

communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state

The Communist Manifesto on the Eventual Disappearance of the State

The Communist Manifesto, a foundational text of Marxist thought, is celebrated for its incisive analysis of class struggle and its call for proletarian revolution. However, a crucial and often less emphasized aspect of its philosophy is its vision of the eventual disappearance of the state. This article delves into the Marxist concept of state dissolution as articulated in the Communist Manifesto and subsequent Marxist literature, exploring the theoretical underpinnings and the historical context of this transformative idea. We will examine the Manifesto's critique of the bourgeois state, its explanation of how the proletariat's seizure of power would lead to a transitional phase, and the ultimate emergence of a stateless communist society. Understanding this key tenet is vital for grasping the full scope of Marxist aspirations for human liberation and societal transformation.

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The Communist Manifesto and the Nature of the State

The Communist Manifesto, penned by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, presents a radical reinterpretation of the state's role in society. Far from viewing the state as a neutral arbiter or a benevolent protector of all citizens, Marx and Engels characterize it as fundamentally an instrument of class

domination. According to their analysis, throughout history, the state has consistently served the interests of the ruling class, acting as a coercive apparatus to maintain its power and suppress the aspirations of the exploited classes. This perspective is central to understanding their thesis on the eventual disappearance of the state, as it posits that the state's existence is intrinsically tied to the existence of class divisions.

The Manifesto argues that in any given historical epoch, the state's laws, institutions, and enforcement mechanisms are designed to uphold the existing property relations and the economic system that benefits the dominant class. Whether it was the feudal lord wielding power through his king or the modern capitalist employing the machinery of the state to protect private property and enforce labor contracts, the underlying function remains the same: to preserve the status quo that perpetuates inequality. This is why the concept of the communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state is so revolutionary; it proposes a future where the very foundation of state power, class antagonism, would be eliminated.

The Bourgeois State: An Instrument of Class Oppression

In their critique of existing societal structures, Marx and Engels dedicate significant attention to the bourgeois state, the political embodiment of capitalist society. They contend that the modern state, arising with the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, is not a representative body for the general will but rather a committee for managing the common affairs of the entire bourgeoisie. This means that the state's primary function is to safeguard the accumulation of capital and the exploitation of labor, which are the cornerstones of the capitalist economic system.

The Manifesto details how the bourgeoisie, through its control of the means of production, also exercises control over the state apparatus. This control is manifested in various ways, including the enactment of laws that protect private property, the use of police and military forces to quell dissent, and the manipulation of public opinion through controlled media and education systems. The concept of the communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state implies that this oppressive structure, the bourgeois state, is a historical product and, therefore, not an eternal or immutable institution.

The authors illustrate this point by observing how the state intervenes to suppress strikes, to enforce wage agreements that favor employers, and to protect the vast wealth accumulated by a minority. Even seemingly democratic states, they argue, ultimately serve the interests of the capitalist class because the economic power of the bourgeoisie dictates political power. The proletariat, lacking ownership of the means of production, is thus systematically disadvantaged and subject to the coercive force of the state whenever its actions threaten the established order.

The Proletariat's Seizure of Power and the Transitional State

The Communist Manifesto outlines a revolutionary pathway for the proletariat, the working class, to overthrow the bourgeois state and establish a new form of political organization. The central idea is that the working class must

first conquer political power, making itself the ruling class and thus using the state as a tool to dismantle the old system. This phase is often referred to as the "dictatorship of the proletariat," a concept that has generated considerable debate and misunderstanding.

However, it is crucial to understand that this "dictatorship" is not intended to be a permanent, autocratic regime. Instead, it is a transitional period, a necessary stage following the revolution where the proletariat consolidates its power and begins the process of social transformation. The primary objective during this transitional phase is to abolish the existing social and economic relations that gave rise to the bourgeois state in the first place.

The Manifesto proposes several measures that the proletariat would implement upon seizing power, which are often referred to as the transitional demands. These measures aim to centralize the means of production in the hands of the state, albeit a state now controlled by the workers, and to lay the groundwork for a classless society. Examples of these measures include:

- Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
- A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
- Abolition of all rights of inheritance.
- Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
- Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
- Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.
- Extension of national factories, instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
- Equal liability of all to labour. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
- Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries, gradually bringing about the same gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by means of a more equable distribution of the population over the country.
- Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, &c., &c.

