

A Manifesto for Revolution

The period that included the French Revolution, the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte, and the French domination of much of Europe (1789-1815) was followed by a period of strong reaction. Many of the revolutionary ideals of social equality, independent national states, and political and social freedom were suppressed, as were the people who advocated them. After 1815, the next generation of rulers of Europe attempted to “turn back the clock” to the time preceding the French Revolution. They reestablished absolute monarchy and privilege, and maintained strict control over the activities and writings of the intellectual class. In Europe, new revolutionary outbreaks in 1830, 1848, and 1870 were followed by periods of reaction and oppression. In the first half of the century, European nationalist movements were successful in gaining a nation’s freedom from outside rule only in Belgium and Greece (In the Americas, however, many of the nations that had been Spanish colonies won their freedom.)

Opposition to reactionary ideas and policies arose early in 19th-century France and Germany. There, younger thinkers proposed new ideas and dreamed of new societies that were not based on inherited wealth or ancient social traditions. (In England, writers like John Stuart Mill proposed a fairer division of the profits of business among the workers, and more rights for women.)

In Germany, groups of young students formed around radical thinkers. A leading member of these groups was Karl Marx (1818-1883). Born into a well-to-do family, Marx was forced to leave Germany because of his radical ideas and associates. He went to Paris in 1843, where he met Frederick Engels (1820-1895). Engels had written about the terrible living conditions of the working class in England, where his prosperous German family had a business. Marx and Engels became life-long friends. In Paris and London, they joined communistic associations of workingmen.

In 1848, Marx and Engels wrote a small work that would become a major source of much radical thought for the next century. They called it *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, or as it is better known, *The Communist Manifesto*. This short publication contains the political and social agenda of a secret society called the Communist League. It tells of the “class warfare” that was arising between two classes in 19th-century society. The ruling, or dominant, class was the bourgeoisie, or capitalists. They owned the means of production, such as factories, and controlled the banking system. Their opponents were the proletariat—the great mass of workers who had no property. The proletariat existed by selling its labor to the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels predicted that a revolution would overthrow the bourgeoisie and set up a communistic society ruled by the proletariat. History was the record of class struggle, they said, of the oppressed fighting their oppressors. In the later 19th and 20th centuries, the *Manifesto* and Marx’s other writings (especially *Das Kapital*, or Capital) became the basic texts for Marxist revolutionary movements around the world. Excerpts from the Manifesto are given below.

The history of all hitherto existing society (recorded or written history) is the history of class struggles...

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production), possesses...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 (the workers, or laborers, who have no means of production)...

The bourgeoisie has played a most revolutionary role in history. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless...chartered freedoms has set up that single...freedom—Free Trade...

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 it paid wage-laborers.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital (or capitalism), is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class developed—a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These laborers, who must sell themselves piece-meal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes (problems, uncertainties) of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master (the workshop owner and teacher; father figure) into the great factory of the industrial capitalist...

No sooner has the laborer received his wages in cash...than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.

The lower strata of the middle class—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat...The proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: Formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat...

The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property.

To be a capitalist is to have not only a purely personal, but a social status, in production...

Capital is therefore not a personal, it is a social, power.

Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate (take) the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate (enslave, command) the labor of others by means of such appropriation.

The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms...that assumed different forms in different epochs (time periods)...

We have seen ...that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to establish democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest (take), by degrees, 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 of productive forces as rapidly as possible.

In the most advanced countries, the following will be...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 right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the hands 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...
8. Equal obligation of all to work...
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries...
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of child factory labor...

Political power...is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another...

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 (person, group) is the condition for the development of all.

The Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political orders of things

They labor everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.

The Communists disdain (refuse) to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Workingmen of all countries, unite!

Review Questions

1. How did Marx and Engels understand the record of history?
2. What two classes did Marx and Engels identify in the society of their time?
3. How did the two classes from question 2 differ?
4. What was to be the immediate aim of the proletariat and the Communists?
5. How was the aim of the Communists to be accomplished?
6. What would happen to bourgeoisie property in the Communist state?
7. How did the ten aims or goals of the Communist Party reveal the party's beliefs and goals?
8. What call did Marx and Engels make at the end of the *Manifesto*?
9. How is *The Communist Manifesto* a reaction to industrialization?
10. What is your opinion of the theory you just read? Do you think it could be a possible solution to problems in the world today? Explain.