Rescuing the Message of *The Communist Manifesto:*

The revolutionary role of capitalism

The Communist Manifesto Project

Preamble

In *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, Marx and Engels place heavy stress on the revolutionary role of capitalism in dragging humanity out of economic and social backwardness, and changing us from peasants into proletarians. By doing this, capitalism removes the only insurmountable barrier to a classless communist society based on mutual regard and the full development of the individual. Such a society then ceases to be a pipe dream, and instead becomes something made possible by historically created conditions. The more that capitalism displaces the old conditions the better the basis for beginning the revolutionary transition to the new society.

Present-day "anti-capitalists" do not share this view, even those who claim to be Marxists. They believe capitalism is destroying a past that should be preserved and is leading us down a path from which we must retreat. Marx and Engels in their day had to contend with similar people, and indeed part of chapter 3 of *The Communist Manifesto* is devoted to them. As with popes and princes, their anti-capitalism is reactionary rather than revolutionary.

At the same time, the message of *The Communist Manifesto* is ignored by those for whom capitalism is the best of all possible worlds. It gets in the way of their mantra about how "communism has failed" because of abortive 20th century revolutions in backward and essentially pre-capitalist regions. However, this experience in fact only confirms the proposition that communism can only successfully emerge from advanced capitalism. Marx and Engels would not have been surprised by how things turned out.

Even while capitalism's eventual grave digger, the proletariat, continues its fitful slumber, the world still moves forward. Capitalism proceeds on its development path, knocking down obstacles to a more advanced classless society. By mid-century if the uneven and erratic development trajectory of recent decades in poorer countries is maintained we will see considerable progress towards a world where industrial modernity is the norm, a world in which capitalism has run its course and no longer has a future.

Introduction

Economic development under capitalism brings high levels of productivity and ends the need for arduous toil. These conditions eliminate the material necessity for the profit motive and open up the prospect of people being spurred on in their efforts both by the desire to work and by mutual regard, while at the same time being happy with a shared prosperity.

"… capitalism removes the only insurmountable barrier to a classless communist society."

Capitalism also sees the emergence of modernity. This eliminates or undermines much of the backward culture of pre-capitalist conditions, with its supremacy of the elder-dominated extended family, tribe or other groups at the expense of the individual and society, with its subordination of women, deference and servility, and acceptance of autocracy and tyranny. A classless, communist society could not possibly emerge directly from such conditions. Emerging from capitalism will be challenge enough.

Capitalism turns people from peasants into proletarians. The proletariat comprises almost everyone who relies on a wage, salary or welfare payment, and it becomes the overwhelming majority of

the population. The big capitalists own the vast bulk of the means of production. This includes public infrastructure owned by them collectively through their governments. They are a tiny handful, perhaps 0.01 per cent of the population. The proletarian class has nothing to lose and everything to gain from communism, a system in which it takes collective possession of the means of production. Unlike their peasant forebears, they have the potential to grow into the role of being their own masters or ruling class.

These material conditions created by capitalism make communism possible. However, it is then up to the proletariat to become aware of its historical role and to take up the dual task of subduing the bourgeoisie and transforming themselves into the new people for the new society. The period of revolutionary transition to communism will be protracted and difficult given the enormous changes required. We can expect some serious, albeit temporary, setbacks.

This question of material conditions is the best response to the claim that the experience of Russia and elsewhere shows that “communism has already failed”. What failed was an attempt to skip over the capitalist stage.

At the moment there is no communist movement, just a pseudo-left. When inquiring minds seek to learn about communism they encounter a range of appalling nonsense from various tiny groups claiming to be communist or Marxist. Some support the police states in Cuba and China, and there are even the occasional North Korea supporters. The absurd regime in Venezuela inspires many of them. They all cling onto the once true but now outdated view that US imperialism is the main problem in the world today, and it is OK to unite with all sorts of monsters against it. They oppose external support for the Arab battle for democracy and hold the mainstream view that regime change in Iraq has been a disaster and the fascist Baath Party should have been left in power. These groups never talk about how capitalism is creating the conditions for communism but simply whine about how terrible the existing system is, and often do this in a reactionary way particularly in their opposition to "corporate globalization" and acceptance of green views on virtually everything. They rarely talk about and scarcely understand communism, and they simply see it as something in a future never-never land rather than as their real purpose. So, communism will have to be rediscovered in the face of all kinds of hogwash from the “left” as well as the right.

