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Excerpt from A World Without Money: Communism

Les Amis de 4 Millions de Jeunes Travailleurs
1975-1976

An article made of excerpts of the 1975-1976 book 'A World Without Money' ('Un Monde Sans Argent: Le Communisme'). Translation and article by Socialist Party of Great Britain, published in their publication Socialist Standard in July 1979. Originally posted online, with the SPGB's introduction, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20091027060011/https://www.geocities.com/~johngray/stanmond.htm>. Another translation of this section, with slightly different wording, is also available on red texts as part of the full 'A World Without Money.'

Communism is the negation of capitalism. A movement produced by the development and very success of the capitalist mode of production which will end by overthrowing it and giving birth to a new kind of society. In place of a world based on the wages system and commodities must come into being a world where human activity will never again take the form of wage labour and where the products of such activity will no longer be objects of commerce.

Communism does not overthrow capital in order to restore commodities to their original state. Commodity exchange is a link and a progress. But it is a link between antagonistic parts. It will disappear without there being a return to barter, that primitive form of exchange. Humanity will no longer be divided into opposed groups or into enterprises. It will organise itself to plan and use its common heritage and to share out duties and enjoyments. The logic of sharing will replace the logic of exchange.

Money will disappear. It is not a neutral instrument of measurement. It is the commodity in which all other commodities are reflected.

Gold, silver and diamonds will no longer have any value apart from that arising from their own utility. Gold can be reserved in accordance with Lenin's wish, for the construction of public lavatories.

Marx and Engels

Marx and Engels set themselves the task of understanding the development of capitalist society. They did not concern themselves much with description of the future world such as had monopolised the efforts of the utopian socialists. But criticism of capitalism cannot be completely separated from a commitment to communism. The historical role of money and the state can only be really understood from the viewpoint of their disappearance.

That Marx and Engels did not talk more about communist society was due, without doubt paradoxically, to the fact that this society, being less near than it is today, was more difficult to envisage, but also to the fact that it was more present in the

minds of the revolutionaries of their day. When they spoke of the abolition of the wages system in the Communist Manifesto they were understood by those they were echoing. Today it is more difficult to envisage a world freed from the state and commodities because these have become omnipresent. But having become omnipresent, they have lost their historical necessity.

Marx and Engels perhaps grasped less well than a Fourier the nature of communism as the liberation and harmonisation of the emotions. Fourier, however, does not get away from the wages system, since among other things he still wants doctors to be paid, even if according to the health of the community rather than the illnesses of their patients.

Marx and Engels, however, were sufficiently precise to avoid responsibility for the bureaucracy and financial system of the 'communist' countries being attributed to them. According to Marx, with the coming of communism money straightaway disappears and the producers cease to exchange their products. Engels speaks of the disappearance of commodity production when socialism comes. And don't let anyone speak to us about an error of youth, as a whole rabble of marxologists has acquired the habit of doing. Our references are the Critique of the Gotha Programme and Anti-Dühring.

The end of property

What is property? This is not so simple a question to answer. Witness the polemic between Marx and Proudhon. The latter had proposed that 'property is theft'. Proudhon well understood that property does not originate in nature. It is the product of a society where reign relationships of power, violence and the appropriation of the labour of others. It is said that property is theft, while theft is only defined with reference to property; this is to turn round in circles.

The problem becomes more complicated when you go on from property to the abolition of property. Should all property, whether involving means of production or personal possessions, be abolished? Should it be done selectively? Should there be a radical break with all property and anything that resembles it?

Communism chooses this last proposition. It is not a question of transferring property titles but of the simple disappearance of property. In revolutionary society no-one will be able to 'use and abuse' a good because they are its owner. There will be no exceptions to this rule. Buildings, pins, plots of land will no longer belong to anyone, or if you like, they will belong to everybody. The very idea of property will rapidly be considered absurd.

Will everything then equally belong to everybody? Will the first-comer be able to put me out of my house, take my clothes off me or take bread from out of my mouth just because I will no longer be the owner of my house, my clothes or my food? Certainly not; on the contrary, each person's material and emotional security will be strengthened. It is simply that it will not be the right of property that will be invoked as a protection, but directly the interest of the person concerned. Everybody will have to be able to satisfy their hunger – and be housed and clothed – at their convenience. Everybody will have to be able to live in peace.

From scarcity to abundance

The right and the sentiment of property will die out in communist society because scarcity will disappear. People will no longer have to cling to an object for fear of not being able to enjoy it any more if they let go of it for a single instant.

By what magic do you intend to bring out this fabulous era of abundance? the bourgeois will ask ironically. There's no magic about it. We will be able to make abundance appear because it is already here under our feet. It is not a question of creating it but simply of liberating it. It is precisely capital, through submitting people and nature to its yoke for many centuries, that has made abundance a possibility. It is not that communism is suddenly going to produce abundance but that capitalism artificially maintains scarcity.

In communist societies goods will be freely available and free of charge. The organisation of society to its very foundations will be without money.

How can we prevent wealth being grasped by some at the expense of others? Won't our society, after a moment of euphoria while people help themselves to existing resources, risk sliding into chaos and inequality before sinking into disorder and terror?

In developed communist society the productive forces will be sufficient to meet needs. The frantic and neurotic desire to consume and hoard will disappear. It will be absurd to want to accumulate things: there will no longer be money to be pocketed nor wage-earners to be hired. Why accumulate tins of beans or false teeth which you won't use?

In this new world people will not have to constantly pay and keep accounts in order to feed themselves, travel about or amuse themselves. They will rapidly lose the habit. From this will spring a feeling of being genuinely free. People will feel at home everywhere. Not being constantly under surveillance, they won't be tempted to cheat. Why seek to lie or build up secret stocks when you are certain of being able to have your fill?

Gradually the sentiment of property will disappear and will appear retrospectively as somewhat odd and mean. Why cling to an object or a person when the whole world is yours?

The new people will resemble their hunting and gathering ancestors who trusted in a nature which supplied them freely and often abundantly with what they needed to live, and who had no worry for the morrow, over which in any case they had no control. For the people of tomorrow, nature will be the world they will have themselves fashioned and the abundance will be created by their own hands. They will be sure of themselves because they will have confidence in their strength and will know their limitations. They will be without worry because they will know that the morrow belongs to them. Death? It exists. But it is pointless crying over what is inevitable. The point is to be in a position to enjoy the present moment.