

# The revolutionary potential of the working class



- ★ Why Marx theorised the working class as an agent of revolutionary change as a consequence of capitalist development
- ★ What is the actual historical experience of the working class movement around the world

Workers  
separated  
from means  
of production



Workers  
forced to  
sell labour  
to capitalists



Regular  
economic  
crises



Labour increasingly  
socialised but wealth in  
the hands of fewer  
capitalists



Workers  
organise to  
defend their  
interests



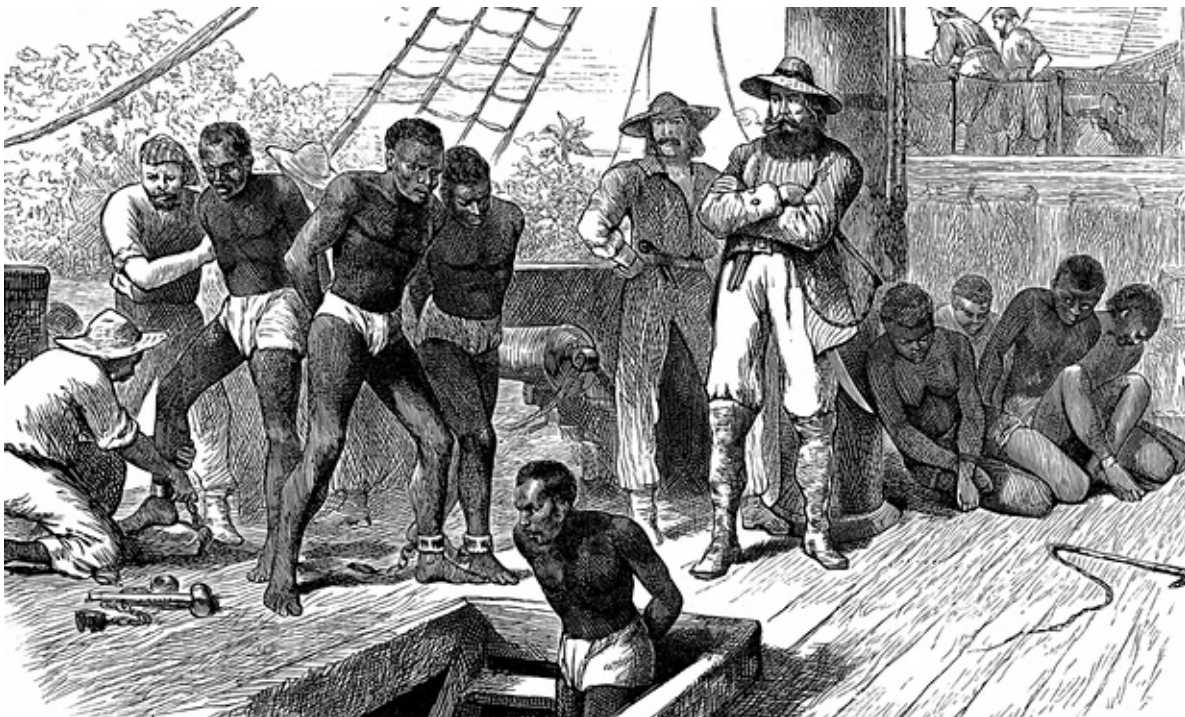
Workers eventually  
forced to use their  
power to replace  
capitalism

“The essential conditions for the existence and for the sway of the bourgeois class is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by the revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers...”

