

# February 1848: The Proletariat Offers Its Own Manifesto as a Social Class for Its Own Emancipation



The back cover of The Communist Manifesto, published in 1848

## Internationalist Voice

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*“A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre.... It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a manifesto of the party itself.”*

Manifesto of the Communist Party

## **Introduction**

On 21 February 1848, a small printer's shop in the Bishopsgate neighbourhood of London published a small German-language pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*. The booklet proposed the end of a capitalist system of internal contradictions through social revolution and its replacement with a communist system. The manifesto was quickly translated into different languages and became one of the most basic and influential historical documents of the proletariat.

The basic premise of this manifesto is not that is represented the theoretical project of two young men under 30; better still, it represented the collective product and social struggle of the proletariat. Despite his genius, Marx did not invent communism for the working class, but it was the proletariat that succeeded in transforming Marx into a communist thinker.

The ideologues of the capitalist system have falsely claimed that communism was the same barbarity that dominated the Eastern bloc and that capitalism eventually liberated those who had lived under that barbarism. They have also stated that capitalism has been able to control its own crises, while insisting that there is no longer a working class nor an anti-capitalist nature because society has entered the era of informatics.

The study of the material context of *The Communist Manifesto*, along with an emphasis on its main content, namely, the overthrow of the barbaric capitalist system by communist revolution and the establishment of a classless society, is more valid than ever, while the material force of communist revolution, the working class, is still the only revolutionary class.

## **The material foundations of *The Communist Manifesto***

The capitalist mode of production was first developed in England and became a dominant production system, before gradually expanding to other European countries. With the expansion of capitalism, a large part of the peasantry were taken from their lands and turned into proletarians. The working conditions were more terrible than today and workers had to work from 60 to 72 hours per week in factories.

With the industrial revolution and the evolution of capitalism in England, advanced machines replaced simple tools in the industrial sector, especially the textile industry. The use of advanced machines led to mass unemployment. The workers saw the machines as being

responsible for their misery, regarded them with anger and hatred, and objected to their existence. It was in this context that workers began to destroy machines in the period 1811-1812 as part of the Luddite Movement. For a short time, the Luddite Movement was so strong that the bourgeoisie was scared and the British state pushed for its bloody repression. At a collective trial in the English city of York in 1812, a large number of activists belonging to this movement were sentenced to death, exile or imprisonment. Subsequently, laws were adopted whereby any damage to machinery would result in heavy punishment and even execution.

Several rebellions occurred in the 1830s and 1840s. A social class was protesting at its exploitation, while a revolutionary spirit was pervading society. Although the radical elements in these movements called themselves “communists”, their communism was a mixture of imaginative aspiration and heroic action. The passage of time and the experiences of the struggle have revealed the ineffectiveness of such thoughts and pursuits. The struggle to improve living conditions required a revolutionary perspective.

The manifesto represents the maturity and reflection of the emergence of a social class in the developments of society. Rather than riots or insurrections, it offered a political programme and a call for social revolution, as its historical mission, in order to end the capitalist system and establish a communist society.

The publication of the manifesto implied that the newly emerging social class provided the fundamental basis of its revolutionary theory in a coherent form, known as scientific communism, and also illustrates the means by which to realize the communist society. This social class is the only social class in human history that has been both exploited and revolutionary, and also the only social class that cannot abandon itself unless it abandons all humanity.

### **The grounds for the formation of *The Communist Manifesto***

In 1834, German migrant workers in Paris formed the League of the Just. Following the failure of the 1839 uprising in Paris, the League of the Just was forced to transfer its activities to London. Once there, it continued its activities under the name of the German Workers Educational Association. In March 1846, Marx and Engels, in line with their goals, formed the Communist Correspondence Committee in Brussels. As the name suggests, the committee honoured the memory of communist workers who had been tried and imprisoned for communist correspondence. The committee sought to communicate with workers’ groups and secret networks. One such group was the League of the Just, which expressed an interest in the positions of the Communist Correspondence Committee, as well as Marx and Engels’ proposals for its reorganization under a new name, the Communist League.

