



THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

A SUMMARY



COMPILED BY MOHAMMED ZEINU HASSEN
ADDIS ABABA ETHIOPIA

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Communist Manifesto reflects an attempt to explain the goals of Communism, as well as the theory underlying this movement. It argues that class struggles, or the exploitation of one class by another, are the motivating force behind all historical developments. Class relationships are defined by an era's means of production. However, eventually these relationships cease to be compatible with the developing forces of production. At this point, a revolution occurs and a new class emerges as the ruling one. This process represents the "march of history" as driven by larger economic forces.

Modern Industrial society in specific is characterized by class conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. However, the productive forces of capitalism are quickly ceasing to be compatible with this exploitative relationship. Thus, the proletariat will lead a revolution. However, this revolution will be of a different character than all previous ones: previous revolutions simply reallocated property in favor of the new ruling class. However, by the nature of their class, the members of the proletariat have no way of appropriating property. Therefore, when they obtain control they will have to destroy all ownership of private property, and classes themselves will disappear.

The Manifesto argues that this development is inevitable, and that capitalism is inherently unstable. The Communists intend to promote this revolution, and will promote the parties and associations that are moving history towards its natural conclusion. They argue that the elimination of social classes cannot come about through reforms or changes in government. Rather, a revolution will be required.

The Communist Manifesto has four sections. In the first section, it discusses the Communists' theory of history and the relationship between proletarians and bourgeoisie. The second section explains the relationship between the Communists and the proletarians. The third section addresses

the flaws in other, previous socialist literature. The final section discusses the relationship between the Communists and other parties.

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.

Bourgeoisie - Composing 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.

2 INTRODUCTION AND SECTION 1, BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIANS (PART 1)

2.1 SUMMARY

The Manifesto begins by announcing, "A spectre is haunting Europe--the spectre of Communism." All of the European powers have allied themselves against Communism, frequently demonizing its ideas. Therefore, the Communists have assembled in London and written this Manifesto in order to make public their views, aims and tendencies, and to dispel the maliciously implanted misconceptions.

The Manifesto begins by addressing the issue of class antagonism. Marx writes, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." Throughout history we see the oppressor and oppressed in constant opposition to each other. This fight is sometimes hidden and sometimes open. However, each time the fight ends in either a revolutionary reconstruction of society or in the classes' common ruin.

In earlier ages, we saw society arranged into complicated class structures. For example, in medieval times there were feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices and serfs. Modern bourgeois society sprouted from the ruins of feudal society. This society has class antagonisms as well, but it is also unique: class antagonisms have become simplified, as society increasingly splits into two rival camps--Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

The Manifesto then shows how the modern bourgeoisie is the product of several revolutions in the mode of production and of exchange. The development of the bourgeoisie began in the earliest towns, and gained momentum with the Age of Exploration. Feudal guilds couldn't provide for increasing markets, and the manufacturing middle class took its place. However, markets kept growing and demand kept increasing, and manufacture couldn't keep up. This led to the Industrial Revolution. Manufacture was replaced by "Modern Industry," and the industrial middle class was replaced by "industrial millionaires," the modern bourgeois. With these developments, the bourgeoisie have become powerful, and have pushed medieval classes into the background. The development of the bourgeoisie as a class was accompanied by a series of political developments. With the development of Modern Industry and the world-market, the bourgeoisie has gained exclusive political sway. The State serves solely the bourgeoisie's interests.

Historically, the bourgeoisie has played a quite revolutionary role. Whenever it has gained power, it has put to an end all "feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations." It has eliminated the relationships that bound people to their superiors, and now all remaining relations between men are

characterized by self-interest alone. Religious fervor, chivalry and sentimentalism have all been sacrificed. Personal worth is now measured by exchange value, and the only freedom is that of Free Trade. Thus, exploitation that used to be veiled by religious and political "illusions" is now direct, brutal and blatant. The bourgeoisie has changed all occupations into wage-laboring professions, even those that were previously honored, such as that of the doctor. Similarly, family relations have lost their veil of sentimentality and have been reduced to pure money relations.

