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On The 150th Anniversary of the Communist Manifesto

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Why do we revere Communist Manifesto even after long 150 years?

For centuries human race was suppressed by human exploitation, national, communal, ethnic and racial oppression, devastating wars and man-made crisis and calamities. Communist Manifesto was the first scientific basis to explain the social causes of these evils and to lay bare the material foundation and objective formulations for putting an end to them. Among the various noteworthy discoveries of Marx, the most important two are: historical materialism and theory of surplus value. It laid the basis of enunciating objective laws of social development and of a science showing how to develop the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and put an end to the rule of capitalism.

While historical materialism provided the laws of social development, surplus value revealed source of bourgeoisie's enrichment – thus unrevealing the mystery of exploitation under capitalism and proving the historical inevitability of the revolutionary overthrow of this formation. Marx regarded science as “a mighty lever of history, as a revolutionary force in the loftiest sense of this word”. The combination of revolutionary thought and revolutionary practice gave rise to the great political ideas of Marxism. The communist manifesto is the embodiment of revolutionary theory and revolutionary tasks and practice, the immortal value of which will never be exhausted.

The Manifesto of the Communist Party – the first all-embracing theoretical document of scientific socialism originated as programme of revolutionary action with brilliant accuracy and in a form amazing, considering the force of its impact and beauty, Marx and Engels, for the first time ever, fully expounded proletarian ideology in the Manifesto.

The most profound contribution of the *Manifesto* of course was the materialist conception of history which it expounded. While the very idea of a materialist conception of history, which makes history an object of analysis rather than a sequence of episodes and personalities, is itself a path-breaking one, the historical materialism of Marx and Engels had four distinguishing features which marked it out from all previous attempts.

1. It recognised an inner dynamics in history and located the source of this movement in the dialectics of the interplay between the social productive forces and the social relations of production, of which the property relations were the most decisive constituent.
2. It showed how this dialectics is realised through the agency of social classes and class struggles.
3. It specifically analysed in a brief but comprehensive fashion how this dialectics was manifesting itself in the historical evolution of the capitalist mode of production.
4. It explained why capitalism was the last antagonistic mode of production, how it created the special historical agency, the proletariat, that would bring about the transcendence not only of capitalism itself but of all class exploitation, and take mankind from its “pre-history” to its “history”.

The power of this outlook came not only from the fact that it was consistent, comprehensive and unflinchingly revolutionary, but above all from the fact that it was true. To be sure, the level of comprehensiveness it reached, though adequate for its purpose at the time, could be, and would be, greatly enlarged subsequently both as the focus of attention shifted beyond Europe, and as capitalism itself underwent changes in conformity with the anticipations of the *Manifesto*. But all subsequent theoretical development represented a concrete application of the basic ideas of historical materialism outlined in the *Manifesto*, a carrying forward of the quest begun by it, rather than a negation of its basic ideas. And this was not because

of some misplaced sense of loyalty to these ideas, but because these ideas were fundamentally true. As Lenin was to remark later: "The strength of Marxism lies in the fact that it is true". This fundamental validity of historical materialism arises from a specific reason. Marx and Engels attributed it, in a proximate sense, to the fact that they started from "real premises": "the premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises...the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity". But this commitment to "real premises" as opposed to dogmas arises from the fact that the Marxist outlook is *uncompromisingly revolutionary*: it is not blinkered by the need to serve any vested interests; it is not constrained by the need to prettify or falsify reality in the narrow interests of any particular self-serving social class or group. Revolutionary socialism as articulated by the Marxist world outlook has an *absolute* need for the truth, and it is for this reason that the *Manifesto* which put forward this outlook as long as 150 years ago has continued to inspire subsequent theoretical development without being negated thereby.

What is happening to capitalism in our time will neither be understood nor correctly assessed if one is not guided by Marx, by the main work of his life - "Capital". Lenin's teachings on imperialism are a direct creative extension of Marx's economic theory. Lenin proved that at this last stage of capitalism every objective condition is created for the transition to socialism and that mankind comes very close to the need for fundamental revolutionary changes.