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When proto-communists do begin to emerge in the next generation or so they will have much to occupy them. As well as furthering the cause of communism, there will also be the more immediate tasks of battling tyranny and defending economic and social progress from the reactionaries of both the right and "left".

When finally achieved, communism will be an advance on capitalism in all respects. On the economic front, it will take off the brakes by eliminating economic crises, vastly increasing support for science, and unleashing the worker initiative and enthusiasm that capitalism cannot tap. On the social front, it will see proletarians transforming their lives, relationships and personalities as they develop a world based on mutual regard rather than the dog-eat-dog conditions of capitalism where sociopaths are often the biggest winners.

Freedom from Want and Toil

The industrial revolution that began over two centuries ago is transforming the material conditions of life in ways that make capitalism obsolete. In the most developed regions of the world it is providing something approaching a modest level of material abundance and removing much of the necessary toil from work. These conditions make it possible to contemplate social ownership where the motivation is no longer profit, or some reward derived from it, but rather mutual regard and the satisfaction obtained from labor.

At the moment, the rich countries are home to only 15-20 per cent of the world's population. However, the middle-income countries such as China, India, Mexico, Turkey and Brazil could well achieve high levels of development over the next two or three generations, while the poorer half of the world should catch up later this century or early in the next. The pace of development will depend on a range of factors including the prevalence of political crises, wars and economic depressions.

With increasing productivity under capitalism, a stage is reached where an equal share of the social product ceases to be shared poverty. Under less developed conditions, the prospect of shared hunger and distress impels those who are in a position to do so to exploit others through plunder, slavery, serfdom or the ownership of the means of production. However, as the average share begins to promise an increasing degree of prosperity, the imperative to fare better than others diminishes. Marx and Engels make this point in part II, section 5 of *The German Ideology*:

... this development of productive forces ... is an absolutely necessary practical premise, because without it privation, want is merely made general, and with want the struggle for necessities would begin again, and all the old filthy business would necessarily be restored ...

Under developed capitalism, mechanization and automation have done much to reduce the odious or toilsome nature of work. Pick and shovel work and carrying heavy loads are things of the past and much of the remaining menial and routine work in the manufacturing and service sectors will be automated in the next generation. The work we are left with will be primarily intellectual in nature and potentially interesting and challenging.

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Some doubt the ability of workers to keep up with the requirements of the new work. Certainly, capitalism leaves a lot of workers behind and on the scrap heap. Nevertheless, the level of training of workers is higher than ever and should increase over time. In developed countries about a quarter of young proletarians graduate from university and a similar proportion have other forms of training.

We can also expect improved ability to perform complex work in a future communist society as many of the conditions that cause stunted development are eliminated. These include lack of family support, peer pressure to underperform and an inadequate education system. Social ownership will end the isolation of education from production and other activities, so uniting learning and doing. Workers will help each other to learn. We will also benefit from an increasing understanding of human development and what causes learning

difficulties. And over the longer term we can expect to see artificial improvements through mind-enhancing drugs, genetic engineering (induced evolution) and brain link-ups to computers.

The Capitalist Social Revolution

The dominance of capitalist market relations brings a social as well as an industrial revolution. The outcome is frightful in many ways but vastly better than what it replaces. In particular, the revolution casts off many ancient shackles and replaces them with weaker capitalist ones.

Proletarians are employees not slaves or serfs. As wage workers they only have a contractual arrangement for part of the day with their capitalist master and are free to move from one job to another. Their boss, unlike the peasants' lord, is probably not the local political chief or magistrate.

Their position in the labor market also frees them from subordination to the extended family, tribe or local community. It provides economic independence and the opportunity to physically escape from these sources of oppression and conservatism.

The new market-based class relations also raise women from their age-old subordinate position. The nuclear family replaces the extended family as the economic unit so that women only have to deal with their freely chosen husband and not his relatives. Then comes the independence of employment for a wage. The changing conditions plus struggles by women lead to the removal of legal discrimination, new divorce laws and various forms of government child support. Even the nuclear family becomes optional. These changes cut away much, although not all, of the legacies of women's oppression and create the conditions where men and women can begin to understand their differences and similarities, and better meet their mutual needs.

