

Book Review: The Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx

By

Luwemba Musa Maswanku

Islamic University in Uganda

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Department of Political Science

Email: luwemba20@gmail.com

Mobile: (+256)774386554/705295758

Book Title: The Communist Manifesto

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Because of one's enthusiasm for Marxst theory and his examination of exploitation and adversarial relationships in society in the past, present, and future, one feel compelled to review this particular work. Perhaps it is the masterful exposure of the affluent, wife-swapping bourgeoisie's exploitation of the working class. Maybe it's the unsettling realization that it's capitalism's death knell or maybe it's just the resounding voice that its principal author, Karl Marx, used to make the proletariat's call to arms.

There is little doubt that the complex, dynamic structure of the European socio-political environment was not avoided by the Communist Manifesto. Marx and Engels write that "the history of all previously existent society is the history of class struggle" in one of its most frequently quoted passages. They are referring to a long history of battle between the State and private traders, feudal lords and peasant farmers, guilds and industrialists, and not merely the class war between the working class of Europe and the bourgeoisie capitalists.

It is demonstrated that the bourgeoisie has changed over time by continuously modernizing its means of production. In fact, a core belief of the Young Hegelians, to which Marx belonged in his formative years, was that change was the law of life and that every thought and force inexorably produced its opposite, and that history was the embodiment of this flow of opposing ideas and forces. Marx and Engels' main argument is that capitalism has a fundamental fault that causes it to self-destruct. Capitalists must exploit employees by

commoditizing labour and taking a portion of the value of labour as profit in order to maintain profits in the face of competition. Additionally, they stated that the only way out of this downward spiral was through the abolition of private property.

When the proletariat grew strong enough and oppressed enough to rebel against the ruling classes as was already happening throughout Europe as the Manifesto went to press that would be the turning moment in this complicated class struggle. The Labour Theory of Value, the central tenet of the "Fundamental Laws" outlined by classical economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo, is the environment in which Marx's argument is best understood. This states that any good's value is equal to its cost of production, and consequently, its main input, labor.

There are a few sentences or brief quotations from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' texts at the very end. These brief, stand-alone sections drew me in and caught my attention more since they expressed their points clearly. I regretted not reading those passages in place of The Communist Manifesto, but if the writing style of that book served as a guide for what to expect from these other selections in their entirety, I am certain that an unabridged version of any of those brief passages mentioned at the end of the book would be equally dull.

For those of you in high school and college, the first half of the book was more useful in describing the interactions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as well as the essential elements of a society that values equality. The second half was excruciatingly not as interesting as the first one. In the second half of the book, there are a few concepts and/or groupings that I believe were not sufficiently described for me to comprehend the points presented. The reader is assumed to be familiar with these ideas and/or groups of people before reading the second half of The Communist Manifesto. In other words, the second half of the book lost me and it might lose you, too. However, like I said, your quotes can be taken from the first half of the book, which is more comprehensible than the second half.

Some of the concepts in the book's first half did appeal to me. The proposal to improve soil, agriculture, industry, and free public education appealed to me. The majority of American businessmen and farmers plunder Native American lands, destroying the soil, forests, and natural beauty in the process. As a result, the environment is transformed into concrete jungles with polluted rivers and unsustainable immigration policies. If American democracy obliterates everything it touches, can we really argue that it is working? The goal of

American businessmen is not to return Native American lands to their original state, free of pollution and immigrant blight.

We can use the earth sustainably and replenish it at the same time, but Republican and Democratic politicians in the United States are too corrupt to provide the EPA with the funding and regulations it needs to hold their wealthy campaign donors accountable for the exploitation and destruction of Native American resources. The United States does not offer free higher education like several other nations do. It would be good to know that everyone who wants it will be able to pursue higher education. I guess a country would have to implement all of the revolutionary changes suggested by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* in order to offer it. To ensure that everyone has access to a college degree, the state may need to regulate everything in form of social services. Therefore, things like private property would have to be sacrificed for college education for all.

In conclusion therefore, one might not agree with several of the views. The concept of doing away with private property bothers any academician. For instance, shouldn't a person get a bigger, nicer house or a better car if he works harder? Marx and Engels' argument, however, is that those who put in the most effort have a worse level of living than those who put in little to no effort. Its easy to realize that class inequality would be eliminated under communism by eliminating the causes of inequality. Many people don't like the concept that my quality of life will be determined by a small group of government officials, regardless of how brilliant or diligent I am, but one could also argue the same thing about American business and the current political climate and the erroneous claims made by American democracy. One would be exchanging one terribly hypocritical and unjust socio-economic-political system for another because America's democracy has not in any way ensured equality and freedom for Native Americans and Black American slave descendants in the 21st century.

However, excruciatingly, the book is a very good read for any one interested in understanding Marxist tradition.