

Communism and the need for political action



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As a young writer in a time of brewing class tensions, Marx studied the historical and present relationship between the classes and wrote several works, including “ The German Ideology” (1845-46) and “ Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848). In his study of the history of society, Marx elucidates a trend in society toward an increase in production of commodities but a decrease in the standard of living, culminating in an inevitable proletariat revolution. This revolution, according to Marx, would result in a system of communism throughout the industrial nations. However, in the same writings of that period, Marx’s tone encourages the proletariat to join his Communist Party, and in the “ Manifesto” outrightly calls on the working men of all nations to unite (Manifesto of the Communist Party p. 500). Since Marx assumes in his historical analysis that communism is the inevitable culmination of the class struggles, and that men in desperate enough conditions will eventually join together to overthrow the entire political and social system, why does Marx see the need to actively recruit new members for his party? The answer can be found in realizing that Marx’s two lines of logic, on the economic and political trends of history, complement each other; Marx’s political activism is action taken within the framework of his theory. In Marx’s early works, he follows two lines of logic: the analysis of capitalism and history, concluding that society is headed towards communism; and the analysis of politics and history, to elucidate the agency by which the classes act. To understand Marx’s claim that communism will be the inevitable “ end point” that society is hurtling toward, one must first understand his theory of history and how capitalism fits into the model. Unlike his predecessors, who theorized that changes in society were based on conquest, Marx’s model sees the underlying theme of

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history to be the change in the mode of production, which is determined by the role of labor. The mode of production is characterized by the extent of the division of labor. “ The existing stage in the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labor,” says Marx (The German Ideology p. 151). Thus, as the mode of production improves, the division of labor will also be more defined. The extent of the division of labor determines the class structure and class relations. However, because the mode of production will advance, it will outgrow the social structure, leading to changes in the social structure (Manifesto of the Communist Party p. 475). Marx begins his historical analysis with early agrarian societies, in which production was undeveloped and people lived by hunting, fishing, or agriculture-laboring entirely for a use value, and not an exchange value. The corresponding social structure was one of an extended family, with chieftain, tribe members, and nominally slaves (The German Ideology p. 151). This agrarian society defines the role of labor in a way that is similar to Marx’s envisioned communism, but it could not last, according to Marx, because its production could increase, changing the social and political structure of society. Later, increased division of labor transformed the agrarian society an “ ancient communal and State ownership,” with a citizen/slave class relation in which the labor of the slaves became the basis of the production. On the other hand, out in the country, feudal or estate property was established, due to the decrease in the population, and therefore a decrease in the available labor. In the feudal system, the difference in the mode of production led to a working class of serfs (instead of slaves), therefore retaining a different but still antagonistic relationship between the serfs and the nobility (The German

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Ideology p. 152-153). Thus, from this empirical data, Marx concludes that although the mode of production changes the class structure, there has always been class struggle, whether between the slaves and masters or between the serfs and lords. From the serfs, then, “ sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed” (Manifesto of the Communist Party p. 474). As expected, the transition to the bourgeois society did not do away with the class struggle. Rather, the tension between the bourgeois and the proletariat increased, because the productive system is arranged so that competition between laborers makes living conditions increasingly worse for the proletariat, in such a way that in order to ameliorate their situation, they must overthrow the current system. “ The proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto, namely labor [...] In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State” (The German Ideology p. 200). Thus, by logic, Marx reasons that since the conditions will only get worse, eventually the proletariat must join together and establish a new social system-communism. Marx’s line of logic follows the trends of history and extrapolates what will happen in the future, following his underlying theme of class struggles in each type of society. However, his analysis of the trends of history lack an explanation of a mechanism by which societies evolve; he just assumes that they happen. In his description of the expected communist revolution, he describes how in the beginning the proletariat cannot succeed because they are disorganized, but that they will swell in numbers and organize, eventually leading to the “ violent, glaring character of revolt” (Manifesto of the Communist Party p. 480-481). Yet how

will the proletariat organize, and how will they revolt? Marx does not explain the mechanism by which the transition from the bourgeois society to the communism will occur in his social/economic theory. Marx's beliefs in how the transition should take place can be found in his analysis of the trends in politics throughout history. In his study of the past transitions, especially the transition from feudalism to bourgeois, he notes that the change in the type of labor available, and therefore the mode of production, is the basis of the social class. Then, the social class that has power groups together to seize the political power: " Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class" (Manifesto of the Communist Party p. 475). With the communists, Marx posits that the same order must follow, that there is first the organization of the proletariat into a social class, and then into a political class, although the transition into a unified political party is not necessarily smooth. " This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between workers themselves" (Manifesto of the Communist Party p. 481). With the political power, the ruling class is then able to pass legislation to reinforce its class, and therefore the class division between the ruling class and the laborers. Thus, while it is the change in the role of labor and the mode of production that are the driving forces behind changing societal structures, it is the political class that legitimizes and maintains that class structure. Given the importance of political power, it naturally follows that Marx should establish his Communist Party as a political group striving for power. " Every class which is struggling for mastery, even when its domination, as is the case with the proletariat, postulates the abolition of the old form of society in its

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entirety and of domination itself, must first conquer for itself political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest," writes Marx (The German Ideology p. 161). By organizing, the Communists can offer a party beside which the desperate proletariat can rally, thus helping to centralize and organize the proletariat social class into a political class. This organization and centralization is one of the steps that Marx defines in the evolution of the proletariat (Manifesto of the Communist Party p. 480-481). Additionally, by gaining political power, the Communists gain legitimacy with the majority of society, the proletariat, and can facilitate the transition into a communist society. Thus, to answer the question of why Marx feels that it is necessary to recruit members for the Communist party, we see that while Marx felt that the turn to communism was an eventual certainty, he did not stipulate that it would happen spontaneously, or without direction. Rather, he recognizes that an important step along the path to communism is to organize around a political party with a strong leader, which. For Marx sees his time period as one in which a social class has been firmly established, but the political class has not, and therefore Marx is fulfilling the next stage in the process of transition. In fact, while Marx may recognize the inevitability of the rise in communism, this transition cannot take place if the proletariat is not aware of the existence of the Communist Party or the platform of the Communists. Therefore, Marx's recruitment and advertising of the Communist Party is merely fulfilling one of the stages along the road to his envisioned end. It is also necessary to remain aware that the reader sees Marx in a dual role: one as a historian/philosopher, and the other as an activist. Marx says, " The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Theses on Feuerbach p. <https://assignbuster.com/communism-and-the-need-for-political-action/>

145). We can see that Marx was not one who believed that a philosopher's job was done after theorizing and writing; rather, he believed that action is necessary to change the world, and therefore took a role within the framework of his own writings. Marx's scientific reasoning leads him to conclude that the rise of communism is inevitable, with or without him; Marx's social conscience dictates that he take a role in the revolution. Thus we read documents by a Marx who is theoretical and scientific, and yet the documents take the tone of a Marx who is promoting the agenda within his theory.