Few people have read Marx’s works with enough patience, care, and attention to detail that might falsify the claims of cynical leaders who have abused the mantle of Marx. This is a problem for twentieth century regimes such as China and the Soviet Union because they initiated communist revolutions before going through the historical sequence that Marx deems necessary. Because they did not go through all of the necessary steps which Marx outlines, they could not have been successful. Their lack of attention to Marx’s ideas led to their destruction. Before deciding that Marxism is a dead end, we should clearly understand what Marxian politics would be— not simply as a revolution brought on by class struggle, but a post revolutionary society in which one’s happiness does not depend on the oppression or dehumanization of others.

Marx famously claims that a period of bourgeois domination must come before modern communism. No regime— historical or modern— has gone through such a stage. They have not developed sufficiently advanced productive forces to eliminate material scarcity— the cornerstone of class struggle. Thus, history has been a constant shift from one form of class struggle to another. Once capitalism reaches a point of unimaginable overproduction, the bourgeois class will inevitably crumble.⁴

As I will focus on throughout this essay, we can also falsify the claims of authenticity to Marx that totalitarian regimes make by contrasting their institutions with those that would naturally exist within the post-revolutionary communism which Marx predicts. Marx’s writings on these subjects are notoriously vague, which is why any

³ Fromm, E., & Marx, K. (1998). *Marx’s Concept of Man*. Continuum., 1.

⁴ Marx, K. (1994). *Selected Writings* (L. H. Simon, Ed.). Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 163-164.

attempt to clarify the authentic meaning of Marxian politics needs to focus on the implications of what Marx writes, not explicit statements.

Marx's vagueness of the future is intentional. As we will visit more at length a little later in the chapter, his unwillingness to fully lay out what communism would look like is based on his belief that societal changes are a result of historical materialism. As Friedrich Engels states in his text, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*,

“the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in men's better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the *philosophy*, but in the *economics* of each particular epoch.”⁵

Because actual societal changes are not made in one's brain, we cannot know what will happen in the future. We cannot predict something that has not happened, because we do not yet know the material changes that will take place between now and then. Engels addresses that people do think and dream about what the future may look like, by stating that,

“Since the historical appearance of the capitalist mode of production, the appropriation by society of all the means of production has often been dreamed of, more or less vaguely, by individuals, as well as by sects, as the ideal of the future. But it could become possible, could become a historical necessity, only when the actual conditions for its realization were there. Like every other social advance, it becomes practicable, not by men understanding that the existence of classes is in contradiction to justice, equality, etc., not by the mere willingness to abolish these classes, but by virtue of certain new economic conditions.”⁶

Again, Engels is explaining here how we cannot know about or accurately dream about the future because it has not yet happened. He specifically says that these changes will only be made when the “actual conditions” exist, not by understanding the issues in

⁵ Engels, F. (1970). *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Progress Publishers. April 2024, <https://www.marx-ists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/>

⁶ Ibid.

society or being willing to abolish them. Engels does not explicitly say that we cannot accurately predict exactly what a Marxian communist future will look like, but he does clearly say that the future will be built on actual history and real life conditions, not on our wishes. Even our thoughts are a reflection of the time that we live in. He mentions multiple times in this text that Marx's conception of socialism is scientific.⁷ This means that it is based on true facts and present conditions. We cannot predict something which has not yet happened. Doing so would be more of an ideological approach than a scientific one.⁸ Thus, Engels explains the vagueness of Marx in his works.

While logically justifiable, this vagueness has given real world totalitarians the ability to persuade the masses that they are true followers of Marxian communism. They have been able to fill in what they perceive to be gaps in Marx's works with their own ideals or modes to gain political power. This is why it is crucial to carefully read any text of political philosophy. Otherwise, you may find yourself making similar mistakes.

This is the point at which some may say "but Marx does predict the future, doesn't he?" It is true that in his writing, Marx has made *some* suggestions about the end of history, but he refrains from purely speculating on what will happen. Instead, he makes arguments for certain truths within a Marxian communist society as a result of history. What I mean by this is that Marx's works are meant to point out the contradictions within history– the issues which must be solved– and reasonably suggest solutions to these contradictions. There is a difference between a wishful dream and a deduction of what the future may hold based on an understanding of the current social and economic tensions. I

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

want to suggest that we can understand Marxian communism and get around Marx's vagueness by examining these contradictions and understanding their solutions.

As we will discuss at length later, Marx often discusses these contradictions as a way to show the reader or imply what a Marxian communist society would look like. One of the largest issues that he points out about capitalism in *The Communist Manifesto* is that in society, "...those of its members who work acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything, do not work".⁹ What he means by this is that in a capitalist society, the people who work everyday— the wage laborers— cannot afford to own anything. They get a measly paycheck that is just barely enough (or sometimes not enough) to get them by. People who can afford to own things are at the top of society, and they are the few who do not work everyday. They do not spend their time in factories making commodities, rather, they are the owners and executives of these companies. They are the people that take home most of the profit made by the company, but are not the ones that actually create the commodities that are made and sold. Thus, a logical prediction that can be made about the future is that Marxian communism will eliminate wage labor. That is the whole point of communism.

Another important contradiction that Marx points to is that of overproduction. Again, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx explains that the capitalist bourgeoisie has created "such gigantic means of production and exchange... like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells"¹⁰, meaning that for the first time in history people are creating more than they can

⁹ *Selected Writings*, 172.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

consume. Marx calls this the “epidemic of overproduction”¹¹ which he claims would result in “barbarism... famine... a universal war of devastation.”¹² There is so much overproduction that the wage laborer is laid off and begins going hungry. Thus, capitalism does the opposite of what people say that it promises to do.

There is also a contrast that we will visit more later that I’d like to briefly bring to light now. A very large contradiction within capitalism is that of freedom and democracy versus authoritarianism. As C.B. Macpherson explains, democracy originally “meant rule by or in the interests of the hitherto oppressed class.”¹³ But is that still the case in democratic capitalist countries? In many capitalist countries, such as the United States, freedom of the market is seen as very important. The very ideology of capitalism is often associated with liberalism. We must make a differentiation, though. It is not liberty for the people, rather liberty for businesses and capitalists. While the market may be free—while companies can make massive profits and CEOs can become billionaires—the wage laborer experiences the exact opposite of freedom and equality. Democracy, which we justifiably love, is not necessarily a true democracy. Our politics may be democratic, but our whole way of life is not. Throughout many of his works, Marx sends a clear message about the capitalist workplace. He would say that when we clock into work, we are at the service of an authoritarian government: our boss.

The discussion of what twentieth century political leaders did and how exactly they misinterpreted Marx in detail is one to be had at a later date, as it may be a little too ambitious for this specific work. First, we must understand what Marxian communism

¹¹ Ibid., 163.

¹² Ibid., 163.

¹³ Macpherson, C. B. (2006). *The Real World of Democracy*. House of Anansi Press Inc.

truly is. We must strip everything away and look at the roots of the theories that he laid out. This thesis will not focus on historical examples of communism or quantitative data of what those examples may have looked like. It is an analysis of his political philosophy. A solid political argument cannot be formed if the foundation is not solid. My aim is to build that foundation.

You may ask yourself why Marx had such a distaste for capitalism. As we will discover, there are many issues that he noticed within the system. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx states that “the only wheels which political economy puts in motion are greed and the war among the greedy, competition.”¹⁴ His claim is that capitalism creates a war between the capitalists. The war may not be bloody, but it certainly has victims: the proletarians.

Some background knowledge is important in order to understand the following chapters. Marx’s arguments for and explanations of communism are based on the theory of historical materialism, as I briefly mentioned before. It is necessary that we understand this theory because it shows us why Marx refused to postulate on what the post-revolutionary utopia would look like. This theory is a bit complex, so we will start with an explanation given by Peter Singer and expound on it. Singer states that, “the materialist conception of history is a theory of world history in which practical human activity, rather than thought, plays the crucial role.”¹⁵ This means that material human activity (such as industrialization) is what creates history, not human thought. This is not to say that thought is not important, however. Thoughts are like seeds that we have in our minds

¹⁴ *Selected Writings*, 59.