In June 1847, the Communist League, which was essentially formed through the merger of the League of the Just and the Communist Correspondence Committee, established its constituent congress. Marx did not attend the founding congress, but Engels and Wilhelm

Wolff (another activist from the Communist Corresponding Committee) were participants. Since this congress, having merged into the Communist League, as well as made changes to its goals and organization, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie has become the goal of the League of the Just. Despite all this, there were ambiguities in the approach and goals of the Communist League. In this regard, Marx challenged to the old slogan of the League of the Just, “All men are brothers”, argued that were men whom he did not want as a brother.

In September 1847, the Communist League drafted its basic position. The draft was influenced by fictional socialism and similar to religious denominations. The following month, Engels sent the draft to Marx, although they were both critical of its content and refused to approve it, believing it failed to examine historical events of relevance. At the second congress of the Communist League, which was held in late November and early December 1847, its fictional socialist positions were abandoned in favour of Marx and Engels’ position. In turn, overthrowing the bourgeoisie, installing the rule of the proletariat and abolishing class-ridden society became the main aims of the Communist League. The congress also commissioned Marx and Engels to formulate a manifesto for the Communist League. In response, Marx and Engels worked responsibly and tirelessly to codify the manifesto, and, in early February 1848, Marx sent the manifesto manuscript from Brussels to London for printing.

### **The method of historical materialism in *The Communist Manifesto***

*“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”*

The manifesto is historically focused on the concentration of industries and productive forces that characterize the evolution of capitalism, as well as historically depicts the formation of capitalism and thus the formation of the social classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. An emphasis on the irreconcilable contradiction between these social classes, which capitalism seeks to intensify, and, most importantly, the concentration of industries and productive forces, as prerequisites for communist revolution and communist society, are clearly described. This concentration in the capitalist system leads to the possession by a tiny minority of the means of production, based on the exploitation of the majority of society. In turn, the elimination of private ownership and the collectivization of the means of production become the main goals of the proletariat.

The manifesto refers to the antagonism of labour and capital as the origins of the class struggle, which, through communist revolution, should promote the proletariat to the ruling class, thereby eliminating the state and the class system. As political power is only necessary when society is divided into social classes, in contrast to capitalist society, which is focused on the individual and individuality, the manifesto emphasizes the social ownership of production, which is the precondition for a society in which the free development of everyone is the condition for the free development of all. Indeed, this is one of the most valuable and important teachings of *The Communist Manifesto*. As the manifesto states:

” When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

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.

### **This is the reason for choosing communism to define the manifesto**

After the global revolution of the 1920s was defeated, amid whose ruins the counterrevolution was victorious in the 1930s, the Stalinists stained the name of communism. The ideologues of the bourgeoisie, with the help of their own advertising apparatus, framed the Eastern bloc and Stalinism as communism, while the barbarians of state capitalism also referred to the consequences of communism. In this context, Trotskyists declared that, since Stalin had slighted the reputation of communism, they declared themselves to be socialists. Of course, internationalist communists (the communist left), as the true defenders of communism, in contrast to the different tendencies of the left of capital, have always defended the identity of communism and declared themselves communist.

Although, for communists, socialism and communism have the same concepts, in the history of the labour movement, the most radical and progressive part of the working class has always associated itself with communism. In such a context, the thinkers of the working class did not hesitate when they chose to name their defining platform as *The Communist Manifesto*. Engels, in the preface to the 1890 German edition of the manifesto, says:

“Nevertheless, when it appeared, we could not have called it a *socialist* manifesto. In 1847, two kinds of people were considered socialists. On the one hand were the adherents of the various utopian systems, notably the Owenites in England and the Fourierists in France, both of whom, at that date, had already dwindled to mere sects gradually dying out. On the other, the manifold types of social quacks who wanted to eliminate social abuses through their various universal panaceas and all kinds of patch-work, without hurting capital and profit in the least. In both cases, people who stood outside the labor movement and who looked for support rather to the “educated” classes. The section of the working class, however, which demanded a radical reconstruction of society, convinced that mere political revolutions were not enough, then called itself *Communist*...Socialism in 1847 signified a bourgeois movement, communism a working-class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at least, quite respectable, whereas communism was the very opposite. And since we were very

decidedly of the opinion as early as then that “the emancipation of the workers must be the task of the working class itself,” [from the General Rules of the International] we could have no hesitation as to which of the two names we should choose. Nor has it ever occurred to us to repudiate it.”

