

The Proletariat

- What defines the proletariat? (*Manifesto*, 8a)
 - Wage laborers
 - Because they must “sell themselves piecemeal,” (rent themselves out by the day or hour) they are a commodity
 - As a commodity, exposed to all the fluctuations of the market
 - The commodification of the wage laborer in Marx’s economics
 - The labour theory of value
 - Use value vs. exchange value
 - The exchange value of a product or commodity = the quantity of average human labor incorporated into the product or commodity
 - The theory of surplus value
 - Profit comes from buying and selling labor –buying labor with wages, selling the labor incorporated into commodities
- Proletarians live only as their labor increases capital
 - Capital = wealth devoted to production of wealth
 - Because of the need to constantly revolutionize the instruments of production, a good portion of the “profit” generated must be converted back to capital
 - The lives wage laborers tied to systemic needs for increased capital

Alienation

- To be alienated is to be “othered” – to be separated or estranged from oneself
- Early attempt to explain the fundamental features of bourgeois economic reality as rooted in the alienation of the worker (“Estranged Labor” in the 1844 manuscripts)
- Work in general is simply a process in which a human incorporates his or her ideas into matter
 - **It is the distinctively human activity of self-expression**
- Under capitalism, work becomes not self-expression, but something that separates the workers from themselves and their humanity
- There are four interconnected strata in which worker are separated or alienated from themselves

The four aspects of alienation

- Workers encounter the **product of labor** as an alien object – the products belong to the employer, not to the workers
 - The total product constitutes the wealth of the bourgeoisie – and therefore the power which the bourgeoisie has over them
 - What enslaves the worker is actually the workers' own labor incorporated into the products belonging to the employer
- Worker encounter the very process of work – their life activity – as foreign or alien
 - The employer – not the worker –dictates when, how and where work will take place
 - In work, workers don't express their own ideas, but the employer's ideas
 - Work is experienced as onerous and unpleasant
- The worker is alienated from his/her “species being” – from the very essence of being human
 - What is distinctive of human is their intellectual capacities, by virtue of which they can incorporate their ideas into matter
 - Under bourgeois relations of production, work is simply a means to a wage
 - The wage is simply a means to satisfy the needs we have “in common with the animal”
 - What is distinctive of us as humans becomes merely a means to satisfy what we have in common with animals
- Estranged from humanity in the form of other humans
 - Workers are essentially at odds with the employer exploiting them
 - They are in competition with other workers for access to work

Proletarian revolution

- Different from all previous revolutions
 - All previous revolutions were by and for minorities
 - “The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority” (*Manifesto*, 10b)
 - Previous revolutions all ended by bringing a new exploiting class to power
- The battle cry of proletarian revolution: abolition of private property (*Manifesto*, chapter II)
 - This means abolition of bourgeois property
 - End of the control of the means of production by a minority who use the means of production to advance their interests at the expense of the interests of exploited classes
- The aim of proletarian revolution
 - That workers have control over their own lives at work
 - An end to exploitation
 - A classless society

The course of proletarian revolution

- The aims of proletarian revolution can be achieved only in stages
- Marx has *no* detailed blue-print for what the final stage will look like
- Three phases of a proletarian revolution (*Manifesto*, pp. 15b-a6a)
 - *Stage 1*: Win the “battle of democracy”
 - “...raise the proletariat to the position of ruling”
 - This may or may not require violent revolution
 - *Stage 2*: Wrest all capital from the bourgeoisie
 - Centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state
 - Increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible
 - This stage is sometimes called the “dictatorship of the proletariat” – see especially Lenin’s *The State and Revolution*. This is sometimes called “state capitalism”
 - *Stage 3*. The disappearance of classes and of political power
 - All production will be “concentrated in a vast association of the whole nation”
 - When this happens, all class distinctions will disappear
 - When this happens, “the public power will lose its political character”
 - “Political power, properly so-called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.”