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## **From “Abolition of Private Property Ownership” to “Rebuilding of Individual Property Ownership”-- Analysis of Marx’s Model of the Development of Human Society**

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**Abstract:** From historical materialism, Marx believed that the development of human society is the result of contradictions between productive forces and production relations. Because of the insurmountable basic contradictions capitalist private property owns, it will be replaced by the more advanced individual property , which is more suitable for human’s full and free development. Thus, Marx’s model of development is “abolishing private property” – “rebuilding individual property” – “realizing human’s full and free development”. As a necessity in the development of society and the “negation of negation” of private property of small-scale production, individual property is not the simple regression of private property of small-scale production or the first negation of private property of small-scale production which is the complete negation of capitalist private property, but a new and higher form of communal property generated on the basis of sublation.

**Keywords:** private property, wage-labor, individual property, united labor, full and free development.

Historical materialism is the theoretical basis of Marx’s development model. Marx believed that as the two aspects of mode of production of human society, productive forces and production relations are interactional unity of oppositeness. Productive forces play the decisive role, which reflect the relationship between human and nature in productive labor and act as the most active factor in mode of production. And production relations reflect relationships among human in production activities, which are decided by the lever and nature of productive forces while take back action to the development of productive forces. It is in the movement of contradictions of productive forces and production relations that human society continually moves forward. Regarding capitalist society as the research object, Marx fully expounded the historical progress of capitalist private property’s negation for private property of small-scale production as the former is based on wage-labor, and elaborated the historical inevitability of individual property’s substitution of capitalist private property as individual property is more advanced and suitable for human’s full and free development.

## **I. “Abolition of private property” and liberation and development of productive forces**

Marx and Engels clearly pointed out in the Communist Manifesto that the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property<sup>1</sup> and that the communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional relations (page 293). The reason why communists have to abolish capitalist private property and make the most radical rupture with the traditional capitalist private property is that capitalist private property has changed from a system basis which originally promotes the development of productive forces to a shackle which seriously hampers the development of productive forces. Therefore, we need to burst asunder this “integument” in order to adapt to the objective requirements of the rapid development of productive forces.

### **1. The historical progress of capitalist private property**

The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part (page 274). The reason why capitalist mode of production can overcome feudal mode of production is that the former adapts to the requirements of rapid development of productive forces. As a result of this, it has created amazing productivity. Steam and the new tool-making machinery were transforming manufacture into modern industry, and thus revolutionizing the whole foundation of bourgeois society. The sluggish march of development of the manufacturing period changed into a veritable storm and stress period of production.<sup>2</sup> The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together (page 277).

From the aspect of elements of economic development, the reasons why capitalist private property has such enormous impetus are that, on one hand, means of production are concentrated in the hands of a small number of people, overcoming the dispersion and low-efficiency of small-scale production as well as achieving economies of scale; on the other hand, capitalists who possess the means of production greedily pursue surplus value, which is the inherent propulsion of unlimited expansion of production and greatly promotes social productive forces. The nature of capital is profit seeking, as Marx pointed out sharply that the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere and establish connections everywhere (page 276). A certain 10 percent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 percent certain will produce eagerness; 50 percent, positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 percent, and there is not a

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1 Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Volume 1, People's Publishing House, 1995, Page 286  
Any quote from Communist Manifesto in this article will be marked with the page of selected works.

2 Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Volume 3, 1995, Page 618

crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged.<sup>1</sup>

However, as capitalism has become full-fledged, because of its own inherent contradictions, when productive forces have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered (page 278), capitalist private property loses its original progress.

## **2. The inherent contradictions of capitalist private property**

Although capitalist private property has realized the scale effect of large-scale production, besides, holders of capital have strong inherent propulsion to expand reproduction for unlimited pursuit of surplus value, as its labor foundation is wage-labor, it still has a cruel nature of exploitation. Capitalists just treat workers as tools for production of surplus value. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value. The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage laborers (page 275). For one thing, they extend the working hours and increase the labor intensity as much as possible; for another, however, they pay workers as little as possible, making the wage laborer appropriates by means of his labor merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence (page 287). The bourgeoisie provide workers with working environment and working conditions as inferior as possible, just on the purpose of profit maximization. For exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation (page 275).

With the accumulation of capital, on one hand, production scale expands unlimited; on the other hand, effective demand of the masses of working people relatively decreases. Accordingly, serious polarization emerges. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.<sup>2</sup> The results of this differentiation directly lead to relative surplus of capitalist production, causing the cyclical outbreak of economic crisis. And the outbreak of economic crisis indicates the temporality of capitalist system. Therefore, with the constant capitalization of surplus value, contradiction between productive forces and production relations in capitalist society gets deeper and deeper. When the contradiction becomes sharp enough to be incompatible with its capitalist integument, this integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.<sup>3</sup>

Analyzing constraints of the development of capitalist society from the aspects of production supply and consumer demand is where Marx exceeds classical economists. In Marx's eyes, under the circumstances of capitalist private property which is based on

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1 Marx, *Das Kapital*, Volume 1, People's Publishing House, 1975, Page 829

2 Marx, *Das Kapital*, Volume 1, People's Publishing House, 1975, Page 708

3 Marx, *Das Kapital*, Volume 1, People's Publishing House, 1975, Page 831-832

wage-labor, capitalists have full propulsion to accumulate capital as well as expand production and supply, while the masses of working people who are exploited and oppressed by capital have limited real purchasing power. This causes the contradiction between the trend of unlimited expansion of production and effective demand of the masses of working people, making economic crisis whose essence is the relative surplus of production inevitable. As a result, the economic development path of capitalism can only be an alternation of prosperity and depression, causing tremendous waste of social resources. For this reason, the society of capitalist private property is neither fair nor efficient, so it must be replaced by the new society of socialist public property. That is to say, the fall of the bourgeoisie and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable (page 284).

