

Class struggle

written by Struggle - La Lucha

January 13, 2019

“The workers have nothing to lose but their chains.” “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” “Workers of the world, unite!”

These are just a few of the slogans still in use today that Karl Marx and Frederick Engels first popularized in 1848 when they wrote the [Manifesto of the Communist Party](#). These popular slogans, and the class society they describe, are just as relevant today as when they were first written more than 170 years ago.

The Communist Manifesto describes the process by which society developed over time so that today it is divided into roughly two great classes. Marxists often refer to the ruling class as the bourgeoisie and the working class as the proletariat. Each class is defined by its relationship to the major means of production.

The ruling class makes up a tiny minority of society. This class owns all the property of industry and commerce—the factories, banks, telecommunication companies, retail stores and more. Most politicians in capitalist democracy are either direct members of the ruling class or its hired agents. Managers, police officers, judges and corporate newspaper editors are also ruling-class agents. The ruling class makes its profits by exploiting the labor of the working class. These capitalists see money as a means to make more money and increase their power. The money reinvested to make more money is called capital.

The ruling class is a small bunch. Many of their names are easily recognized. Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Warren Buffet, Michael Bloomberg, Elon Musk, the Koch Brothers, and the Walton family (owners of Wal-Mart) are just a few of the biggest names in modern capitalism.

The working class includes all the people who create all the goods and services in capitalist society. These workers are only able to survive by working for someone else – a capitalist. A person is still a member of the working class even if their income is supplemented by investments in their 401K or stock options that the company provides its employees in lieu of direct wages.

The unemployed are also workers. Unemployment is a constant and necessary feature of capitalism. The ruling class purposefully forces a significant number of workers into unemployment as a reserve army to compete with employed workers and to drive down wages. The reserve army also provides the capitalist with the flexibility to rapidly hire these unemployed workers at low wages during periods of economic expansion.

Stay-at-home parents are also members of the working class. Their unpaid labor is necessary to raise the next generation of workers. Children are workers' dependents who are being brought up and trained to be future workers. The children of workers are members of the working class.

The working class is an international class that is artificially divided into separate countries because of the history of capitalist rule. In fact, before the emergence of class society there were no countries. The first country, of sorts, might have been Egypt 3000BCE. There were no borders until the beginnings of capitalism some 300 years ago.

The U.S. working class is multinational. A large portion of the workers here belong to oppressed Black, Latinx, Asian, Native and Arab nationalities. Some are immigrants and may be documented or not. Workers from the oppressed nationalities, including documented and undocumented immigrants, form a super-exploited segment of the working class. One thing all workers have in common is that their labor produces all the wealth in society.

Additional reading

[The Paris Commune](#) — by Karl Marx

[Introduction by Friedrich Engels to The Civil War in France](#) - “Do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

- Return to [What is Marxism?](#)