Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

from *The Communist Manifesto*

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**Bourgeois and Proletarians**

The history of every past society is the history of struggles between classes.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another. They carried on a ceaseless fight, now open, now hidden. The fight ended every time with a revolutionary reorganization of the whole of society or with the common ruin of the classes at odds.

In times long past, almost everywhere we find a complete separation of society in distinct groups. In various ways society broke down into classes. In ancient Rome we have patricians, proven warriors, common people, poor workers, and slaves. In the Middle Ages there were feudal lords and their vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, itinerants. In each of these classes, there were gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that followed on the end of feudal society did not leave behind the opposition between classes along the way. It simply settled down and brought about new classes, new modes of oppression, new forms that continued the old struggles. Our times, the times of the middle classes, have all the same simplified the relations between the classes. Society has increasingly broken down into two large camps. At odds are two classes facing off against one another, those with property and those who work, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Out of the serfs of the Middle Ages came the free citizens of the first cities, and out of these citizens there developed the first elements of the bourgeoisie.

<...> There resulted a revolutionary reduction of feudal society.

The feudal way of guild production and distribution could not meet the needs of the new markets. The guild masters were pushed aside by the industrious middle classes as factories arose. The piecework of the different corporations faded away as factories handled the various stages of producing marketable goods.

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...the bourgeois [did] grow and increase its capital and push aside to leave behind the classes descended from the Middle Ages.

So we see how the bourgeoisie of modern times is itself the outcome of a long process that rearranged whole modes of producing and moving goods.

Each stage of the bourgeois expansion generated political progress that went along with these events. The feudal lords ruled over the class below. This class then supplied itself with weapons and governed the communal accords of city republics. Monarchies also drew income from a subject population. When the industrial age began overwhelming the nobility as a ruling class, as well as absolute monarchies, and as industry spread though the lands, industry began claiming for itself political rule through representation of the class that had brought about the industrial age and its world market. Modern political rule of the state is nothing more than the committee that runs the business of the whole bourgeois class.

The bourgeoisie has put its revolutionary mark on history.

Where it took over power, the bourgeoisie put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, and idyllic conditions. It mercilessly shredded the checkered feudal accords between a God-sanctioned
nobility and the people, as it let rise between men relations reached by naked interest and hard cash. It drowned the blessings of prayers answered and the enthusiasms of knighthood and the sentimental celebrations of art in the icy waters of selfish calculation. The worth of good men faded into its market value, the liberty that had been won in hard struggle and sanctioned by law became the freedom to leave conscience aside and get the best price possible. In sum, the bourgeois let drift away the exploitation well covered by religious and political accord for an open and shameless exploitation, dry and direct.

The bourgeoisie stripped bare all the proper services, esteemed and even revered, as it did away with false privilege. It changed doctors and lawyers, ministers and poets, men of learning as well, into paid laborers. It tore away the veil of sentiment behind which sat the family, broke down its relations, and returned it to a pure matter of money and possessions. The bourgeoisie has shown how brutal force and thick-skinned insensitivity, which those who look to the past admire so much in the Middle Ages, has come to its fitting completion. First it proved what human effort can bring about. It brought off marvels of labor other than the Egyptian pyramids, the Roman aqueducts, and the Gothic cathedrals. It organized impressive treks other than the migrations of peoples and crusades.

The bourgeoisie cannot get by without constantly revolutionizing its instruments of production, and along with them the relations of production, and as well all the relations of society. The primary condition of existence of all earlier industrial classes had been the changeless reliance on the old ways of production. The constant reorganization of production, the continuous rattling of all social regularities, the everlasting uncertainty and shifting about set the time of the bourgeoisie apart from all earlier ages. All fast-fixed relations with their worthy ways and established ideas and outlooks have come apart and new practices end up old before they have settled in. All that stands firm as authorized has gone up in smoke, everything sacred is secularized, and people are finally made to look on their daily ways and neighborliness with knowing eyes.

The bourgeoisie has subjected each country to the rule of cities. It has brought about huge cities. It has as well seen to a population of the city well beyond that of the countryside. In this way it has disengaged an important part of the population from the idiocies of life in the country. Just as it has made the countryside dependent on the city, so has it made the barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on civilized people, the farmers on the bourgeois, the East on the West.

More and more the bourgeoisie put an end to the scattered condition of means of production, the ownership of property, and of the population. It gathered the people together, centralized the means of production, and concentrated property in the hands of the few. The inevitable consequence was political centralization. Independent, or loosely joined provinces with distinct interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation were bundled together into one nation, one government, one legal system, one national and cohesive interest, one border control.

We have already seen how the means of production and distribution on which the bourgeoisie built arose out of feudal society. At a given stage in the development of such production and distribution, the conditions in which feudal society produced and marketed, that is, the feudal organization of agriculture and manufacture, with a word the feudal mode of holding property, no longer matched the forces of production. Such ownership was restraining
rather than promoting production. It had tied itself up in all sorts of ways. It had to shed its feudal entanglements and it did so.

In its place came open competition, along with its appropriate social and political laws, under the economic and political rule of the bourgeois class.

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