In the past, industrial classes required the conservation of old modes of production in order to survive. The bourgeoisie are unique in that they cannot continue to exist without revolutionizing the instruments of production. This implies revolutionizing the relations of production, and with it, all of the relations in society. Thus, the unique uncertainties and disturbances of the modern age have forced Man to face his real condition in life, and his true relations with others.

Because the bourgeoisie needs a constantly expanding market, it settles and establishes connections all over the globe. Production and consumption have taken on a cosmopolitan character in every country. This is true both for materials and for intellectual production, as national sovereignty and isolationism becomes less and less possible to sustain. The bourgeoisie draws even the most barbaric nations into civilization and compels all nations to adopt its mode of production. It "creates a world after its own image." All become dependent on the bourgeoisie. It has also increased political centralization.

Thus, we see that the means of production and of exchange, which serve as the basis of the bourgeoisie, originated in feudal society. At a certain stage, however, the feudal relations ceased to be compatible with the developing productive forces. Thus the "fetters" of the feudal system had to be "burst asunder," and they were. Free competition replaced the old system, and the bourgeoisie rose to power.

Marx then says that a similar movement is underway at the present moment. Modern bourgeois society is in the process of turning on itself. Modern productive forces are revolting against the modern conditions of production. Commercial crises, due, ironically, to over-production, are threatening the existence of bourgeois society. Productive forces are now fettered by bourgeois society, and these crises represent this tension. Yet in attempting to remedy these crises, the bourgeoisie simply cause new and more extensive crises to emerge, and diminish their ability to prevent future ones. Thus, the weapons by which the bourgeoisie overcame feudalism are now being turned on the bourgeoisie themselves.

2.2 COMMENTARY

The Communist Manifesto opens with a statement of its purpose, to publicize the views, aims and tendencies of the Communists. As such it is a document intended to be read by the public, and it is meant to be easily grasped by a general audience. It is also meant to be a broad description of what Communism is, both as a theory and as a political movement.

In this first section, Marx already introduces several of the key ideas of his theory. One main idea is that all of history until now is the story of a series of class struggles. Underlying all of history, then, is this fundamental economic theme. The most important concept being discussed here is the concept that each society has a characteristic economic structure. This structure breeds different classes, which are in conflict as they oppress or are oppressed by each other. However, this situation is not permanent. As history "marches" on, eventually the means of production cease to be compatible with the class structure as-is. Instead, the structure begins to impede the development of productive forces. At this point, the existing structure must be destroyed. This explains the emergence of the bourgeoisie out of feudalism. It will also explain the eventual destruction of the bourgeoisie. Marx believes that all of history should be understood in this way--as the process in which classes realign themselves in compliance with changing means of production.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this theory of history is what it does not deem important. In Marx's theory, history is shaped by economic relations alone. Elements such as religion, culture, ideology, and even the individual human being, play a very little role. Rather, history moves according to impersonal forces, and its general direction is inevitable.

Marx believes that this type of history will not go on forever, however. The Manifesto will later argue that the modern class conflict is the final class conflict; the end of this conflict will mark the end of all class relations. This section begins to suggest why this might be, positing some of the ways in which the modern era is unique. First, class antagonisms have been simplified, as two opposing classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, emerge. Secondly, while exploitative relationships were previously hidden behind things like ideology, now the veil has been lifted and everything is seen in terms of self-interest. Thirdly, in order for the bourgeoisie to continue to exist, they must continually revolutionize the instruments of production. This leaves social relations in an unprecedentedly unstable state.

3 SECTION 1, BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIANS (PART 2)

3.1 SUMMARY

After examining the nature and history of the bourgeoisie, the Manifesto now turns to the proletariat. As the bourgeoisie developed, so did the proletariat, and it is the proletariat who will eventually destroy the bourgeoisie. The proletarians live only as long as they can find work, and they can find work only as long as their labor increases capital. They are a commodity, and are vulnerable to all the fluctuations of the market. Due to the development of machines and the division of labor, the proletarian's work has lost all "charm;" the proletarian is simply an appendage of a machine. Furthermore, as his work becomes more repulsive, his wage only decreases. Marx describes the worker as a soldier, and as a slave. Distinctions of age and sex are becoming less important as all people are simply instruments of labor. Furthermore, no sooner does the worker

get his wages from his exploitative boss, then he is exploited by other bourgeoisie, such as his landlord.

