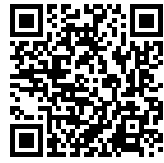




# IS MARX STILL USEFUL?

*Posted on May 1, 2018 by W. S. Cholmondeley*



Although Marxist concepts have largely been ridden over by the march of capitalism, a process that Marx himself certainly did not foresee. However, this does not mean that capitalism is dominant because of inherent superiority. Marx's [\*Communist Manifesto\*](#) is precisely important because of capitalism's dominance – because it is the only system that can provide an effective critique of capitalism, as it exists today.

Capitalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is certainly ubiquitous. Goods and services spread into all kinds of hidden nooks and crannies of society, where there is the slightest potential for profit. This is the grand beneficial attribute of capitalism, as we know it today.

However, capitalism as implemented in our times makes an unreasonable and unrealistic assumption – that economic prosperity requires constant expansion of the entire system (growth).

That is, more goods and services must be provided constantly to ever-growing markets, which require a constant population growth and/or the acquisition of buying power by people who never had it before. In order to keep the system growing, increasingly resources must be consumed to make the goods for the ever-growing markets and more and more energy must be expended to make them, to distribute them, and to collect and dispose of the waste.

It is the ever-expanding, ever-growing status inherent in capitalism that [\*The Communist Manifesto\*](#) actively seeks to analyze.

The analogy that immediately comes to mind is that of an aging star, whose ever-expanding propensity leads to a might implosion. Added to this effect is the role of leaders, which is continually cut down, where the desire is to see less government.

Therefore, there is an absence of political leaders (in politics and in economic infrastructures) that want to actively promote a policy that contradicts the ideology of perpetual growth.

[\*The Communist Manifesto\*](#) begins its critique at very center of the capitalist system – the worker, upon whose labor the entire system depends. Thus, the class struggle assumes a central position in the Marx's work, where we read about the "doctrine of the conditions of liberation of the proletariat."

This was a doctrine that sought to culminate in scientific evidence that the laws of history and the economy require development towards the expansion of capitalism and the victorious revolution of the working class against capital. It involves total divergence from ethical socialism.

Thus, [\*The Communist Manifesto\*](#) takes a striking and original stand: the future of mankind's intellectual progress and the future of the proletariat were identical.

Intellectuals used to concern themselves with classical writers and with the great contemporary artists

and scientists could now identify their cause with the cause of the working classes.

They could change the world, not just study it and comment on it. It is this notion of change that is so crucial to the Manifesto and makes the work so very relevant to our times, since capitalism always desires the status quo; change is the kiss of death for capitalism.

Further, *the Manifesto* sees through the liberal linguistic habits as curtains of mist that conceal the reality of capitalism. In fact, the whole of nature our society is certainly determined by the prevailing technology of consumption and production.

And yet, the great gap in our society is between those who own the technology (the capital) and those who work with it. Around this gap, the bulk of the classes form in our society: the bourgeoisie or middle class and the proletariat or working class. The family itself has become a reflection of this class society in which the man is the property-owning ruler and the woman, the property-less proletarian.

This notion still persists today, despite tendencies to the contrary. Consequently, the owners of technology become ever richer and more independent and the working class becomes ever poorer and more dependent. Thus, a class struggle an omnipresent dynamic force in social life is created.

As well, the Manifesto puts forward a scientific theory of production relations and class struggle. It predicts that the technology exploited by capitalism confers immense welfare on its owners, and that workers will turn against them when the time is ripe for them to rise in revolution.

Only after that revolution will the good society emerge. Marx is certainly right in his criticism of natural rights: rights are neither congenital nor eternal. Nor are they given finally in a social contract. Rights are taken, exercised and given in conflicts and negotiations, and confirmed, developed and undermined in legislation and customs.

The surest relevance of *the Manifesto* lies in its advancement of ethical socialism, which ultimately has converged with the dictates of capitalism. Therefore, private individuals can own companies, though preferably also work in them. Solidarity becomes vertical, applying to one's own company: directors and engineers are counted as members of the workers' collective.

But if ethical socialism had been given a chance of shaping the market economy, the more offensive aspects of capitalism (such as dismissals without notice and large-scale exclusion of many employees) and the least egalitarian aspects of capitalism (such as unearned incomes and positions of power that the capitalists can bequeath to children who do not perform productive work) would presumably never have evinced their present development.

Thus, in conclusion, we see that *the Manifesto's* relevance lies in its change wrought upon present-day

capitalism, in the shape of ethical socialism, whose catalogues of rights propounded by reform parties have constituted the most attractive elements.

In broad terms, one could say that the more the election campaigns and political exercise of power in the advanced industrial countries have been concerned with promises on rights, rather than with the hope of revolution, the more successful they have been among the voters.

The social science of our own day concedes that people sharing the same life situations develop common needs and values that may find expression, for example, in political demands.

These demands may very well be clad in a language that resembles ethical socialism's catalogues of rights. Here, modern political sociology has a more subtle view than Marx had. There is much more political dynamite in ethical socialism than Marx thought.

***The [photo](#) shows, "Train Platform," by Hans Baluschek, painted ca. 1925.***