## **Internationalism of the manifesto**

*“The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.”*

Internationalism is one of the most basic principles and values of the working class, when viewed at an international level, regardless of race, nationality, religion, language, etc. Internationalism is also a necessary condition for building a communist world, in which the free development of everyone is a condition for the free development of all.

Internationalism is also a touchstone that determines whether something or someone is revolutionary and anti-revolutionary. During the First World War, the vast majority of labour parties active in the Second International, namely, social democratic parties, betrayed internationalism, defended their homeland and associated themselves with the bourgeois camp. Only the Bolshevik Party and a handful of revolutionaries remained loyal to internationalism in the Second International. This phenomenon was repeated during the Second World War. Even the Trotskyists, in the name of defending the revolution, sent workers to imperialist massacres and moved over to the bourgeois camp; only internationalist communists remained loyal to proletarian internationalism and believed that workers should fight against both fronts, the Allies and the Axis.

The radical phrase part of the left of capital, whether in the metropolis or on the periphery, such as worker-communism, undermined the concept of internationalism, while pushing through their anti-revolutionary and nationalist goals and objectives under the guise of internationalism. Other leftist tendencies of capital were also obviously proud of their patriotism; thus, during imperialist tensions between small and large gangsters, they took sides and persuaded workers to slaughter those opposing gangster camp. All of the various tendencies on the left of capital, which sought to justify their reactionary and anti-communist stances, were attempting to recapture some of the arguments of proletarian thinkers who had been raised during the flourishing period of capitalism: the days when communists defended national movements as well as those that had a progressive nature.

For example, one of the patriotic, counterrevolutionary and reactionary groups in peripheral capital, the Labour Party of Iran (Tufan), argued that “proletarian internationalism is complementary to the patriotism of the proletariat” in order to justify its patriotism. These patriots who, in their fiery defence of their capitalist country during the period of the reactionary and imperialist war between Iran and Iraq, stole the upper hand from the Basijis and encouraged workers to become cannon fodder for their own bourgeoisie. Ho Chi Minh,

one of the champions of the left of capital, stated that he felt love and respect for Lenin because he believed that Lenin was a great patriot.

In contrast to the tarnishing of Lenin's name by the different tendencies on the left of capital, it should be noted that Lenin was a great internationalist and, fortunately, always remained honourably internationalist. Unlike patriots, during the First World War, Lenin neither became a patriot nor defended his homeland, choosing instead to promote the slogan, "Turn the imperialist war into civil war".

Contrary to the patriotism on the left of capital, whether in the metropolis or on the periphery, Engels' immortal work, *The Principles of Communism*, consolidated the most basic positions of the proletariat with regard to the communist revolution, and in particular its internationalist character, while the reactionary positions of patriotism are clearly illustrated. In this work, we read:

"Will it be possible for this revolution to take place in one country alone?

No. By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the Earth, and especially the civilized peoples, into such close relation with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others.

Further, it has co-ordinated the social development of the civilized countries to such an extent that, in all of them, bourgeoisie and proletariat have become the decisive classes, and the struggle between them the great struggle of the day. It follows that the communist revolution will not merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilized countries – that is to say, at least in England, America, France, and Germany.

It will develop in each of these countries more or less rapidly, according as one country or the other has a more developed industry, greater wealth, a more significant mass of productive forces. Hence, it will go slowest and will meet most obstacles in Germany, most rapidly and with the fewest difficulties in England. It will have a powerful impact on the other countries of the world, and will radically alter the course of development which they have followed up to now, while greatly stepping up its pace.

It is a universal revolution and will, accordingly, have a universal range."