The lower strata of the middle class, such as tradespeople, gradually sink into the proletariat. This is due to the fact that they lack sufficient capital, and the fact that technology has rendered their specialized skills no longer useful.

The Manifesto then describes the past history of the proletariat. As soon as this class was created it began to struggle with the bourgeoisie. This struggle originally involved the individual laborer, and later groups of workers, rebelling against the bourgeois that directly exploited them. These workers hoped to revive the medieval status of the worker. At this point, the workers were still disorganized, divided by geography and by competition with one another. Furthermore, when they did form unions, they were under the influence of the bourgeois, and actually served to further the objectives of the bourgeoisie.

However, with the modern development of industry, the proletariat increased in number, and became stronger and more concentrated. Furthermore, distinctions among laborers began to dissolve, as all shared equally low wages and equally unsure livelihoods. At this point, workers began to form trade unions and other associations, a process in which they are still engaged at the time of the Manifesto's writing. The proletariat is further helped in its unification by the increased means of communication made possible by modern industry, allowing for the struggles to take on national character. While the organization of the proletariat into a class is continually destroyed by competition among workers, each time it rises again stronger. Furthermore, as other classes try to use the proletarians to forward political their own ends, they give them tools to fight the bourgeoisie.

Marx explains that the only class today that is really revolutionary is the proletariat. All of the other classes that fight the bourgeoisie--such as the shopkeeper--are conservative, fighting to

preserve their existence. Among the proletariat, however, the Old Society is already past preservation. "Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests."

Historically, the proletariat are also unique. In the past, when a class got the upper hand, it tried to subject all of society to its own mode of appropriation. However, the proletariat lack any property of their own to retain or expand. Rather, they must destroy all ways of securing private property at all. Another unique characteristic of the proletariat is that, while past movements were started by minorities, the proletariats are a vast majority, and are acting in the interest of that majority.

The proletarians' struggle is first and foremost a national struggle. Marx writes that he has traced the proletariat's development through a veiled civil war, up to the point of open revolution and the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Until now, every society has been based on class oppression. In order for a class to be able to be oppressed, however, its slavish existence must be sustainable, held steady: in contrast, laborers in modern industrial society are continually suffering a deterioration of their status; they become poorer and poorer. The bourgeoisie are thus unfit to rule, because they cannot guarantee "an existence to its slave within its slavery." Thus, with the development of Modern Industry, the bourgeoisie produces "its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."

3.2 COMMENTARY

Marx spends a significant portion of this section discussing the plight of the modern laborer. He argues that the worker is commodified, and seen as part of the machinery. He matters only in so far as he produces, and he does not have control over the fruits of his labor. The story of the laborer is a story of flagrant exploitation, and has had great resonance with many of Marx's readers.

Marx also presents ways in which the proletariat are a unique class. They are connected by improved communication, and by the miserable existence they share in common. They are also in the majority in society, and their numbers are increasing. The most significant trait of the proletariat, however, is that they have nothing to lose. By the nature of being proletarians, they have no power or privileges they must defend. Rather, to help themselves they must destroy the entire system. Because of this, when they have their revolution, they will destroy the entire system of class exploitation, including all private property. Thus, the stage of history that Marx is describing is the last stage. However, it is important to understand that this stage is only possible because of all the other stages that came before it. The proletariat had to be ready for revolution.

4 SECTION 2, PROLETARIANS AND COMMUNISTS

4.1 SUMMARY

The Manifesto then discusses the relationship of the Communists to the proletarians. The immediate aim of the Communists is the "formation of the proletariat into a class, [the] overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, [and the] conquest of political power by the proletariat." The Communists' theory simply describes a historical movement underway at this very moment. This includes the abolition of private property.