The opponents of socialism, talking about the "obsoleteness" of Communist Manifesto and Marxism-Leninism, usually refer to new phenomena characteristic of present-day capitalism when the scientific and technological revolution gave a tremendous rise of productive forces. Yes, the capitalism of the end of the 20th Century is different in many respects. Its evolution reflects the enormous growth of productive forces and socialisation of labour, the disintegration of colonial empires, internationalisation of finance capital and the major gains of the working class and the democratic and national liberation movement. With the major setback to socialism in early 90s imperialism is almost free to impose his hegemonistic design and an unipolar world. But the prediction of the Manifesto about the insurmountable crisis of capitalism and its inherent inability to resolve the basic needs of the society and its people comes undeniably true. Capitalism has forever lost the

exclusive right to dispose of the destinies of the peoples when socialism, ushered in with the Great October Revolution, has had its strong appeal across the globe.

Capitalism has, however, succeeded in prolonging its existence. But this has cost and continues to cost the peoples very, very dearly. Moreover, it has created a threat to humanity itself on earth.

Nonetheless, the “old mole of history”, as Marx figuratively described the process paving the way for revolution, continues its work, continues because the nature of capitalism, the essence of its basic contradictions, has not changed and its social evils are accumulating and growing. Life has dispelled the illusions about flourishing and ‘crisis free’ capitalism. At the end of centuries of capitalist expansion, here is how things stand 60% of the world population has 5.3% of world output and income, while more than 83% is in the hand of the richest 20%. Marx’s prediction on this score has thus been fully borne out. The Communist Manifesto says, “The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together”. But in today’s context that massive wealth of capitalism is quite negligible. According to latest UN Human Development Report a vast majority of the world population have little access to safe water and food.

In the Manifesto, Marx and Engels accused the bourgeoisie of creating a society in which private property exists for only one-tenth of the members of the society and “its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths”. It was their precise scientific understanding that the subsequent development of capitalism would inevitably fail to alter this equation which is vindicated today after 150 years – after such an unimaginably strong scientific and technological base and the absence of any threat from socialism.

After such a long period, the truth of the words written by its authors in the preface to the German edition of Communist Manifesto in 1872 can be remembered: “However, much the state of things may have altered during the last 25 years the general principles laid down in this Manifesto are, on the whole as correct today as ever”. In the same preface the practical application of the formulations contained in the Manifesto, they emphasised, will always and every

where depend on the concrete conditions existing at the time. By creatively applying the Marxist dialectical method in his study of the economics and contradictions of the capitalist countries in the new period, Lenin showed that in the period of imperialism – the period of the decline and decay of capitalism – it is possible to break the chain of capitalist states at its weakest link. The aggravation of the contradictions between the imperialist states would help to ensure the victory of the proletarian revolution in Russia which, as Lenin argued, was destined to initiate the socialist revolution. The Great October Socialist Revolution indicated brilliant analysis and prediction by Lenin.

Changes in historical conditions and the practical experience of class struggle of the proletariat in different countries undoubtedly continue to necessitate the further clarification and development of individual propositions in the first programme document of the Communist Party, but its basic, most general principles – those principles which continue to serve as the basis of the world revolutionary process – remain the same.

The Chinese revolution, Vietnamese revolution, Cuban revolution, Korean revolution after Paris Commune and October revolution, are other landmark events for the revolutionary movement, a successful application of science of Marxism elaborated in the Manifesto. Today there is still a growing intense interest in this outstanding piece of Marxist literature. It is now published in almost every languages of the world and is read and studied everywhere. Nor in this interest is purely historical. On acquainting themselves with the ideas contained in this work, the working class and the people in general seeking economic and social liberation find the answers to the most urgent and controversial questions arising in the course of their struggle, discovered the methodology to use examining the high complex of phenomena of economic and political life, and received tremendous encouragement for their historical optimism.

As any historical document, the Manifesto bears the mark of its age, and is therefore best understood in the context of that period which gave birth to it.

