

THE
Communist
Manifesto
in the Age of Imperialism

From the pages of
Workers World

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The Communist Manifesto in the Age of Imperialism

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150 years young

The book that scoped out capitalism's rotten heart

By Sara Flounders

What is happening in East Asia? What does it mean for working and poor people in the United States?

News broadcasts show thousands of frantic people stripping the shelves bare in Indonesia, buying every item in sight as their country's currency becomes more worthless by the hour. Ten million Indonesian workers are expected to be laid off—2 million over the next month.

Millions of workers in Thailand, Malaysia, south Korea and the Philippines are already receiving lay-off notices.

Wages are so low in all these countries that millions can barely feed their families working 60 hours a week.

Experts haven't a clue

How could it be that this crash took by surprise every politician, banker, corporate executive, and many thousands of financial analysts, portfolio managers and mutual fund investors in East Asia, the United States and Western Europe?

Computers provide instant information. Millions of dollars can be moved in a wink. International financial institutions can calculate the production of every computer disk and pair of jeans.

So how can such booming economies collapse overnight?

How is it that none of the financial wizards noticed the corruption, patronage, speculation and easy loans now cited as the causes of this widening crash? Why can't the extravagantly paid experts control or stop the havoc that is destroying the

livelihoods and savings of millions of people?

Why 'Communist Manifesto' became a best seller

Things have changed enormously in the last 150 years. Nevertheless, the best explanation for the roots of the crisis now whirling through Asia and spreading tremors on Wall Street was written a century and a half ago.

It can be found in an all-time best seller that has been translated into hundreds of languages and printed in thousands of editions. Yet few Wall Street investors would admit to having read it.

Now is the time to read "The Communist Manifesto" by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

Time and again, this ringing exposé and condemnation of capitalism has proven more accurate than the best capitalist financial experts' explanations.

The Manifesto, written on the eve of a great revolutionary upsurge in Europe in 1848, showed how these wild economic crises are endemic to capitalist society. The capitalist owners cannot control the vast productive forces they bring into motion.

Capitalism is inherently unstable. Its tendency to expand production vastly exceeds what can be sold at a profit. For the first time in history, the capitalist mode of production created scarcity and poverty not because of too little being produced—but too much.

Marx unlocked the secret of capitalist profit. In simple terms, it is the difference between the value of what workers produce and what they are

paid.

Capitalism is based on ruthless competition among a relatively small number of owners of the productive forces. They can survive only by constantly expanding and capturing new markets, producing goods at cheaper and cheaper prices, and driving down workers' wages.

This competition sends the capitalists over the whole globe. Their drive to create new markets, introduce new technology and find cheaper labor uproots all older cultures and societies.

Sweatshops then—and now

"The Communist Manifesto" described a capitalist system then in its infancy. It was a world of sweatshops, child labor, illiteracy, grinding poverty and insecurity for the hundreds of thousands of new workers packed into emerging industrial centers like Manchester, London, Paris, New York and Chicago.

Social Security, welfare, unemployment insurance, medical benefits, safety standards and public schools did not exist. Workers had absolutely no right to unionize or strike for better conditions. The Manifesto became a ringing call for the newly emerging working class to grasp its potential power and organize.

At the time "The Communist Manifesto" was written, more than 95 percent of the world's people still lived in small hunting and gathering societies, were peasants tilling tiny plots, or were artisans turning out just a few products for local trade.

Marx and Engels explained just how ruthless the new class of ex-

plotters would be in revolutionizing production and changing social relations. Capitalism means the "uninterrupted disturbance of social conditions, uncertainty and agitation," they wrote.

The layers of small peasants, landholders and artisans would increasingly be destroyed as their skill and crafts were made obsolete with the relentless introduction of new technology. All these layers of the old society would be pushed into the working class in increasing numbers.

Today, as Marx and Engels predicted, this new class structure has spread over the whole world. Almost everywhere, society is divided into a small class of capitalists and a large class of wage workers who can survive only by trying to sell their labor to the capitalist bosses.

This change is most dramatic in the developing world. The biggest cities with millions of workers hardly earning enough for survival are in the developing world.

Millions of workers—many of them former peasants and artisans—have crowded into cities like Sao Paulo, Brazil; Cairo, Egypt; Bangkok, Thailand; Seoul, south Korea; Calcutta and Bombay, India; and Mexico City. Desperate for work, they often lack even the meanest roof

over their heads.

The capitalist class's power is far greater and more concentrated than it was 150 years ago. But the way it plans to get out of the latest cycle of overproduction is the same as in Marx and Engels' day: on the workers' backs.

Shut down production. Lay off millions of workers. Drive down wages still further. Absorb the weaker capitalist competitors.

Isn't this the plan of the International Monetary Fund and the big banks today for Asia?

This drive for superprofits is recreating the sweatshops of the 19th century—not only in the oppressed countries, but also in the imperialist centers themselves.

Not just analysis, but a revolutionary message

Even if every bankrupt capitalist in East Asia and every corporate head and IMF director read "The Communist Manifesto," they couldn't behave any differently.

Every capitalist, in order to survive, has to maximize profits, no matter the risk.

When it was possible to make super profits in Asia, that's where the investment money flowed, regardless of the risks. When the in-

evitable crash comes, only the strongest survive—and they do so by pulling the working class down even further.

So who can benefit from reading "The Communist Manifesto"? The workers.

This small booklet for the first time provided a scientific explanation of how workers, through collective organization, could win a bigger share of what they produce and resist the capitalist tendency to continually drive down wages.

Even more important is the Manifesto's revolutionary message: Only the working class can solve the crisis of capitalism that so eludes the most brilliant market experts.

The workers, who produce all society's goods, can throw off the small group of reckless expropriators and reorganize society on a planned, rational basis.

It carries no corporate advertising. It has been banned and burned in many countries. It has been denounced by the rich.

But "The Communist Manifesto" was nevertheless at the top of the best sellers list worldwide for 150 years.

Now it is likely to become very popular again among a new generation of workers.

The Communist Manifesto

A clarion call full of ideas

By Sam Marcy

Of all the great classics in the treasury of Marxism, "The Communist Manifesto" unquestionably stands out as the most popular and widely read throughout the world. Bourgeois ideologists, even the most virulent opponents of Marxism, never fail to be astonished by the persistent attraction the Manifesto has for each new generation of revolutionary militants.

The Manifesto, written by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in 1848, is a creative revolutionary synthesis of propaganda and agitation, as these terms were originally defined by George Plekhanov when he was still a revolutionary Marxist.

"Propaganda" was then understood as the presentation of many complex ideas to a small group of people, while "agitation" was conceived as the presentation of a few ideas or a single idea to a large audience. Of course, there's no wall between the two.

The Manifesto illuminates a great number of complex ideas.

It presents the materialist conception of history in clear, brilliant language. It traces the history of the class struggle from its earliest days to 1848. It analyzes the rise of the bourgeoisie, explains its revolutionary role—and not only analyzes the intermediate classes in bourgeois society, but also mercilessly exposes the nature of capitalist exploitation and oppression as it had never been done before..

The Manifesto's diagnosis of capitalist society is at the same time a prognosis of the destruction of capitalism at the hands of what the Manifesto calls the "grave diggers" of capitalism—the revolutionary proletariat.

Far from being merely a criticism of feudal and bourgeois society, the Manifesto thus unequivocally points the way to the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

Not just a critique but a guide to action

Furthermore, the Manifesto subjects to critical analysis the nature of the capitalist state, as well as the role of the family, religion and culture.