Marx says that Communists have been "reproached" for desiring to abolish the "right" of acquiring private property through the fruits of one's labor. However, he points out, laborers do not acquire any property through their labor. Rather, the "property" or capital they produce serves to exploit them. This property, controlled by the bourgeoisie, represents a social--not a personal--power. Changing it into common property does not abolish property as a right, but merely changes its social character, by eliminating its class character. In a Communist society, then, labor will exist for the sake of the laborer, not for the sake of producing bourgeois-controlled property. This goal of communism challenges bourgeois freedom, and this is why the bourgeois condemn the Communist philosophy. Marx writes, "You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths

of the population." Despite what the bourgeois claim, Communism doesn't keep people from appropriating the products of labor. Rather, it keeps them from subjugating others in the process of this appropriation.

The Manifesto then addresses some objections to Communism. Many dissenters maintain that no one will work if private property is abolished. However, by this logic, bourgeois society should have been overcome with laziness long ago. In reality, it is presently the case that those who work don't acquire anything, and those who acquire things don't work. Other opponents hold that Communism will destroy all intellectual products. However, this reflects a bourgeois misunderstanding. The disappearance of "class culture" is not the same thing as the disappearance of all culture.

Marx moves to the arguments against the "infamous" Communist proposal of abolishing the family. He says the modern family is based on capital and private gain. Thus he writes, the Communists "plead guilty" to wanting to do away with present familial relations, in that they want to stop the exploitation of children by their parents. Similarly, they do not want to altogether abolish the education of children, but simply to free it from the control of the ruling class. Marx complains that the bourgeois "clap-trap" about family and education is particularly "disgusting" as Industry increasingly destroys the family ties of the proletarians; thus it renders family and education as means for the transformation of children into articles of commerce.

Communists are also criticized for their desire to abolish country and nationality. Marx replies that workingmen have no country; and we can't take from them what they don't have. National differences and antagonisms lose significance as industrialization increasingly standardizes life.

Marx then says that those charges against Communism based on religion, philosophy, or ideology "are not deserving of serious examination." Man's consciousness changes with the conditions of his material existence. "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class."

In response to the claim that there are certain universal ideas, such as that of Justice, that have transcended the vicissitudes of history, Marx replies that this universality is only an apparent one, reflecting an overriding history of exploitation and class antagonism. The Communist revolution is a radical rupture in traditional property relations. It should be no surprise that it accompanied by radical changes in traditional ideas.

We see then that the first step in the working class' revolution is to make the proletariat the ruling class. It will use its political power to seize all capital from the bourgeoisie and to centralize all instruments of production under the auspices of the State. Of course, in the beginning this will not be possible without "despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production." Probable steps in the revolution will include: the abolition of ownership of land; the institution of a heavy progressive or graduated income tax; the abolition of all inheritance rights; the confiscation of emigrants' and rebels' property, making all people liable to labor; State centralization of credit; State centralization of communication and transportation; State appropriation of factories, the gradual combination of agriculture and manufacturing industries, the elimination of the distinctions between town and country, and the establishment of free education for children.

When class distinctions have disappeared, public power will lose its political character. This is because political power is nothing more than "the organized power of one class for oppressing another." When the proletariat eliminate the old conditions for production, they will render class antagonism impossible, and thereby eliminate their own class supremacy. Bourgeois society will be replaced by an "association" in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

4.2 COMMENTARY

One of Marx's most interesting claims in this section is that the ideas of religion and philosophy are actually rooted in people's material existence; particular ideas are only the results of certain

relationships of production. The most enduring or prevailing ideas are simply those that serve the interests of the ruling class. Thus, the ruling class makes the rules that structure society, and supports those ideas that forward its own ends. For example, the bourgeoisie glorify property rights because they are the ones in society with property.

This is also the section where Marx gives a sense of what he thinks the revolution will be like. The workers become the rulers, and work to eliminate private property. It is important to consider in which instances the Manifesto is simply trying to describe a historical process, and in which instances it is also advocating particular methods and goals: Communism understands history to be an unchangeable force, but also as leading to a morally desirable outcome. The question thus arises, What is the Communist's role in the historical process? If the revolution is an inevitable force of history, we might even question why the Communist Manifesto is necessary.

