

Summary of the Communist Manifesto (Revised)

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Original summary provided by Spark Notes

Communism is often viewed as the “evil” opposition of capitalism, its image plastered as monstrous dictators and malicious governments. This is actually a generalized misconception. The truth is, communism does not have a moral standing. It is simply a socioeconomic system meant to distribute resource and wealth fairly among the people. Karl Marx was a German sociologist and philosopher, as well as a political revolutionary, and was regarded as the father of communism. In 1847, he and fellow philosopher, Friedrich Engels, were commissioned by the Communist League of England to produce a manifesto to convey the ideals behind the communist movement. In the production of this manifesto, Karl Marx drew on the influence of one work by G.W.F. Hegel, who theorized history as a process in which the world becomes conscious of itself as spirit. Marx expanded on this by saying that as one becomes conscious of one’s self as spirit, the material world causes one to feel increasingly alienated from one’s self. Escaping this alienation requires some form of revolution. This doctrine became the basis to the Marxist philosophy. This work complements that philosophy.

Section 1: Bourgeois and Proletarians

The Manifesto opens by addressing how the history of society is the history of struggles among social classes. In every excelling civilization, we see how the people are divided by status, income, or origin. We see the self-proclaimed higher class, the bourgeoisie, and the lower working class, the proletariat. We see how the bourgeoisie have taken control over the mode of production and exchange, giving them power in the time of Modern Industry. They gained heavy political sway, and eventually, the interests of the State became those of the bourgeoisie, exclusively. They made all professions wage-labor, in doing so, put proletarians under subjugation of the bourgeoisie. What is unique about the bourgeois social class is that it continually needs to revolutionize its means of production and expand its market of profits. And with every revolution, they continue to exploit the labors of the people. When economic crises arise, typically through the actions of the bourgeoisie, the people they founded their system on revolt against them, the same way their fore founders had, in an inevitable cycle.

Section 2: Proletarians and Communists

As the bourgeois evolve and extend their systems and networks, the proletariat evolves itself. The proletariat, in relations of production, are just an extension of the machines of modern industry, instruments of labor. This is solely their place in the bourgeois system, their worth measured by an illusionary number, and are vulnerable to fluctuations in the market. As the wages of the proletarians are decreasing, and more proletarians are losing work due to new developments in modern industry, they find themselves unable to support themselves in current mode of production. However, along with these new developments, the population of the proletariat vastly increased. They soon found that they held the true power behind the success of the bourgeoisie and inevitably revolt. But though the history of this struggle between classes, we see that the modern proletarians are unique in themselves. In history, this type of revolution is usually a mere reallocation of property and the means of production. The modern proletariat have no property to retain, and know they are the means of production and can directed it in the best interests of the majority, which was the entirety of the proletariat.. With their distinctions dissolved, they sought to distribute all wealth and property in a common ownership, and disregard the image of State and instead serve the preservation of the people. Marx believes this is the only plausible end to the class struggle and that this change is inevitable.

Section 3: Socialist and Communist Literature

In this section, Marx critiques three subsets of different Socialist and Communist literature. The first subset referenced is Reactionary Socialism; consisting of Feudal Socialists, Petty-Bourgeois Socialists, and the German Socialists. Feudal Socialists were mainly French and English aristocrats that argued the ways of the modern bourgeois society, their primary objection being how the bourgeoisie create a revolutionary motion that can threaten their way of life. The Petty-Bourgeois Socialists were a group that believed the bourgeoisie would eventually succumb to the proletariat. Marx conceded to the Petty-Bourgeois literature for their illustration of the contradictions in the conditions of modern production. Their suggested alternatives, however, were to recede to the previous ways of production and exchange, leaving them in the same position as before. The German Socialists had adopted some ideas from French Socialists and Communists, but failed to realize that Germany and France did not share similar social conditions. The Germans contemplated the French ideas and found they lost practical significance, and therefore,

undermined them. The Germans are also against the rise of the bourgeoisie, although not recognizing that their rise is an essential step in history. Marx states that all of the proclaimed Communist and Socialist literature exported from Germany are characteristic of Reactionary Socialism.

The second subset is that of Conservative Socialism (or Bourgeois Socialism). It reflects the interests of a segmented group of the bourgeoisie that wished to remedy previous grievances to ensure the survival of bourgeois society. They desire to have the advantages of modern industry, but without any of its potential disadvantages. Essentially, a bourgeoisie without the proletariat. Or, rather, a proletariat that doesn't complain and isn't unruly.

The third subset mentioned entails Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism. This subset originated by the initial attempts for the proletariat to achieve their own ends, however, the proletariat did not reach the conditions for emancipation. In turn, the socialist looked for new social laws to generate the essential material conditions that would free the proletariat. Marx finds these writings to carry a significance in that they challenged every fabric of society, a significance that could enlighten the working class. But this form of socialism was based on idealistic concepts and did not provide solid basis for practical action, and thus, was an irrational vision. As the modern class struggle took form, this socialist perspective lost gravity in its practicality.

Section 4: Position of Communists in Relation to Existing Opposition

The concluding chapter in the Manifesto details the Communist agenda to forward their objectives, and the roles they plan in working with the opposing parties. The Communist cooperate with the opposition only to the extent that it benefits them. The Communist party fights for all revolutionary movements, but fights for the aims of the working class, foremost, and is always kept in context with the Communist movement as a whole. Marx openly declares that their ends can be attained only by forcibly overthrowing all existing social conditions. They never stop instilling recognition in the working class of the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and by helping them gain the weapons to eventually overthrow the bourgeoisie.