¹⁵ Singer, P. (2018). *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press., 43.

which we can choose to plant into the material world to create something tangible or actionable. We can look to Singer again for a further explanation, where he states,

“... the driving force behind historical change is, according to the materialist theory of history, the development of the forces of production. The change from one form of society to another occurs when the existing structure of society acts as a fetter on the further development of the productive forces. But communism is the final form of society. Communism will therefore inherit the dramatic advances in the production so ruthlessly made by capitalism, and will allow these forces to develop to their fullest extent possible.”¹⁶

This quote can be broken down into two sections. The first two sentences give more details on historical materialism, which Singer explains is a theory that states that historical developments primarily occur due to changing productive forces. When a type of society no longer allows for more development in production, it changes. Again, this means that history is not a result of peoples’ thoughts, ideas, or ideologies, but rather of material change in the organization of society, largely because of relationships between humans as a result of production. The second part of this quote will be something that we come back to throughout this piece, as it is also very important. Singer states that there is nothing after communism. There will not be any further material changes that alter the formation of society. This is not to say that Marxian communism will be a stagnant society where no more developments are made. This is a common argument that we see against historical and present day communist countries such as North Korea, which is shown in the news as far less developed than capitalist South Korea. By paying careful attention to the last sentence of the quote above, we see that Singer explains that because of the nature of historical materialism, there will still be developments within communism. We should take this to mean that science will still progress, even if productive forces themselves do not

¹⁶ Ibid., 86.

change. This again points to historical materialism. If we understand that history changes with material developments, then we must also understand that a Marxian communist society would take into account all of the developments that were made before, thus making it the most advanced form of society. It would take everything good from capitalism, leaving behind only the bad.

We must then ask if historical materialism inevitably leads to a Marxian communist end or not. Jonathan White answers this question by explaining that Marx and Engels state that history,

“Is creating not just the need for the overthrow of capitalism but the tools for doing so, laying the foundations of a new, higher and more sophisticated social organism. This is important because it means that historically speaking, capitalism cannot be seen as human history gone wrong, or condemned simply as moral obscenity. Instead, Marx and Engels see capitalism as a necessary stage of human history...”¹⁷

Capitalism should not be seen by those who study Marx as some sort of mistake. Rather, it is a necessary stepping stone to communism. Marx and Engels explain this well in *The German Ideology*, where they state that,

“Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* still to be established, not an *ideal* to which reality (will) have to adjust. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of affairs. The conditions of this movement result from premises now in existence. The social power, that is, the multiplied productive force from the cooperation of different individuals determined by the division of labor, appears to these individuals not as their own united power but as a force alien and outside them because their cooperation is not voluntary but has come about naturally. They do not know the origin and the goal of this alien force, and they cannot control it. On the contrary, it passes through a peculiar series of phases and stages independent of the will and the action of men, even directing their will.”¹⁸

¹⁷ White, J. (2021). Making Our Own History: A User’s Guide to Marx’s Historical Materialism. Praxis Press., 7.

¹⁸ *Selected Writings*, 120.

Marxian communism will naturally be the end result of historical materialism because of the natural course that history will follow in solving the contradictions that capitalism creates. Capitalism has sown the seeds for a Marxian communist society. As we will explore throughout this entire thesis, communism is meant to resolve the issues within capitalism. In order to further investigate Marxian communism, it is necessary to gain some sort of understanding of how production and the market work within capitalism. As explained by two professors and political thinkers, Thomas L. Pangle and Timothy W.

Burns:

“First, as we have seen, the system forces everyone who is not a big owner into the proletariat working class. Second, the system cannot avoid depriving the workers more and more of physical necessities and economic security. For as we've seen, competition intensifies among the big corporations, and so costs of production must be cut, and this eventually requires cutting real wages, making the workers work harder and longer for less and less.”¹⁹

While this may be a basic explanation of how an economic system works, Pangle and Burns explain it well. The primary principle of capitalism is that everyone who is not a member of the capitalist class is forced to work for the capitalists. Because of this principle, and because of the inequalities within capitalism, the proletarians sink deeper into a metaphorical quick sand that swallows them up before they can escape its grasp.

We must also examine the aspects of capitalism which Marx and others may find unappealing. The “great war” is of course a portion of it, but there are details which we should not miss. We can turn to political philosophers such as G.A. Cohen to understand what makes capitalism so harmful. He claims that “because motivation in market exchange consists largely of greed and fear, a person typically does not care *fundamentally*,

¹⁹ Pangle, T. L., & Burns, T. W. (2015). *The Key Texts of Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press., 375.

within market interaction, about how well or badly anyone other than herself fares.”²⁰ It appears from this quotation that in some ways, capitalism strips away our humanity. It takes away our compassion for one another. We learn to care only about ourselves (and our immediate family members who are impacted by our choices). We begin seeing every human interaction as monetary in one way or another. Cohen states that “...in a market network no one does anything for anyone without getting something from *that* person.”²¹ Do we only do things for others in order to get something in return? While it may not seem that this is *always* the case, with a little bit of inspection we can understand that it is *mostly* the case. We may do things for our family or friends because we love them. We do not expect any benefit from our good deeds, but otherwise, capitalism is cutthroat. Every action that we take is transactional in some sense. We work because we expect our employers to pay us. If we do not provide enough profit for our employers, we get fired. We expect to receive, and only give when we know that we will get what we want in return.

“Is this not a poor way to live?” you may ask yourself. Is there room for true community within capitalism? Cohen would argue that,

“We cannot enjoy full community, you and I, if you make, and keep, say, ten times as much money as I do, because my life will then labor under challenges that you will never face, challenges that you could help me to cope with, but do not, because you keep your money.”²²

This may be a simplification, but I believe that it does the job in explaining one of the issues within capitalism. Sure, we may find community with one another on other bases. People congregate over the same religious beliefs, similar interests, shared culture, and

²⁰ Cohen, G. A. (2009). *Why Not Socialism?* Princeton University Press., 44-45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

²² *Ibid.*, 35.

many other things, but these are small communities. A “full” community, as Cohen explains, cannot exist if we live in a society where some people live lavishly while others suffer endlessly. Injustice and inequality appear to be part of the differentiation between capitalism and communism.

What, then, is community? What do the interactions within a proper community look like? We can answer these questions by looking at the communities that we already find ourselves in. Of course, these are smaller communities, but they still teach us similar principles. Joining communities like fraternal organizations, sports teams, or close knit neighborhoods gives people a sense of belonging. They create a close connection between the members, resulting in a type of “brotherly love”. The other people within those communities feel like a second family to you. You have probably been supported by them in difficult times. In return, you may have cooked a warm meal for someone in your community when they were sick, or given them a ride when their car breaks down. You work well together. Everyone contributes if they can. If they can’t, then that’s okay too. In his book, *The Once and Future Worker*, Oren Cass describes various situations that may make it difficult for some people to work. He points to “...pregnancies, ailing relatives, unforeseeable disasters, and addictions.”²³ Which can temporarily or permanently prevent someone from working. Those people are not left behind. In other words, community is based on the concept that we help one another. We have a mutual understanding that we will all help our community, but not necessarily an expectation that we must receive things from each other in return.

²³ Cass, O. (2020). *The Once and Future Worker: A Vision for the Renewal of Work in America*. Encounter Books., 178.

I believe it to be very important to make my intentions in writing this thesis clear. I am not interested in using this work as a way of convincing anyone to feel the way that I may feel. This thesis is not meant to make anyone a communist. In fact, I do think that there are some failures within Marxism. All that this text is meant to do is inform. It is my wish to provide a clearer understanding of Marxian communism in hopes of invoking a desire to consider our political, social, and economical landscape. It is not my job, nor should it be, to tell you what to believe. I merely hope that you walk away from reading this more able to drown out the noise that is being made around Marx's work based on a misunderstanding of its true nature. We cannot decide what we believe if we do not first understand the concepts which we are debating.

There is another important note to make when writing a piece that examines political philosophy. In all instances, but specifically this one, it is important to read political works with the willingness to change your mind. Of course, you may walk away with the same opinion that you had before. That is in your right. However, one must strip away all of their previous biases, good and bad, of the two economic structures in order to have a base understanding of the philosophy behind communism. This is not possible if you conflate capitalism with democracy and communism with tyranny, or capitalism being good and communism being bad. The best way to approach any reading of political theory is with an open mind.