Above all, in tracing the development of the proletariat from its earliest days in mere handicraft production to its role in large-scale industry by 1848, the Manifesto points to the "proletariat alone as the really revolutionary class" and the historic agent for constituting a new social order, free of exploitation or oppression.

All of this is propaganda—irreplaceable working-class propaganda. Yet at the same time it is also revolutionary agitation of the highest order. It fans the flames of revolution.

On the one hand, the Manifesto directs itself toward presenting a succinct, coherent and lucid exposition of the basic principles of Marxism. To that extent, it directs itself to "the few"—not necessarily the middle class, but the advanced sections of the working class..

On the other hand, with its ringing call to overthrow the oppressors and exploiters, the Manifesto addresses itself directly to the broadest and widest sections of the working class.

It is this dialectical unity of opposites—propaganda and agitation—so skillfully blended together that makes the Manifesto such a monumental achievement.t.

Nothing could be a more crystal-clear call to the proletariat than the

final paragraph of the Manifesto.

It ends with this ringing call to action:

"Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

"Workingmen of all countries, unite!"

Such a mighty clarion call for revolutionary worldwide action by the proletariat has yet to be surpassed.

Marx and Engels were not unaware that the working class was a narrow segment of society at the time the Manifesto was written. As Engels said in the 1890 preface to a Polish edition of the Manifesto, "Few voices responded to 'Workingmen of all countries, unite!' when we proclaimed these words to the world ... on the eve of the first Paris revolution in which the proletariat came out with demands of its own."

However, wrote Engels, "On Sept. 28, 1864, the proletarians of most of the Western European countries joined hands in the International Workingmen's Association." And even though that International—the first attempt at a world organization of the proletariat—lasted only a few years, said Engels, it left a glorious heritage.e.

National chauvinism vs. internationalism

Just prior to the start of World War I, the working-class movement in Europe, under the leadership of the Social Democratic parties, reached the zenith of its authority over the broadest masses on the continent. Immediately after the out-

break of the war, however, the movement was virtually smashed as a result of the betrayal by the Social Democratic leadership.

The adherents of revolutionary Marxism—in reality the adherents of the principles enunciated by the Manifesto—were temporarily reduced to a small minority. The majority had succumbed to chauvinism. They had forgotten one of the principal tenets in the Manifesto: that the workers in a capitalist country have no fatherland. . . “The workingmen have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.”

The Social Democratic leaders’ surrender to chauvinism cost the proletariat dearly in World War I: millions upon millions of lives lost and untold devastation and destruction.

Nothing so much arouses the prejudices of the bourgeois ideologists, nothing so much enrages them and exposes their deep-seated chauvinism, as the question of “patriotism,” the “defense of the national interest.” Today, more than ever, this invariably means the defense of the capitalist state and giant finance capital.

Any lie, any falsification will do to corrupt, vulgarize and distort the real meaning and significance of the defense of one’s country, as it was understood both in Marx’s time and in the imperialist epoch.

Marx and Engels had written extensively about the autonomy and unity of each nation. It is well known that they had fought for the independence of Poland, Hungary, Ireland and Italy. Engels wrote in 1893 in a preface to the Italian edition of the Manifesto that the defeat of the 1848 revolutions resulted in “the fruits of the revolution being reaped by the capitalist class.”

“Through the impetus given to large-scale industry in all countries,”

he wrote, “the bourgeois regime during the last 45 years has everywhere created a numerous, concentrated and powerful proletariat. It has thus raised, to use the language of the Manifesto, its own grave-diggers.”

Engels then added this remarkable thought, as pertinent today as it was then: “Without restoring autonomy and unity to each nation, it will be impossible to achieve the international union of the proletariat, or the peaceful and intelligent cooperation of these nations toward common aims.”

The progressive epoch of the bourgeoisie in the struggle against feudalism—especially the period when Marx was writing—demonstrated a trend toward diminishing national differences and antagonisms. It was due to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market.

The subsequent evolution into monopoly capitalism diverted this trend. Indeed, capitalism has not been able to carry out a single one of its economic trends to its ultimate conclusion.

The classical example of this is the failure of the various trusts and combinations, through the process of competition, to be converted into total monopoly and become a worldwide trust or “super imperialism,” which Karl Kautsky thought would abolish the anarchy of capitalism.

As industrial and technological development grows by leaps and bounds, monopoly capitalism, rather than narrowing national differences and ameliorating national oppression, exacerbates them. It is no wonder that the bourgeois world is literally divided into oppressing and oppressed nations.

But this does not at all disqualify the class struggle. It merely imparts a greater urgency for the revolutionary cooperation and solidarity of all

the workers in both the oppressing and oppressed nations—in a common struggle against imperialism, capitalism and all forms of bourgeois reaction and feudal rubbish left by centuries of oppression..

The revolutionary contribution of the bourgeoisie, as Marx explained, was in developing the world market, which has “given a cosmopolitan character to production.” This has greatly increased the strategic role of the working class in production and in relation to the class struggle.

Marx’s words are even more true today: “In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency,” the bourgeoisie has tremendously enhanced “intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations.”

The bourgeoisie cannot create even the semblance of world unity, despite the obvious foundations laid by the gargantuan growth of the productive forces and the ensuing economic interdependence.

Only the proletariat in alliance with the oppressed peoples and the socialist countries can lay the political and social foundations for worldwide solidarity. This is precisely because only socialism, which is based on planning and the common ownership of the means of production, can purge the worldwide market of its imperialist chaos, its unpredictable crises, and the reign of the arbitrary based on superprofits.

Indeed, the world market, as Marx said, “makes national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible.” It inevitably generates proletarian class solidarity—the truest basis for bringing about the solidarity of the human race.

From unpublished notes written by Sam Marcy in 1983.

Marx was right

Rich get richer, poor get poorer

By John Catalinotto

How bad is it? According to a recent study, the 225 richest people in the world hold wealth equal to that possessed by the poorest 50 percent of the entire human race.

The three top ultra-rich people, including Bill Gates, own more than the Gross National Product of the 48 poorest nations combined.

These sordid facts were publicized in a United Nations report on the world's growing income gap released Sept. 9. They illustrate once more that the world's reality is right in line with Marxist concepts that are 150 years old.

The report's authors in the UN Development Program in The Hague, Netherlands, certainly didn't plan to vindicate Marx. But they would have had to turn reality on its head to show otherwise.

Of the 173 countries in the study, 70 to 80 have lower per-capita incomes than they did 10 or 30 years ago. People in Africa consume 20 percent less than they did 25 years ago.

So the poor are getting poorer as the rich are getting richer. Or, as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote in "The Communist Manifesto" in 1848, under capitalism "pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth."

To illustrate the extent of the poverty, the report states that more than 1 billion people suffer "human deprivation and stunted lives marked by illiteracy, inadequate income and exclusion from the social

mainstream." UN Development Program Administrator James Gustave Speth wrote in his introduction that "it is scandalous that the poor are unable to consume enough to meet even their most basic needs."

Who's to blame?

The UN report pointed out that the 20 percent of the world's population living in the wealthiest countries—what socialists would accurately describe as imperialist countries—consume 86 percent of the world's goods and services. The poorest 20 percent consume only 1.3 percent.

While this last figure broadly illustrates the horrible inequalities of life in a post-Soviet world dominated by the capitalist market, it fails to target the criminals who thrive on the exploitation of human labor. In that sense, the report misses what should be the most important finding of them all—namely, who's to blame for all of this?

