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# Perspective of Communism, part 1: Why communism is necessary and possible

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*In the movement of the working class against the attacks of capitalism, the specific role of revolutionaries is not just to insist on the need for workers to take control of their struggles and spread them as widely as possible; it is also to show that the day-to-day struggles of our class are the preparation for an ultimate confrontation with this system, aimed at dismantling it and replacing it with a radically new society.*

*We are not talking here about the 'alternative worlds' proposed by the 'anti-globalisation' movement; as we show in our article on the European Social Forum, these are not really an alternative at all, but a slightly modified version of present-day capitalism. We are talking about communism.*

*Ah, but 'communism is dead' we are told: it died when the Berlin Wall fell and the Stalinist regimes of the east collapsed. At best, the argument goes, the idea of communism is 'utopian', impossible, contrary to human nature, a daydream of mad fanatics. And indeed, for the vast majority of workers - even those engaged in bitter struggles against the system - communism is also no more than a nice idea, good in theory but unworkable in practice.*

*And we reply: the claim that communism died in 1989 is a lie - the deceitful propaganda of the ruling class. **Because the Stalinist regimes had nothing to do with communism and were capitalist from top to bottom.** The demise of these regimes was not the death of communism, but the end of a particular form of capitalist domination.*

*With the republication of this series written in the 1970s(1), we intend not only to show what communism really means, but also to show that far from being a failed dream, communism is both **possible** and absolutely **necessary**, the only real solution to the insoluble contradictions of capitalism in decay.*

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The idea of a society in which misery, oppression, social inequalities and private property no longer exist is not new. Solidarity would be the basis of all human interaction in this society, where men would no longer respond to each other like vicious animals. The blossoming of liberty for each would be the condition governing the flowering of liberty for all. In differing forms, this idea crops up even in the earliest writings of Antiquity. The Greek philosopher Plato wrote of it (while simultaneously defending slavery!), as did the first Christians. Later, in the Middle Ages, it reappeared, most notably in the conceptions of the Millenarian movements, but also in the writings of the German monk Thomas Münzer, one of the leaders of the Peasant Wars.

## The historic limits of capitalism

However, communist conceptions were not fundamentally developed until such time as a new class - the proletariat - made its first appearance in society. For the first time in history, a class existed which carried within itself the real possibility of transforming the old dream into reality. As early as the seventeenth century in England and the eighteenth in France, political currents grew up within the bourgeois revolutions taking place at that time and proclaimed the communist project in more or less explicit terms. Thus, even while the proletariat was not a fully formed class in society, it nonetheless created organisations like the 'True Levellers' in England and the Equals in France to defend its historic interests. But it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, with the growth and concentration of the working class accompanying the development of large-scale industry, that the communist movement was able to make precise its own objectives and the means to attain them. This entailed a break with past utopian conceptions, best-expressed in the work of Fourier, Saint-Simon and Owen, and the distancing of the movement from the sectarian, conspiratorial activity of Blanqui and his cohorts. Religious references which had permeated the movement previously, and which even influenced as lucid a communist as Weitling, were swept aside in 1847 with the appearance of the first rigorous, scientific formulation of communism. The *Communist Manifesto* provided the theoretical basis for all the later developments in understanding of the proletarian movement. In this document, communism is not presented as the invention of a few visionaries that merely awaits application, but is seen as the only society which can succeed capitalism and overcome its mortal contradictions. The essential argument contained in the *Manifesto* is that capitalism, like all societies before it, cannot go on forever. If it did at one point represent a progressive step in the development of humanity, notably by unifying the world through the creation of a world market, capitalism today is wracked with insurmountable contradictions. These plunge the system into ever more violent convulsions which will end in it being swept away. By causing an immense development in the productive forces of society, and most important among them the working class itself, capitalism has brought into being the conditions necessary for its own transcendence and the creation of a society based on abundance. The working class is the subject of the social transformation of capitalism, and situated as it is on the lowest rung of the social ladder, it cannot emancipate itself without emancipating the whole of humanity.

