Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

from The Communist Manifesto

Translated by David Flood, OFM, St. Bonaventure University

Chapter 1. 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.

The discovery of the Americas and the rounding of the Cape laid out new territory for the bourgeoisie. The markets of India and China, the colonization of America, trade between the colonies, the increase of goods and wares gave commerce, traffic, and industry a boost never known before. 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.

The markets did not cease expanding, demand grew and grew. Even the factories could not keep up. Steam and machinery revolutionized industrial production. The early factories gave rise to modern industry and its plants, middle-class businessmen led to millionaire industrialists. The foremost of the bourgeoisie put whole armies to work.

Industry of this size brought about the world market, prepared by the discovery of America. The world market saw to the immeasurable expansion of trade, navigation, and communication on land. This development resulted in the further spread of industry. Just as industry, commerce, navigation, and railroads spread throughout, to the same degree did the bourgeoisie 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 bourgeoisie 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 need to expand its market for products ceaselessly drives the bourgeoisie around the globe. It has to get space everywhere, settle in everywhere, develop connections everywhere.

By developing global markets the bourgeoisie has made the whole world’s production and consumption cosmopolitan. It has snatched the local grounds for industry from under a country’s feet, much to the regret of reactionaries. A country’s traditional industries are swept away and go on being swept away from day to day, pushed aside by new industries as countries try to keep up with the times. These industries no longer depend on local raw stuffs, but work on material from the farthest reaches of the world. They produce not only for the local country, but for all countries where the products are of use. New products replace a country’s traditional ones
and cover old needs, as these products from far-off lands of other climate turn into something that must be had. In the interdependence of the countries the new products crisscross one another to reach countries and regions that had fared for themselves in their own complacency. And as in material production, so too with the world of thought and custom. Cultural achievements of individual lands become common property, as it becomes more and more difficult to withdraw into one country’s individuality and its limits. Out of the many national and local publications there arises a world literature.

The bourgeoisie draws even the most backward of countries into civilization by a rapid improvement of the means of production and through the ever increasing clarity of communication among peoples. The very bearable cost of goods are the heavy artillery with which the bourgeoisie shoots all Chinese walls to smithereens. It turns the artillery as well on the stubborn hatred of barbarians towards strangers and forces their submission. It makes all countries embrace as their own its productive practices, would they not be taken completely apart. The bourgeoisie forces acceptance of what it calls civilization on countries. They have to become bourgeois. In a word, it brings about a world that looks like itself.

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.

The bourgeoisie created more massive and more colossal productive forces in hardly a hundred years of its rule than all previous generations together. Harnessing the forces of nature, new machinery, the use of chemicals in industry and farming, steam-propelled ships, trains, electrical telegraphy, vast regions now agriculturally productive and rivers opened to traffic, peoples settled on new lands as if by magic: what earlier century could even imagine that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?

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.

We see a similar movement in our day. Modern bourgeois society, with its practices of production and distribution, with its way of handling property, has conjured up before us a powerful means of seeing to life’s supplies. In that it resembles the sorcerer who has summoned
forth from below forces it can no longer control. For decades past the history of industry and commerce has been nothing more than the history of the indignation of modern powers of production against the modern conditions of production, that is, the mode of property that assures the way the bourgeoisie lives and rules. We need no more than name the crises of commerce. Periodically it appears, threatening the existence of the whole bourgeois society. The crises see to the destruction of a major portion, not only of what has been produced but even of the means of their production. With the crises there comes an epidemic of society which would have seemed nonsense to all the epochs that had gone before, the epidemic of excessive production. Suddenly society finds itself thrown back into a condition of passing barbarianism. A famine, a war of general destruction seems to have estranged it from all the means of life. Industry and trade seem destroyed. And how is that? The reason: it is burdened with too much civilization, too much of life’s goods, too much industry and trade. The capacity to produce, which stands at its service, no longer promotes bourgeois civilization and bourgeois property. On the contrary, the capacity has become overwhelming for bourgeois reality. It is held back. As soon as it gets beyond bourgeois restraint, it will bring the whole of bourgeois society to disarray. It threatens the very existence of its proprietary hold on things. The wealth produced by the bourgeoisie’s ways has proven too much for its author and overwhelms its ability to contain it.

How can the bourgeoisie overcome these crises? On the one hand it can see to the forced destruction of a mass of productive means. On the other hand it can conquer new markets and see to the thorough exploitation of old ones. And how to go about that? It sees everywhere still more powerful crises while reducing the means to avoid them.

The bourgeoisie had the weapons to lay low feudalism. It now turns them against itself.

However the bourgeoisie not only forged the weapons that saw to its death. It saw to the men who would wield the weapons: modern workers, the proletariat.