I carry the burden in this thesis to clarify Marxian communism by implication in response to the contradictions that Marx outlines. As we will discover throughout some of his works, Marx claims that capitalism will be the final stage before the communist revolution. It is because of the unique aspects of capitalism that a communist revolution

will naturally occur and put an end to all class antagonisms for the rest of time. This is why we can say that Marxian communism is the solution to all of the contradictions within capitalism.

The following three chapters will help clarify Marxian communism in their own right. Chapter II discusses *The Communist Manifesto* and will focus on the industry, property, and community. Chapter III will then dive into *The German Ideology* and will discuss the ideology surrounding class struggle and economic systems. Chapter IV will consider *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*— particularly the section titled “Alienated Labor” — and will focus on the issues within wage labor under capitalism and how those issues would be fixed within Marxian communism.

CHAPTER II: *THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* is one of the most important pieces of political literature, but is very often misunderstood. Throughout this work Marx and Engels explain the pitfalls of capitalism by dissecting the class structure that is crucial to this economic system. Furthermore, they explain that communism will represent the first time in human history where the overthrow of the ruling class (the bourgeoisie) by the underclass (the proletariat) does not create a new ruling class that oppresses the next underclass.²⁴ The ongoing cycle of revolution after revolution that always results in another class struggle with no end in sight finally ends when communism wins.

It is important to note that what Marx and Engels are defending is not communism as is understood from a historical context, but rather is historical materialism, which is the philosophical explanation of communism as outlined by Karl Marx. The historical examples often brought as cases against Marx's works are too expansive and complicated to tackle within this paper, but it is my hope that this work will encourage an ongoing conversation about Marxism's critiques and whether or not those are valid. In order to understand what Marxian communism truly is, one must first understand what capitalism is. You cannot understand one without understanding the other because they stand in opposition.

The Communist Manifesto does not spend much time explaining what communism is, but it describes at length what communism is not. It spends much more time discussing the problems within capitalism, and paints Marxian communism as the

²⁴ *Selected Writings*, 176.

solution to those problems. The issue is that not everyone reads between the lines. This can be very dangerous, so it is of utmost importance that as a society we read and think about every word and its true meaning.

The Communist Manifesto describes at great length what capitalism is. First, it is important to establish some basic societal structures within capitalism. After understanding these, we can begin to understand what Marx and Engels believed that communism would look like. They state that within capitalism,

“The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means production, and has concentrated property in a few hands.”²⁵

Marx and Engels are explaining a few key components of capitalism here. The first is that it encourages the population to centralize. Due to the nature of capitalism- large industries that require masses of wage laborers- people can no longer live scattered throughout the nation; they must be close together. The second is perhaps more important, and is part of the reason for the first: the ruling class in a capitalist state centralizes the means of production. As Marx and Engels have explained, in a capitalist system, the means of production (i.e. the resources and structures to produce goods) are concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy property owners.²⁶ Because only a few people fit into this ruling class and own the means of production, labor becomes concentrated both geographically and socially. Labor does not belong to everyone or exist everywhere. Rather, labor is owned by few, but done by many. Thus, workers are pushed to live closer together in order to properly work within the capitalist manufacturing system. They must come together in a

²⁵ Ibid., 162-163.

²⁶ Ibid., 159-160.

type of “army” that has to work closely together for the system to work. This explains the concentration of population. Finally, this section of *The Communist Manifesto* states that property also only belongs to the bourgeoisie. In a capitalist society, the structure of the economic system is as such: the laborer is at the bottom, taking home enough pay to keep him employed, but not enough to make him well off. He owns no property.²⁷ He produces for wages, but nothing more. The true capital belongs only to the bourgeoisie.

If these conditions exist within capitalism, it begs the question of what Marx and Engels believed that communism is. It can be reasonably inferred that it is the answer to the issues within capitalism. When reading *The Communist Manifesto*, it is important to ask oneself: if this is true to capitalism, then what is true to communism? What was Marx’s intent? Some interpretation is necessary, but it is crucial to stay true to the text and not allow too much leeway. Perhaps Marx and Engels left some gaps in their explanation of communism because they expected the reader to understand their intent without having to spell it out. This vagueness may not have been the best idea, as this work (and many of their others, as we will cover later) has been misunderstood and misinterpreted by many. That being said, based on our understanding of historical materialism, we can come to the conclusion that Marx did not expect to be misinterpreted in such a way. He would not have had any way of predicting these instances before they had occurred.

Returning to the section at hand, in only two sentences Marx and Engels clearly explain three major components of a capitalist society. Capitalist states have a clustered population, consolidated means of production, and concentrated capital. From this, we are meant to understand that communist states should have spread out and commonly

²⁷ Ibid., 171.

owned means of production and capital. In other words, every individual has equal access to owning the means of their own production, property, and capital. Marxian communism does not believe that the government, government entities, or a few wealthy individuals should own any industries or own the labor of anyone else. This means that there are no monopolies, nor state owned enterprises. Rather, individuals labor for themselves or in collaboration with others without having to report to a higher up, or to the government. It would be a grave misunderstanding to consider one's country a communist country, and to equate this system to the teachings of Marx, if this country's means of production is in the hands of the government.

The question that commences is what we can then infer about the concentration of population within communism. Here, it is important to make a distinction. Communism is not merely the opposite of capitalism. It is very different, and in some ways opposite to capitalism, but some things are similar (although, for very different reasons). An example of this would be the concentration of population. In capitalism, as we can understand from the aforementioned quote from *The Communist Manifesto*, laborers are forced to live in concentrated areas due to the nature of their work. Work is often done in vast numbers, each laborer being one small wheel on a never-ending train. Every little wheel is small enough that it goes unnoticed, but each must be there for the train to properly progress.

Population concentration within Marxian communism would look different. While Marx did not necessarily flesh this out, we must consider a few things to begin to understand what he may think about this topic. We can see that the word "communism" derives from "community". As is expressed in almost every interpretation of Marxian

communism, whether true or false, fictional or historical, there is an understanding that communism must be based in the concept of community. While in the present day it is somewhat easier to have a community with others who live far away from you by means of the internet, it is (dare I say) impossible to have a fully functional working community that is not physically in the same area. Thus, Marxian communism also requires a centralized population, but within a different context. Capitalism forces laborers to come together in order to have a job and maintain themselves within the economic system. The key distinction is that this is forced. There is less of a community and more of a purely functional concentration that has been decided on by the bourgeoisie. Marxian communism, on the other hand, is focused on the community aspect. There is a people-driven reason to live together.

We can look at other communist and socialist thinkers to gain some insight into this small but important distinction. G.A. Cohen, a political philosopher and university professor, addresses this question in one of his works, where he states that “... the requirement of community that is central here is that people care about, and, where necessary and possible, care for, one another, and, too, care that they care about one another.”²⁸ This is the main difference. While concentrated populations within capitalism are a product of forced labor within a market system, communities within Marxian communism are built to be an exchange of care. People live close to one another in communism because they rely on and care for each other. They provide equally (to the best of their abilities) to one another, whereas densely populated capitalist states are the result not of care, but of desperation.

²⁸ *Why Not Socialism?*, 34-35.

Marx and Engels take their claims about capitalism further within *The Communist Manifesto*. They explain that within a capitalist system, the wage laborer is a slave. Even though “Marxists have always maintained that the productive forces generated by capitalism were powerful enough, if applied to the satisfaction of reasonable human needs, to eliminate poverty and create a society of abundance,”²⁹ they clearly have not. Capitalism creates an immense abundance of wealth. Company executives can afford multiple million dollar homes, luxury cars, and purses that cost five figures. There is no doubt that that money could go very far if distributed more evenly. The class antagonisms between the proletariat and the bourgeois are so strong, and the conditions of labor are so poor, that the laborer is made a slave. By taking away the individual's ability to control their own work,

“Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers... Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class and the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.”³⁰

If capitalism creates slavery, then Marxian communism does not create slavery. Rather, the individual is free in mind, body, and actions. He does not have to answer to others in order to afford to live. This means that he does not have to conform to the wishes of any boss, any company, or any government entity.

The concept of freedom within Marxian communism may reasonably lead to questions about how the community would stay intact, and how it may resolve disagreements. This is an important question to raise, but it does have an answer. Again, this is

²⁹ Sweezy, P. M. (1981). *Four Lectures on Marxism*. Monthly Review Press., 44.

³⁰ *Selected Writings*, 165.

not something that Marx directly discusses in *The Communist Manifesto*, but other political philosophers can help us consider what Marx may want us to infer.