The big-business media in the United States, to the extent they covered the report at all, emphasized this "consumption" disparity. In effect they blamed the entire population of the imperialist countries for consuming too much, especially items that are not necessities. At the same time, they quoted "experts" who blamed the government of Third World countries for "corruption" and "bad policies."

In truth, the pursuit of ever greater profit by the class of billionaire owners of the big banks and corporations controlling the global

economy has impoverished such a huge section of humanity. If that class were removed from power by the working class, it wouldn't take very long to begin to bridge the gap.

The report says extending access to basic education to everyone in the world would cost an estimated \$6 billion annually. Universal access to clean water and sanitation would cost \$12 billion, and basic health and nutrition, \$13 billion. Just these basic, no-frills changes would dramatically improve the lives of a billion people.

The money required is really peanuts.

By contrast, \$780 billion is spent on the arms industry—most of it by the United States or spent for U.S. weapons. And some \$435 billion is spent yearly just on advertising to keep up the consumption of items like tobacco, alcohol, cosmetics and other non-necessities in the richer countries.

This money is controlled by the big capitalist enterprises. They rake in huge profits convincing people to buy things that are not only wasteful, but deadly to health and well-being.

But even this doesn't tell the whole story. Consumption is relative and extremely unequal. Within the richest capitalist countries, at least 37 million workers are unemployed, 100 million people are homeless and nearly 200 million have a life expectancy of less than 60 years. In the United States, nearly one-sixth of the population lives in poverty despite the high per-capita income.

A guide to the basics

The Communist Manifesto and the world crisis

By Fred Goldstein

When Karl Marx, with the collaboration of Frederick Engels, wrote "The Communist Manifesto" 150 years ago, it was meant to promulgate the communist world view and serve as a guide to the worldwide proletarian revolution.

Among other things, the Manifesto is a living demonstration of the historical materialist explanation of history. It shows the dynamic development of capitalist society out of the womb of feudalism. The authors showed that the new capitalist form of exploitation—wage slavery—was superior to feudalism because it required the revolutionary development of the productive forces, while feudal society was static precisely because it rested upon preserving the primitive means of production suitable to serfdom.

The Manifesto's explanation of the revolutionary overthrow of feudalism by capitalism, however, was only a prelude to showing that capitalism was also destined to be overthrown. Like feudalism, its inner economic contradictions had become a brake upon human social progress.

Indeed, in 1848, when Marx and Engels were working out the fundamentals of Marxism, they had already described in a most illuminating way the fundamental forces that made capitalism a crisis-ridden system and could only bring about disaster for the working classes. The Manifesto showed that the contradiction between the narrow bounds of private property and the gigantic growth of the productive forces was the root of all modern-day economic crises.

One hundred and fifty years later, the working class can still use the Manifesto as a basic guide to understand the world economic crisis. There is more enlightenment in the two or three paragraphs devoted to explaining it than in all the reams of explanation by bourgeois experts.

Manifesto still the basic guide to understanding capitalist crisis

Now a new world capitalist economic crisis has devastated the masses of Asia and Russia, is threatening to engulf Latin America, and ultimately will reach the United States and other imperialist countries. As it progresses by fits and starts—driving bailouts, interest rate shifts, currency revaluations, and other forms of financial manipulation—capitalist economic experts of all schools struggle to explain it. Their explanations, of course, leave room to solve the crisis in a way that keeps capitalist exploitation afloat.

Many factors, large and small, have been cited as contributing to or causing the problems of world capitalism. The latest evil is the so-called liquidity crisis, or fear of lending by the banks and bondholders.

Much ink has also been spilled about the Japanese banking crisis and how it is to blame for not pulling Asia out of its crisis. Before that it was the lack of "transparency," or "crony capitalism" in south Korea and Indonesia, or the lack of a modern banking system in Thailand.

Each statement of the problem comes with a built-in solution.

Just ease interest rates and credit will flow, allowing capitalism to reverse the current downward trend. Pump money into the Japanese banking system so that the bosses

can borrow more money and the Japanese recession will be solved. Create some sort of new "financial architecture" to eliminate "crony capitalism" and make the economies of the oppressed countries more "transparent" and imperialist exploiters will send their capital back in.

But these solutions are illusory, because they do not address the fundamental problem. Of course there is a growing credit crisis, currency crises, bad debt problems in Japan. The problem is to explain them. Only a Marxist analysis can do that.

The "liquidity crisis" doesn't explain why millions of workers in Indonesia are unemployed and there's a poverty rate of 40 percent. Japan's highest unemployment rate and worst recession since World War II are not due merely to the banking crisis. "Crony capitalism" and the lack of "transparency" don't explain why millions of workers are being thrown out of their jobs in south Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The growing crisis in Brazil, with unemployment rising, production declining and poverty rampant, is not due simply to a currency problem. Nor is something called the "Asian flu" responsible for the layoffs that have begun in the U.S. at Raytheon, Gillette, Merrill Lynch, Boeing, Bankers Trust, Xerox, Kodak, Compaq and Motorola.

All this is caused by the crisis of capitalism, as first vividly described in the Manifesto.

Marx on 'the absurdity of overproduction'

"Modern bourgeois society," wrote Marx and Engels, "with its re-

lations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.

"For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against property relations that are the conditions for bourgeois rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put on trial, each time more threateningly, the existence of the entire bourgeois society. In these crises a great part not only of existing products, but also of previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed.

"In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of overproduction. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce."

Indeed, millions of workers and peasants in Asia are now experiencing a "universal war of devastation" precisely because the imperialist banks rushed into the area with \$400 billion in loans during the 1990s. They financed a great productive explosion, from hotels to electronics to real estate to auto production.

The multinationals that borrowed this money set up microchip factories, clothing and toy sweatshops, auto plants, steel mills, electronics assembly lines—so that now the entire region is devastated. Why? Because production outstripped consumption, as it always does under capitalism, just the way Marx de-

scribed it in the Manifesto. There is too much industry, too much commerce, and that has produced misery.

But, as Marx points out, the problem is not too much production per se. There may be 12 million "excess" automobiles that cannot be sold—at a profit. There are more houses than can be rented—at a profit. There are more computers than can be sold—at a profit.

Modern factories could supply the population with all its needs—if profit did not get in the way. It is private ownership of these factories, houses, offices, satellites, telephone systems and so on that is the problem. Marx called this "bourgeois property relations."

'Excess' capacity must be destroyed

"The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them," continues Marx. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? "On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means where by crises are prevented."

Marx went on in "Capital" to detail the general law of capitalist accumulation, the tendency of the rate of profit to decline, and other laws of capitalist development. For the first time, there was a scientific explanation for the crises described in the Manifesto—and it demonstrated that the ultimate overthrow of capitalism was inevitable.

All the reports by capitalist statisticians and researchers confirm that the only way Asia can get out of its crisis on a capitalist basis is if a huge part of its industrial capacity is destroyed. And now recent economic reports from the Federal Reserve Board show an increase in excess capacity and growing inventories in the U.S.

The truths described by Marx in 1848 are haunting the likes of Alan Greenspan and Robert Rubin in 1998 as they seek to put out the fires with bailouts of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Marx described the relentless need of each capitalist grouping to expand its markets and spheres of exploitation. Lenin, writing more than 60 years later, showed that this had led from a period of gradual capitalist expansion to the growth of monopolies and imperialism by the turn of the century. And it was this modern-day imperialism, driven by the same contradiction between private property and the vast, socially operated means of production, that plunged the world into a crisis in 1914 from which the capitalist system has never really freed itself.