In the same degree to which the bourgeoisie, that is, capital, developed, to that degree did the proletariat, the class of modern laborers, develop itself. They lived no longer than by the work they found, they found work no longer than capital supplied them labor. These workers were forced to sell themselves, one by one. They were a commodity as was any other thing on sale, and consequently in similar fashion subject to all the bargaining of commerce and all the ups and downs of the markets.

With the spread of machines and the division of labor, a common worker saw no distinctive character to his role; there was nothing there that attracted him. He belonged to the machine; he was trained to give the machine the most simple and boring attention. He earned little for his meager service. He got enough to keep alive and to see to the continuation of his race. The price of the commodity, including labor, made up the cost of production. To the same degree that the offensiveness of the work grew, so did the pay decrease. Even more, to the degree that machine and the division of labor increased, so did the mass of work grow, either through an increase in work hours or through the increase of work done in the given time, or through the increase in the speed of the machine and so on.

Modern industry changed the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the large factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of workers are crowded together in the factory and organized as soldiers. The workers are lined up as ordinary soldiers of industry under the watch of a complete hierarchy of officers, minor and major. They are not only the servants of the bourgeois class and the bourgeois state; they are turned into the daily and hourly servants of the machine. They are looked down on by the one in charge and above all by the individual
bourgeois manufacturer himself. This despotic control is all the more petty, spiteful, and bitter, the more often gain is made known as the final purpose.

The less manual labor demands skill and strength, that is, the more modern industry develops, the more is the work of men pushed aside by that of women and children. Differences in gender and age no longer count socially in the worker class. All that remains is the work of instruments, different in cost by gender and age.

As soon as the manufacturer has finished exploiting the laborer to the degree that he pays him cash, then other members of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker and so on, set upon him.

Those who till then belonged to the lower middle class, people with smaller businesses and trades, retirees and artisans and farmers, all of these classes slip into the proletariat. Either they lack the capital to do business on the scale of major industry; they cannot keep up and soon fade away; or they do not have the new skill needed for success. The proletariat finds recruits in all classes of the population.

The proletariat passes through successive stages. Its struggle with the bourgeoisie begins with its existence. At first laborers struggle alone, then workers at one factory, then workers of one sector of production at one place in revolt against the one bourgeois directly exploiting them. They direct their attacks not only against the conditions of bourgeois production, but against the very instruments of production. They destroy the wares from elsewhere causing them trouble. They break apart the machines, they torch the factories. They try to bring back the journeyman practice that passed as the Middle Ages faded away.

At this stage the workers made up a disorganized and splintered mass scattered across the land. They were not yet a mass that held together because they joined together, but the result of the merging bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie had to stir up the whole proletariat in order to realize their own political goal and, for a while, succeeded. At this stage the workers fought, not against their enemy, but the enemy of their enemy, against what remained of the absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeois. In this way the encompassing movement of history lay concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Every victory so attained was a victory of the bourgeoisie.

However, as industry continued to grow, the proletariat not only grew in numbers. It was pressed together into larger masses. Its force grew and it became conscious of its strength. The livelihood and the interests of the workers became more and more alike, for the machinery was more and more wiping away differences in the work done and forcing down the pay practically everywhere to the same low level. The increasing competition among the bourgeois and the consequential crises in commerce made the workers’ pay unreliable. The constant and rapid improvement of the machinery rattled the workers’ very hold on life. The clashes between the individual laborer and the individual bourgeois were increasingly taking on the character of clashes between two classes. The workers start forming alliances against the bourgeois. They come together in demanding their pay. They see to their own associations in order to be well armed for these occasional outbreaks. Here and there the struggle breaks out in riots.

From time to time the workers seize the upper hand; it does not last long. The real consequence of the clashes is not immediate success, but the way the workers reach out and gather more and more into their union. They put to profit the growing means of communication, one dimension of the expanding industry, as they reach out and bond with workers in other localities. As soon as they establish contact, they give the many local conflicts a common character and soon have a nationally unified class struggle.
But every class struggle is a political struggle.

The union, which the bourgeois of the Middle Ages with their miserable roads needed centuries to establish, the proletariat with the railways of modern times achieved in a few years. The proletarians had organized as a class and consequently as a political party. Again and again they tore it apart through the differences among the workers themselves. Yet repeatedly they came together again, more strong, sturdy and powerful. They forced the legal recognition of their particular interests by playing off differences among the bourgeoisie. In this way they got the ten-hours bill in England.

