

January 25, 2017

Excerpts from The Communist Manifesto

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

5 word summary:

Although it at first had little or no impact on the widespread and varied revolutionary movements of the mid-19th century Europe, the Communist Manifesto was to become one of the most widely read and discussed documents of the 20th century. Marx sought to differentiate his brand of socialism from others by insisting that it was scientifically based in the objective study of history, which he saw as being a continuous process of change and transformation. Just as feudalism had naturally evolved into mercantilism and then capitalism, so capitalism would inevitably give way to its logical successor, socialism (a term which in Marx's usage includes its most advanced form, communism) as the necessary result of class struggle. Marx's insistence that tough-minded realism should replace the utopian idealism of earlier socialists had profound consequences which will be discussed in detail in the coming days.

Question(s):

5 word summary:

Part I: Bourgeois And Proletarians

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

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

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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.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified 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.

Question(s):

Part IV: Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties

5 word summary:

In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

In all these movements they bring to the front, as the leading question in each case, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time.

Finally, they labor everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.

The Communists disdain 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!

Question(s):