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The emergence of capitalism has been accompanied by the bourgeois democratic revolution that brings equality before the law, freedom of speech and assembly, due process and constitutional rule. People now expect these political conditions and feel aggrieved by their absence. They could not imagine being ruled by the bejeweled thugs of earlier times. This provides space for the proletariat to organize itself and for a revolutionary movement to emerge and develop. Although, when the capitalists feel sufficiently threatened they dispense with these arrangements. This may involve goons and death squads, a state of emergency, a military coup or the coming to power of a fascist tyrant. However, such drastic measures cannot permanently put the genie back in the bottle and they are bound to provoke resistance.

Overcoming both submissive and oppressive behavior will be at the core of the struggle for communism. Individuals will require the boldness to stand up to people who act in a harmful manner either to them or to others, while expecting other people to submit to you is completely at odds with a culture of mutual regard. Overcoming the submissive and oppressive forms of behavior found under capitalism will prove difficult enough. Having to at the same time overcome their

far more extreme pre-capitalist forms would be unimaginably difficult.

The constant flux experienced under capitalism is also important for communism. Pre-capitalist societies are static. The way of life in your old age is the same as that in your youth. In keeping with this there are set and unchanging ways of thinking and general acceptance of how things are. Under capitalism there is constant change and increasing uncertainty in the conditions of life and the prevailing ways of thinking. It then becomes possible for people to look at where they are and where they are going. This is expressed well in *The Communist Manifesto* as follows:

All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men.

The Proletariat

In the advanced capitalist countries, the capitalist class (a.k.a. the bourgeoisie) own most of the means of production, and almost everyone else is a proletarian who either lives off a wage or salary, or becomes a pauper dependent on government welfare handouts. The process is far less complete in the rest of the world and there are even large regions where peasants and small-scale producers still make up a large proportion of the population.

The bourgeoisie is quite small and smaller than it used to be as a result of the ownership concentration that has accompanied the development of modern industry. The big shots are frequently referred to as the 1 per cent. However, the figure is more like 0.01 per cent. That is 100 in every million which would seem to be the right order of magnitude. The total figure if we include everyone who could live a luxury lifestyle simply on the earnings of their financial assets would still be well under 0.1 per cent. There is of course also the stratum of highly paid and loyal hirelings. If we include them the total figure may stretch to around 1 per cent. From the proletariat's point of view the smaller their combined numbers the better.

There is still a petty bourgeoisie, and it makes up 10 per cent of the workforce at most. It includes small employers, farmers who own and operate their own land, and shop keepers. Generally, their incomes and habits do not set them apart from the proletariat, and they are usually quite happy for their offspring to take up paid employment.

It is common for apologists of the present system to deny the existence of classes. Capitalists can go bankrupt and become proletarians, and children can be disinherited. Likewise, proletarians can rise to the rank of capitalist. There are no legally recognized classes that you are born into and to which different laws and privileges apply. This has been true since the end of feudalism. However, pointing to a certain mobility between classes confirms rather than refutes their existence.

We are also reminded that many workers hold various income earning assets including stocks. However, this is generally savings out of wages for retirement. It is simply foregoing present for future consumption. Other retirement schemes with no pretense of owning anything would be better for wage earners.

Some confine the proletariat simply to workers directly employed by capitalists.

They exclude government employees such as fire fighters, nurses, teachers and clerical workers. Some restrict the class even further by excluding retail and other service workers who do not produce physical stuff. All that needs to be said here is that the social and economic position of all workers is the same. They all contribute directly or indirectly to the profits of the capitalists and are dispossessed of the means of production.

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There are a significant number of people who are described as self-employed or contractors and therefore not wage or salary earners. In most cases this is a difference in form rather than substance where they have one "client" who is effectively their employer. Besides, many in this category move regularly between employment and "self-employment". The people involved are reliant on their labor power for their livelihood rather than living off income from wealth. Their economic and social position is no different from that of an obvious proletarian.