Marx and Engels believed that capitalist growth leads to the formation of large industries, which extract raw materials from the most remote parts of the globe, while the products from these industries, namely, commodities, also penetrate the most remote parts of the globe. The capitalist mode of production transforms all industries and their infrastructure into components of the whole and brings together all nations and generates a whole unit called the capital world, in which capitalism becomes the dominant global form of production.

The history of any mode of production, other than the socialist mode of production, can be divided into two periods: a period of growth and a period in which this mode of production declined. The capitalist mode of production, which began in the 15th century, saw its most decadent period in the early 20th century. The outbreak of the First World War showed that capitalism had become rotten as a global production process, chaining the hands and feet of

the productive forces. Meanwhile, since commodity production is global, the struggle of the working class is also international in its form, as is the alternative to the proletariat, the socialist mode of production; however, socialist islands cannot be formed.

### **The manifesto as a historical document**

The publication of the manifesto reflected the emergence of the workers as a social class. This class, coupled with the theoretical coherence of communism, chose to fight the barbaric capitalist system as well as offer an alternative to capitalism, the socialist mode of production. Communism, as a science and theory of the conditions for the liberation of the proletariat, is not a religion with predetermined dogmatic principles. Marxism is fluid and enriched by the experiences of class struggle. Although the theoretical principles and the underlying foundations in the manifesto are still valid, and are the guiding lights of the proletariat, there are still ambiguities that require new experiences on the part of the proletariat or correction after some time. There are ambiguities in the manifesto such that the proletariat can exploit bourgeois democracy and promote itself to the ruling class. It was only after the experience of the Paris Commune that the need to completely destroy the bourgeois state, replacing it with a dictatorship of the proletariat, became evident to the working class and its scholars. Since *The Communist Manifesto* has now become a historical document, no writer has the right to change it. In the preface to the 1872 German edition, Marx and Engels write:

“However much that state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in the Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever. Here and there, some detail might be improved. The practical application of the principles will depend, as the Manifesto itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing, and, for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section II. That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of Modern Industry since 1848, and of the accompanying improved and extended organization of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February Revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details been antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.” (See *The Civil War in France: Address of the General Council of the International Working Men’s Association, 1871*, where this point is further developed.) Further, it is self-evident that the criticism of socialist literature is deficient in relation to the present time, because it comes down only to 1847; also that the remarks on the relation of the Communists to the various opposition parties (Section IV), although, in principle still correct, yet in practice are antiquated, because the political situation has been entirely changed, and the progress of history has swept from off the earth the greater portion of the political parties there enumerated.

But then, the Manifesto has become a historical document which we have no longer any right to alter. A subsequent edition may perhaps appear with an introduction bridging the gap from 1847 to the present day; but this reprint was too unexpected to leave us time for that.”



## **Manifesto for the communist revolution**

The communist revolution is more than a hope and a dream or a utopia; it is an essential requirement for the progress of humanity. Communism is not about a just division of poverty and misery; rather, it is about a decent world and a better life for humanity. The communist revolution needs a programme, as well as a force that is capable of delivering it.

*The Communist Manifesto* was originally the programme of the Communist League, drafted by Marx and Engels. But the manifesto was a manifestation of the emergence of the social class, which, with its manifesto, asserted its claim to overthrow the barbaric capitalist system with a dialectical and historical expression. The manifesto clearly calls for the destruction of capitalism, not through conspiracy, insurrection or revolt, but through global social revolution. By changing the mode of social production, no class other than the proletariat, which is the only revolutionary class in the present era, has the material force need for the communist revolution. Indeed, the proletariat has inevitably announced a programme for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism through revolutionary communism and the replacement of capitalism with the dictatorship of the proletariat, in pursuit of a classless communist society.

The manifesto refers to the role of the communists, who have no interests apart from the interests of the proletariat. Furthermore, they acknowledge the role of the party as a necessary weapon in securing victory for the communist revolution. The proletariat itself is the product of the capitalist production system; it is also the gravedigger of capitalism. The communist revolution is the product of a vast movement representing the great majority of society, and this social class cannot abandon itself unless it betrays the whole of humanity.

**”Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of the world, Unit!”**

M. Jahangiry  
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