Finally, this section is interesting because it exhibits Marx's techniques of responding to criticisms. Marx is harsh and often quite sarcastic about the critiques of Communism. Consider whether his approach is rhetorically effective. Would he be more convincing if he took a more serious tone about the critiques of Communism? Would the Manifesto retain its "revolutionary" character if he did change his tone?

5 SECTION 3, SOCIALIST AND COMMUNIST LITERATURE

5.1 SUMMARY

In this section, Marx presents and critiques three subsets of Socialist and Communist literature. The first subset is Reactionary Socialism. Reactionary Socialists include the Feudal Socialists, the Petty-Bourgeois Socialists, and the German, or "True" Socialists; all of these groups fight against the rise of the bourgeoisie and modern Industry, without realizing the historical process the bourgeoisie represent. Feudal Socialists were French and English aristocrats who wrote against modern bourgeois society. However, their chief complaint about the bourgeois was that it creates

a revolutionary proletariat that will uproot the old order of society. Thus, they objected to the bourgeoisie because they were a threat to their way of life. The Petty- Bourgeois Socialists were a class that saw it would eventually lose its separate status and become part of the proletariat. Marx concedes that the Petty- Bourgeois publications successfully showed the contradictions of the conditions of modern production. However, their suggested alternatives to this contradictory system were either to restore the old means of production and exchange, or to push the modern means of production and exchange into the framework of old property relations. Thus, this socialism is "reactionary and Utopian" and can't accept the facts of history. Third there is German, or "True" Socialism. These German thinkers adopted some French socialist and Communist ideas, without realizing that Germany did not share the same social conditions as France. As contemplated by the German thinkers, the French ideas lost all practical significance and were "emasculated." These socialists supported the aristocracy and feudal institutions against the rising bourgeoisie, forgetting that the rise of the bourgeoisie is a necessary historical step. The "true" socialists support the interests of the petty- bourgeoisie, and thus support the status quo. They even reject class struggles. Marx claims that almost all of the so-called Communist and Socialist literature in Germany at this time are in fact of this character.

The second subset of Socialism is Conservative, or Bourgeois, Socialism. This subset reflects the desires of a segment of the bourgeois to redress social grievances, in order to guarantee the continued existence of bourgeois society. Followers of this idea include "economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, [and] hole-and-corner reformers of every kind." They want the advantages of the social conditions generated by Modern Industry, without the struggles and dangers that necessarily accompany them. "They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat." These bourgeoisie believe that the best society is the society in which they have power; they want the proletariat to keep its weak role, but to stop hating the dominant bourgeoisie. A second form of this kind of Socialism recognizes the fact that only changes in economic relations could help the proletariat. However, the upholders of this kind of socialism do not accept that such changes necessarily entail a destruction of the

relations of production. Rather, they wish to make administrative reforms, which simply decrease the cost and amount of administrative work for the bourgeois government.

The third subset is Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism. This subset originated with the first attempts of the proletariat to achieve their own ends. The attempts were reactionary, and the proletariat had not yet reached the maturity and economic conditions necessary for emancipation. These socialists therefore looked for new social laws to create the material conditions necessary to free the proletariat. Their writings are important because they attacked every principle of existing society, and are thus useful for enlightening the working class. However, they are of a Utopian character: although their vision did reflect authentic proletariat "yearnings" to reconstruct society, it was ultimately a "fantastic" vision, providing no basis for practical action. Thus the Critical-Utopian Socialists become less significant as the modern class struggle takes shape; lacking practical significance, their "fantastic" attacks lose theoretical justification. Thus, while the founders were in many ways revolutionaries, their followers are mere reactionaries. They oppose political action by the proletariat.

5.2 COMMENTARY

This section is principally a review of other Socialist thinkers. Marx argues that each approach fails because it misses out on a key component of Communist theory. The Reactionaries fail to realize that the inevitability of the bourgeoisie's rise, and of their eventual fall at the hands of the proletariat. The Conservative Socialists, similarly, fail to see the inevitability of class antagonism, and of the destruction of the bourgeoisie. The Critical-Utopian Socialists fail to understand that social change must occur in revolutions, and not by pure dreaming or words.