The driving forces that Marx described expressed themselves in the first worldwide breakdown of the system—an imperialist war to redivide the world's markets and colonies. Twenty million workers and peasants were killed in World War I, including many colonial peoples who were drafted into imperialist armies and sent to the slaughter. Huge components of the means of production were destroyed in Europe and Asia.

From this crisis emerged the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. In Europe several pro letarian revolutions failed, but the national liberation struggles in China, southeast Asia and India were given a great impetus.

An economic crisis raged throughout Europe after the war. U.S. imperialist loans sustained the revival of world capitalism for a decade, but then came the stock market crash of 1929 followed by the Great Depression. The world truly witnessed a "universal war of devastation," in the words of the Manifesto.

The depression was temporarily overcome in Germany by fascism and militarization. In the U.S. a slight upturn from 1934 to 1937 was followed by another crash, which

was even more rapid than the earlier one. It was World War II and militarization that brought the U.S. out of its crisis. What a price to pay!

After this even more devastating war, the U.S. experienced imperialist prosperity based on continued militarization, rebuilding Europe and taking over its colonies. Yet another market crash in 1969 was followed by recovery, inflation, stagnation and a shrinking world to exploit as the Vietnamese defeated the U.S.

Revolutionary victories followed in Cambodia, Laos, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Ethiopia. All attempts to overthrow the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea and socialist Cuba came to naught. Revolutionary movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador challenged U.S. domination.

It was towards the end of the Carter administration that U.S. imperialism decided to try to reverse its world fortunes and bolster its profits by going all-out against the U.S. working class at home and the USSR and the national liberation movements abroad.

The Reagan administration

launched an anti-labor offensive here and a "full-court press" against the Soviet Union. Both campaigns were ultimately successful. The scientific-technological revolution had given Wall Street the upper hand, both in restructuring industry and in the all-out, anti-Soviet struggle that added a trillion dollars to the national debt. Wall Street boomed.

The "End of History" was declared, meaning the permanent triumph of capitalism. A "crisis-free" New Era was hailed in the boardrooms, on the trading floors and in the capitalist media.

But these historic victories for world capitalism have not relieved their crisis-ridden system of its contradictions. On the contrary, they have, as Marx said, "paved the way for more destructive and extensive crises" and have diminished "the means whereby crises are prevented."

World capitalism has proven itself unable to function other than by periodically creating massive crises for humanity in the form of wars or depressions. This present-day economic crisis can only be understood

as a continuation on a vast, global scale of the crisis described by Marx in the Manifesto.

So-called "globalization" has incorporated tens of millions of new workers into the world working class. Modern communications have made it possible to coordinate the class struggle worldwide.

In this regard, it is essential to remember the final conclusion of that section of the Communist Manifesto that deals with the crisis of bourgeois society:

"The advance of industry," concluded Marx, "whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the laborers, due to competition, by the revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."

Connecting the dots with Marxism

By Monica Moorehead

From a presentation at an Oct. 23 public forum on "The World Economic Crisis and the Future of Marxism" in New Paltz, N.Y.

There have been thousands of books that have come and gone, but "The Communist Manifesto" has stood the test of time—even during periods of political reaction.

Marxism is more than a political philosophy or a bunch of radical thoughts. Marxism is the science of not only interpreting the world but of fundamentally changing it to advance all of humanity.

I want to focus on one particular struggle to show the relevance of Marxism today—the Oct. 19 mass political funeral in New York City to protest the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard, a 22-year-old gay man in Laramie, Wyo.

Shepard is not the first gay man to be murdered in this country and unfortunately he won't be the last. Anti-gay violence is an everyday occurrence. What made the Shepard murder different was the national response to it.

His death lit a fuse of mass anger and frustration throughout the lesbian, gay, bi and trans communities.

From Wyoming to Texas

In the New York demonstration, many marchers had signs saying "From Laramie to Jasper, Texas, hate kills!" Jasper is the place where James Byrd, an African American, was dragged behind a truck by a couple of white racists until he was mutilated and killed.

Why didn't the mainstream media pick up the link between these two lynchings? The signs were very visi-

ble. Were the media worried about letting everybody else know there is a link?

Marx wrote in his groundbreaking work "Capital," "Labor in the white skin can never be emancipated while labor in the black skin is branded." During that period, this profound statement meant that the class interests of white workers as wage slaves were intrinsically linked to the total liberation of African slaves.

The struggle against slavery in the United States was so important to revolutionaries at the time that Marx and Engels wrote a class analysis of the U.S. Civil War. They called upon the victorious Northern bourgeoisie to arm the former slaves against the defeated Confederacy during the period known as Reconstruction.

But the North didn't arm the slaves; instead they were left defenseless during a reign of terror carried out by the Ku Klux Klan. This was a tremendous blow to the Black masses' struggle to gain full democratic rights on a par with whites.

This unfinished revolution laid the basis for institutionalized racism; that legacy lives on today. This has led to whites and others not appreciating the strategic role that slavery played in establishing the United States as the most powerful capitalist country and also how institutionalized racism affects social, political and economic relations.

So the New York march linking gay oppression to racism is not only a call for unity. It's a sign of growing political consciousness.

Consciousness starts out being instinctual, a gut reaction towards injustice. Through study and activism, these instincts can evolve into class consciousness—beginning to understand which side you're on.

It's like the game of connecting the dots—when there are just the dots on the page, there's no concept. But when you begin to connect the dots, you get the whole picture.

Cops and the state

Another important point about the demonstration is the role the police played. The media made a big deal about organizers not getting a permit to march in the streets. As a result over 100 people were arrested, including some of the organizers and five Workers World Party members.

Thousands marched in the streets anyway. As usual the media portrayed the marchers as the perpetrators of violence. In reality, this was another cop riot, just like the one at the Million Youth March on Sept. 5 in Harlem.

This raises what Marxism teaches us about the role the police play in a society divided into haves and have-nots. Marx and Engels wrote that cops—along with the prisons, the courts and so on—compose what is known as the state. The state is a repressive force that exists to keep the masses of people down, to oppress and suppress any kind of resistance or fight back.

Lenin wrote in "State and Revolution" that according to Marx, "the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another. The state arises where, when and to the extent that class contradictions objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that class contradictions are irreconcilable."

Underneath all the righteous anger and frustration is the growing instability of the capitalist economy. The recent crisis began in East Asia; it has since spread to Russia, Brazil

and elsewhere. Sooner or later it will hit the United States with the force of a hurricane.

The fault of this crisis does not lie in the so-called Asian flu, which is a racist term. The fault lies in the inner workings of the capitalist system—a system governed by fierce global competition, which eventually results in a lower rate of making profits and capitalist overproduction of goods.

Marx and Engels raised that one of the main contradictions of capital-

ist production is that the means of producing everything in society are the global, cooperative labor and skills of the workers. But the ownership of these means of production is private, and in the hands of the capitalist ruling class.

A growing number of young people are questioning whether there is a future for them under capitalism. It may be in the back of their minds, but it's there. It is just a question of moving it from back there to up here.

The biggest crisis we face—

whether we consider ourselves communists, revolutionaries or progressives—is a crisis of leadership. Voting for Democrats as the “lesser evil” will not fundamentally change our conditions for the better.

The progressive movement needs to reorient itself in the direction of an independent and working-class program that will unite all of the social and economic struggles. We must be open to all questions as well as be optimistic about achieving our goals.