A section of the proletariat that one must reluctantly acknowledge is the so-called lumpen proletariat. This is a criminal and often brutal element that capitalism creates, and that would side with reaction in return for payment. Their reliance to some degree on welfare and occasional employment makes them part of the proletariat. Unfortunately, their number is not insignificant.

The bourgeoisie encourages many proletarians to think of themselves as "middle class" with a stake in the system and in this they have had some success. By the mid-20th century, the typical proletarian in the developed countries had experienced considerable improvements in their material circumstances both in terms of income and working conditions. They achieved a level of comfort previously reserved for professionals and highly skilled workers.

At the same time, there has been an increase in the relative importance of professional and skilled jobs because of the requirements of large scale modern industry and a population that can now afford such things as dental care, automobiles, electricity and plumbing. This has allowed the more capable and motivated members of the proletariat to set their sights on "getting ahead" under the present system.

So, the very preconditions for communism created by capitalism, at the same time, take some of the sting out of living under the present system. Capitalism has delivered the demands of the old militancy. This could change dramatic-ally when a serious economic depression hits. However, ultimately there needs to be a new militancy that is unsatisfied even with the best that capitalism can deliver. Proletarians have to realize that they have nothing to lose and everything to gain from taking collective possession of the means of production.

Why write this? Hasn't Communism already failed?

There is a thoroughly entrenched view that the experience of revolutions during the 20th century shows that communism has failed. It is true that there was a failure. However, it was not of communism, but rather of an attempt to sustain a path towards it when its preconditions were absent. Russia in 1917 and virtually

all the “communist” regimes established mid-century were essentially backward pre-capitalist societies. Most people were peasants rather than proletarians, and they were more interested in land for the tiller than social ownership. There was little modern industry and thinking was more medieval than modern. They had not passed through the capitalist stage, which is necessary for a successful communist revolution. As the experience of other backward countries shows, even getting capitalism off the ground under these circumstances is hard enough, let alone a society that aims to supersede it.

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This peculiar state of affairs arose because the bourgeoisie was too weak, cowardly or treacherous to carry out its own tasks. Instead, in the first half of the 20th century, communists found themselves at the head of both anti-feudal modernist revolutions and patriotic resistance to fascist aggression and occupation.

After World War II, the Bolshevik regime in the Soviet Union was joined by a host of other countries in what became 'the socialist camp'. It included China, Vietnam and Yugoslavia where their own revolutionary forces had taken power, and eastern and central Europe and northern Korea where regimes were established by virtue of Soviet military occupation in the aftermath of the defeat of Germany and Japan. So, by historical accident communists found themselves burdened with the task of raising their societies out of social and economic backwardness. They had to perform the work of capitalism. They had to create an industrial base and a trained workforce virtually from scratch. The "failure of communism" was a consequence of the tardiness, perhaps even failure, of capitalism.

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Under these conditions the move in a communist direction could only be quite limited and eventually proved unsustainable. They took important preliminary steps but did not achieve the real substance. Industry was placed under state ownership which meant that capitalist industry was expropriated and the new accumulation of private wealth thwarted. At the same time there was a degree of economic security for workers. The system was described as socialism, the first stage on the road to communism. However, the weakness of the proletariat placed severe limits on what could be achieved. With a couple of exceptions in central Europe, it only began to become a significant section of society with the industrialization that followed the revolution. Proletarians were former peasants engaged mainly in the low paid toil that you would expect at this stage of development. They were simply not ready to be a ruling class. There was not the basis for a society based on mutual regard. Enthusiasm and unprompted initiative was limited in these harsh conditions and so there was a heavy reliance on material incentives and top down command with all kinds of perverse results. The freedom and democracy required for the full

development of the proletariat was not possible given the intensity of external and internal opposition and the weakness of the revolutionary forces.

Because most work was arduous and repetitive manual labor, and the education level and background of the typical worker left them ill-equipped for involvement in the mental aspects of production, there was a minority who did the thinking and deciding. These were the managers, engineers and officials - generally referred to as 'cadres'. Members of this elite had a vested interest in entrenching their privileged position and were unlikely to encourage an invasion of their domain as workers became more skilled and educated, and industry more mechanized, nor to willingly start to take upon themselves a share of the more routine forms of labor.