These measures are not ends in themselves but rather instruments to dismantle the capitalist order and prepare the ground for the eventual disappearance of the state. The success of the communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state hinges on the effective implementation of these transitional policies.

The Withering Away of the State: A Marxist Prophecy

The ultimate goal of the proletarian revolution, as envisioned in the Communist Manifesto and further elaborated by Marx and Engels, is the establishment of a communist society, a society without classes and, consequently, without a state. This concept, often termed the "withering away of the state," is a cornerstone of Marxist theory and a central theme when discussing the communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state.

The logic behind this gradual dissolution is rooted in the Marxist understanding of the state's fundamental purpose. If the state is an instrument to manage and perpetuate class antagonisms, then as class antagonisms cease to exist, the need for the state will also disappear. In a communist society, where the means of production are collectively owned and operated for the benefit of all, there will be no ruling class to be served by a state apparatus. Furthermore, with the elimination of economic exploitation and social inequality, the underlying causes of crime and social disorder that necessitate state intervention will also diminish.

Engels, in his work "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State," provides a more detailed exposition of this process. He argues that as society progresses from primitive communalism to class-divided societies, the state emerges as a mechanism for the dominant class to control the subordinate class. The transition through capitalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat is seen as a historical necessity to overcome these class divisions. Once these divisions are abolished, the coercive functions of the state—the police, the army, the legal system—will become obsolete. Public administration, rather than being a coercive force, will transform into the simple management of economic and social affairs, analogous to how a factory supervisor manages production processes, but without the inherent power imbalances.

In this stateless communist society, the collective will of the people, organized through free association and direct democracy, would guide social and economic life. The alienation and oppression associated with the state would be replaced by freedom, cooperation, and self-governance. The communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state, therefore, points towards a future of human emancipation where the apparatus of coercion and domination is no longer necessary.

Conditions Necessary for State Dissolution

The transition to a stateless communist society is not an automatic or immediate consequence of the proletarian revolution. Marx and Engels identified several crucial conditions that must be met for the eventual disappearance of the state to occur. These conditions are deeply intertwined with the transformation of economic relations and the eradication of class consciousness.

Firstly, the abolition of private property in the means of production is paramount. As long as private ownership of capital exists, there will be inherent conflicts of interest between owners and non-owners, necessitating a state to mediate or enforce these relations. Collective ownership, where the means of production are owned and controlled by the community as a whole, removes the material basis for class division and, consequently, for the

state.

Secondly, the overcoming of scarcity and the establishment of abundance are essential. Marx believed that under communism, the productive forces would be so highly developed that society would be able to satisfy the needs of all its members. In a society of abundance, the struggle for resources, a historical driver of conflict and the need for state control, would largely disappear. Production would be organized to meet human needs rather than to generate private profit.

Thirdly, the development of a new consciousness and a transformation of human nature are critical. In a classless society, individuals would no longer be shaped by the alienating and competitive forces of capitalism. Instead, a sense of social solidarity, cooperation, and shared responsibility would prevail. This transformed consciousness would mean that people would voluntarily adhere to social norms and contribute to the common good without the need for coercive state enforcement.

Finally, the transcendence of the division between mental and manual labor, and between town and country, is also a significant factor. These divisions, characteristic of class societies, create hierarchies and social fragmentation. A communist society, by integrating intellectual and manual work and by harmonizing the relationship between urban and rural life, would foster a more integrated and egalitarian social fabric, further reducing the need for state intervention.

The successful realization of these conditions is what the communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state anticipates. It is a process of profound societal transformation, not merely a political change.

Critiques and Counterarguments Regarding State Disappearance

The Marxist concept of the eventual disappearance of the state has been a subject of extensive debate and criticism since its inception. Many thinkers and political movements have questioned the feasibility and desirability of a stateless society, offering various counterarguments.

One of the most common criticisms centers on the inherent nature of human beings. Critics argue that human beings are inherently self-interested and prone to conflict, and that a state, with its authority and enforcement mechanisms, is necessary to maintain order and prevent anarchy. Without a state, they contend, society would devolve into a chaotic free-for-all, dominated by the strongest or most unscrupulous individuals.

Another significant critique revolves around the practical challenges of managing complex societies without a central authority. Modern states provide essential services such as infrastructure, healthcare, education, and defense. Critics question how these services would be organized and funded in a stateless society, and who would be responsible for coordinating large-scale projects or responding to national crises.