We must discuss the work of Thomas L. Pangle and Timothy W. Burns, who explain that Marx understands communism to be the result of historical development.³¹ In other words, communism and its lack of government institutions does not bring humans back to the dawn of our existence, when we operated much differently than we do in our modern times. Communism is possible only by advancing through history, finally surpassing the final stage of capitalism and reaching communism. Because of this, it would be reasonable to assume that even with the lack of a government, people would still hold on to certain levels of decorum and democracy. There is an understanding that is perhaps ingrained in us as humans that there are certain things that we should not do and certain crimes that we should not commit, even if there is no written “law” that says so. Pangle and Burns also state that:

“...with the advent of the industrial proletariat class, it can now be seen that we are on the verge of the final act in the drama, which is at the same time the prelude to what Marx calls ‘truly human’ history. We can now see that hundreds of thousands of years stretch before us in which humans will live and continue to evolve, but in a way that is no longer tragically and desperately contradictory, conflict ridden, exploitative, unjust.”³²

For a community to succeed, there needs to be mutual respect between the members and a level of justice. Justice, as Pangle and Burns mention in the quote above, does not only exist in state-lead societies. The struggles and experiences of the proletariat class will teach it about comradery and justice in a way that will make it simple to deal with

³¹ *The Key Texts of Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, 365-366.

³² *Ibid.*, 367.

disputes in a Marxian communist world. Community requires reliance and trust, which I believe that many would agree helps build communication.

After discussing the three key results of capitalism, *The Communist Manifesto* details what the following natural steps are. Marx and Engels explain that,

“The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff.”³³

Marx and Engels explain that there are a few key components within the government system of a capitalist country. Perhaps the most important to note is “one national class-interest”³⁴ meaning one goal or set of goals that the country as a whole is striving to achieve. Due to the economic system that is capitalism, this raises a few questions. Is this interest to become wealthier? Perhaps more successful? Or more powerful? What happens to those who stand in between where someone is and where they want to be? Is this a conformist mindset? If so, what happens to those who don’t want to conform? For some, these questions might start to gnaw at the invisible string that connects capitalism to an idea of “goodness”.

Communism is often depicted in films and novels as controlling and strict, but we must not forget the importance of looking at it through a Marxian, philosophical lens. If capitalism is equated to “one national class-interest”³⁵, then what is Marx saying that communism is? In a communist society, people are more free to set and achieve their

³³ *Selected Writings*, 163.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

own aspirations. There is no external pressure, such as a national identity or a parent-like leader, to do as everyone else.

Marx and Engels discuss the concept of individualism more explicitly in the following pages of *The Communist Manifesto*. They specifically explain the difference between how capital is treated, versus how workers are treated. They state that “in a bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality.”³⁶ What they mean is that wealth is valued more than individual laborers. Capital, meaning money, is seen as an independent entity. Proletarians are seen as cogs in the machine that brings money to the bourgeoisie. They are not individuals, rather they are numbers. One wage laborer is seen as having no value, but all together, they are valuable. Additionally, wage laborers are dependent. They not only rely on one another in order to ensure that their work is done, but they rely on the bourgeoisie to give them jobs and to pay them for their work. That is the path that they have to survive. Because of their class, this has been laid out for them. Again, if this is a reason that Marx is arguing against capitalism, it is up to the reader to reasonably infer what communism would look like. It would not be reasonable to assume that in Marxian communism, one individual is seen as most important. There are no classes, so one person is not put above another. Each human has value as a person.

We must take this a further step and question why the class structure is so inherent to a capitalist society. Furthermore, we must understand why so few are in the bourgeoisie class. Under capitalism, Marx and Engels explain that the wage laborer is only paid enough to maintain his life and reproduce.³⁷ Additionally, the authors state that

³⁶ Ibid., 171.

³⁷ Ibid., 171.

the laborer is “allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it.”³⁸ It is a jarring realization that the working class is seen as a tool to uplift the ruling class. The laborers are needed by the ultra-wealthy because otherwise, there would be no extensive wealth for the bourgeoisie. Thus, the proletariat are not paid out of benevolence, but out of necessity. They are paid enough to live, to reproduce more generations of laborers, and to be willing to continue working. They live not for themselves. If they were suddenly laid off of their jobs or no longer needed, they may not be able to live anymore. Their life and their livelihood is controlled by the bourgeoisie. The proletariat is kept down by those above them. By explaining this negative effect of capitalism, Marx and Engels are aiming to explain why communism would be more free.

Capitalism is not ideal for anyone except for the few people in the ruling class. It creates wealth for the bourgeoisie, but torture for the proletarians. Like every previous impoverished class, the proletariat have no other means of truly achieving freedom than to overthrow the current system. Within capitalism, the working class has been given the tools to rebel inadvertently. Because of the class structure and work structure within capitalism, “not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons - the modern working class- the proletarians.”³⁹ The bourgeois have paved the way for their own downfall. They have created conditions so intolerable that their own beloved system crumbles at the hands of the masses. This is a powerful statement made by Marx and Engels. They are saying that the conditions that the proletarians are born into are so insufferable and unjustifiable that no one would want to live that way.

³⁸ Ibid., 171.

³⁹ Ibid., 164.

We must turn again to the discussion of historical materialism and how it helps the proletariat fight against these terrible conditions. Peter Singer explains that,

“The basis of the dialectical movement Marx describes is not the hopes and plans of people, but the economic imperatives that flow from the existence of private property. The proletariat becomes conscious of its misery, and therefore seeks to overthrow the capitalist form of society, but this consciousness arises only because of the present situation of the proletariat in society.”⁴⁰

The material realities of end-stage capitalism point to the necessity of change. There is somewhat of a pattern of history. One class oppresses another, then the condition for the oppressed class becomes unbearable, then a revolution occurs (this would be material change) and a new system emerges.

One can understand that Marx and Engels define communism as a system where suffering by a majority of the population at the hands of a few is non-existent. If communism is meant to be the end of history, i.e. the end of the constant turnover of economic, social, and political power, then communism cannot be a system of oppression or any type of class struggle. For class struggle to cease to exist, classes must cease to exist.⁴¹ What this means is that the wellbeing of the majority is not sacrificed for the wellbeing of the minority. What is good for all is most important. Perhaps this is a more democratic system than one might originally think when they hear of communism. The success of the community is in the hands of everyone and benefits everyone. It does not benefit some due to the punishment of others.

⁴⁰ Marx: *A Very Short Introduction*, 40-41.

⁴¹ *Selected Writings*, 176.

CHAPTER III: *THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote *The German Ideology* in part to disprove philosophies laid out by previous political theorists on the topic of communism. They approached this work by outlining the issues that they had with the beliefs of philosophers such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Max Stirner, Bruno Bauer. More importantly, Marx and Engels subliminally explain the lack of ideology and delusion in a communist society.

The German Ideology is one of the most detailed explanations of historical materialism. It is in this text that we can really learn about and understand the concept. He discusses how Hegel and other German philosophers had a different understanding of what caused changes in history. He believed that, “they have never had an *earthly* basis for history.”⁴² By this, he meant that their conception of history was based on ideological advancements. As I’ve mentioned earlier, Marx believed that societal shifts were due to material changes. He stated in *The German Ideology* that,

“It is obvious at the outset that there is a materialistic connection among men determined by their needs and their modes of production. This connection is forever assuming new forms and thus presents a ‘history’ even in absence of any political or religious nonsense which might hold men together in addition.”⁴³

If these material conditions and relationships among men are a result of the modes of production, then we can understand that they are not the result of ideologies. In other words, ideologies do not create history. Rather, they are created by history. Our ideologies do not cause what happens. The conditions of our time do.

This also means that there is a gap between reality and ideology. Because our ideologies are created as a result of our time, they are not always rooted in reality. Our

⁴² *Selected Writings*, 115.

⁴³ *Selected Writings*, 116-117.

ideologies are “created” because they help us explain or understand what is happening around us. This does not mean that they are always logically sound or true, as we will discover.

