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Dirk J. Struik, Birth of the Communist Manifesto, With Full Text of the Manifesto, all Prefaces by Marx and Engels and other supplementary material, New York: International Publishers, 1971.

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Harold J. Laski

Communist Manifesto Socialist Landmark

A New Appreciation Written for the Labour Party

Together with the Original Text and Prefaces

London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948

15: .. in the famous aphorism of Marx, that "the ruling ideas of an age were the ideas of its ruling class."

15: "Hitherto," Marx was to write, "it was the mission of philosophers to interpret the world: now it is our business to change it."

16-30:

16: The composition of the Communist Manifesto is set in the background of the evolution into unity of a number of those groups of exiled revolutionaries which are the ~~xx~~ inevitable outcome of an age of repression and reaction.

64: No phrase has been subject to so much representation as the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Let us be clear at once that neither for Marx nor for Engels was it the antithesis of democracy; for them, its antithesis was the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" which as they believed obtained in every country, even when concealed by formally democratic political ~~xxxx~~ institutions, so long as ownership of the means of production remained in middle class hands. Marx and Engels meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat an organization of society in which the state-power was in the hands of the working class, and used with ~~xxx~~ all the force necessary to prevent its being seized from them by the class which formerly exercised its authority.

65: From this angle it seems to me inescapable that Marx and Engels did not conceive the dictatorship of the proletariat to mean the dictatorship of the Communist Party over the rest of the community, that is, the centralisation of the state-power in the hands of a single party, which imposes its will by force on all citizens outside its ranks.

67: The "withering away" of the state is another famous phrase that has been much discussed and much misunderstood. In one sense it is a purely logical inference from the definition of the Manifesto. The state is there defined as the "executive committee of the bourgeoisie." Obviously therefore as the power to govern is taken out of the hands of the bourgeoisie by the workers, the state as a bourgeois institution ceases to exist because being in the workers' hands it becomes transformed into a proletarian institution. Marx and Engels then argued that its coercive authority, the army for example, the police, and the civil service would have to be so adapted as to be capable of use by the workers for socialist purposes. They thought in 1872... that a socialist society would have to "break" the political machinery of the régime it took over //68// in order to make the adaptation successful... The organs of government were to be genuinely democratized. They were to be in and of the new proletarian society, not, as in capitalist society, over and above the workers, separated from them by caste-like walls so that they could impose upon the workers the discipline necessary to maintain in its fullness the capitalist mode of production. The defence forces, the police and the civil service were to have no special privileges and no special place in the new régime. Their members were to be looked upon as workers performing a necessary social function in the same way as any other groups of workers.

68: It should be added that when Marx and Engels spoke of the "withering away" of the state there is no reason to suppose they believed that in a socialist country the hopes of the philosophical anarchists would be fulfilled and that all authority would be the outcome of express assent to its orders. No doubt both of them strongly believed that the private ownership of the means of production passed away, there would be far less need for a coercive apparatus in society. That was a natural view for them to take since they held that it was the private ownership of the means of production which was responsible for most of what was evil in the social process.

Their insistence that the state-power was essentially used to protect that ~~pk~~ private ownership from attack was, of course, held with great emphasis by Adam Smith himself. "It is only under the shelter of the civil //69// magistrates," Adam Smith wrote (Wealth of Nations bk V, ch 1, S 2), that the owner of that valuable property, acquired by the labour of many years, or perhaps many successive generations, can sleep a single night in security."

69: Some discussion is desirable of the materialist conception of history which is the vital thread upon which the whole of the Communist Manifesto hangs; the more so because it continues to be strangely misrepresented by historians and social philosophers. It is not a claim that all actions are the result of economic motives. It does not insist either that all change is economically caused. It does not mean that the ideas and behaviour of men are fatalistically predetermined and that, whether he will or no, the emergence of a socialist society is inevitable. It is the ~~argument~~ argument that, as Engels put it (Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, Section 3, Allen and Unwin), "production and with production the exchange of its products is the basis of every social order; that in every society which has appeared in history, the distribution of the products and, with it, the division of society into classes or estates, is determined by what is produced, and how it is produced, and how the product is exchanged." This is the basis from // 70 // which Marx and Engels were led to that philosophy of history which led them to part company with their former allies, the Left Hegelians, whose conceptions are attacked in the Manifesto. For it led them to see that the way in which the total social production is divided in a community is not the outcome of the purposes, either good or bad, of the members of the community, but of the legal relations which arise out of given modes of production, and that these legal relations are independent of the wills of those engaged in production. Since changes in the modes of production and exchange are ceaselessly taking place, legal relations which were at one time adapted to the conditions of the time, cease to be adapted to them. It is in this disproportion between legal relations in the community and the forces of production in it

that the changes in men's ideas of good and bad, justice and injustice, are to be found. That class in a community which legally owns the means of production uses the ~~xxx~~ state-power to sanction that division of the product of which it approves. It therefore seeks through the coercive authority at the disposal of the state-power to compel the general acceptance ~~xxxxx~~ of its approved division; and systems of values, political, ethical, religious, philosophical, are ways in which, directly or indirectly, men express their agreement or disagreement with the nature of the division which the owners of the instruments of production endeavour to impose.

