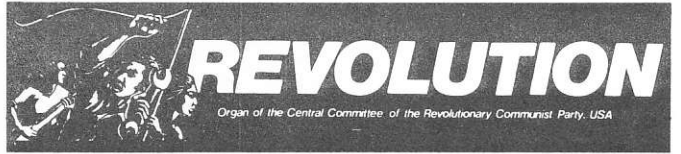


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Classes and Class Struggle



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What do communists stand for? And, in particular, what do we mean when we talk about classes, class struggle and proletarian revolution? The following article is written in answer to these frequently asked questions—Ed.

Communism as a philosophy and as a social system represents the highest interests of the working class. The rulers of this country, just as they distort Communism, also distort the role of the working class in society.

One of their favorite deceptions is to describe the workers as “middle class” and oppose them to the very poor. They try desperately to rob the workers of real class consciousness, just as they rob them of the material wealth they produce.

They obscure the truth that the basic factor in determining class is not income, but *relationship to the means of production*.

A worker in a steel factory, for example, may have the same income as a small shopkeeper. But the steel worker owns nothing with which to earn his living, except his brawn and brain. In order to live, he must *sell his labor power*—exchange his ability to apply his brawn and brain to materials, machines, etc., for a wage.

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Worker a Wage-Slave

The materials, machines, the factory building and the land it sits on—the *means of production*—do not belong to the worker. They belong to a capitalist who buys the worker's labor power and puts him to doing whatever work will make the most profit for the capitalist. Under the rule of capital, the worker is a wage-slave.

The small shopkeeper, on the other hand, may do some work in his shop, but he also *owns* the shop, the commodities sold in it, and any equipment used in it. And, in most cases, he hires a few clerks, or other "help." While he may not be rich, he is master of his little shop.

The steel worker and the small shopkeeper may both be "little people," but they belong to separate classes in society. Society is basically an organized way that a stable community of people produce and distribute the things they need to live. At each stage of the development of society, people enter into definite *social* relations with each other, in order to carry out production.

This establishes the class structure of society. Those who completely control the means of production stand as lord and master over those who own little or none. Whichever group owns the means of production also controls the way in which the wealth produced by all of society will be distributed.

State Protects Class Interests

The owning class, as the ruling class, sets up the *state*—the military and police, bureaucracy and legal system—and other institutions, political,

educational, etc., which protect its rule. And the ruling class promotes the ideas, philosophy, habits and customs—the *ideology* and *culture*—which reflect its position in society and reinforce its rule. To struggle against the ruling class, the oppressed classes also develop institutions, ideology and culture that represent their class interests.

To break this down, we only have to look at the way different groups in our society make their living, the role they play in society generally, and the outlook that characterizes each group as a social class.

There are the bankers and other big stockholders who have controlling interest in the large corporations—the monopoly capitalists, or *bourgeoisie*. (There are different layers in the capitalist class, or *bourgeoisie*, but generally this term is used to refer to the monopoly capitalists who are clearly the dominant section of this class.) They do no work useful to society, but they monopolize ownership of the means of production and control the government as a tool to oppress the majority of society. They are the ruling class.

Directly opposed to them are the workers in the large factories and other working people who own no means of production and sell their labor power to capital. As Karl Marx said, they can live only so long as they work, and can work only so long as they enrich the capitalists. This is the working class, or *proletariat*, which makes up the largest single class in our society. The working class includes workers in the "service industries" and office workers (such as typists, not professionals) as well as those engaged in manufacturing. It includes all unemployed workers (whether or not they are "officially" counted as such by the

authorities) and working class housewives.

Between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat stand various other groupings—shopkeepers, small factory owners, small farmers and others who own a small share of the means of production. These, together with the professionals, students and intellectuals, lower-level managers, etc., form the middle strata of society, generally called the *petty bourgeoisie*.

Finally, there are those who live by illegal means—the criminals, or *lumpenproletariat* (excluding the big crime syndicates, Mafia, etc., which are really part of the bourgeoisie).