Global capitalism breeds gross inequality

By Donna Goodman

From a presentation at an Oct. 23 public forum on "The World Economic Crisis and the Future of Marxism" in New Paltz, N.Y.

When Marx and Engels analyzed capitalism in the Communist Manifesto, the industrial age was just beginning. Since then, capitalism has shown an extraordinary productive ability and capacity to create wealth for a few—but at the cost of wage exploitation and national oppression, the annihilation of Native peoples, the enslavement of Africans, colonial subjugation, horrendous world wars and imperialist adventures.

As Marx foretold, capitalism's great wealth has not appreciably benefited the lives of the majority of the world's people because that wealth is distributed so unequally. Workers in industrialized countries have been allowed to obtain a small share of capitalism's wealth in order to keep them from rebelling, but they also experience periodic economic crises, wars, financial insecurity and alienation.

Despite certain historic achievements, an objective analysis of capitalism's economic and social history demonstrates the continuing viability of the socialist alternative Marx and Engels outlined 150 years ago.

With the downfall of the Soviet Union nearly a decade ago, the global economy has come under the joint ownership of the major capitalist industries, corporations and banks. We are told the history of socio-economic transformation is over. In September, Retired Gen. Colin Powell told West Point cadets that capitalism is a great system despite some faults and, after all,

"There are no competing ideologies on the face of the earth." He meant the very idea of a society based on cooperation and genuine equality is no longer valid.

We'll see about that.

Meanwhile, global capitalism must take responsibility for the "faults" Powell mentioned.

The world has nearly 6 billion people. Most live in the capitalist orbit. About 1.2 billion live in what the United Nations calls "developed" countries—the industrialized imperialist nations. Some 4.8 billion live in less developed countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

According to the UN "Human Development Report 1998," the 20 percent of the global population living in the developed countries consumes 86 percent of the world's goods. The remaining 80 percent consume just 14 percent of the goods. This includes the poorest 20 percent, who get 1.3 percent of the goods.

As the manifesto notes, capitalism generates great wealth, but pauperism develops far more rapidly. The UN predicts that in 50 years 8 billion people—out of a projected world population of 9.8 billion—will live in poor countries.

Incomes fall in 75 countries

Some 75 nations suffered a reduction in per capita income over the last 30 years. Between 1980 and 1990, the poverty rate in Latin America and the Caribbean jumped from 33 to 50 percent. In Africa, consumption dropped 20 percent since the mid-1970s.

Sixty percent of people who live in less developed countries lack safe sewage systems. Over 30 percent lack clean water, and 25 percent live in exceptionally poor housing.

Twenty percent have no access to doctors, ever.

Millions of children under the age of five die every year for lack of just pennies worth of preventive medicines. More than two billion people have no access to schools. One billion are starving or malnourished.

A billion of the world's working people are looking for jobs, according to the International Labor Organization. Over 150 million are out of work—including nearly 40 million in the industrialized countries. The rest are under-employed and looking for full-time jobs.

These conditions will only worsen as the effects of the capitalist economic crisis spread through the world. According to the World Bank, over 20 million workers in east Asia fell into poverty last year.

Robbery by the rich

The UN says it would cost \$6 billion to provide a basic education to all who now can't get one. It would cost \$9 billion to provide adequate water and sanitation to billions more.

Is capitalism lacking funds to do the job? Hardly.

If Microsoft's Bill Gates donated just 25 percent of his personal wealth, billions of people could be educated, drink clean water and live in a sanitary environment.

Speaking of billionaires, the world's 225 richest capitalists have nearly as much money as the poorest 50 percent of the world's people combined. The three richest people have assets exceeding the combined gross domestic products of the poorest 48 countries.

Washington used to disparage the Soviet Union when it had a socialist economy, despite its full employ-

ment and generous social policies. How fares Russia today, a decade after the counterrevolution?

Capitalism has nearly destroyed Russia. Russia's gross domestic product has dropped 81 percent since 1990. Agricultural output has decreased 63 percent. Over 70,000 factories have closed. Prices have risen by 350 percent. Average monthly wages and pensions have declined by 78 percent and 67 percent, respectively.

The country's free medical care system is a shambles. Life expectancy has fallen by several years. More than 13 million people are unemployed, and tens of millions of workers who are working haven't been paid in at least six months.

'Grave problems' for U.S. workers

Grave problems also plague the U.S.

The richest 1 percent here own 44 percent of the country's total assets. From 1977 to 1994, their average income rose 72 percent. The richest 10 percent got nearly 90 percent of the benefits from the stock market boom between 1989 and 1997.

Meanwhile, 1,500 Wall Street brokers received \$1 million or more in 1997. Average compensation on Wall Street jumped \$120,000 between 1996 and 1997. Corporate executives are also raking it in. The AFL-CIO reports that CEOs make 209 times the average factory worker's pay. In 1965 it was "only" 44 times as much.

The reality for working-class people is very different.

Even during the boom years, according to the Economic Policy Institute, inflation-adjusted earnings for workers in 1997 were 3.1 percent lower than in 1989. Real hourly wages stagnated or fell for 60 percent of workers.

Since 1973, hourly wages, adjusted for inflation, have dropped over 12 percent. The institute also says a "typical married-couple family" worked 247 more hours in 1996 than in 1989—six weeks of additional work.

The hardest hit workers are those who have not graduated from college—almost 80 percent of the work force.

Right now 16.5 percent of the U.S. population lives below the official poverty line. In 1995, there were 2.5 million poor people in New York State alone.

Some 26.5 percent of African Americans live in poverty. So do 27 percent of Latinos.

The incomes of the poorest 20 percent in the U.S. fell almost 15 percent between 1977 and 1990. A worker who gets the \$5.15 an hour minimum wage and has two children lives far below the poverty line.

At least 25 percent of children under the age of six live in poverty, according to the National Center for Children in Poverty.

There's no food shortage here. But this year, according to the Institute for Food and Development Policy, 30 million Americans are going hungry, including 12 million children. Hunger here has increased 50 percent since 1985.

The institute says between 5 and 7 million people in the U.S. are homeless for all or part of the year. The number of people without health insurance jumped this year to 16.1 percent—the highest level in a decade, according to the Census Bureau.

Highway robbery

In 1997, taxes on Corporate America constituted just 11 percent of the nation's tax revenue. Fifty years earlier, big business contributed 40 percent. If today's giant corporations paid taxes at the rate they paid in 1947, the U.S. could wipe out poverty.

Washington's gigantic military machine continues to expand, even while social programs are gutted. Congress recently passed a \$270 billion Pentagon spending bill. On Oct. 21, President Clinton and Congress added another \$8.1 billion.

What does all this mean?

It means we must work to create a society based on cooperation, not competition; economic equality, not inequality; support for education, health and welfare, not the military, the corporations and the rich; brotherhood and sisterhood, not racism, sexism and anti-gay/lesbian bias; an end to world poverty and the elimination of class differences, not allowing one small class of rich people to grab most of the wealth.

I think a lot of people agree with these sentiments, even if they have never considered the socialist alternative.

The Russian Revolution and the Communist Manifesto

By Greg Butterfield

It is often forgotten—and sometimes deliberately overlooked—that Karl Marx and Frederick Engels' "The Communist Manifesto" was originally called "The Manifesto of the Communist Party."

The famous pamphlet was written 150 years ago, not only as the world view of two individuals but as a program of action for a revolutionary organization—the Communist League, which included German, French, British, Spanish and Dutch workers.