For a modern reader, Marx's discussion of the second subgroup perhaps deserves the most consideration. The Conservative Socialism that Marx condemns is precisely the attitude embraced by countries like the United States toward the plight of workers. Welfare, Social Security and a

minimum wage are all measures that Marx would dismiss as attempts to preserve the capitalist system by making the situation of the proletariat tolerable. It is worth considering, then, whether Marx's critique is convincing. Basically, Marx seems to argue that these "reforms" are actually done in the interests of the bourgeois, in order to placate the proletariat and make them accept their social role. Marx believes that this form of Socialism is misguided; he contends that the only way to really address the grievances of the proletariat is through a restructuring of economic and social relations. This is a revolutionary act; the suggested reforms of Conservative Socialists are merely palliative. How does Marx's critique hold up to states such as the U.S. or Western European nations--nations that have instituted such "Conservative Socialist" programs? Is Marx correct in stating that these reforms serve the interests of the ruling capitalists, and not the workers? Looking back from the present, and having thus seen "Conservative Socialism" in action, does historical evidence still support Marx's claims of the inevitability of a proletariat uprising? Does it support the desirability of such an uprising?

6 SECTION 4, POSITION OF THE COMMUNISTS IN RELATION TO THE VARIOUS EXISTING OPPOSITION PARTIES

6.1 SUMMARY

The Manifesto concludes with a discussion about the role of the Communists as they work with other parties. The Communists fight for the immediate aims of workers, but always in the context of the entire Communist movement. Thus, they work with those political parties that will forward the ends of Communism, even if it involves working with the bourgeoisie. However, they never stop trying to instill in the working class a recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, and to help them gain the weapons to eventually overthrow the bourgeoisie.

Thus, "the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things." They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by forcibly overthrowing all existing social conditions. The Manifesto ends with this rallying cry:

"Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. **WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**"

6.2 COMMENTARY

This final section reveals the political agenda of the Communists. Their final goal is always a proletariat revolution and the abolition of private property and class antagonism. Because they believe that history must go through a set of stages, however, this may mean sometimes supporting the bourgeoisie, in order to eventually make a workers' revolution possible. While the Communists have a strong theoretical foundation, integrating observations and predictions, they are also advocating those predictions, and attempting to accelerate their realization. Thus, they do not simply declare that workers shall one day unite. Rather, they call on workers to unite, promising them freedom and a better world. How separable are the political and theoretical messages of the Communists? Is the Communists' theory of history an essential part of its revolutionary message? Consider from a rhetorical perspective how the Communist cause might be helped or harmed by the claim that revolution is inevitable.

7 STUDY QUESTIONS

Who is the Communist Manifesto's target audience? What are its aims as a document?

Political reforms cannot eliminate class antagonisms because these antagonisms are due to the basic structure of society. Class is an outgrowth of the means of production. It is this economic structure that gives certain people the power to exploit others. As long as this structure exists, there will be a ruling class and an exploited class. Reforms might improve the standard of living of the exploited class, but it cannot alter the fact that they are powerless socially. Marx refers to the advocates of such reforms as Conservative Socialists. These socialists are misguided because they don't realize that class struggle is integral to history, and is unavoidable in the capitalist system. They represent bourgeois interests, because they are trying to preserve bourgeois hegemony by dampening the revolutionary energy of the proletariat. These conservative socialists will ultimately fail, however, because the revolution is an unavoidable stage of history, and the proletariat will always be a revolutionary class.

Why isn't it possible to eliminate class antagonisms through political reforms that improve the workers' quality of life? How does the Manifesto reply to such reformers?

