

Book Review Of The Communist Manifesto By Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Communist Manifesto is one of the influential political documents in history. It was written in 1848 by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Furthermore, it was commissioned by the Communist League and was first published in London as Manifesto of the Communist Party. The manifesto is divided into four chapters or parts namely: Bourgeois and Proletarians, Proletarians and Communists, Socialist and Communist Literature and Position of the Communist in relation to the various existing opposition parties.

Communist manifesto is Marx and Engels theories about the structure or nature of society and politics. It reveals how the society is characterised by class antagonisms in all historical epoch of human existence. Hence the chapters will be evaluated separately and its application to contemporary situation in Nigeria.

II. BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIANS

The authors began this section by proclaiming that a spectre was haunting Europe and that was the spectre of communism, hence the necessity to publicly (openly) publish their party views and aims. They postulated that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”. Marx and Engels admonished that they were living in the modern bourgeois society which sprouted from the ruins of feudal society. Here, bourgeoisie refers to the class of modern capitalists who own the means of production and are also employers of wage labour. The epoch of the bourgeoisie possesses a distinct feature, simplified class antagonisms between two great hostile classes directly facing each other – Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

The discovery of America and other colonies and steam and machinery revolutionised industry opened up fresh grounds for rising up of the bourgeoisie. Modern industry has established a

world market for capitalism to thrive on and every step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class. For instance, there was an oppressed class during the sway of feudal nobility, and in modern time the representative state exclusive political sway. Thus, Marx saw the executive modern state as a committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie.

This section depicts the characteristics of the bourgeoisie in respect to their relationship with the proletarians. The bourgeoisie are cash or capital driven, and when it is possible, they alter situation to their advantage. They advocate free trade for exploitation through the use of politics and religion.

The bourgeoisie have stripped honourable occupations of their own such as the lawyers, priests, the poets and scientists thereby turning them into mere wage labourers. It has also torn away family ties and reduced family relation to mere money relationships. The existence of the bourgeoisie is made possible due to the constant revolution of instruments of production and relations of production and with them the whole relations of society.

The need for expansion makes the bourgeoisie explore all surfaces of the globe and has given the world market a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption. Through rapid improvement of all instruments of production facilitated by means of communication draws all nations into civilisation. Psychological manipulation is done by production of cheap commodities even to barbaric nations. The proletarians are only but wage labourers whose interaction with the bourgeoisie leads to further pauperisation.

However, the weapons the bourgeoisie felled- feudalism, are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself, and has also called into existence the men who will wield the weapons – the modern working class – the proletarians. Just as the development of capital, is the development of the proletariat, a class of labourers who live only so long as they find work and only if their work can increase the bourgeoisie capital. The dignity of the workers has been reduced to that of a commodity, an element of commerce and is also subjected to fluctuations of the market.

Therefore, the authors postulated that other middle class - the artisan, small manufacturers, shopkeepers and peasants cannot stand up against the bourgeoisie and are always struggling to keep their positions in society. The proletarians on the other hand are subjected to the same oppression whether in Germany, England, America or France and the law, morality and religion are usually ideas of the ruling class in the interest of the bourgeoisie.

Every human society is based on antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes and certain conditions must exist for such relationship. Pathetically, the modern labourers instead of rising with the process of industry sinks deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class and is pauperised.

III. PROLETARIANS AND COMMUNISTS

Here emphasis was made on the aim of the Community Party. The communists do not form a party opposed to other working-class parties. Their aim is the formation of proletariat into a class, overthrow of bourgeois supremacy and conquest of political power by proletariats.

Communists advocated the following principles in order to achieve their aim:

1. Abolition of private property
2. Abolition of the family and rescuing education from the influence of the ruling class.
3. The acknowledgement of the community of women.
4. Raising the proletariat to the ruling class position to win the battle of democracy.

An achievement of the aforementioned principles will lead to the following in most advanced countries.

- i. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes,
- ii. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax,
- iii. Abolition of all rights of inheritance, and
- iv. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels
- v. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
- vi. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.
- vii. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of wastelands and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
- viii. Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
- ix. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries, gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equitable distribution of the populace over the country.
- x. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education and industrial production.

(See Marx and Engels 1848, p. 26 – 27).

IV. SOCIALIST AND COMMUNIST LITERATURE

This section differentiates communism from other socialist doctrines that existed at that period. Aristocrats of England and France for instance wrote pamphlets against the bourgeoisie, but paradoxically, they also enjoy the “apples” that grow from the bourgeoisie gardens of exploitation – capitalism.

Marx and Engels categorised this section into reactionary socialism, critical-utopian socialism and communism and conservative or bourgeois socialism. The various perspectives approach towards capitalism varies but the authors dismiss them on the basis that they advocated reform which was impossible.

However, the position of the manifesto was a radical overthrow of the bourgeoisie which was only possible through the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat - the working class.

V. POSITION OF THE COMMUNIST IN RELATION TO THE VARIOUS OPPOSITION PARTIES

This is the smallest section of the Communist Manifesto and the concluding part. Here, is a brief discussion of the communist position on struggles in various countries of the mid-nineteenth century such as Germany, France, Switzerland and Poland which were on the eve of bourgeois revolution.

The communists pledge support for every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. They declared that their mission can be attained only through the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Lastly, they made a clarion call for the working class to unite – “Working Men of all Countries, Unite”.

VI. APPLICATION TO CONTEMPORARY SITUATION IN NIGERIA

Contemporary Nigerian society is enmeshed in political and economic crises of various forms, intensity and pervasiveness. The state at best fits Marx and Engels description of the state as a committee of managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie and ruling class. Just as the advocacy that “the history of all hitherto society is the history of class struggle” is the Nigerian situation.

The state has transformed itself to the status of an entrepreneur that does business for the interest of its citizens and in the process promotes the interest or stakes of the ruling class (politicians) at the detriment of the larger majority - working class, students, women, children and the poor (peasants). In other words, the Nigerian state has the character of rent seeking, prebendalism and patrimony.

The entrepreneurial role of the Nigerian state has incorporated Nigeria into the global capitalist system. The Nigerian society however is merely a consumer nation that imports a variety of commodities from the advanced or developed countries. The advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has further maintained the dependency relation through online shopping where goods can be bought online via the use of the internet and delivered to consumer's door step across the globe.

Worst still, contemporary Nigerian state does not provide welfare for its citizens, but serves the interest of the politicians and elites, captains of industries, multinational corporations and CEOs of big conglomerates such as Alhaji Aliko Dangote. This often leads to reactions and conflicts between the two classes – oppressing and oppressed. Thus, strikes and protests by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Trade Union Congress (TUC), students unions and civil societies among others are often the order of the day.

Therefore, the way forward is when the Nigerian working class forms a consciousness of its own, free of personal rivalry and collectively oppose the Nigerian bourgeoisie and possibly overthrows it will there be change. This sounds utopian. However, it is pertinent for Nigeria to encounter a revolutionary

change from her existing social and political structures in order to move the country forward.

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