Marx had concentrated his research mainly on gigantic modern capitalistic development of his time. Thus the question of working class alliance with the peasantry didn't come prominently. The

weakness was felt during Paris Commune.

Describing the Paris Commune's historic importance for the world at a session of the General Council of the First International on May 23, 1871, Marx said: "The principles of the Commune were eternal and could not be crushed; they would assert themselves again and again until the working classes were emancipated." The Paris Commune was historically important mainly because its government was the world's first government of the working class, a genuine people's government. During the Commune, the French working class showed that the time had come when the proletariat was quite capable of acting as leader of all the progressive forces of society.

By recommending that the Paris Commune should above all win provincial support and get assistance from the peasantry, Marx confronted the Communards with the question of the proletariat's allies in a socialist revolution. But when the Communards tried to implement these recommendations, they encountered sectarian, mainly Proudhonist, sentiments.

Although this, first proletarian revolution took place more than a century ago, the events associated with the Commune have always aroused keen interest everywhere in the world. The working class's revolutionary struggle, which intensified after the French proletariat's heroic action, ie, after the greatest proletarian movement in the 19th century, corroborated the enormous importance of the Commune's legacy. That was the first historical acid test of the Communist Manifesto.

Dwelling on the objective reasons why this first worker's revolution was defeated in spite of the heroism of its participants, Lenin noted that "two conditions, at least, are necessary for a victorious social revolution – highly developed productive forces and a proletariat adequately prepared for it. But in 1871 both of these conditions were lacking. French capitalism was still poorly developed, and France was at that time mainly a petty-bourgeois country (artisans, peasants, shopkeepers, etc). On the other hand, there was no workers' party; the working class had not gone through a long school of struggle and was unprepared, and for the most part did not even clearly visualise its tasks and the methods of fulfilling them".

The Commune's history corroborated the fact that the alliance between the working class, on the one hand, and the peasantry, small urban proprietors, handicraftsmen and the working intelligentsia, on the other, is vital to the victory of the proletarian revolution. In this respect, it is important for the working class to lead all the foregoing social sections. Since the Commune was actually the outcome of a combination of diverse movements, its importance is especially felt today in the struggle to establish a coalition of all emerging proletarian forces which oppose monopoly rule and imperialism.

The founders of scientific communism, Marx and Engels, were the first to advance the idea of the possibility and necessity of a worker-peasant alliance. They stressed that the proletariat must be more than just the ally of the peasants; it must act as their leader, this being its historic mission as creator of a new society.

Basing himself on Marx's and Engel's propositions, Lenin in his work "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social Democrats" (1894), substantiated and further developed the idea of the worker-peasant alliance which was a requisite for the working people's successful struggle for social emancipation.

The Manifesto of the Communist Party summarised, as it were, the development of Marxist theory upto 1848. But now the theory was virtually complete, and it constituted an integral philosophy, a radically new concept of the cognition and transformation of the world. This new concept formed the basis of the programme of the Communist League, the first international party of the revolutionary proletariat.

One of the basic principles of this party and of the teaching that formed the ideological basis of its struggle was and remains to this day – the organic unity of theory and practice. The definition of the theoretical principles of scientific communism in the first two chapters of the Manifesto is therefore logically followed in Chapter III by a critique of various trends for non-proletarian socialism, while the fourth, concluding chapter contains a description of the tactics of the proletariat in various countries.

The indomitable force of Communist Manifesto is felt all over the world even 150 years after its birth. Despite setbacks, distortions

and deviations of the Communist movement, the teachings of the Manifesto and the influence of the ideas of scientific socialism are constantly increasing and the political position of the working class gains in strength. Thanks to the Manifesto the firm conviction of the people in the final victory of their struggle for emancipation, freedom and progress at the expense of immense sacrifice has been given a scientific basis.

And, in this context and idea expressed by Marx is as true today as it was in his lifetime, namely that: "even under the most favourable political conditions, any serious success of the working class depends on the maturity of the organisation which educates and concentrates its forces." The Indian Communists have drawn great inspiration from this historic document.