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# The Main Points of "The Communist Manifesto"

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1. "The Communist Manifesto," written by [Karl Marx](#) and Friedrich Engels in 1848, is one of the most widely taught texts in sociology. The Communist League in London commissioned the work, which was originally published in German. At the time, it served as a political rallying cry for the communist movement in Europe. Today, it offers a shrewd and early [critique of capitalism](#) and its social and cultural implications.

For sociology students, the text is a useful primer on Marx's critique of capitalism, but it can be a challenging read for those outside this field of study. A summary that breaks down its main points can make the manifesto easier to digest for readers just getting acquainted with sociology.

## History of the Manifesto

"The Communist Manifesto" stems from the joint development of ideas between Marx and Engels, but Marx alone wrote the final draft. The text became a significant political influence on the German public and led to Marx being expelled from the country. This prompted his permanent move to London and the pamphlet's 1850 publication in English for the first time.

Despite its controversial reception in Germany and its pivotal role in Marx's life, the text didn't receive a great deal of attention until the 1870s. Then, Marx took a prominent role in the International Workingmen's Association and publicly supported the 1871 Paris commune and socialist movement. The text also grew in popularity because of its role in a treason trial held against German Social Democratic Party leaders.

After it became more widely known, Marx and Engels revised and republished the book into the version familiar with readers today. The manifesto has been widely read around the world since the late 19th century and remains the foundation for critiques of capitalism. It has

inspired calls for social, economic, and political systems organized by [equality and democracy](#) rather than exploitation.

## Introduction to the Manifesto

*"A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism."*

Marx and Engels begin the manifesto by pointing out that the European powers-that-be have identified communism as a threat. These leaders believe that communism could change the power structure and the economic system known as capitalism. Given its potential, according to Marx and Engels, the communist movement requires a manifesto, and that is what the text in question intends to be.

## Part 1: Bourgeois and Proletarians

*"The history of all hitherto existing society is the [history of class struggles](#)."*

In the first part of the manifesto, Marx and Engels explain the evolution of capitalism and the exploitative class structure that resulted from it. While political revolutions overturned the unequal hierarchies of feudalism, in their place sprung a new class system composed primarily of a bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and proletariat (wage workers). Marx and Engels explain:

"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."

The bourgeoisie achieved state power by creating and controlling the post-feudal political system. Consequently, Marx and Engels explain, the state reflects the world views and interests of the wealthy and powerful minority and not those of the proletariat, who make up the majority of society.

Next, Marx and Engels discuss the cruel, exploitative reality of what happens when workers are forced to compete with each other and sell their labor to the owners of capital. When this occurs, the social ties that used to bind people together are stripped away. Workers become expendable and replaceable, a concept known as a "[cash nexus](#)."

As the capitalist system grows, expands, and evolves, its methods and relations of production and ownership are increasingly centralized within it. The global scale of today's [capitalist economy](#) and the extreme concentration of wealth among the [global elite](#) show us that the 19th-century observations of Marx and Engels were accurate.

While capitalism is a widespread economic system, Marx and Engels argue that it is designed

for failure. That's because as ownership and wealth concentrate, the exploitative conditions of wage laborers worsen over time, sowing the seeds of revolt. The authors assert that, in fact, that revolt is already fomenting; the rise of the Communist Party signals this. Marx and Engels end this section with this conclusion:

"What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."

Often quoted, this section of the text is considered the manifesto's main body. It is also taught as an abridged version to students. The other parts of the text are less well-known.

## Part 2: Proletarians and Communists

*"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."*

In this section, Marx and Engels explain what the Communist Party wants for society. They begin by pointing out that the organization stands out because it does not represent a particular faction of workers. Rather, it represents the interests of workers (the proletariat) as a whole. The [class antagonisms](#) that capitalism creates and bourgeoisie rule shape these interests, which transcend national borders.

The Communist Party seeks to turn the proletariat into a cohesive class with clear and unified class interests, to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie, and to seize and redistribute political power. The key to doing this, Marx and Engels say, is the abolition of private property. Marx and Engels acknowledge that the bourgeoisie respond to this proposition with scorn and derision. To this, the authors reply:

*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; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths. You reproach us, therefore, with intending to do away with a form of property, the necessary condition for whose existence is the non-existence of any property for the immense majority of society.*

Clinging to the importance and necessity of private property only benefits the bourgeoisie in a capitalist society. Everyone else has little to no access to it and suffers under its reign. (In a contemporary context, consider the [vastly unequal distribution](#) of wealth in the U.S., and the mountain of consumer, housing, and educational debt that buries most of the population.)

Marx and Engels go on to state the 10 goals of the Communist Party:

Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.

A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.

Abolition of all rights of inheritance.

Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.

Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.

Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.

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.

Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.

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.

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.

### **Part 3: Socialist and Communist Literature**

In the third part of the manifesto, Marx and Engels present an overview of three types of critique against the bourgeoisie. These include reactionary socialism, conservative or bourgeois socialism, and critical-utopian socialism or communism. They explain that the first type either seeks to return to a feudal structure or preserve conditions as they are. This type is actually opposed to the goals of the Communist Party.

Conservative or bourgeois socialism stems from members of the bourgeoisie savvy enough to know that one must address some [grievances of the proletariat](#) to maintain the system as it is. Marx and Engels note that economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, those who run charities, and many other "do-gooders" espouse and produce this particular ideology, which seeks to make minor adjustments to the system rather than change.

Finally, critical-utopian socialism or communism offers real critiques of the class and social structure. A vision of what could be, this type of communism suggests that the goal should be to create new and separate societies rather than fight to reform the existing one. It opposes a collective struggle by the proletariat.

## **Part 4: Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties**

In the "Communist Manifesto's" final section, Marx and Engels point out that the Communist Party supports all revolutionary movements that challenge the existing social and political order. The manifesto ends with a call for the proletariat, or working class, to come together. Invoking their famous rally cry, Marx and Engels say, "Working men of all countries, unite!"