None of these groups is sealed off from all others, in an air-tight bag. There are overlappings, and within each group there are, of course, sub-groups and strata. (In our society, the class structure is further complicated because the oppressed nationalities have, to varying degrees, class structures within their own population concentrations, which have their own particular features, even while they fit into and conform to the basic class structure of our society as a whole.)

But in general, members of each class in society have a common method of earning their income, based on their common relationship to the means of production.

And each of these groups is characterized by a particular world view, or *ideology*, also founded on their relationship to the means of production.

Bourgeois Outlook

The bourgeoisie, because they make private profit by exploiting labor, promote the ideas of selfishness and “look out for number one.” They

reduce all relations between people to cold cash. They use the mass media, the educational system and other institutions, which they own and control, to promote these ideas.

Even their advertisements not only sell their particular products, but their system and their outlook in general. Equitable Life Insurance—“Is there anyone else in the whole human race/with your kind of style and your kind of grace? . . . No, there’s nobody else like you. . . .” Benjamin Moore, Mooreguard Paints—“I’m using this paint (supposedly the best) because it’s *my* house” (the idea is that if it’s somebody else’s house you could use lousy paint), and so on.

This bourgeois culture is aimed at confusing and dividing the working people to keep them enslaved to the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie constantly promote the notion that they are rich and run things because they are smart, they worked hard (!) or maybe “lady luck smiled on them,” while the workers are at the bottom because they are stupid or lazy, or fate is against them (born under a bad sign, etc.).

The small capitalists and other petty bourgeoisie, while they are opposed to the big monopolies, want to break up the power of the monopolies so that they can have a chance to compete and become rich themselves. They look down on the workers and try to maintain their position above them. Because of their basically unstable “in-between” position, they waver between following after the bourgeoisie and uniting with the proletariat in struggle against the bourgeoisie.

The lumpenproletariat, who are really a kind of “illegal petty bourgeoisie,” may lead a very desperate existence. But they live by ripping people

off—especially the workers who are most accessible to them. While sections of the “lumpen” may be won over by a powerful class conscious workers’ movement, as a group the lumpenproletariat is most easily bribed to serve the monopoly capitalists in attacking the workers’ movement.

Proletarian Ideology

The working class is characterized by its own world outlook, which differs from that of every other class. Because workers engage in large-scale, *socialized* labor—thousands and millions of workers cooperating to produce the wealth of society—and because they have this wealth stolen by the capitalists, the outlook that characterizes the working class—*proletarian ideology*—is based on the principles of cooperation, equality and deep hatred for the exploitation of man by man.

The class conscious workers see the need and the possibility to take the large-scale means of production out of the hands of the capitalist thieves and make them the common property of society—*socialize* them—in order to bring them into harmony with the socialized character of labor, to develop society and distribute the wealth according to the needs of the people.

Of course, not every member of the working class grasps the outlook of his class at any given time, and not even the most class conscious worker is “100% pure proletarian” in his ideology. No one living in a society divided into classes, and especially one still ruled by the bourgeoisie, can

escape the influence of bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology.

This is why the working class must develop its own political party, made up of its most class conscious members, who, through struggle, criticism and self-criticism can collectively grasp and apply working class ideology—Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought—in opposition to the ideology of the bourgeoisie (and other exploiting classes) and, on that basis, can act as the vanguard, or general staff, of the workers’ struggle against the bourgeoisie and all forms of exploitation.

The struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie arises from the basic contradiction of capitalist society—that production is highly socialized while the *appropriation* of the wealth produced is concentrated in a very few hands.

As capitalism develops, this contradiction becomes more and more intense. The road to resolving this contradiction can only be opened through proletarian revolution—the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the seizure of power by the proletariat, the smashing of the bourgeois state and the establishment of a state ruled by the masses of working people in the interests of society as a whole. ■

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