The basic differences within traditional society itself played themselves out in various ways to the benefit of the working class. The bourgeoisie found itself in constant battle. Initially it was against the aristocracy. Later it arose within the bourgeoisie itself, as some bourgeois had difficulty contending with interests particular to industrial progress. It always found itself at odds with the commercial interests of foreign countries. In all these battles the bourgeoisie ended up forced to call for help on the working class. It dragged the workers into the politics of the day. As a result the bourgeois themselves supplied the proletariat with their own cultural material, that is with weapons against their bourgeois interests.

Furthermore, with time, as we saw above, thanks to the progress of industry, entire sections of the ruling class were toppled into the proletariat, or at least felt their living conditions threatened. They too supplied the proletariat with abundant educational material.

At a time when the conflict between the classes nears decision and resolution, the disintegration process within the ruling class, within the whole society of old, takes on such a heavy and garish character that a small portion of the ruling class severs connections with society and takes up the revolutionary cause, the cause of the class which bears the future in its hands. Just as earlier portions of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so in our day a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat. More precisely, a part of the bourgeois ideologues makes the move, those who, from a higher point of view, have grasped theoretically the whole historical movement.

Of all the classes that stand today over against the bourgeoisie, the proletariat alone is truly a revolutionary class. The classes that remain come undone and settle into the vastness of industry. Only the proletariat has constituted itself.

The lower strata, the minor industrialists and distributors, the artisans and farmers, all fight against the bourgeoisie to keep afloat their existence as middle configurations. They are conservative and not revolutionary. Worse still, they are reactionary, for they try to spin the wheel of history backwards. If they are revolutionary, they are so with reference to their impending move to join the proletariat. In this way they are not protecting their immediate interests, but those of the future. They let fall their own point of view and take up that of the proletariat.

The underclass, the Lumpenproletariat, the asocial and undone dregs of the lowest levels of the old society, gets heaved, thanks to the proletariat revolution, into the movement here and there. In accord with their past life, they will find it easier to let themselves be bribed into reactionary intrigues.

The living conditions of the old society have already been done away with in the living conditions of the proletariat. The proletarian has no property. His relations with his wife and children no longer have anything in common with the bourgeois family. His national character has been thoroughly stripped away through industrial labor, through his subjugation by capital, the same in England as in France, the same in the United States as in Germany. Laws, morality,
religion are for him just so much bourgeois prejudice that covers just so many bourgeois interests.

All classes of the past that came out on top set out to assure the place in life which they had acquired. They subjected society to the conditions of their success. The working class can seize society’s productive forces only if, once on top, it does away with the strategies of acquisition employed to reach control. It has nothing private to hold on to and must do away with all the assured privacy of the past and all ways of acquiring property.

All movements of the past were movements of minorities or in the interest of minorities. The movement of proletarians is the movement that made itself out of an overwhelming majority in the interest of the overwhelming majority. The proletariat, the lowest level of today’s society, cannot raise itself and stand on its own without smashing to smithereens the whole upper level that constitutes official society. Although the contents of the proletariat’s struggle against the bourgeoisie are not national, their form is. Understandably, the proletariat of a given country has, first of all, to get rid of its own bourgeoisie. When we trace the general phases of the proletariat’s development, we follow the more or less hidden civil war within a given society. It continues up to the point where the proletarians burst out into an open revolution and establish control of the proletariat through the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

Every previous society, as we have seen, was based on the enmity between the oppressing and oppressed classes. However, if a class is to prevail over another, it has to make sure it allows those in submission to eke out the ways and means of their survival. The serf succeeded as serf to scratch his way into communal citizenship, just as the citizen succeeded in shaking off the yoke of feudal absolutism over the commune. The modern worker, on the other hand, instead of drawing advantage from the progress of the economy, sinks deeper and deeper under the fate of his own class. The worker becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops still more rapidly than population and wealth. It often comes to pass that the bourgeoisie is incapable of remaining for long the dominant class in society and imposing the practices of its class as the basic law of success. It cannot rule because it is unable of assuring its slave survival in his slavery. The reason is it cannot avoid letting him sink into a situation where it must feed him instead of being fed by him. Society cannot continue under the rule of the bourgeoisie, whose way of life is no longer compatible with society.

The basic condition for the existence and the rule of the bourgeois class lies in heaping up the wealth in private hands through the constitution and increase of capital. Capital relies on wages. Wages come solely from the contest among workers. Industrial progress, borne forward by a bourgeoisie without will and resolution, replaces the competitive isolation of the workers with an association of revolutionary purpose. As industry reaches new levels, the very grounds on which the bourgeoisie produces and claims its products will be snatched away from under its feet. It produces above all those who will bury it. Its downfall and the victory of the proletariat are both unavoidable.