The proletariat is a unique class in several ways. First, the exploitation it faces is more transparent than that of any previous class. In the past, class relationships were clouded by religious beliefs and sentimentality. People did not realize that their relationships were fundamentally economic and exploitative in nature. Capitalism exposes this exploitation, because it is based solely on ideals of self-interest and money. Thus, the proletariat are uniquely aware of their status as exploited peoples. Secondly, the proletariat are more interconnected than any previous revolutionary class. This is due to improved communication brought about by capitalism's technological advances, and because the proletariat all share an equally miserable existence. They are also the majority in society, whereas previous revolutionary classes were traditionally in the minority. Finally, their historical role is unique. In order to further their ends as a class, they must destroy the entire

system of class exploitation. Thus, with their revolution all private property is eliminated and classes disappear.

Perhaps the most serious question about the proletariat, then, is why they will revolt. Marx believes that revolutions are spontaneous uprisings of exploited peoples. He does a plausible job of showing why the proletariat have reason to overthrow the current system, and even why they would eliminate private property if they succeeded. What is less clear is what would motivate the original revolution. There is a jump between historical forces and individual agency that it may be hard to accept. The proletariat are unique in large degree because their conditions are so dire. It is worth considering whether Marx underestimates the power of such conditions to defeat, rather than motivate, oppressed peoples.

How is the proletariat different from past revolutionary classes?

Marx argues that the property rights that the bourgeoisie wish to protect are actually bourgeois property rights. They protect bourgeois interests, as can be seen by the fact that only the bourgeoisie actually own property. Marx further argues that property itself is a social commodity. It belongs to people because of the social structure of society. Thus, changing private property into communal property is really only changing the social character of property. It is not violating a personal claim. This argument about property is similar to Marx's arguments about other rights, as well as about law, philosophy and religion. None of these notions reflects universal truths, valid across all social contexts; rather, they are all ways of protecting the interests of the ruling class. For example, the bourgeoisie make property into a right because they are the ones with the property. We may think that some of these ideas are truly universal, because they have survived across time. However, it is more likely that they have lasted throughout history only because exploitation has lasted throughout history. With an end to exploitation, many of the ideals embraced by modern society would be radically altered.

How does the Manifesto reply to people who complain that the elimination of private property violates property rights? What does this suggest about the validity of rights in general?

Why is it necessary for Communists to call for a worker's revolution, if they believe that such a revolution is inevitable?

How is modern Industrial society self-destructive? Why does Marx believe that the end of modern society will represent the end of all class antagonisms?

What is Marx's theory of history? Use this theory to explain the decline and fall of the feudal era. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this theory?

Despite Marx's predictions, Communism has not emerged out of Industrial society to become the dominant societal system. Is this fact enough to disprove Marxist theory? Speculate on how Marx would explain this fact, in keeping with the general structure of his theory.

It can be very difficult to figure out what Marx believed a Communist society would look like. What hints does he give in the Manifesto about his vision of this future society? How does this vision compare with "Communist" societies that arose in later years (e.g., in the Soviet Union)?

8 REVIEW QUIZ

1. According to Marx, the history of all society up to his time is the history of:
 - A. Darwinian natural selection
 - B. Class struggles
 - C. The intellectual elite
 - D. General harmony punctuated by barbaric invasions
2. According to Marx, what is one difference between modern bourgeois society and societies of the past?
 - A. Modern society has class conflicts, while in the past different classes lived in harmony
 - B. Gradations of class are more complicated in modern society than in the past
 - C. In modern society class antagonisms have been simplified into a struggle between two main rival groups
 - D. There is no substantial difference
3. Which of the following traits is characteristic of modern bourgeois society?
 - A. Exploitative class relationships are no longer hidden
 - B. Exploitative class relationships are hidden by religious illusions
 - C. Exploitative class relationships have been eliminated
 - D. None of the above
4. The mistake made by "Reactionary Socialism" is that it:
 - A. Reacted against the historical development of the bourgeoisie without understanding its context in the broader march of history
 - B. Supported the bourgeoisie's developing power
 - C. Represented the interests of the working class, instead of the ruling class
 - D. All of the above
5. Conservative Socialism redresses social grievances by mitigating the suffering of the proletariat, with the unstated goal of:
 - A. Aiding the proletariat in its violate uprisings