Furthermore, historical attempts to implement Marxist-inspired revolutions have often resulted in the establishment of highly centralized and authoritarian states, rather than their withering away. This outcome has led many to conclude that the state, once established, has a tendency to perpetuate itself and even expand its power, rather than disappear. Critics point to the experiences of various socialist states in the 20th century as evidence against the possibility of state dissolution.

The concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" has also been a point of contention. Critics argue that concentrating power in the hands of any group, even a self-proclaimed vanguard of the working class, inevitably leads to oppression and the suppression of dissent. They question whether such a transitional state could truly relinquish power or whether it would become entrenched.

These critiques highlight the significant theoretical and practical hurdles that must be considered when examining the communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state. The debate continues about whether the conditions for such a dissolution are achievable or even desirable in practice.

The Legacy of the Communist Manifesto's Vision of a Stateless Society

Despite the criticisms and the historical complexities, the vision presented in the Communist Manifesto regarding the eventual disappearance of the state continues to hold significant ideological and philosophical weight. It represents a profound aspiration for human liberation from all forms of oppression, including the coercion and alienation imposed by the state apparatus.

The Manifesto's critique of the state as an instrument of class domination provided a powerful analytical tool for understanding power dynamics in society. This critique has influenced numerous social and political movements, even those that do not explicitly adhere to Marxist ideology, by encouraging critical examination of state power and its relationship to economic and social inequality.

The idea of a stateless communist society, while utopian to many, serves as a benchmark against which existing societal structures can be evaluated. It prompts questions about the ultimate purpose of governance and whether a society that is truly free and equitable can be achieved without centralized coercive power. The aspiration for a society where administration replaces government, and free association replaces political authority, remains a potent ideal for those seeking radical societal change.

Moreover, the underlying principles of moving towards greater social equality, collective well-being, and the reduction of exploitation, which are foundational to the concept of state disappearance, continue to resonate in contemporary discussions about social justice and economic fairness. The enduring legacy of the communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state lies not only in its radical proposal but also in the fundamental critique of power and inequality that underpins it.

Conclusion: The Enduring Significance of the Communist Manifesto on the Eventual Disappearance of the State

The Communist Manifesto's exploration of the eventual disappearance of the state offers a compelling, albeit controversial, vision of a future society freed from the structures of political coercion and class division. By articulating the state as a historical product of class antagonism, Marx and

Engels laid the groundwork for understanding its eventual obsolescence. The Manifesto's core argument posits that as the proletariat, through revolution and the establishment of a transitional state, abolishes class distinctions and the private ownership of the means of production, the very need for a state will cease to exist.

The withering away of the state, as envisioned, is a complex process contingent upon the creation of abundance, the development of a new social consciousness, and the elimination of the material conditions that give rise to exploitation. While historical attempts to implement these ideas have faced significant challenges and criticisms, the fundamental aspiration for a society free from oppression and alienation continues to inspire critical thought and social activism. Understanding the communist manifesto on the eventual disappearance of the state is crucial for appreciating the full scope of Marxist thought and its enduring impact on political philosophy and the ongoing quest for a more just and equitable world.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the Communist Manifesto mean by the 'eventual disappearance of the state'?

The Communist Manifesto, authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, posits that in a communist society, the state, as an instrument of class oppression, would wither away. This means the abolition of standing armies, police, and other repressive apparatuses that maintain the existing power structures.

Why do Marx and Engels believe the state will disappear under communism?

They argue that the state exists to manage the conflicts arising from class antagonism, particularly between the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (workers). In a classless society where private property is abolished, the need for a state to protect one class from another would cease to exist.

Does the Communist Manifesto suggest an immediate abolition of the state?

No, the Manifesto does not advocate for an immediate abolition. It proposes a transitional phase, often referred to as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' where the working class would seize state power to suppress counter-revolution and reorganize society towards communism.

What is the role of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the eventual disappearance of the state?

The dictatorship of the proletariat is seen as a necessary, albeit temporary, stage. It's a state controlled by the working class, used to dismantle capitalist institutions, centralize the means of production, and prepare the ground for a society where class divisions, and thus the need for a state, are eliminated.

How does the abolition of private property relate to the disappearance of the state?

The Communist Manifesto links the state's existence to the protection of private property. By abolishing private ownership of the means of production and collectivizing them, the economic basis for class conflict and the need for a state to defend property rights would be removed.

What are some common criticisms or misunderstandings about the Manifesto's view on the state's disappearance?