## **Decadence of capitalism and perspective of communism**

Although the *Communist Manifesto* was mistaken in its conception that capitalism had already reached the limits of its own development and the communist revolution was, therefore, imminent - a mistake which its authors Marx and Engels recognised some years later - nonetheless its essential understanding of the unfolding of capitalist development has subsequently been amply confirmed. This is particularly true with regard to the idea that capitalism cannot escape from its own economic crises, which become successively more violent.

Today, once again, the economic crisis imposes on society an aberration typical of capitalism. Hundreds of thousands of individuals are plunged into the most terrible misery, not because production is insufficient to meet their needs, but because production is too great. However, today's crisis is of a different type than the crises analysed in the *Manifesto*. The crises of the last century appeared in a period of full capitalist expansion; the system could 'solve' its crises at that time by eliminating the least profitable sectors of the economy in conjunction with its conquest of new markets. The crises of the nineteenth century constituted the heartbeat of a vigorous social organism. But since the first world war capitalism has entered into its phase of historical decline; of permanent crisis. From that time on, no real solution to the crisis has been possible within capitalism. The system can only continue to exist on the basis of an infernal cycle in which increasingly acute crises are followed by war, reconstruction and further crisis. As the Communist International announced in 1919, the era of imperialist wars and revolutions had arrived and communism was on the historical agenda. Since then, the successive convulsions suffered by

humanity have confirmed, each time more forcibly, the urgent need for humanity to go beyond the capitalist mode of production which now severely hampers any further human development.

After the first world war, the crisis of 1929 provided another spectacular illustration of the bankruptcy of capitalism. In its wake, the holocaust of the second world war demonstrated that the scope of capitalist barbarism could exceed even the unbelievable horror of the first world butchery. Since capitalism has entered into its phase of decadence, humanity has paid the monstrous price of over 100 million deaths to keep this system functioning; and that is not counting the terrible human losses caused by unnecessary famine, malnutrition and general misery which capitalism forces millions of human beings to endure.

Today's crisis is not the first indication of capitalism's bankruptcy, nor the first proof of the need to replace it with communism. In many domains the crisis merely reflects in a clearer light contradictions which have torn the system apart in the past. But to the extent that a startling discrepancy exists between the enormous possibilities this system possesses to satisfy human needs, and the catastrophic usage to which capitalist production is actually put, the necessity for another type of society makes itself felt today in a way which is even more imperative than it was in the past.

The new society which will succeed capitalism must be able to overcome the contradictions which plague society today. This is the only way that such a society can function as a definite objective necessity and not as a utopian construction of the human mind. Its characteristics must be in complete opposition to the negative laws underpinning the development of capitalist society.

The root cause for the evils which ruin capitalism resides in the fact that the aim of capitalist production is not to satisfy human needs but to accumulate capital. Capitalist production does not produce use values but exchange values. Private appropriation of the means of production thus comes into conflict with their increasingly social character. In other words, capitalism decomposes because it produces for a market which is itself more and more restricted since it is based on an exploitation of wage labour. The surplus value produced by the exploitation of the working class can no longer be realised, i.e. be exchanged for goods which can enter into an enlarged cycle of capitalist reproduction.

### **The basis of communist society**

The economic character of communism must, therefore, be the following:

1. The only incentive governing production will be the satisfaction of human needs.
2. The goods which society produces will cease to be commodities; exchange-value will disappear and only use value will remain.
3. The present restricted framework hampering the process of production will become more and more socialised. Private ownership of the means of production, whether possessed on an individual basis as in laissez-faire capitalism or by the state as in decadent capitalism, will give way to the socialisation of the means of production. This will mean the end of all private property; the end of the existence of social classes and thus the end of all exploitation.

One objection is often raised against this conception of society. It questions why such a society has not already come into existence since it would contain all the characteristics most appropriate to human development and would most closely constitute an ideal form of society. In other words, why should this form of society be a possibility today when it hasn't been possible to create a society like this in the past? In their reply to questions like these the anarchists usually answer, as all the utopians answered before them, that in fact communism has always been possible. Since objective

material conditions don't stand in the way of communism, all that is needed is sufficient human will. What the anarchists can't explain is why human will hasn't been strong enough in the past to create communism and why the will to create communism, which did exist within minority groupings, didn't extend itself throughout society in the past.

