

THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

In 1847, a group of radical workers called the "Communist League" met in London. They commissioned Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who had recently become members, to write a manifesto on their behalf, soon known as the Communist Manifesto. Marx was the principle author, with Engels editing and assisting. The Communist Manifesto was originally published in London in 1848. Of all the documents of modern socialism, it is the most widely read and the most influential. It is the systematic statement of the philosophy that has come to be known as Marxism.

Marx (1818-1883) was a German philosopher, economist and sociologist, as well as a political revolutionary. He met Engels (1820-1895) when he moved to Paris after 1843, and they worked together on several essays. Marx and Engels are best known for their revolutionary writings about Communism. One of Marx's primary intellectual influences was the work of G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel's theory presents history as a process in which the world becomes conscious of itself as spirit. Marx took this idea and furthered it, arguing that as man becomes conscious of himself as spirit, the material world causes him to feel increasingly alienated from himself. Escape from this alienation requires a revolution.

Marx and Engels were not simply content with theorizing about revolution in the abstract, however. They thought that theory was only useful insofar as it promotes social change, clarifying the proper means and ends of revolution; they were thus not only authors, but activists, and believed that by theorizing they were actively influencing history. The Communist Manifesto can be understood as one attempt to influence history by spreading information about the communist movement.

Marx's theory should be understood in the context of the hardships suffered by 19th-century workers

in England, France and Germany. The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries created a seemingly permanent underclass of workers, many of whom lived in poverty under terrible working conditions and with little political representation. The Communist Manifesto was written on the eve of the Revolution of 1848 in Germany. The failure of this worker and student-led revolution caused Marx to later revise some of the arguments and predictions that appear in the Communist Manifesto. However, the general structure of Marx's original arguments, as well as its revolutionary tone, remained unchanged.

TERMS TO KNOW AS YOU READ:

Bourgeoisie - Comprising the class of modern Capitalists, the bourgeoisie are the employers of wage laborers, and the owners of the means of production.

Means of production - The means of production include not only the physical instruments of production (tools, machines, etc.), but also the methods of working (skills, forms of cooperation, division of labor, etc.), and knowledge that can be applied to production (science, etc.).

Mode of production - The economic structure of society that defines people's mode of living. It consists of the means of production as well as the relations of production.

Proletariat - The class of modern wage-laborers. They do not have their own means of production, and therefore they must sell their own labor in order to survive.

Relations of production - The necessary relations between people as required for a certain form of material production. The relations of production refer to the distribution of the means of production, the forms of possession (collective and individual private property), and the distribution of the product.

ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

Part I

1. Marx boils all of human social history down to one thing. What is that thing?
2. What two camps does Marx say, "in a word," take part in this one thing?
3. All periods of human history, according to Marx, result in one of two outcomes. What are they?
4. What is unique or distinctive about the present/current struggle, according to Marx?
5. Out of the most recent period of history has risen the *bourgeoisie*. How did they accomplish this?
6. What, according to Marx, is the worst offense of the *bourgeoisie*?

Part II

7. What can you gather from this section about Marx's views on Christianity?
8. What does Marx believe is the eventual destiny of the *proletariat*?
9. Generally speaking, how will they accomplish this?
10. What does Marx believe will be the ultimate outcome, following the ascension of the *proletariat*?

Excerpts from the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS

Marx and Engels used a couple of terms here that need to be clarified. First of all, bourgeoisie referred to the new business and industrial class that had emerged in the last few centuries before his time (as opposed to the traditional landed aristocracy); proletariat referred to the workers in these factories (owned by the bourgeoisie), who, in Marx' view, were "wage slaves," bound to work for wages lest they starve.

Part I: Bourgeois and Proletarians

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: It has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other bourgeoisie and proletariat. . . .

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange..

The bourgeoisie has played a most revolutionary role in history. The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left no other bond between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms,

has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

Part II: Proletarians and Communists

What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class. When people speak of ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact that within the old society the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence.

When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the eighteenth century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death-battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge.. We have seen above that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i. e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible. These measures will, of course, be different in different countries.

Nevertheless, in most advanced countries, the following will be pretty generally applicable:

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all rights of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the banks of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal obligation of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the populace over the country.
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labor in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, etc.

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.

Part IV: Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties

.. Workingmen of all countries, unite!