A common misunderstanding is that it implies anarchy or a complete absence of social order. Critics also question the practical feasibility of such a transition and the potential for power to become concentrated in new forms, even without a traditional state.

Is the 'withering away of the state' a unique concept to the Communist Manifesto?

While the term 'withering away' is strongly associated with Marx and Engels, the idea of a less coercive or more participatory form of governance in advanced societies has been explored by various thinkers. However, the specific Marxist framework of class struggle as the driver for state abolition is distinct.

What would replace the state in a communist society, according to the Manifesto's vision?

The Manifesto doesn't detail a specific replacement but suggests that public functions, currently performed by the state, would be handled by the community or a system of administration for the general affairs of society, rather than governing people.

How have historical attempts to implement communism in the 20th century interpreted or implemented the idea of state disappearance?

Historically, attempts to establish communist states often resulted in highly centralized and powerful states, leading many to argue that the 'withering away' never occurred or was fundamentally misunderstood. Some interpretations suggest these states became permanent, rather than transitional.

What is the ultimate goal of the state's disappearance for Marx and Engels?

The ultimate goal is to achieve a truly classless, stateless society where individuals are free from exploitation and oppression. This is envisioned as a society of abundance, cooperation, and human emancipation, where 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to the communist concept of the eventual disappearance of the state, with descriptions:

1.

The State Abolished: A Guide to Post-Statist Society

This seminal work explores the theoretical underpinnings of stateless communism, delving into how a society without a coercive governing apparatus might function. It examines the historical arguments for the withering away of the state and proposes practical models for decentralized organization and collective decision-making. The book offers a vision of a world where voluntary cooperation and mutual aid replace state authority.

2.

From Class Struggle to Classless Harmony: The Stateless Horizon

This book traces the Marxist dialectic from the emergence of class-based societies to its ultimate conclusion: a stateless, classless utopia. It meticulously details the historical forces that led to the creation of the state and argues for its inevitable obsolescence as capitalism is overthrown. The author envisions a future where the means of production are communally owned, eliminating the need for state enforcement of private property.

3.

Anarchy's Promise: The End of State Domination

Focusing on the anarchist perspective within communist thought, this title champions the complete abolition of all forms of hierarchical authority, with the state as its prime target. It argues that liberation from oppression can only be achieved through the dismantling of state power and the establishment of self-governing communities. The book explores various strategies for achieving this stateless society, emphasizing direct action and communal autonomy.

4.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat: A Stepping Stone to Statelessness

This work critically examines the transitional phase in Marxist theory where the working class seizes state power, but argues it is a temporary, necessary evil. It posits that this "dictatorship" is designed to suppress counter-revolutionaries and facilitate the transition to a truly communist society, which by its nature, would be stateless. The book delves into the historical debates surrounding this concept and its ultimate purpose.

5.

Communal Living: Building the Stateless Future

This book provides practical insights and historical examples of communities that have strived for statelessness and communal living. It moves beyond

abstract theory to showcase how people have organized themselves without reliance on state structures for resource allocation, conflict resolution, and social organization. The author highlights the importance of voluntary association and cooperative work in building a non-hierarchical society.

6.

The Withering Away: A Theoretical Exploration of State Obsolescence

This title offers a deep dive into the theoretical mechanisms by which the state is predicted to disappear according to communist ideology. It analyzes the economic and social transformations that would render state functions redundant, such as the end of exploitation and the universal abundance of resources. The book explores the philosophical justifications for this ultimate societal evolution.

7.

Beyond the Nation-State: A World Without Borders and Bosses

This book argues that the nation-state is a historical construct intrinsically linked to capitalism and that its demise is a prerequisite for genuine communism. It envisions a global, stateless society where national boundaries and governmental powers are dissolved. The author explores how international cooperation and shared resources would flourish in such a world.

8.

The Free Association: The Essence of Communist Governance

This title focuses on the core principle of "free association" as the foundation of stateless communist society. It explains how individuals would freely and voluntarily associate to meet their collective needs and pursue common goals, without the compulsion of state law. The book emphasizes the power of self-organization and the natural inclination of people to cooperate when freed from external domination.

9.

The Great Transformation: From State Control to Human Emancipation

This book frames the transition to a stateless communist society as the ultimate stage of human liberation. It charts the historical trajectory of human societies, from primitive communism through various forms of state and class oppression, to the final emancipation from all forms of domination. The author provides a grand narrative of societal progress culminating in a stateless, fully realized human potential.

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