As is true with many of Marx and Engels’ works, it is up to the reader to understand what exactly they are saying about communism. As was the case with *The Communist Manifesto*, *The German Ideology* does little to describe the conditions within communism. Rather, it describes how things came to be in the capitalist society that we find ourselves in, and how these issues would be solved with communism. In this specific text, a lot of what the authors deal with are belief systems and their place in society. We can understand why Marx might have approached much of his work in this way. Peter Singer explained that, “he believed that history owed its momentum to the development of the forces of production rather than the development of ideas. This does not mean that theory is unimportant.”⁴⁴ Theory, as we will explore, helps material change occur.

Before reading the text, it is critical to understand one thing. In the present day, communism is often depicted as deeply ideological. There is a differentiation that must be made, however. Communism as an ideology is the system of thought that describes what communism is, how it will come to be, who will initiate the revolution, why change is necessary, etc. This is not the same as ideology within communism. Marx and Engels explain that once a Marxian communist society has already been created and the end goal has been achieved, there will no longer be a need or a natural existence for philosophy, religion, politics, etc. Singer details this quite well by writing that,

“According to Marx’s view of history, as the economic basis of society is transformed, so is our consciousness. Greed, egoism, and envy are not ingrained forever in the character of human beings. They would disappear in a society in

⁴⁴ Marx: *A Very Short Introduction*, 79.

which private property and the private means of production were replaced with communal property and socially organized means of production... a communist society would have a new ethical basis.”⁴⁵

We will discuss throughout this chapter what this ethical basis will be, and further flesh out why our current consciousness is different from that in Marxian communism.

The depiction of communism that has often been sold to the masses is that of deep ideology to the point of brainwashing. Generally, films and books will show a so-called communist leader enforcing a way of thought onto the people, but this is not Marxian communism. What do Marx and Engels say about ideology and communism?

First, it is important to understand where such ideas and delusions come from.

According to Marx and Engels,

“The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is directly interwoven with the material activity and the material relationships of men... The same applies to intellectual production as manifested in people's language of politics, law, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc... Consciousness can never be anything else except conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process...to arrive at man in the flesh, one does not set out from what men say, imagine, or conceive, nor from man as he is described, thought about, imagined, or conceived. Rather one sets out from real, active men and their actual life-process and demonstrates the development of ideological reflexes and echoes of that process.”⁴⁶

This is to say that ideology is invented by man. Of course, this seems clear to most people on the surface, but we must look a little deeper to understand what the authors mean by this. Marx and Engels say that the actual activity of people is what causes their ideas. People use their experiences to form their ideas. The authors go further to say that this is how religion, morality, and politics (among others) came to be. Thus, these ideologies are created by man for some individual purpose.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁶ *Selected Writings*, 111-112.

The purpose of these man-made ideas is important to understand. Something about capitalism lends itself to the imagination of these concepts in peoples' minds. Some aspect of this system made it possible, and even beneficial, for these delusions to exist. Marx and Engels explain how German philosophers, such as Max Stirner, view history and religion. The authors state that,

“It postulates religious man as the original man, the starting point of all history. In its imagination it puts the religious production of fancies in the place of the real production of the means of subsistence and of life itself...Such theoretical notions do not exist and do not need to be explained to the mass of men, that is, the proletariat. If this mass ever had any theoretical notions, for example, religion, these have now long been dissolved by circumstances.”⁴⁷

With this passage, the authors establish the belief that the bourgeoisie spends too much time pondering religion and philosophy. The members of the ruling class ask themselves about the “realm of God” which does not actually exist because they have created it in their minds.⁴⁸ They use these abstract ideas to explain things that happen in real life. Rather, they should be using actual life to explain life. Marx and Engels argue that the bourgeoisie use this as a way to pass time, as it is nothing more than pure imagination. It is their circumstances that allow them to create these concepts in their minds. These concepts are something that they sell to themselves and to the proletariat. While the proletariat may buy into these concepts for a while, they simply do not exist. The proletariat has to live in the realm of reality and does not have time to bother with things that Marx and Engels believe are fake. Thus, the unveiling of these man-made ideologies is important for a future revolution.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 126.

Within capitalism, philosophy and religion are often used to explain things away. While a capitalistic society may seem like an incredibly sensible one, the opposite is true. Marx and Engels explain that nothing has changed in history simply with one's imagination. Real changes can only occur with real actions. They state that,

“...all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism, by resolution into ‘Self-consciousness’ or transformation into ‘apparitions’, ‘specters’, ‘fancies’, etc., but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to this idealistic trickery. Not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history and also of religion, philosophy, and all other types of theory. It shows that history does not end by being resolved into ‘Self-consciousness’ as ‘spirit of the Spirit’, but that there is a material result at each historical stage, a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor...”⁴⁹

The authors are saying here that historical issues do not get resolved simply with thoughts and ideas. History is a result of the actual conditions of the time. Thus, changes can be made only by changing those conditions. One cannot simply ponder or pray away the situation in which they find themselves. That would be a waste of time. Rather, material forces are what create history. If proletarians actually want to be released from their chains, they must take real action. Marx and Engels further make this point by saying:

“...the ‘liberation’ of ‘man’ is not advanced a single step by their reducing Philosophy, Theology, Substance, and all that trash to ‘Self-consciousness’ and by their liberating man from the domination of these phrases which have never held him in thrall... Nor will we explain to them that real liberation can be achieved only in the real world and with real means, that slavery cannot be abolished without the steam engine and the spinning jenny, that serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture improved agriculture, and that people on the whole cannot be liberated so long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, shelter and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. ‘Liberation’ is a historical and not a mental act. It is effected by historical conditions, by the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, transportation...”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid., 124-125.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 129.

Of course, we must recognize that ideas are what lead to revolution. Not all philosophy is negative, but it is also not necessary in the final stage of history: communism. It is only beneficial to the proletariat in that it helps *achieve* communism. Additionally, if we consider what we know about historical materialism, our ideas are based on our material circumstances. We cannot imagine or come up with things that are not based in our understanding of history and our present time. The way that we think today and the ideologies that we have are based on real material conditions. If this is the case, if conditions cannot be changed merely by theology or philosophy, then why would they exist? Why do they matter so much to the people, particularly the bourgeoisie?

Marx and Engels answer these questions very clearly. Not only do they do this, but they also allude to what a communist society would look like. They explain that,

“In every epoch the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, that is, the class that is the ruling material power of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual power. The class having the means of material production has also control over the means of intellectual production, so that it also controls, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of intellectual production. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one and therefore the ideas of its domination. The individuals who comprise the ruling class possess among other things consciousness and thought... among other things they rule also as thinkers and producers of ideas and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age.”⁵¹

This passage is incredibly powerful because it explains very clearly why these ideologies came to be. The ruling class of any given time created certain ways of thought in order to control the under class. Not only do they own the means of production in a material sense, but they also own thought. They create mass ideas which are inconspicuously distributed to the proletariat in order to explain why things ought to be the way that they are.

⁵¹ Ibid., 129.

A king might tell his subjects that God made him king. In the same way, a bourgeois factory owner might tell his employees that he was destined in some way to lead everyone to prosperity. This is done because,

“Each new class which displaces the one previously dominant is forced, simply to be able to carry out its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society, that is, ideally expressed. It has to give its ideas the form of universality and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.”⁵²

By maintaining that these ideas are rational, the bourgeoisie justifies its role in society. Not only does the ruling class justify these ideas to the proletarians, but also to itself. The bourgeoisie has a need to prove that there are good reasons for why society is structured the way that it is. Thus, concepts such as religion, philosophy, our conceptions of morality, etc. all come from the desperation of the ruling class to maintain its rule.

Other political philosophers have interpreted a second message from Marx’s discussion about ideology— one which must also be examined. Thomas L. Pangle and Timothy W. Burns explain that,

“Ideology, as ‘the illusion of the class about itself,’ thus reveals something very important about humans: They cannot accept the fate that they are unjust or that they are driven, by economic scarcity and competition and hence necessity, to have to exploit others. Throughout the history of class struggle, humans have always desperately needed to believe in some myth, some false theory or religion, that veils from them their own ugly, exploitative domination.”⁵³

From this we can learn that ideology is created not only to justify the ruling class’ actions to the underclass, but also to make the ruling class itself feel more justified in doing what it is doing. Rather than accepting that the capitalistic system is unjust, the bourgeoisie must convince themselves that it is not such by using some sort of myth.

⁵² Ibid., 130.

⁵³ *The Key Texts of Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, 370.