The Communist League was a small organization with little influence in the recently born industrial working class. But its Manifesto became the road map for revolutionary workers worldwide.

It was 69 years later, on Nov. 7, 1917, that Russia's working class took power in its own name, under the banner of revolutionary Marxism.

V.I. Lenin and other leaders of the Russian Revolution—history's first successful socialist revolution—based their strategy and tactics on the perspective Marx and Engels set forth in "The Communist Manifesto."

How did workers and the rural poor in Russia come to embrace the program of "The Communist Manifesto"—and what's more, take action to make it a reality?

And what are the lessons from that 1917 convergence of mass consciousness and Marxism for revolutionaries today?

Russia's workers did not develop a socialist consciousness at one stroke. In part, it came about from decades of class struggles between the workers and poor peasants on one side, and the wealthy capitalists

and landlords on the other.

But even with this rich experience, a socialist revolution would have been impossible without a communist organization that carried on the revolutionary tradition of that earlier "Manifesto of the Communist Party."

That organization was Lenin's party, popularly known as the Bolsheviks.

In its ranks, the Russian communist party counted some of the most experienced activists and dedicated revolutionary workers. It embodied the historical experience of the working-class movement.

What role did this Marxist party play?

During the revolutionary events of 1917, the workers' movement would have lost its way or even faced annihilation if not for the program, slogans and tactics employed by the Bolsheviks.

Bolsheviks & the Paris Commune

In the Manifesto, Marx and Engels taught that "the emancipation of the proletariat can only be achieved by the workers themselves."

Under capitalism, Marx and Engels explained, workers must sell their labor-power to a boss. Workers create all value. But by not paying workers the full value of what they produce through their labor, the bosses rob the fruits as profit.

The workers have nothing to lose and everything to gain by seizing political power and taking over the factories, stores and banks. Then a rational, planned restructuring of the economy can begin.

In 1871 workers in Paris arose and began to carry out these measures. They created the Paris Commune, a

new form of political power based on workers' rule.

But the Parisian workers were isolated. Their leaders lacked a clear strategy. After three months they were defeated by the French and German armies.

From the Paris experience, Marx concluded that the working class "cannot simply take hold of the ready-made state machinery" inherited from capitalism. The workers must break up the old repressive state—government structures, courts, police and military—and build their own state modeled on the Commune.

'All power to the soviets!'

It was later, in the 1890s, that "The Communist Manifesto" and other Marxist literature began to circulate widely in Russia, alongside the explosive growth of railroads, mining, and of factory labor in Petrograd and other cities.

Russian revolutionaries studied Marx's teachings on the Paris Commune. They popularized these ideas among the working class. Marxist study circles were formed among the most political workers in factories, where they labored 12 to 14 hours a day.

In 1905, during an uprising against the hated Czar Nicholas II, Russian workers created the first soviets, or workers' councils.

The soviets looked and acted much like the Paris Commune.

The 1905 uprising was put down in a bloodbath. Leading workers and activists were jailed, exiled or killed. A long period of setbacks followed. But the lessons of the 1905 revolution and the soviets were preserved and taught by the Bolsheviks to a new generation.

By 1917 Russia was neck-deep in

the First World War. Nicholas II sent uncouped millions of underfed and often unarmed peasant- and worker-soldiers to their deaths.

Russia's army, still commanded by the rotting feudal class, was no match for the forces of its German imperialist rival.

Rebirth of the soviets

A mass strike by women garment workers in March 1917 set off an uprising that finally toppled the czar.

This first stage of the revolution was not socialist in character. It was a bourgeois democratic revolution—that is, it brought to power the capitalist class that grew up in the cracks of old feudal Russia.

But within this revolt lay the seeds of a socialist transformation: the rebirth of the soviets.

Lenin recalled this in his report to the Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in March 1918:

"The spontaneous formation of Soviets of Workers' Deputies in the March Revolution was a repetition of the experience of 1905—we had to proclaim the principle of Soviet power."

A coalition of capitalists and social-democrats formed a provisional government.

But another power was also growing at the same time: the soviets of workers, soldiers and peasants.

The communists charged that the new "official" government was loyal to the exploiting classes. They advanced the slogan: "All power to the soviets!"

The socialist parties that predomi-

nated in the soviets wanted to reach a compromise with the capitalists.

Only the Bolsheviks—after being convinced by Lenin, and basing themselves on Marx—believed the soviets could take power and feed the hungry, end the war and redistribute the land.

The communists proved right.

The provisional government did not make a fundamental break with the czar's imperialist policies. The new government continued the war. It refused to break up the big holdings of the landlords and distribute land to the peasants. Hunger spread.

'Bread, peace & land'

The rallying cry of the November 1917 revolution, led by the Bolsheviks, was "Bread, peace and land."

How could such basic demands become a call for the overthrow of the ruling classes and usher in the most radical reconstruction of society ever attempted?

Russia's people desperately needed bread, peace and land. But capitalism's need to expand its markets compelled the bosses and landlords to continue the war.

The hungry and suffering masses learned that their needs could only be realized by overthrowing capitalist rule.

At each step, the communists protested alongside the workers, propagandized in the soviets and agitated among peasant-soldiers at the front.

When troops led by czarist general Kornilov threatened to restore the monarchy in August 1917, it was

the Bolsheviks—not the capitalist provisional government—that organized workers and soldiers to defend their democratic gains.

In November, the communists organized the insurrection that overthrew the provisional government. The soviets, with a Bolshevik majority, seized power.

Companies of soldiers deserted the old army. Workers occupied factories. Peasants drove out the landlords.

"A wave of civil war swept over the whole of Russia, and everywhere we achieved victory with extraordinary ease precisely because the fruit had ripened, because the masses had already gone through the experience of collaboration with the bourgeoisie," Lenin said.

"Our slogan, 'All Power to the Soviets,' which the masses had tested in practice by long historical experience, had become part of their flesh and blood," he added.

Through civil war, intervention by 13 imperialist armies, and decades of unrelenting Cold War, the Soviet workers built a society where jobs, education, health care and housing were the rights of all.

In 1991 internal political corrosion, after decades of imperialist economic and military pressure that included threats of nuclear annihilation from the U.S., resulted in a capitalist counter-revolution in Russia and the other republics of the Soviet Union.

But like the Paris Commune, the lessons of the 1917 victory and its aftermath will strengthen the coming struggle for socialism.

Marx's theory of revolution

By Brian Becker

From a presentation at an Oct. 23 public forum on "The World Economic Crisis and the Future of Marxism" in New Paltz, N.Y.

We have taken on a dangerous assignment in commemorating Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on the 150th anniversary of the publication of "The Communist Manifesto." Why? Because history has a tendency to render great historical figures—especially revolutionary fighters who were despised, ridiculed, and repressed by their ruling classes while they lived—into harmless icons after their death.

Karl Marx was hated and demonized by the ruling classes of Europe because he was above all else a revolutionary. He dedicated his life to revolution. A genius from the ranks of the bourgeoisie, Marx and his family led a life of great poverty and destitution so that he could devote all of his energies to the movement for the liberation of the working class.

Marx brought forth a new theory of revolution. That's why he was hated. And because so many workers from China to Russia to Cuba to South Africa have upheld the banner of Marxism as they overthrew oppressing classes, Marx and his theory of revolution continue to be the focus of great hatred by the bosses, bankers, landlords and land owners everywhere.

It's not easy to talk about revolution in the United States because there is so little understanding of the concept. The only historical event in the United States that is characterized as a revolution was in fact not a revolution: the American Revolution.