Once career, income and position are the primary impulse, economic results take a second place to empire building, undermining rivals, promoting loyal followers, scamming the system and concealing one's poor performance from superiors. The opportunity for workers to resist these developments was limited by the lack of freedom and the culture of subordination which drains away confidence and the courage to act. This culture can be very strong even in the absence of political tyranny as we can see in any "liberal" capitalist society. At the same time, one can imagine that, under these conditions, rank and file workers with special abilities or talents would tend to be more interested in escaping the workers' lot by becoming one of the privileged rather than in struggling against it.

Mao Zedong, the head of the Chinese Communist Party until his death in 1976, referred to this process, once fully entrenched and endorsed at the top, as capitalist restoration and those encouraging it as revisionists and capitalist roaders. The Chinese Cultural Revolution that he led in the late 1960s was an attempt to beat back this trend. However, that revolution was undermined and defeated, and the capitalist roaders were able to seize supreme power in China after his death.

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The Soviet Union and similar regimes in Eastern Europe ended up as a distinctive type of dead-end, economically, politically and socially, and their demise in 1989-90 is one of the celebrated advances of the late 20th century. At the same time, by discarding much of the empty and dysfunctional formal shell of socialism and operating more like normal capitalist economies, both China and Vietnam have managed to achieve considerable economic development in recent decades. Cuba is now beginning to take this route. The monstrosity in North Korea survives through mass terror and the support of the Chinese. All these regimes are an affront to freedom and democracy, and will share the same fate as those in other countries where the capitalist "Communist Parties" have already been overthrown.

Notwithstanding this grim picture, there were still some significant achievements. In a large part of the world, landlords and feudal relations were swept from the countryside. Industrialization was raised from a very low base and generally outperformed the backward countries in the capitalist camp. Most

importantly, after a crash industrialization in the 1930s, the Soviet Union was able to defeat the fascist Axis powers through the largest military mobilization in human history. This is something for which the world should be eternally grateful.

The dilemma faced by 20th century communists was anticipated by Engels in the following passage from chapter 6 of *The Peasant War in Germany*, published in 1850:

The worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which he represents and for the realization of the measures which that domination would imply. What he can do depends not upon his will but upon the sharpness of the clash of interests between the various classes, and upon the degree of development of the material means of existence, the relations of production and means of communication upon which the clash of interests of the classes is based every time. What he ought to do, what his party demands of him, again depends not upon him, or upon the degree of development of the class struggle and its conditions. He is bound to his doctrines and the demands hitherto propounded which do not emanate from the interrelations of the social classes at a given moment, or from the more or less accidental level of relations of production and means of communication, but from his more or less penetrating insight into the general result of the social and political movement. Thus, he necessarily finds himself in a dilemma. What he can do is in contrast to all his actions as hitherto practised, to all his principles and to the present interests of his party; what he ought to do cannot be achieved. In a word, he is compelled to represent not his party or his class, but the class for whom conditions are ripe for domination. In the interests of the movement itself, he is compelled to defend the interests of an alien class, and to feed his own class with phrases and promises, with the assertion that the interests of that alien class are their own interests. Whoever puts himself in this awkward position is irrevocably lost.

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This discussion of the “failure of communism” in backward countries certainly does not imply that the process of communist revolution would be easy in countries that have reached the developed stage of capitalism. While capitalism has created conditions that make communism possible, there is nothing automatic about it. Indeed, it will require an entire epoch of struggle to make the transition to a society based on mutual regard rather than profit. There cannot be any notion of ‘socialism' that does not see it as a revolutionary transition that is prone to capitalist restoration. The initial threat from the old bourgeoisie is followed by a threat from a new bourgeoisie emerging among cadres who wave the red flag in order to oppose it.

The initial period of the revolution will have many problems. A large number of people will be hostile, neutral or lukewarm in their support. New revolutionary governments will be far less experienced than their opponents, and will face many difficulties getting into power and holding onto it. The old management cannot be dispensed with overnight and will be in a position to sabotage output and efforts to change things. Defeat could result from revolutionaries making mistakes or the counter-revolution recovering from temporary disarray.