This leads us to ask what communism would look like. Would there be any delusions in a Marxian communist society? The simple answer is no. There is no ruling class. Thus, there is no reason to create these ideologies as tools to suppress the working class. Marx and Engels explain that,

“the entire appearance, that the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas, comes to a natural end as soon as class rule in general ceases to be the form in which society is organized, as soon as it is no longer necessary to represent a particular interest or as general or ‘the general interest’ as dominant.”⁵⁴

It is not necessary to invent these general interests for the masses because there is no one to oppress. There is no underclass to mold into the operational gears of society. Rather, a Marxian communist society would understand that “individuals have always begun, always begin, with themselves. Their relationships are relationships of their actual life-process.”⁵⁵ The people would come to understand that relationships are real. People connect with each other in ways that are visible to us. They work together and live together in a way that does not require a complex handbook or an exploitation of imagination. Rather, people respect each other because they understand the natural consequences of not doing so. There would no longer be the interest of one class, but rather the true interest of all. The interest of each individual would be beneficial to the whole community, thus it becomes the interest of everyone. It would be a mistake to believe that the lack of capitalism, hence the lack of these ideologies, would cause chaos and danger. Morality would still exist, but perhaps not in the way that capitalism has taught. Singer explains that “once communism has been established and classes have disappeared, however, we will pass beyond class morality, to what Engels called ‘a really human morality’.”⁵⁶ In other

⁵⁴ *Selected Writings*, 131.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁶ *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*, 82.

words, morality would no longer be based on false ideologies or systems of oppression. Instead, there would be a truly pure, human morality.

It would be a grave mistake to believe that communism would lead to another extreme ideology. Marx and Engels have clearly addressed this. Under Marxian communism, there is no need for ideology. No one – not one single individual – is in a position higher than the rest. Thus, there is no need for ideology or manipulation. There is only need for practicality.

CHAPTER IV: *THE ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHIC MANUSCRIPTS OF 1844*

The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 written by Karl Marx also outlines the differences between communism and capitalism very well. While lesser known than *The Communist Manifesto*, this text contains sections such as “Alienated Labor” which helps us deduce in more detail some of the basic aspects of communism.

What is alienation? We refer to anything that we do not know, recognize, or connect with as alien to us. A person who lives in the United States but is not yet a citizen would be considered an alien. A topic that we do not understand may be an “alien concept” to us. Alienation, then, is the process or action of becoming an alien to something. We can be alienated from our work, as Marx discusses in detail. We can also become alienated from ourselves. We may lose our sense of identity. As we will discover, Marx points out that capitalism is alienating for many.

In order to learn from the section titled “Alienated Labor”, it is important to understand a basic fact that Marx points to. He states that,

“The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes a cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces. The increase in value of the world of things is directly proportional to the decrease in value of the human world.”⁵⁷

Working under the bourgeoisie means that the more that the laborer produces, the less valuable he is. He is poorer both financially and in personal worth. His work is devalued. Imagine that a wage laborer makes six products an hour, while his coworker only makes four. They are both paid the same hourly wage. The first laborer is being paid one sixth of his hourly wage per product, while the second is being paid one fourth of his wage per

⁵⁷ *Selected Writings*, 59.

product. Thus, the first laborer, while more efficient, is being paid less per product than his coworker. They both create the same product, but their work is valued differently. The first laborer is in some sense punished for the speed of his work, while his employer makes more money off of him, as he has created more commodities. In a communist world, laborers solely profit off of their products, thus, their value does not decrease as their production increases.

There are certainly some downsides to being paid based on the number of commodities that you produce. Your work may be more rushed, tiring you out sooner. Or perhaps you have some sort of disability that makes it difficult for you to work as efficiently as others. If you have a bad week of sales, you may not be able to afford things that you would usually. With all of this being said, we need to understand that our way of thinking is based on our lived experiences. We are thinking of these downsides given the context of the capitalist system in which we live. As I mentioned previously, everyone helps one another in a healthy community. If you are unable to contribute as much as others, you are not thrown to the wolves. If you do not make enough goods on a certain day to be able to trade for sufficient food for your family, your community will not let you go hungry. Perhaps wage labor does give you a sense of security, but the negative effects of alienation outweigh the benefits.

Furthermore, we must understand that the profits produced by the laborers are not equal to the take home pay that they receive. In capitalism, "...the value of labor... measured in hours of work is less than what the worker produces also measured in hours of work."⁵⁸ This seems like a simple fact of capitalism, but I would argue that it is

⁵⁸ *Four Lectures on Marxism*, 29.

something that we must really think about when we consider why we would want to fix the issues that exist in the current system. The object that the laborer creates is valued more than the work of the laborer. If it takes you one hour to make a commodity, you can be certain that you will not be paid an hourly wage that is equal to the full price of the item.

Marx then explains what happens to the wage laborer under capitalism. He states that,

“...the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, the most miserable commodity; that the misery of the worker is inversely proportional to the power and volume of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands and thus the revival of monopoly in a more frightful form; and finally that the distinction between capitalist and landowner, between agricultural laborer and industrial worker, disappears and the whole society must divide into the two classes of proprietors and propertyless workers.”⁵⁹

It is easiest to understand what Marx is saying here by breaking it down into sections.

The first fact that he brings up is that the laborer becomes a commodity, a miserable one at that. Meaning that a worker is no longer seen as a person, but rather as an input of production that can be bought with a rather low hourly wage. Next, Marx states that the more the laborer's production increases, his happiness decreases. Meaning that the harder he is forced to work, the more miserable he becomes. If we take these two points as facts of capitalism, it becomes simple to explain what conditions would look like under communism. Marx expects the reader to understand communism as the solution to the many problems of capitalism without having to lay out in extreme detail what a communist state or world would look like. If capitalism requires that the wage laborer is seen as a commodity rather than a person, we can infer that communism does the opposite. Marx

⁵⁹ *Selected Writings*, 58.

wants us to understand that under communism, the worker's happiness can come from his work. He is creating a livelihood for himself, while also creating for his community. He is the master of his own work. He is not forced into misery due to the demand to work harder and faster by an employer who benefits solely off of his productivity. Under capitalism, there is unequal access to owning the means of production. We're often sold the idea that everyone has the opportunity to become a corporate boss, but we fail to recognize that familial ties, access to education, and social capital have an influence on who gets more opportunities. There is a difference between the external threats to work hard within a capitalist society and the internal inspiration to provide for oneself and one's community within a communist society.

Next, we must come to understand the second part of the quote above. Marx continues by explaining that the so-called competition within capitalism is what leads to monopolies. The bourgeoisie, the few people at the very top of the socioeconomic ladder, have amassed so many laborers underneath them that they control a large portion of the workforce. Due to their exploitation of those below them, they accumulate incredible wealth and power. The more workers below them, and the faster that they work, the more power the bourgeois owners have, while the workers are barely surviving. This system makes it possible for the proprietors to stay at the top, and the propertyless workers to remain below. Again, the reader must make an educated assumption of what communism would look like after understanding these aspects of capitalism. We can begin by understanding that within Marxian communism, there would be no such class structure. This means that there would be no proprietors which had power over the workers. If there are no wealthy owners, then there are no people that work below them. This means that they

cannot accumulate capital at the hands of exploitation. Thus, monopolies would not exist. This begs the question of how labor would be structured within a communist state, something that can be explored by continuing the reading of *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

Capitalism breeds alienation. There are a few different types of alienation that are especially prevalent in the workforce. First, we must consider the product created by the laborer. Marx states that,

“... the object which labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as an alien thing, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor embodied and made objective in a thing. It is the objectification of labor. The realization of labor is its objectification. In the viewpoint of political economy this realization of labor appears as the diminution of the worker, the objectification as the loss of and subservience to the object, and the appropriation as alienation (Entfremdung), as externalization (Entäusserung)... The externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his work becomes an object, an external existence, but also that it exists outside him independently, alien, an autonomous power, opposed to him. The life he has given to the object confronts him as hostile and alien.”⁶⁰

What does this mean and why is it so important? What Marx is telling us is that under capitalism, the producer (the proletarian) is separated from the product. What you make is not your own. You do not have the discrepancy to sell it or keep it, what price to sell it at, or how to sell it. It does not belong to you, making it alien. When you clock into work, everything you do there belongs to your employer, and you are paid a small wage in return. There is no connection with your product. As Peter Lindsay puts it, “labor that is controlled is labor that is quite apart from the person.”⁶¹ The more separated you feel from your product, the more alien that object is to you. There is no emotion connected to

⁶⁰ Ibid., 59-60.