The U.S. Revolution was not a so-

cial revolution because it did not change the existing property forms. The slave owners were still the slave owners after the revolution. In fact, they led the revolution. And the slaves were still the slaves.

It was a political revolution in the sense that a new form of government was created. The British colonial government was replaced by a new coalition government of slave-owners and a new merchant class or bourgeoisie.

In fact, Thomas Jefferson—the author of the Declaration of Independence, the great spokesperson for liberty and equality—owned 200 human beings as slave laborers. In addition, between 1802 and 1803 he assisted Napoleon on the naval blockade, sanctions and later invasion of Haiti in an attempt to crush the great slave revolution that had abolished slavery in the Western Hemisphere for the first time.

There has only been one real revolution in United States history—what we know as the Civil War.

The Civil War was a genuine social revolution. The economic power of the old slave-owning class—including its legal property rights to own slaves—was crushed. Chattel slavery was replaced with capitalist wage slavery.

The reason the Civil War was so bloody was that it was a real revolution. It took a struggle of that magnitude to dispossess the slave-owning classes of their property.

This was not simply a political revolution—a change in the form of government. It was a social revolution because it ushered in a profound readjustment in class rule.

The character of this momentous struggle should not obscure the fact that the property-owning capitalists in the North betrayed Black freedom within a decade. The Northern in-

dustrialists restored the old slave owners to power—but as partners in capitalist rule. And the former slave owners, in turn, introduced the apartheid police state that dominated the Southern part of this country for the following 100 years.

But chattel slavery had been ended for good.

Theory of revolution

What was Marx's theory of revolution?

In a letter he wrote to his friend and comrade Joseph Wedemeyer on March 5, 1882, Marx described his contribution in the most succinct possible way:

"No credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle of the classes, and bourgeois economists had discovered the economic anatomy of those classes.

What I did that was new was to prove:

- 1) that the existence of the classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production;
- 2) that the class struggle leads necessarily to the dictatorship of the proletariat;
- 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society."

"The dictatorship of the proletariat." Those sound like scary words. But Marx was not using the word dictatorship as a pejorative. He used the word in a scientific sense.

Marx considered all class societies to be the dictatorship of its dominant class. This is at the heart of Marx's analysis of the state.

If Marx were alive today he would

not conclude that the United States is one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. He would characterize it as a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. And his solution to the suffering brought about by capitalism in the United States would be to replace the iron-fisted rule of the bankers and bosses with the dictatorship of the proletariat—the working class.

Liberals and conservatives alike will howl: There is no dictatorship in the United States. This is a democratic form of government.

Marx would agree. It's a democratic form of government—a very limited form of democracy—resting on top of a state apparatus that functions as the dictatorship of the rich, of the capitalist ruling class.

For example, IBM made \$5 billion in profits in 1995 and then laid off more than 50,000 employees in order to use the profit to replace those human jobs with new technologies.

Was this decision made by voting? Yes. The board of directors of IBM voted to lay the workers off. The masses of workers got to vote for the president of the United States. But the bosses exercised a dictatorship over "their property, their company."

A one-sided use of force

How many poor people are in Congress? None. How many poor people are judges? None.

How many rich people are on death row? None. How many acts of police brutality are there against millionaires and billionaires? None.

How many tenants are evicted from their homes because they can no longer afford rent? Tens of thousands each week. How many landlords are evicted from their homes because they rob and cheat their tenants or refuse to make repairs? Again, none.

How many times in U.S. history have striking workers been able to call the police and say, "Please come down here right away, there are scabs crossing the picket line and

stealing my job. Please arrest them." That'll never happen.

The bosses, though, always call the police to protect the strike breakers and the boss' "property."

This one-sided use of force, coercion and repression is wielded only to satisfy the interests and needs of the bourgeoisie. This is the law of the land.

Police, courts and prisons evict tenants, arrest strikers and act as an occupation force against rebelling Black and Latino communities in order to make sure that poor people don't expropriate rich people.

This is all an exercise of dictatorship.

And this use of force in the interest of one class for its domination and its profit extends to the realm of foreign policy.

The people of the United States weren't asked to vote on whether or not they wanted a Pentagon war against Vietnam or Korea. They didn't vote for the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic, 1983 bombing of Lebanon, 1983 invasion of Grenada, 1986 bombing of Libya's capital city, 1989 invasion of Panama or 1991 slaughter in Iraq.

The people didn't vote on the 1993 "humanitarian" invasion of Somalia in which the Pentagon estimates that it killed 10,000.

The masses don't get to vote on invasions, or embargoes, blockades, and sanctions.

The population of this country doesn't get to vote on whether the United States should kill more than 1.5 million Iraqis, a majority children and elderly, through hunger and disease as the result of sanctions.

The decisions to use these levels of force and coercion are reserved for the state apparatus that pursues a policy to defend the global interests of U.S. capitalist corporations. The policy in the Middle East is designed exclusively to serve the interests of Exxon, Mobil, Texaco, not the workers in the United States.

Power to the people!

Marx believed that this dictatorship of the bourgeoisie takes a myriad of political forms: a democratic republican form, military junta or fascist police state. In some cases even a monarchy.

But beneath the form of government rests a system of coercion and repression that serves and protects the interests of the bourgeoisie.

Marx wanted to get rid of this dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. He saw the need to replace it with a dictatorship of the proletariat. And he saw this form of state as a necessary transition to the abolition of all classes into a classless society.

Like the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the dictatorship of the proletariat could assume a myriad of political forms. It could be very democratic. That's the way the Soviet Union was during Lenin's lifetime, and Cuba is today. Or it could be less democratic—the way the Soviet Union became during the Stalin period.

But the dictatorship of the proletariat is in its essence the use of state power to defend the interests of the working class, the poor, the formerly oppressed.

It defends collective ownership of property as a right. It defends the right to a job, the right to universal health care.

The dictatorship of workers and oppressed peoples is required to make racism illegal and to use the state apparatus to decisively eradicate racism. And to abolish anti-woman violence, gay bashing and all other reactionary forms of violence perpetrated against oppressed people.

The dictatorship of the proletariat will ensure that no landlord will ever evict a tenant again. That no group of capitalists can own all the property created by the collective labor of the working class. And no boss can ever again exercise the authority to lay off the workers.

The Communist Manifesto: short and powerful

By David Perez

Every time I reread "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," better known as "The Communist Manifesto," I am amazed by both its passion and its continuing relevance. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote the Manifesto in 1848. Yet some of it reads like it was written yesterday.

It's a real tour de force of writing. Its very first words, "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism," immediately grab the reader.

The authors proceed to illustrate the dynamics of the capitalist system in a language rich in Gothic metaphors and imagery—from the opening "specter" to the way capitalists are likened to a "sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells."

The latter description refers to the nature of capitalist economic crisis, which results in "an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of over-production."

Marx and Engels' description was not only accurate in 1848; it applies with equal power today, in 1998. The capitalist world is currently in the throes of a severe economic crisis, one marked by a glut of commodities—in everything from automobiles to crude oil to soybeans, as the bosses readily admit.

Despite this abundance of goods, the ranks of the unemployed grow legion, as do hunger and exploitation.

Brief yet potent

What also makes the Manifesto a compelling read is its structure. Marx and Engels manage to get in a lot of information in each paragraph, many of which are one sentence

long. Like this passage:

"The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

"They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of communism.

"All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.

"The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favor of bourgeois property.

"The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few.

"In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."