– Marx, *Communist Manifesto*



# The political legacy of primitive accumulation of capital

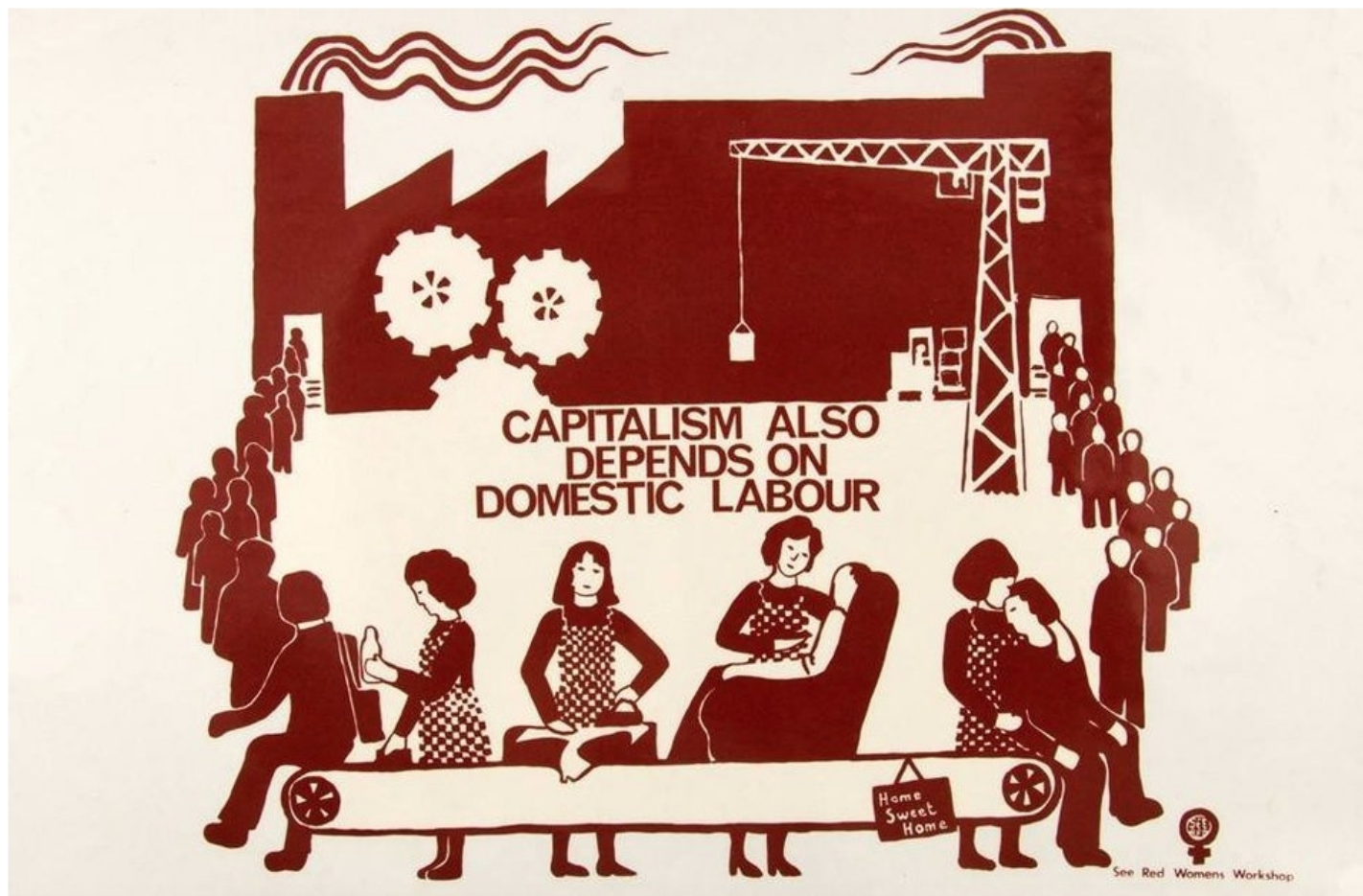


'The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins... are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.'

– Marx, *Capital* Vol 1

# Capitalism and the family

The working-class family is the system's economic unit, an integral part of the reproduction of capitalist relations. As a necessary component of the wage form of exploitation, capitalism imposes a sexual division of labor. Women are obliged to fulfill the wife/mother role in order to ensure the system a steady supply of labor power.





# The early labour movements in Europe



**Chartism in Britain**



'the working class cannot simply lay hold of ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes'

– Marx & Engels 1872 *Preface to Communist Manifesto*



**Paris Commune  
1871**



# The Paris Commune 1871

“The Commune, therefore, appears to have replaced the smashed state machine ‘only’ by fuller democracy,” Lenin explained in *State and Revolution*. “But as a matter of fact this ‘only’ signifies a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different type. This is exactly a case of ‘quantity being transformed into quality’: democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy; from the state (= a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer the state proper.”

– Lenin, *State and Revolution*





# Imperialism and the labour movement

“...capitalism has now singled out a handful (less than one-tenth of the inhabitants of the globe; less than one-fifth at a most “generous” and liberal calculation) of exceptionally rich and powerful states which plunder the whole world simply by ‘clipping coupons’...”

“Obviously, out of such enormous superprofits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their ‘own’ country) it is possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the ‘advanced’ countries are doing: they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

# The weakest links in the imperialist chain

The Russian Revolution broke the weakest link in the imperialist chain . But this revolution was not followed up, as anticipated, by revolutions in the more developed imperialist countries — even though WWI did create such revolutionary conditions.

This led to the relative isolation of the Russian Revolution, a bloody and devastating civil war fueled by an alliance of imperialist states, and eventually a bureaucratic counter-revolution led by Joseph Stalin .

Subsequent revolutions have all broken out in the colonial and semi-colonial nations (such as China, Vietnam, Cuba) and all these revolutions have faced similar challenges of imperialist aggression and an underdeveloped economic base.







Under capitalism, the prevailing ideology in the working class is capitalist ideology — a set of ideas that presents capitalism as natural, parliamentary democracy as the pinnacle of civilisation, and the system as eternal.

In the process of class struggle, more politically advanced segments challenge and break from the dominant ideology and in a revolutionary upsurge this happens on a mass scale.

We need to build an organisation that “leads the struggle of the working class, not only for better terms for the sale of labour-power, but for the abolition of the social system that compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich. [It] represents the working class, not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organised political force.”



“The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.”

– Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*