⁶¹ Lindsay, P. (1996). *Creative Individualism: The Democratic Vision of C.B. Macpherson*. State University of New York Press., 68.

that product, no matter how much you may project yourself into it. As a laborer, it is natural to throw yourself into your work, if not only because of how time consuming or laborious it is. Thus, we unknowingly put a small piece of ourselves into each item that we create. However, the product that you made belongs to someone else. It is not an extension of you, but rather an external object that never belonged to you. In realizing this fact, the laborer realizes that they are less important than the objects which they produce. The worker is reduced merely to a worker. They are seen as completely separate and external to their work. To the employer, they are only a means to create a product, but not the actual creator of the product. Proletarians do not have a connection to the fruits of their labor. The laborer is just one commodity that is used to create another commodity. Additionally, Marx states that under capitalism, the more life that the laborer breathes into the product that they are creating, the less life that they retain. The more effort that the proletariat puts into creating wealth for the bourgeoisie, the less that the proletarians have for themselves. They are giving more power to the bourgeoisie, thus making themselves even smaller.

How then would things be different under Marxian communism? Again, we must understand communism to be the answer to the problems of capitalism. We must take what Marx told us is wrong with capitalism, and use that to reasonably infer what his idea of communism is. If under capitalism, the laborer has no connection to his product, that is to say- if his product is completely external from him, then the opposite is true in communism. This would look like an individual tradesman that has specialized in a craft. They would create a product that has usefulness to others, while also having a connection to it. Until that product is sold, it belongs to the maker. It is not created for someone else

to sell and profit off of, as is done in capitalism. Rather than being a monotonous part of a large process of production, the skilled tradesman would create their product from start to finish and be deeply connected to it. In some senses, the product would be a part of the person who made it and vice versa.

Marx would want us to make an important distinction between what labor will look like in a communist society and what it used to look like in the pre-industrial society. Because of how integral the theory of historical materialism is to Marxian communism, we must understand that our methods of production would not take a step backward. We would not find ourselves back in the pre-industrial cottage industry, as this would not be congruent with historical materialism. As the theory suggests (and as I have previously mentioned), we can only get to Marxian communism by going through all of the stages of history. Communism can only exist because of all of the contradictions within capitalism. Thus, before we can even arrive at Marxian communism, we must have the most advanced form of capitalism possible. This would mean that we would still have incredibly advanced technology and resources. A Marxian communist society would benefit from those modern developments and continue to create newer tools to help with production. This would also mean that those living in a Marxian communist future would not face the same scarcity that people in centuries before have faced. Capitalism has eliminated the issue of scarcity.

The other main form of alienation under capitalism is alienation from the labor itself (the act of making the product). In order to understand this, there are a few key points to learn. First, Marx points out that,

“Labor is external to the laborer- that is, it is not part of his nature- and that the worker does not affirm himself in his work but denies himself, feels miserable

and unhappy, develops no free physical and mental energy but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind. The worker, therefore, feels at ease only outside work, and during work he is outside himself. He is at home when he is not working and when he is working he is not at home. His work, therefore, is not voluntary, but coerced, forced labor. It is not the satisfaction of a need but only a means to satisfy other means.”⁶²

There is a lot of information condensed within these few sentences, so it is easiest to break it down into sections. Marx begins by saying that labor (which we can assume means wage labor) is not a natural human thing. It is not natural for a person to go to a workplace where they produce only to benefit others, and where they take home a measly pay that is just enough to make them return the next day. This work, Marx suggests, is completely draining to the body and the mind of the worker, making him dread work. If someone despises doing something, why would they voluntarily do it? Marx argues that they don't. Wage labor is coerced. In a capitalist society, the proletariat has no other way to make a somewhat decent living. His choices are either to work a grueling job with little payoff, or to sink deeper and deeper into poverty until he can no longer live at all. This is not really a choice. Proletarians do not go to work in good conscience, but rather because there is no other reasonable option. Work is not what gives laborers satisfaction. Rather, it provides just enough to satisfy needs in life, such as food and shelter.

As is quite common in his works, Marx does not follow this explanation of capitalism with one of communism. The reader must come to understand what Marxian communism is on their own. This must mean that in communism, everyone feels happy in their work. How can this be? Simply put, workers would no longer experience alienation. The individual works for themselves and in accordance with what satisfies them. They see themselves reflected in their work. They are one with the means of their production.

⁶² *Selected Writings*, 61-62.

Rather than being a small cog in the machine that is a capitalist workplace, they are completely involved in the act of production from start to finish. This gives them self-satisfaction. They can see with their own eyes that they were the reason for the completion of a product and they reap the benefits of doing so by making a full profit off of their work.

Imagine a factory worker in a capitalist state who creates one portion of a larger product. Perhaps the factory makes shoes and this individual is responsible for placing the front leather panel on each shoe. He has a hand in creating one hundred pairs of shoes a day, but only participates in one small part of the process. He does not decide what kind of work he does, nor does he have any input as to how much the shoe sells for. It would not be unreasonable for him to eventually feel inadequate. This is to no fault of his own, but of the system that he works in. He sees no reason to be connected to the process of production or to the fruits of his labor. He knows that he is not being paid adequately for the work that he does. If he is one of ten people needed to make a shoe, he does not receive ten percent of the profit. Rather, he receives a much smaller wage while his employer profits off of his work. He attaches the toe section to the shoe not because it satisfies him, or because he wants to. He does it as a means of survival. Paul Sweezy, a political philosopher who has written multiple texts about Marx and communism, states that laborers "...would not sell their capacity to perform useful labor to others if they possessed the means and materials of production necessary to produce goods and services for their own account."⁶³ What would it look like if laborers did possess those means?

Imagine a shoemaker in a Marxian communist society. He has years of experience and is known as a very skilled individual. He can only make five pairs of shoes a day, but

⁶³ *Four Lectures on Marxism*, 26-27.

he does every step of the process. He creates the sole, sews every piece of leather onto it, and finishes the shoes off with laces. He has pride in his work because he is invested in it. He owns his own mode of production. Not only this, but he has the ability to decide how much to sell the shoes for, and he takes home all of the profit that he makes. He is deeply intertwined with his work in a way that satisfies him. His work is owned by none other than himself.

The third, and perhaps most complex type of alienation that Marx discusses is that of alienating man from man himself and from his own species. Marx begins by explaining that as humans, we have a different way of thinking and existing than other animals do. While most animals only do what they need in order to keep themselves and their offspring alive, they do not generally do anything to help others within their species. Humans are species-beings, a term which Marx describes as a being which recognizes its species as its own and treats it as such. By this, Marx "...appears to be saying that man's consciousness of himself is related to his awareness of himself as a member of humanity."⁶⁴ Humans become the full version of themselves when they recognize and are in tune with the whole of humanity. The issue is that when man is alienated from himself – when he feels outside of his own body and mind – he cannot connect to his species either.⁶⁵ Thus, Marx states,

"It changes his superiority to the animal to inferiority...alienated labor hence turns the species-existence of man, and also nature as his mental species-capacity, into an existence alien to him, into the means of his individual existence. It alienates his spiritual nature, his human essence, from his own body and likewise from nature outside him."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Elster, J. (2000). *Making Sense of Marx*. Cambridge University Press., 63.

⁶⁵ *Selected Writings*, 63-64.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

It cannot be lost on the world what exactly Marx is saying here. Capitalism takes a core pillar of humanity, something that separates us from every other animal species, and destroys it. Labor of any sort is no longer for the good of the species, but for the good of oneself. Man no longer works because it benefits others, but rather because he needs to take home the money to support himself and his life. No longer do people think about the species as a whole, but only about themselves as individuals. It is the only way to survive.