This does not mean that changes may be regarded as ~~ixx~~ irrelevant to the ~~x~~ ideas of men; but it does mean that men's ideas are continually evolving as their minds come to realise that changes in the methods of production and exchange render some ideas obsolete and require new ideas. As feudalism became transformed into capitalism, the legal relations it implied hindered the full use of the forces of production. The values ~~mf~~ of the feudal system had been able // 71 // to maintain before the advent of the capitalist method of production emerged became no longer acceptable. Then, as Engels wrote, the bourgeoisie shattered the feudal system, and, on its ruins established the bourgeois social order, the realm of free competition, freedom of movement, equal rights for commodity owners, and all the other bourgeois glories." Now the Manifesto argues, changes in the forces of production have rendered the legal relations of capitalism obsolete in their turn; and socialism merges as the claim to new relations, and therefore to new values which the workers, as the class which suffers most from this obsolescence, seek to put in its place.

No serious observer supposes that the materialist conception of history is free from difficulties, or that it ~~xx~~ solves all the problems involved in historical interpretation. But no serious observer either can doubt that it has done more in the last hundred years to provide a major clue to the causes of social change than any other hypothesis that has been put forward. There can really be no valid reason to deny that, over the whole space of recorded history, class struggle has been a ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ central principle of its development. Nor

can it be denied that class struggle is intimately bound up with the relations of production in some given society and the ability to develop the full possibilities of the forces of production at any ~~xxx~~ given time. It is equally clear, on any close analysis, that the class which owns the instruments of production uses the state-power to safeguard that ownership and seeks to repress the emergence of ideas and values which call that ownership into question. Anyone, moreover, who examines objectively any period in which the mode of production is rapidly changing, the of the Reformation, for example, or the period between the two world wars, cannot fail to note that they also are periods marked by the grave instability ~~that~~ of // 72 // traditional values and traditional institutions. There is nothing in the theory of the Manifesto which argues more than that the occurrence of such a period means that, if the traditional values and institutions continue to function in the new economic setting, they will deprive large numbers of their means of living, and that they will therefore, seek to emancipate themselves from a position of which they are the victims. To do so, as Marx and Engels point out, they must possess themselves of the state-power that they may adapt the ~~xx~~ relations of production to the implications of the new order. And, on the argument of the Manifesto, since the passage from capitalist to social ownership marks the end of a history in ~~xx~~ which the instruments of production have been predominantly the possession of one class, the transition to public ownership means, when it is successfully effected, the emergence of a classless society.

73 .. All the world applauded Robert Owen as long as he made the operation of that "revolution" in the mind and practice of the human race a philanthropic experiment confined to his own factories in New Lanark. But when he argued that his principles were so obviously rational that all social organization should be adapted to their application, the world turned angrily upon him and showed him that, in the absence of the necessary material conditions, a principle which has justice and truth ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ and reason on its side will still be unable to conquer the world by the inherent force of its own virtue. It is not until men see that the "anarchy of social production" caused by capitalism in decay can be replaced by "a socially planned regulation of

of production in accordance with the needs of society as a whole and of each individual," that they are prepared to get rid of capitalism.

"The forces operating in society," wrote Engels (Socialism, Utopian and Scientific S. 3), "work exactly like the forces operating in nature: blindly, violently, destructively, so long as we do not understand them and fail to take them into account. ■ But when we once have recognised them, and understand how they work, their direction and their efforts, the gradual subjection of them to our will, and the use of them for the attainment of our aims, depends entirely upon ourselves. And this is ~~xxxx~~ quite especially true of the mighty productive forces of the present day." That is, I think, the central principle which underlies the Communist Manifesto; it is the social application of Bacon's great aphorism that "nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed." It is our attempt to show that every pattern of social institutions presupposes a stage in the development of productive forces, and that those, who seek for the achievement of the // 74 // pattern in which they believe, will succeed only if their aim is justified by the character of those productive forces at the time when they make the effort. That was why, though Carlyle and Ruskin saw the evils of their own day, their remedy was an anachronism when they preached it; they preached a sermon to men who, as it were, had already left their church. That was why to take a contemporary instance The New Deal of President Roosevelt was able only to assuage temporarily the wounds he sought to heal; for those wounds were not some temporary infliction, but the symptoms of a disease far more deep and deadly than he was prepared to recognize.