There has to be a fundamental change in human behavior and the way society operates. The bourgeoisie, and the habits and ways of thinking of its society will prove tenacious, and the proletariat will have to transform itself in the struggle against them.

We will have to learn new ways and cast off old ones. We will have to unlearn passive, submissive and weak-spirited habits engendered by capitalism, and develop the new morality of mutual regard and steadfast resistance to the old forms of behavior. Mutual regard is enlightened self-interest where everyone does the right thing knowing that a large and increasing section of society is doing the same. It will be the basis of morality and what is honorable. We will all share in the 'pool' of greater prosperity and goodwill that results. Such a culture is totally at odds with capitalism where the rich exploit everyone else and a large number of people are simply thrown on the scrap heap.

Critical for success is the emergence of a large and increasing number of people who see the revolutionary transformation of the conditions around them as a prime mission in life.

Red and Green at odds

While greens have better instincts than many on a range of social issues such as inequality and racism, and they are hardly likely to rally behind counter-revolutionary tyrants, their opposition to material progress is a major problem. They believe that the global abundance required to lay the basis for communism is unachievable because of "limits to growth" or "planetary carrying capacity". However, prosperity for all is not difficult to imagine. Where land is a constraint we can build higher into the sky and tunnel deeper into the ground. Precision farming, biotechnology and other innovations will provide far more food while using less land and water, an already established trend that is gathering pace in spite of opposition from greens. There will be limitless supplies of clean energy from a range of resources. We can already be sure that future generations of nuclear power technology would be able to rely on virtually inexhaustible fuel resources. Then there are future technologies we can presently only guess at. For example, biotechnology may open up new ways of harnessing the sun. The mineral resources we rely on are more than sufficient, even without considering future access to extra-terrestrial resources and our ability to devise ways to substitute one resource for another. We will protect the biosphere with more advanced and better funded waste and conservation management. Indeed, we have seen capitalist countries get cleaner as they get richer.

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Just as we can thrive with possibly 11 billion people in 2100, we can thrive if there is a lot more in 2200. A mix of currently conceivable and not yet conceivable advances in science will make this manageable. At some stage we can expect our descendants to transform themselves into a post-human species with totally new needs, and new abilities to harness nature to meet them. And as they head off into the rest of the solar system and beyond, they will no longer be held back by any earthly constraints.

Concerns about the impact on material progress of looming environmental crises, stemming from climate change, and emissions in agriculture and industry are best addressed by vastly increasing the funding of the research and development needed to accelerate the transition to better, cheaper, safer and emission free technologies. The wrong response is the green fixation with renewable energy, organic farming and reduced consumption.

Then we have those who not only think that abundance is impossible but relish the idea of going back to a more primitive economy. They seek a steady state economy based on small scale local production. They have the delusional idea that such a mode of production would provide more rewarding and less alienating work than under the present system. This is based on a romanticized picture of pre-industrial society full of happy artisans and self-sufficient peasants, and silly chatter about how people in poor countries are happier than people in rich ones.

They claim that for production to be sustainable it should be kept to what is possible on the basis of renewable and reusable resources and we should forego large-scale use of depletable metals and other minerals. They claim such an economy would deliver wholesome "sufficiency". In fact, it would deliver abject poverty just as it did in the past.

Those greens who are the most ‘radical’ and anti-capitalist and therefore the most ‘left’ are in fact the most reactionary. If what they advocate were taken seriously it would mean making industry small-scale and local. This would rule out many technologies and products. Virtually the only source of energy would be firewood as solar panels and wind turbines would be impossible or too expensive to produce. An electric light bulb would have the same problem. Computers, telecommunications and anything electronic would be impossible. The primary source of locomotion would be draft animals and their numbers would be limited by the fact that their calorie consumption per head is many times that of a human. Productivity would plummet with the reversion to more labor intensive technologies with most time devoted to producing food, clothing and other basics. There would be no ability to deal with natural disasters, including those resulting from climate change, nor to move large quantities of grain in the case of a local crop failure. As the material conditions regressed to those before capitalism, so would the social and political, with local thugs exacting tribute and fighting each other over the spoils.