The book itself is quite short, about 12,000 words. It was originally published in London as a 23-page pamphlet. Later the authors added several prefaces to new editions.

The fact that it's small only adds to its impact.

It is a rare document indeed that, although brief, can become one of the "world's most influential books of the past 200 years," as characterized in the 1998 World Almanac. This potency comes not only from the Manifesto's analysis. More than anything, the book is a call to ac-

tion—and to liberation.

Marx and Engels urge the workers of the world to break free of their chains and establish a new, just social order—a communist order. They stress that capitalism will not go away by itself. It takes organization and struggle.

It is perhaps fitting that Marx and Engels wrote this in 1848. That was the same year Harriet Tubman escaped slavery and formed the Underground Railroad.

Change inevitable

Of course, much has changed since the Manifesto was written. The fundamental workings of capitalism, however, have stayed the same.

Nonetheless, it would be foolish to think a modern analysis wouldn't do some revision and updating. In 1872, Marx and Engels themselves said the Manifesto was a historical document, "out of date in many respects."

Footnotes were added to later editions. In the preface to the 1888 English edition, Engels wrote that their statement "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" should be amended to read "all written history."

Developments in anthropological studies had led Engels to understand that much of pre-historic society was classless. He expounded on this theme in his classic work, "The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State."

The current epoch, after the terrible setbacks in the socialist camp, poses new questions, new circumstances and new challenges. On this 150th anniversary of the Manifesto, no better tribute can be paid to its authors than to read and study their classic book—not for sentimentality, but to share in its vision and continue the struggle by whatever means necessary.

The Marxist meaning of materialism

By Nancy Mitchell

This article is adapted from a talk given at a seminar on "The Communist Manifesto Today" sponsored by the San Francisco branch of Workers World Party.

I'm going to talk a little bit about Karl Marx and Frederick Engels' concept of historical materialism. First, it would be helpful to take a look at the historical context.

"The Communist Manifesto" was written in the midst of what is called the Industrial Revolution, which started in the 18th century in England and was entering its heyday in Europe in the mid-19th century. Technological advances were happening at many levels of production. The steam engine, the power loom, the printing press—these were all changing the nature of transportation, the distribution of information, and most importantly the production of goods.

More inventions happened in a quarter of a century during the industrial revolution than in all previous history. With these technological changes came political changes as well. Old ideas were being challenged, the ownership of wealth and power was moving from the hands of the aristocratic classes to a new capitalist class.

Material conditions at root

Materialism was the method Marx and Engels used to analyze society. What the materialist method did was to look first at the productive forces of society—the way the society is organized to produce and distribute goods—and to understand how this shapes both the institutions of that society and the consciousness of

people in it. Materialist philosophy said that all ideas have their root in the material conditions out of which they come.

This was a very important and revolutionary way to approach philosophy, because at that time philosophy revolved around idealism, the notion that the outside world is a reflection of concepts thought up beforehand, that society is organized around some pre-existing ideas and therefore history is a history of ideas.

Marx and Engels said that being determines consciousness, not the other way around, which means that people's ideas are generally shaped by the material conditions in which they live. And if you think about it, this really makes sense to us.

From where the capitalist sits, the system looks like a pretty sweet deal; whereas from the position of the workers, it's clearly a system of oppression. These conflicting world views are based in the material conditions out of which they come. The "being determines consciousness" concept has been really revolutionary and provided the foundation for a number of social movements—like the Black Power movement, the feminist movement, the lesbian/gay/bi/trans movement.

Materialism takes the focus away from a discussion of abstract ideals that society is supposed to be emulating, and looks at the actual material organization of society.

The historical materialist approach to society allows us to see the source of class conflict. By looking at the system of production, we can see that the interests of the capitalists—namely, to make increasing profits—and the interests of the workers—to survive and live comfortably—are fundamentally at odds.

Being determines consciousness

This is what is meant by "being determines consciousness." A person's interests, ideas, world view are influenced by their social position. And people enter into these relations of production independently of their own will.

It's not like the child laborer in a sweatshop chooses to be an oppressed worker. People are tied to their material conditions of existence, and it is those conditions that determine the way they think. The material condition is what also determines the society's institutions, such as the legal system and the political superstructure—that is, the state.

The materialist way of looking at society revealed a different kind of history than what had previously been believed. It was really the first time someone looked at the history of the workers; before that they were just left out.

The materialist approach reveals that before the capitalist era, there were other systems of production—feudalism is an example, so is slavery. And in these other systems, like capitalism, there was a struggle between the ruling class and the exploited class.

In fact, the struggle for equality has resurfaced over and over again throughout modern history, through slave revolts and peasant rebellions, for example. And this is what they really mean by the term "dialectic." The dialectic refers to the dynamic and interactive struggle between the classes—that society is not stagnant, but ever changing.

This is important to keep in mind when the ruling class is talking about capitalism as the end of history or a

permanent system. It may seem like capitalism keeps dragging on forever, but really this system has occupied about one percent of human history.

Capitalism is simply a system of production like others before it. It—like feudalism and slavery—is wracked by contradictions and eventually will be overthrown by a revolutionary reconstitution of society.

What Marx and Engels really introduced was a scientific method for looking at the history and future of class relations. This is what we call scientific socialism—as distinct from utopian socialism, which is really an idealist concept. Scientific socialism

says that there is a material basis for the victory of the oppressed classes over the oppressors. And that the struggle for justice and equality, which is a struggle for socialism, has a scientific grounding.

The capitalists like to tell us that a stratified class society and competition are human nature or the way it's always been. Well, the ruling classes always want to sell their system as eternal. Kings did it before capitalists ever tried to make the claim.

But scientific socialism rejects this notion, and says that the only thing that is eternal is change. Of course this doesn't mean that the working classes are to sit back and wait for

that inevitable change to come. Marx and Engels said that while it may have been the task of earlier historians and philosophers to interpret the world, the task of historical materialists is to change it.

I think it's important to add here that Marx wrote that capitalism rose in Europe "with blood dripping from its every pore." Meaning that it was the slave trade, and the genocide of the Native populations of the "New World"—and really just the rape and pillage of the lands beyond Europe—that laid the foundation for the development of capitalism on that continent.

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Workers World is a party of class struggle. Working and oppressed people all share one enemy: the capitalist class of bosses and bankers who live off the profits that we create.

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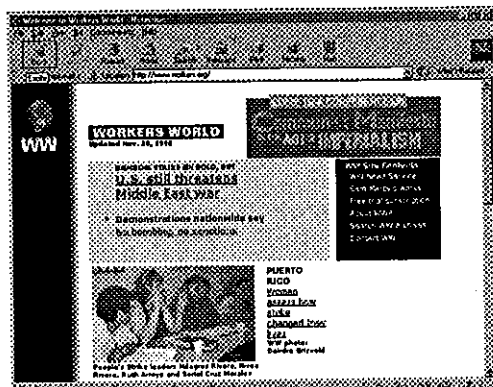
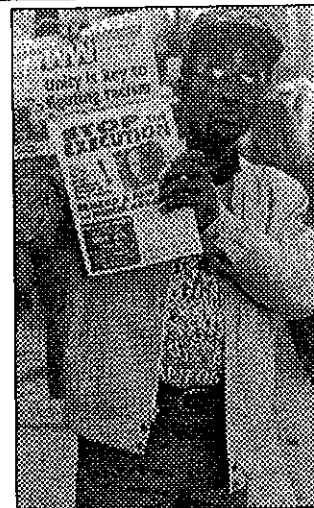
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