74 .. after Bismarck repealed the anti-socialist laws in Germany and the Social Democratic Party there began despite all opposition to make both constant and remarkable gains, Engels began to set the art of revolution in an importantly different perspective. BL: (1) universal suffrage becomes a weapon of emancipation, (2) fighting at the barricades pointless because of advanced weapons, (3) as capitalism decays right will violate constitution, (4) revolutions are not won by a single mighty stroke but by the intellectual maturity of the masses (pp 74-79)

92 This was clearly seen, as early as September 1918, by Rosa Luxembourg. "Without general ~~xx~~ elections," she wrote (Die Russische Revolution (1918) p. 113), "freedom of the press, freedom of the assembly, and freedom of speech, life in // 93 // every public institution slows down and becomes a caricature of itself, and bureaucracy emerges as the one deciding factor... Public life gradually dies, and a few score party leaders, with inexhaustible energy and limitless idealism, direct and rule. Amongst them the leadership is, in reality, in the hands of a dozen men of first-class brains, even though from time to time an elite of the working class is called together in Congress to applaud the speeches of the leaders and to vote unanimously for the resolutions they put forward."

94 The Manifesto did not propose the exchange of one dictatorship for another; it proposed the democratisation of power by putting the power of the state into the hands of the working class. It assumes that the decline of capitalism has produced a working class mature enough to recognise that it must take its destiny into its own hands and begin the building of socialism. It does not believe that this effort can be made successfully until all the economic conditions of a particular capitalist society are ripe for it; over and over again Marx and Engels made it clear that they regarded any other view as irresponsible. Neither of them had any faith in Blanquist methods. Neither of them believed for one moment that in the absence of the necessary economic conditions some modern committee of Public Safety on the Jacobin model could prematurely establish socialist relations of production by terror. Neither of them thought that the deliberate decomposition of democratic institutions would hasten the coming of socialism; on the contrary, as Engels so repeatedly said, their view was the very different one that the greater the progress of democratic institutions in a society, the more likely it was that the Right would turn from them to an eagerness for dictatorship. They regarded the destruction of democratic institutions as the supreme method a decaying capitalist reaction would employ in order to arrest the growth of that democratic class-consciousness in the worker, which is the proof

that the time is becoming ripe // 95 // for the transition to socialism. That is why ~~Marxism is~~ in the famous preface to the Critique of Political Economy (Selected Works I 356) Marx could insist that "no social order ever disappears before all the ~~existing~~ productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have been matured in the womb of the old society."

95 No criticism of the Leninist interpretation of the Manifesto means for one moment that any democratic socialist believes that there is some highroad down which one may pass peacefully from capitalism to socialism.

96: The reason why Marx and Engels were always clear that a fundamental change was unlikely to be peaceful, was given with clarity by the French historian, Mignet, in the introduction to the History of the French Revolution that he published in 1824. "When a reform has become necessary and the moment for accomplishing it has arrived," he wrote (ET London 1919), "nothing can prevent it, everything furthers it. Happy were it for men could they then come to an understanding; would the rich resign their superfluity, and the poor content themselves with achieving what they really needed, historians would have no excesses, no calamities to record; he would merely have to display the transition of humanity to a wiser, freer and happier condition. But the annals of nations have not as yet presented any instance of such prudent sacrifices; those who should have made them have ~~xxx~~ ~~xx~~ refused to do so; those who have required them have forcibly compelled them; and good has been brought about, like evil, by the medium and with all the violence of ~~xx~~ usurpation. As yet there has been no sovereign but force."

97: What it (the Communist Manifesto) brought into social philosophy were four new and vital insights. It related first the need for inevitable change to the causes which made it inevitable. It linked that change, in the second place, to those divisions in the social order the antagonism between which has been the vital source of conflict among man. It explained, thirdly, why there was reason to suppose that the conflict between the dying capitalist way of life and the ~~xx~~ emerging socialist way would be the last stage in those conflicts due to social divisions, and why as they ended there would begin a new and richer relation between man and man, since there would be at long last the final destruction of those fetters of production which stood between humanity and its mastery of nature. Finally the authors showed how men may become conscious of the historical position they occupy, and gather thereupon the knowledge that is necessary to take the next effective step upon their road of their long journey to freedom.