COMMUNIST MANIFESTO HANDOUT

To begin, inequality always existed in society. Marx and Engels write: “in the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank” (p. 482).

Marx and Engels use the term “modern bourgeois society” to refer to what we understand to be the “class system”.

There are two key ideas that underlie Marx and Engels analysis of social class within a capitalist economic system:

1. There are 2 social classes

   **The Bourgeoisie** – The owners of the means of production - (the resources which are used to produce profit, and therefore wealth).

   **The Proletariat** – The workers who sell their labor to the bourgeoisie – (workers keep the profits they make from their workers' efforts).

2. These two classes are inherently in opposition to one another. What makes life good for the owners (securing profits) automatically takes away from the workers, and anything that makes life better for the workers automatically takes away from owners. Antagonism is built into the system itself regardless of how individuals think about it.

An aside: Marx and Engels also referred to the power differences between these two groups stating: “each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class” (p. 483).

**Latent Functions / Dysfunctions of a capitalist economic system:**

- Change is normal.
- Global expansion of markets.
- The creation of periodic economic crises (Epidemic of overproduction).

**The effect of this capitalistic system on its workers:**

They are “a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital… workers are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market” (p. 487).

Furthermore, “the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance and for the propagation of his race” (p. 487). In other words, the minimum wage is the wage that will keep the worker from starving or freezing, and will also allow workers to reproduce (creating the next generation of workers).

As the division of labor increases and tasks become more and more menial, labor becomes more and more alienating.

Also with the division of labor, laborers become increasingly indistinguishable. (Instead of craftsmen, we have "appendages of machines".)

Middle-class shopkeepers, trades people, etc., become proletarians b/c their skills are rendered worthless by new methods of production or they need more capital to be successful. (Think how grocery stores keep getting bigger and bigger, putting "Mom & Pop" stores out of business.)