The natural environment would not benefit from this madness. Reverting to firewood and pre-industrial agriculture is no way to preserve the environment with our population levels. Some exponents understand this and put their hopes in a massive "die back" where the population is reduced to a mere fraction of its present level. They see people as an environmental problem, akin to pollution, rather than as the inventive and awesome motive force in history.

Capitalist growth is too slow rather than too fast

Instead of opposing capitalism because it is not static as the greens do, communists say it is too slow! Capitalism may be streets ahead of stagnant pre-capitalist societies, however, the gap between what is possible and what capitalism delivers is wide and getting wider. It is an increasing fetter on the economy’s productive forces.

Economic slumps are one cause of the gap. They lead to massive production

losses and human misery. In the 19th century there used to be very regular 10-year short sharp cycles of boom and bust. These are now much more drawn out. The last global cataclysmic crash occurred more than 80 years ago and is outside of living memory. So, the one that is presently looming will come as a big shock.

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As well as the mass unemployment of depressions there is also the not inconsiderable permanently unemployed. This mainly comprises people who have been demoralized by the system and left ill-equipped to develop and upgrade their skills and abilities. They are often encouraged to rot on welfare. In their defense of the 'welfare state', the pseudo-left endorses this increasing pauperization of the masses, unlike *The Communist Manifesto* that denounced it.

The profit motive is another retardant on production rather than the spur people claim it to be. Capitalist firms apply various rewards and penalties to get their employees to do their bidding. If a job is in any way complex it becomes difficult to assess performance, and supervision cannot come close to matching what would be achieved if workers simply wanted to do the job to the best of their ability.

Just as slavery required unbreakable tools and the whip, and feudalism allowed the serf a share of the product rather than simply a subsistence ration, so capitalism needs 'incentives'. But the mutual regard culture of communism will prove far superior to the profit motive for improving productivity. This changed behavior will totally transform work. We will endeavor to make other people's work more productive and rewarding. These relations with our fellows are what make it possible for work to become something performed for its own sake rather than simply a necessary means to an income, so adding greatly to motivation. At the same time, we will not stand idly by as people harm others or economic outcomes. We will also go out of our way when necessary. This would include extra time or effort at critical moments at work. We may, for example, be tired or missing out on a planned gathering with friends and family. The reward is the successful completion of an important task.

Bourgeois economists argue that all this well-intentioned motivation would come to very little because an economy based on social ownership has an inherent economic calculation problem: in the absence of market transactions between enterprises it could not have a properly functioning price system. We do not know how economic decisions will be made in the future under communism. However, we can say that there is nothing about the non-market transfers of custody between economic units that would prevent decentralized decision-making based on prices. Communist workers could hardly do a worse job of allocating investment funds than do highly fluctuating interest rates and exchange rates produced by capitalist finance. There are good reasons for thinking that economic decision-making would be far superior to that under capitalism. To begin with there would be far more scope for coordination, and less for secrecy and deception.

Human material progress depends more than anything on scientific research and breakthrough innovations. As a result, a society taking the communist path would devote a very high proportion of investment to these areas. Under capitalism they are grossly underfunded and their application impeded. Major breakthroughs are far too infrequent. All the

fields of engineering - nuclear, chemical, mechanical, aerospace, electrical - have seen little change in recent decades. Cheaper energy alternatives to fossil fuel are still not in view. There are several reasons for capitalism's poor performance, and they are listed here in turn.

Industry incumbents often spend heavily on long lived investments and have little desire to devote resources to breakthroughs that would devalue these. Rather, they concentrate their research and development on efforts to increase or preserve their value. Incremental improvements in computers and electronics are the prime example. Indeed, in current parlance "new technology" is synonymous with developments in these areas.

The market for science and innovation is limited by the public good 'free rider' problem. This is most extreme in the case of pure research but also applies in a lot of applied research. It is difficult to make money from many forms of knowledge and where you can it is because you have been able to exclude others, or restrict access to only those with deep pockets or the most pressing need for it. Science also ought to be undertaken globally and not for national "competitiveness".

"Human material progress depends more than anything on scientific research and breakthrough innovations. As a result, a society taking the communist path would devote a very high proportion of investment to these areas."