Marx continues the explanation of this third form of alienation by describing how someone living under capitalism sees themselves. This is the alienation of man from himself. This happens because,

“A direct consequence of man's alienation from the product of his work, from his life activity, and from his species-existence, is the alienation of man from man. When man confronts himself, he confronts other men. What holds true of man's relationship to work, to the product of his work, and to himself, also holds true to man's relationship to other men, to their labor, and the object of their labor.”⁶⁷

Marx tells us a few key things here. Based on the other forms of alienation he described, he wants the reader to imagine how those might impact how a person sees themselves. Considering the externalization of man from the fruits of his labor, the means of production, and his own species, it is not difficult to see how man could lose sight of his own existence. His body becomes detached from his mind in a sense. Because he has no connection to his labor, he sees his own labor as the same as another man's labor. There is nothing to differentiate between the two. This gap between oneself and others widens. Suddenly, there is little difference. You see yourself in the same light that you see

⁶⁷ Ibid., 64.

another: both detached from everything that a human should be connected to. It is as if you are completely outside of yourself, watching everything happen in third person.

The depressing reality of Marx's claims truly makes one wonder what communism would look like. Popular culture seems to believe that the same monotony, uniformity, and externalization that exists under capitalism would also exist under communism, but Marx disagrees. Again, he does not give us much context as to what he thinks that communism looks like, so it is our job to reasonably infer. A Marxian communist society would be void of all of the issues that exist in a capitalist society. Otherwise, Marx would not be pointing out these truths to dismiss capitalism as a viable economic and political system. We have already established that there would be no alienation of labor in a Marxian communist state. Thus, we can also infer that there would not be alienation of man from his species or man from himself. These forms of alienation are merely a result of the first two. If individuals take pleasure and ownership in their work – if their work is satisfying, and not a means to satisfy other aspects of life – then there is no alienation. Man works for the benefit of his society. What he gives is also what he gets. Someone may be a nurse because they understand that if they care for others, they will be taken care of in return. A farmer knows that they can sell their produce in return for clothing. Man lives in a mutual symbiotic relationship with others. His purpose is not only to care for himself and his needs, but to care for his species as a whole. That also gives man true purpose, something that wage labor cannot satisfy. It makes people different from one another, each having their own value and their own connection to work, whatever that may be. Marxian communism provides people with a community. It fosters connection with others and with oneself, while capitalism is incredibly individualistic.

In the “Alienated Labor” section of Karl Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx’s underlying message is that of freedom. Under Marxian communism, the individual has freedom from the modern day slavery of wage labor. They are freed from the coercion that is working under a wealthy member of the bourgeoisie who profits solely off of the work of those below them. Additionally, people have the freedom to fulfill their needs. They are not so drained from their work and dominated by the workforce that they are barely able to keep themselves afloat. They are free to take care of themselves, to do work that is satisfying to them, and to do what any person needs to do in order to ensure their well-being and happiness. Under Marxian communism, a person is a full person who has worth, not a commodity whose only value is the profit that it can produce for higher-ups.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Karl Marx was not only a philosopher, but a voice for change. He did not write these works for us to read, (mis)interpret, and move on. He wanted us to engage with them and understand what he meant. He wanted us to open our eyes to the state of our affairs in hopes that sometime in the future, when we are ready, we would create a better life for ourselves. I hope that I have provided you with some clarity on what Marxian communism truly is.

It is only fair that we look to Marx himself in order to understand him. We cannot blame him for atrocities that he did not commit. We cannot characterize him based on the twisted perceptions that world leaders had of him. If someone misunderstood you, wouldn't you want your name cleared?

It is my hope that in the future more people will come to understand the true intentions of Marx. Perhaps one day we will all recognize that Marxian communism is democratic, not tyrannical. Maybe people will begin to understand that communism cannot be forced. It has to come about naturally as a result of historical materialism. This will take time. Few people are willing to set their opinions aside. It is only natural that the ideologies of our time veil us from our ability to see things for what they truly are. Marx would believe that one day, that veil will be lifted.

Capitalism hurts us all. It's true that it creates extravagant wealth and success for the few at the top, but as the common saying goes, money doesn't buy happiness. It hurts the 99% of us who sell our souls to the corporations that we work for because we turn into miserable, alien versions of ourselves. It hurts the 1% because no matter how much

money they have, they will never have a healthy community. We reap what we sow, and oppression reaps collective pain.

I'd also like to return to the brief discussion in my first chapter on actual examples of real-world communism. I think that it's important to draw a few conclusions from the three works of Marx that we examined. Perhaps these ideas will help inspire a future conversation.

The first point that I'd like to make is that as Peter Singer believes,

“...Marx condemned conspiratorial revolutionaries who wished to capture power and introduce socialism before the economic base of society has developed to the point at which the working class as a whole was ready to participate in the revolution.”⁶⁸

Hopefully now, you see why. Marx clearly shows that a society has to fully be ready for communism. Perhaps this is why Marxian communism has never been achieved. Historical materialism has not led us to that point yet. As G. A. Cohen has stated,

“... whereas Marx predicted that socialist revolution would first break out in advanced capitalist countries, it in fact occurred first in a relatively backward one, one so backward that one might even refuse to call it a capitalist country.”⁶⁹

Because of this, “...the Soviet failure can be regarded as a triumph for Marxism: a Soviet success might have embarrassed key propositions of historical materialism...”⁷⁰ In other words, had the Soviet Union succeeded— that is, had it implemented a communist system that actually worked well— it may have been a reason to delegitimize Marx. In many ways, his whole theory of communism hinges on historical materialism. The very fact that the Soviet Union did not solve all of the problems within capitalism proves that it

⁶⁸ Marx: *A Very Short Introduction*, 80-81.

⁶⁹ Cohen, G. A. (2000). *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*. Princeton University Press., 390.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 389.

was not yet ready for Marxian communism. Capitalism and class antagonisms themselves had not naturally developed as much as they needed to.

We can attribute a lot of this to the fact that the Soviet Union and other dictator-lead communisms still had a state. As Engels points out, once communism is nearly achieved, “the political authority of the State dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organization, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, his own master — free.”⁷¹ Marxian communism is the end of all class antagonisms, thus, the end of the state. There is no “overlooker” who is ensuring that everything plays out properly. There is no power over the people. Rather, the people govern themselves in what I would call a true democracy. Perhaps not in the formal sense that we are used to, but in the true sense of the word.

So what? Why should we make these differentiations between Marxian communism and the twentieth century examples of communism that we’ve seen in our world? Who cares about what Marx says?

The people care. Roughly 30% of the population in the United States is either below the poverty line or considered low-income.⁷² Since 1968,

“The top 1 percent's share of national income has nearly doubled while the official poverty rate for all U.S. families has merely inched up and down. The extreme concentration of income and wealth at the top has not only siphoned resources away from those at the bottom end of the income ladder. It has also increased the political power of the ultra-rich, which they’ve used to shape trade, tax, labor, health care, campaign finance, and other policies in their interest.”⁷³

⁷¹ *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

⁷² Anderson, S. (Ed.). (2017). POVERTY. In *THE SOULS OF POOR FOLK: A PRELIMINARY REPORT* (pp. 8–13). Institute for Policy Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27071.5>

⁷³ *Ibid*.

We should care because we are all being impacted. How is it that in the United States, one of the richest countries in the world, people are so poor? Imagine what it is like in other parts of the world.

We should care because we are alienated from ourselves and our humanity. We are turned into profit-making machines. When you meet someone new in the United States, they don't ask what you enjoy doing with your free time. They ask what you do for a living. Our work defines us, yet it takes so much away from us. We work not for joy, but for hopes that in the little free time that we have, we may participate in joyful activities. We work to keep ourselves and our families alive, yet many dread going into work everyday. Even if you don't, you should be able to recognize that many do.

We should care because even if we feel like these things don't impact us, they impact others. Where has our sense of community gone? When was the last time that you spoke with your neighbor, or helped an elderly community member with a laborious task? We should care about each other. It's simple. Even if I do not think that I'm being harmed, if I see that you are being harmed I should want to make a change. Our world has made us selfish, at least to a certain extent. We should care because we have a deep connection with the whole of humanity.

I'll leave you with this: Marxian communism is the end of history. As *The Communist Manifesto* suggests, capitalism creates a new type of slavery. As *The German Ideology* explains, ideology is created to support systems of oppression. As *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* show, capitalism alienates man from his work, himself, and from his humanity. Marxian communism resolves these injustices.

Marx wants us to understand that one day, the perfectly oiled machine will start to deteriorate. The individual cogs will be so damaged that the gears will stop turning— one by one. Eventually, they will stop participating in the intricate system to which they belong. They have to be ready for this, but they will collectively realize what has led to their demise, and they will revolt against the machine. After that day, the cogs will be truly free.

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