Marxism, however, gives a serious answer to these questions. It explains why one of the essential conditions for the evolution of humanity is the development of the productive forces, or in other words the productivity of human labour. Each level of development of the productive forces of a particular society corresponds to a given type of productive relationship. The relations of production are the relations established between men and women in their activity of producing goods destined to satisfy their needs. In primitive societies the productivity of labour was so low that it scarcely satisfied the barest physical needs of the members of the community. Exploitation and economic inequality were impossible in such a situation: if certain individuals had appropriated to themselves or consumed goods in greater quantities than other members of this society, then the poorer off would not have been able to survive at all. Exploitation, generally in the form of slavery established as the result of the territorial conquest of one tribe by another, could not appear until the average level of human production had gone beyond the basic minimum needed for physical survival. But between the satisfaction of this basic minimum and the full satisfaction, not only of the material but also the intellectual needs of humanity, there exists an entire range of development in the productivity of labour. By means of such development, mankind steadily became the master of nature. In historical terms, it was this period which separated the dissolution of primitive communist society from the era when fully developed communism would be possible. Just as mankind wasn't naturally 'good' in those ages when men and women weren't exploited under the conditions of primitive communism, so it hasn't been naturally 'bad' in the epochs of exploitation which have followed. The exploitation of man by man and the existence of economic privilege became possible when average human production exceeded the physical minimum needed for human life to reproduce itself. Both became necessary because the level of human production could not fully satisfy all the needs of all the members of society.

As long as that was the case, communism was impossible, whatever objections the anarchists may raise to the contrary. But it is exactly this situation which capitalism has itself radically modified, owing to the enormous increase in the productivity of labour which it has brought into being. Capitalism methodically exploited every scientific discovery, generalised associated labour, and put to use the natural and human riches of the entire world. But obviously the increase in the productivity of labour set in motion by capitalism was paid for by an intensification of exploitation on a scale unknown in human history. However, such a profound increase in human productivity does represent the material basis for a communist society. By making itself the master of nature, capitalism created the conditions by which humanity may become master of itself.

## **Humanity's future at stake**

The capitalist crisis today is an excellent demonstration of the necessity for communism. For the first time in the history of humanity, a society plunges the greater part of its members into the most acute misery, not because it cannot produce enough, but because it produces too much in relation to the laws which govern how it regulates production.

Before the rise of capitalism humanity knew crises, but never crises of overproduction. Today this congenital evil of the capitalist system reveals itself with unequalled violence: unemployment increases relentlessly, underemployment spreads throughout the productive process, more and more murderous and extensive wars break out. All of these things prove that the real utopians are those people who imagine it is possible today to achieve a greater satisfaction of human needs

through the reform of capitalism, and not its complete overthrow. The whole gamut of economic, political and military events which have shaken the world over the last decades bear testimony to the fact that humanity, if it remains bound by the laws of capitalism, will find itself moving down the road towards a third world holocaust. The magnitude of that war would make the other two appear almost inconsequential.

While the unbelievable destructive power of past inter-imperialist conflicts has demonstrated that mankind can master nature, and therefore that communism is possible, it has also shown that mankind's mastery over nature can also be used to destroy humanity itself. Thus, communism becomes a necessity today, not only to ensure the further progress of the human species, but more simply to ensure that humanity survives at all.

In the next article in this series we will examine various objections raised against the viability of communism, mainly those that argue that humanity is 'naturally' incapable of realising such a society. *FM*

## Notes

(1) See *World Revolution* 25, 26, 28; the series is also available on our website.

## Deepen:

- [The Perspective of Communism](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

## General and theoretical questions:

- [Communism](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

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[1] <https://en.internationalism.org/tag/28/336/perspective-communism>

[2] <https://en.internationalism.org/tag/4/34/communism>