

An Introduction: *Proletarians and Communists* and the *Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation*

In the selected readings of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx discusses four concepts: 1) the distinguishing feature of Communism is the abolition of bourgeois property, not property in general; 2) wage labor does not create any property for the laborer, rather, it creates capital for the capitalist;¹ 3) Communism does not give rise to laziness, and in reality, the bourgeois who do not work gain everything and the laborers who do all the work, gain nothing; 4) capitalist property is in the hands of the few ruling elite and not in the hands of the majority, and it is this ruling elite, the bourgeoisie, who also decides the laws of the wage-labor class.

The above concepts are a prelude to Chapter 32 of *Capital*, where Marx discusses the course or movement of capitalist accumulation. Marx outlines the idea that the private property of the laborer is his means of production (i.e. the peasant of the land which he cultivates) and it is only when the laborer is the private owner of his own means of labor, set in action by himself, that the petty mode of production advances. However, along the way, there is a shift towards capitalism at the expense of the majority of people, the laborers. Marx asks, “What does the primitive accumulation of capital resolve itself into?” His answer to this question is the termination or expropriation of the owning private property based on the labor of its owners. This is how the bourgeois acquired their capital, insofar as private property is supplanted by *capitalist* private property.

Marx analyses Wakefield’s theory of the colonies, as a case study, to discuss the direction of the capitalist accumulation. In the beginning, the colonies had abundance of labor, the land was still public property and there was plenty of it. The laborers in the colonies owned the means of their own labor and had private property. Therefore, the rules of the capitalist “mother country” no longer applied during this time in the colonies; thus, there was an inherent tension in the socio-economic state of the colonies between capitalists and laborers. The wage laborer was paid more in the colonies and he becomes the owner of private property and a competitor to the capitalist. In order to heal this “anti-capitalist cancer”, the government has to artificially raise the price of property so that the wage laborer works longer and harder before he can become independent afford his own private property, and by this time, a new sector of wage labor will follow in their place.

Marx argues that the ultimate outcome of capitalism is that the system, by its very nature, will be responsible for its own demise. The nature and principles of capitalism is expansion, growth, and non-cooperation. This ethos will result in the weaker/smaller capitalists to be usurped by the larger/stronger capitalists, whereby, control of the capital will be at the hands of the very few. Marx notes that as capitalism grows, so does the misery of the working class, who is massive in number, and united. Ultimately, this will result in the laborers’ revolt. However, Marx emphasizes that once this revolt occurs and capitalism falls, private property will not necessarily be re-established, rather, individual property will be established based on cooperation, possession in common of the land and the means of production which is produced by the laborer himself.²

Is Marxism compatible with human nature and the desire for more than self-preservation?

¹ Marx notes that the way property can be created for the *existing* wage laborer is for new wage-labor to be created for “fresh exploitation”. C. B. Macpherson, *Property, Mainstream and Critical Positions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 62.

² *Ibid.*, 66.