Firms and nations try to keep knowledge secret for their own use. Firms often receive patent or copyright protection from government which turns their knowledge into intellectual property for a given period. The most egregious effect of these property rights is to restrict access to, or increase the cost of, new technologies and knowledge that are needed for further research and innovation. Seed patents impeding the development of genetic engineering is a prime example. The most technically advanced workers are so aware that computer software is held back by copy-right that they have developed elements of the communist mode of production with "free and open source", regardless of their political views. This outlook has also spread into 'open culture' more generally. Wikipedia and MOOCs highlight the future mode of production still fettered by old social relations, starting to break through and already proving its superiority despite seriously restricted resources.

Even being able to capture the benefits will not be enough to induce capitalists to spend on research and development if they consider them too uncertain or too far in the future.

Philanthropy can play a useful role. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is a prominent example. However, this in itself is far from adequate. We have had to rely heavily on government to fund much of the research and development that has occurred. Indeed, some of the most important innovations of the present era are the result of this. Examples are computers, the Internet, jet engines, satellite communications, fracking technology, nuclear power and gas turbines. Also, all the important features of the Apple iPhone were the result of U.S. Department of Defense funded research. However, government spending often has to be prompted by some major emergency like hot and cold wars. Otherwise, there is not much of a constituency under normal times and it is inclined to be the first thing to be cut when governments endeavor to

rein in the budget.

Over recent decades an anti-technology and anti-science mentality has gained considerable support and is mainly associated with the green movement. This trend can justly be called a product of capitalism. It is a backward looking response to the brutal and alienating way that industrialization has occurred under the present system. Also, a section of the ruling class pander to green thinking and it has a strong presence in academia. Green organizations are the beneficiaries of a number of charitable funds set up by both living and dead capitalists. The green movement has helped to hold back development in a range of areas including genetically modified crops and nuclear power, and it has had considerable success in selling the idea that new technologies as a rule have unintended consequences on our health or the environment that cancel out any benefit.

The nature of work under capitalism places another constraint on science and technology. There is gaming among researchers as they scramble to get their slice of the funding cake, and personal prestige and career can take precedence over outcomes.

The need for advances in science and technology are all too plain to see. We need cures for illnesses such as cancer, Alzheimer's disease and malaria. We need better farm plants and animals. We need harder, stronger and lighter materials. A primary concern at the moment is the development of energy options cheaper than fossil fuels so they can be widely adopted in poor countries. Renewable energy will cost far too much until the cost of energy storage can be brought down drastically. Presently planned improvements in nuclear fission technology will narrow but not close the cost gap with coal or gas. While important for the longer term, carbon capture and storage is by its nature an add-on cost, and anyway is only in its infancy. Nuclear fusion research is progressing but is still at the stage of solving basic problems.

What Now?

If there were a communist presence at the moment it would have much common ground with people who are progressive in the true sense, and generally be at odds with the present pseudo-left. For example, it would support the following:

- economic growth;
- a large increase in funding for science, and research and development, so that we have the means of ensuring high living standards for everybody on the planet;
- the pursuit by the western powers of an active foreign policy that assists political, social and economic progress in the developing countries. Among other things, this would mean no comfort for tyrants and kleptocrats, and military intervention where necessary;
- those powers ensuring their dominant military superiority and the capacity to deploy where needed;
- large militias in the democracies to ensure that professional soldiers are not the only ones with military training;
- capitalist globalization and the view that the present economic problems of the more backward countries are due to too little rather than too much capitalism;
- workers demanding adjustment assistance not job protection when their

work is “exported” or eliminated by automation. It is in the long-term interest of the proletariat that their ranks are swelled in the more backward countries and that routine labor is automated; and

- the view that the increasing austerity in many countries is not due to “neoliberal” attacks on workers, that can be reversed by marching up and down, but to economic conditions that can only be resolved by capitalism going through a crisis comparable to the depression of the 1930s or by it being overthrown.

In Conclusion

Communism has history on its side. The conditions for it are being created by capitalism as it eliminates the necessity of want and toil, and places most people in a class that can only benefit from collective ownership of the means of production. Collective ownership both enables and requires the full development of a culture of mutual regard, and this will remove the shackles that capitalism places on human flourishing, with its culture of dog-eat-dog mutual antagonism reinforced at every moment by market relations.

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The Communist Manifesto Project 2017

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