From all above, the private property communists have to abolish is capitalist private property which is based on wage-labor and where a small number of people cruelly exploited the masses of working people by virtue of their possession of the means of production. That is to abolish the private property which is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few (page 286).

## **II. “Rebuilding of individual property” and realization of “human’s full and free development”**

As the society of capitalist private property is neither fair nor efficient, after abolishing capitalist private property, what form of public property should be established for promoting both the development of productive forces and equitable distribution? Marx profoundly indicated from the philosophical perspective of the negation of negation that capitalist private property is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labor of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production.<sup>1</sup>

Then, what is the ultimate goal of the future society of individual property? Marx made it clear that the purpose of the communists is to realize human’s full and free development. In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (page 294). The future society is a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Marx, *Das Kapital*, Volume 1, People's Publishing House, 1975, Page 832

2 Marx, *Das Kapital*, Volume 1, People's Publishing House, 1975, Page 649

What on earth is the individual property that Marx conceived of? And what are its differences from the past private property with personal possession of the means of production? Is it possible to achieve the goal of human's full and free development in such a society of individual property? From the connotation and characteristics of individual property, it is totally different from the past private property and has internal relations with the goal of realizing human's full and free development.

### 1. The connotation and characteristics of individual property

In order to better elaborate the connotation and characteristics of individual property, in this paper, the characteristics of individual property, capitalist private property and private property of small-scale production are listed in the following chart:

Characteristics Forms of property	Forms of labor	Combinations of means of production	Exploitative nature	Productivity	Fairness and efficiency	Goal	Relations
Private property of small-scale production	Based on their own labor	Scattered	Little exploitation	Under developed	Relatively fair but inefficient	Affluence	Been denied
Capitalist private property	Wage-labor	Concentrated in a small number of people	Serious exploitation	Developed	Unfair but efficient	Profit maximization	Negation of the former
Individual property	United Labor	Communal possession	No exploitation	Highly developed	Fair and efficient	Human's full and free development	Negation of negation

It can be seen from the figure that no matter from the aspects of its labor foundation and form of possession of the means of production, or from the aspects of exploitation nature, productivity, fairness and efficiency as well as development goal and relations, the individual property that Marx conceived of is by no means a regression of private property of small-scale production, not to mention a simple improvement of capitalist private property. It is a new and higher form of communal property.

First, it can be certain that individual property, as the outcome of negating capitalist private property, is by no means private property but public property. Seeing from its labor foundation, it is based on united labor, not on individual labor. Furthermore, it is a complete negation of wage-labor. And seeing from its form of possession of the means of production, it is the common possession of all workers, not the scattered personal possession, not to mention the possession of a small number of people. It is not a form of property, the necessary condition for whose existence is the non-existence of any property for the immense majority of society. The property where the existence for the few is solely due to

its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths (page 288) is what the communists are committed to abolish.

Second, as the “negation of negation” of private property of small-scale production, individual property is not the first negation of private property of small-scale production which is the complete negation of capitalist private property, but a kind of sublation. It is individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era and on the modern large-scale industrial production and operations as well as a broad and deep social division and co-operation.

## **2. Individual property is the economic foundation of realizing human’s full and free development**

From Marx’s development model, property is not the purpose, but the means to achieve the purpose. The ultimate goal of development is to realize human’s full and free development. Therefore, “abolition of private property” is not the goal of its own, but a means to help the masses of laborers obtain economic liberation through eradicating the economic basis where exploitation is able to exist. Through eradicating the old division and the one-sidedness caused by this division, “abolition of private property” helps every social member fully exert their wisdom and intelligence as well as accordingly obtain full and free development. Similarly, “rebuilding of individual property” is not the goal of its own, but a means to make exploitation impossible through communal property on the basis of individual property and make labor no longer a means of capital expansion, but a source of happiness and well-being as well as a means of providing material basis for human’s full and free development. That is to say, living labor is no longer a means to increase accumulated labor. On the contrary, accumulated labor is but a means to widen, to enrich and to promote the existence of the laborer. Thus, under the circumstances of capitalist private property, the past dominates the present...capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality. But under the circumstances of future individual property, the present dominates the past (page 287). It is the independent and individualized living person that controls over the past labor (the means of production, etc.) and continually expands the field of space for human’s full and free development.

In brief, on the issue of development, Marx always stood on the position of historical materialism, insisting on being people-oriented and maintaining the fundamental interests of the masses of working people. As a result, Marx’s supreme principle on the choice of forms of property is always that production relations must adapt to the development of productive forces. It is because individual property not only promotes the rapid development of productive forces (United labor is benefited both from division and collaboration effect and from scale effect), but also has no possibility of exploitation (Common possession deprives some people’s power of possessing other’s labor for free by

virtue of their possession of the means of production) that Marx regarded individual property as the economic basis of realizing human's full and free development.

Obviously, it is a long and complex process from "abolishing private property" to "rebuilding individual property". As Marx foresaw, no social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, when communists make clear of their direction of development, they have to at the same time fully understand the complexity and difficulty of approaching the target along this direction. And when making clear of the long term and twists of their goal, communists should at the same time always adhere to the target unwaveringly. They have every reason to properly master the relations between direction and ways as well as goal and means, firm the ideals and beliefs of communism, walk along the socialism road with Chinese characteristics and put untiring efforts for the ultimate goal of realizing human's full and free development.

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