- B. Eliminating modern bourgeois society without a violent revolution
 - C. Restoring the feudal social system
 - D. Securing the continued existence of bourgeois society
6. Is it possible, according to Marx, for the Communists' aims to be achieved without the use of force?
- A. Yes, their aims can be achieved without force if the state makes worker-friendly reforms
 - B. Yes, their aims can be achieved without force if enough people join Utopian Socialist communities
 - C. Yes, their aims can be achieved without force if workers receive equal political representation in government
 - D. No, their aims can only be achieved with force
7. Which of the following thinkers had the most major intellectual influence on Marx?
- A. John Stuart Mill
 - B. Aristotle
 - C. G.W.F. Hegel
 - D. Vladimir Lenin
8. Which of the following goals is the immediate aim of the Communists?
- A. The unification of the proletariat into a ruling class
 - B. The overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy
 - C. The conquest of political power by the proletariat
 - D. All of the above
9. Which of the following is presented as a common objection to the Communist agenda?
- A. No one will work if private property is abolished
 - B. The family will be destroyed
 - C. Communism violates property rights
 - D. All of the above
10. During which century was the Communist Manifesto published?

- A. The 19th century
- B. The 17th century
- C. The 20th century
- D. The 18th century

11. Who wrote the Communist Manifesto with Marx?

- A. Vladimir Lenin
- B. Friedrich Engels
- C. Joseph Stalin
- D. John Stuart Mill

12. What is the FIRST step in the working class revolution?

- A. The raising of the proletariat to the status of ruling class
- B. The eliminate all conceptions of class
- C. The creation of a permanent dictatorship of the proletariat
- D. None of the above

13. Which of the following is NOT suggested as a likely development during the early stages of the proletariat revolution?

- A. The abolition of all inheritance rights
- B. State centralization of communication and transportation
- C. The establishment of free education for children
- D. An increase in the distinction between town and country

14. What sort of political parties do the Communists say they will work with?

- A. Those parties that will forward the ends of Communism
- B. Any party that opposes the bourgeoisie
- C. Those parties that promote worker-friendly reforms
- D. All of the above

15. Which of the following is NOT a trait of the proletariat?

- A. They are a class of modern wage-laborers

- B. They do not have their own means of production
 - C. They are a small minority of the population
 - D. They must sell their own labor in order to survive
16. Which of the following is a component of the "means of production"?
- A. The instruments of production (tools, machines, etc.)
 - B. Methods of working (skills, forms of cooperation, division of labor, etc.)
 - C. Applied knowledge (science, etc.)
 - D. All of the above
17. What is the primary source of changes in man's ideas?
- A. Natural selection
 - B. Man's material conditions
 - C. Progress towards Reason
 - D. None of the above
18. What system did modern Industrial society replace?
- A. Feudalism
 - B. Capitalism
 - C. Utopianism
 - D. None of the above
19. What do the proletariat stand to lose in their revolution?
- A. Their property
 - B. Their class dominance
 - C. Control of their labor
 - D. Nothing
20. The "mode of production" consists of each of the following EXCEPT
- A. The means of production
 - B. The relations of production
 - C. Inevitable class antagonism

- D. None of the above
21. Which of the following is a true statement about the struggles that dominate history?
- A. They reflect class antagonism
 - B. They are sometimes visible but sometimes hidden
 - C. They either end in reconstruction of society or total ruin
 - D. All of the above
22. Whose interests does the modern state serve?
- A. The proletariat's interests
 - B. The aristocracy's interests
 - C. The bourgeoisie's interests
 - D. The Church's interests
23. In modern society, who owns the means of production?
- A. The bourgeoisie
 - B. The proletariat
 - C. The military
 - D. The state
24. Who will own property after the workers' revolution is over?
- A. The proletariat
 - B. The bourgeoisie
 - C. The nobles
 - D. It will be owned communally
25. Which of the following characteristics does NOT describe the bourgeoisie?
- A. They are the employers of wage-laborers
 - B. They are the owners of the means of production
 - C. They are the class of modern Capitalists
 - D. They were the ruling class in the feudal period