

# A discussion on the controversial communist manifesto

[History](#)



## **The Collectivist Proclamation**

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels outlines a social order in their political pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto* published in 1848 that is neither unique nor scientifically supported. For all the eloquence of the writing, certain areas and topics are developed thoroughly yet others are seemingly touched upon and moved on without a deeper exploration of the logical refutations and moral revulsions. Throughout the manifesto, the central conflict is pitted between the fact that the 'ruling class determines the ruling ideas of the time' against that of who has the right to rule and the 'power to subjugate the labour of others' (83) by means of appropriation of the products of society. Marx and Engel's text is heavily influenced by the Socialist writings from France and England in the 1840s and it shows from the contents of the text that it is from the ruling classes of their time that their ideas sprung forth. There is also a significance in the proletariat's struggle against the bourgeois in that because the class relationships were clouded by religious beliefs and sentimentality, they did not realize they were being oppressed and that their labour was exploited by the ruling class. Although it is unclear in the text their initial source of the original motivation, what is clear is that it is inherent that the working class must eradicate the exploitations of class distinctions in order to further the case of their own class. In this paper I will first examine the the scope of the Manifesto's rejection of morality, philosophy, and religion in light of society's pecking order.

Then, tracing back to the roots of Socialist and Communist literature, I will discuss if and how communism can be free from the constraints of the ruling

ideas of the time referring to the crumbling nature of relationships. Finally, I can come to some conclusion in the opinion that communism cannot be free from the ruling ideas of its time due to its origins in French literature and the direction it has chosen to take as both a literary work and in its ideals.

The blatant rejection of principles such as morality, philosophy and religion in the manifesto that are considered inalienable rights in modern society supports the notion that 'the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class' (86). The bourgeois can reject the principles because it is in their power to do so. In section I 'Bourgeois and Proletarians', it is stated that the bourgeoisie 'cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production and with them the whole relations of society.' (67) The content of such relations then, are deemed unimportant by the manifesto due to its dynamic and unstable nature; thus, those in power can be disposed rather quickly. Additionally, technological advancements propel the nation forward at such a pace to keep up with the demand of production that as the shot-callers of the society change, the essence of the ideologies vary as well. Therefore, the most enduring ideologies are those that serve the interest of the ruling class of the time but are more often than not short-lived.

Having the upperhand of economic poweress, the bourgeoisie cold-heartedly tears apart the foundations of 'idyllic relations' and '[drowns] the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism in the icy water of egotistical calculation.' (67) To the proletariats, the issues of law, morality and religion are teeming with

bourgeois interest and prejudices that are thus overwhelming and dangerous. The flippant tone of the text reflects the sentiment that because the bourgeoisie is to be overthrown, these decorative addendums to society should not be emphasized. Instead, value should be placed on the coal, the working class, that keeps the engine of the society moving forward. That is also to say that the origins of these frivolous ideologies (morality, philosophy and religion) are rooted in one's materialistic existence, grows under the scope of certain relationships of production and blooms in the light of economic success by coming out on top of society's ladder.

The concept that the ruling ideas of each age is ever the ideas of the ruling class not only hints to its fragile equilibrium, but is also credited to the impeccable timing of the circulation of socialist literature tracing back to the French Revolution that found its way to Germany, giving birth to the origins of communism. The social construct of France and Germany in the late 18th century was vastly different yet conceptually similar in many ways. France was fighting the first of many battles of the French Revolution while Germany "[has] just begun its contest with feudal absolutism." (94) Although the social conflicts were different, the same tensions of upheaval were so similar that when these writings appeared in Germany, " German philosophers...eagerly seized on [them], only forgetting, that...[the] French social conditions had not immigrated along with them." (94) This creates the first instance where communism's origins root them in a position where the foundations of the ideology was neither entirely supported based on their own situation nor their own ideas. They took the criticisms of the French bourgeoisie out of context and based the German literati by combining the "

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new french ideas” with their own “ ancient philosophical conscience.” (94) Right from the beginning communism took up under the wings of German philosophers feathered by the ideas in their own minds. This underpins the very foundations of communism and from there the ideas took shape; the interpretations of morals in a society lies solely on those who have the power to interpret them.

The ideology of communism can never be fully free from the ruling ideas of the time because it is ingrained in the manifesto and the ideology that “ they...express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.” (80) They can never be indifferent to the ruling ideas of its time because the foundations of their ideology, to promote the interest of the working class — which will always be to overthrow the bourgeoisie and claim political power for the proletariats — is always present. Furthermore, by definition of Marx and Engels, “ the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,” (64) further cementing the notion that communism is inescapable from the ruling ideas of its time.

Communists stand very close in relation to the proletarians in that they are not of a separate party in opposition to the working-class parties, “ they have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole” and neither do they “ set up any sectarian principles of their own” (79) to further the proletarian movement. Therefore their attachment is to the plight of the proletariats and to them only. However, in this case, the opposite can be seen that Communism can indeed be free from the ruling idea of the the

time because it's not about what the ideas are (because their central dogma stays the same) and instead it has always been about conditioning the movements of the present upon the criticisms of the old. " In Communist society, the present dominates the past." (82) " The living person is dependent and has no individuality" (82) and thus as the times changes, the Communist party will adapt to the variances of the social construct of the times.

This brings forth the question regarding the cohesiveness within a communistic society. If the ethereal concepts of philosophy, religion, and morality are to be rejected and the present is ever changing, then what brings the proletariats together in the aftermath of the revolution once they've overcame the bourgeoisie? The answer lies in the fact that the class antagonisms and " decomposing elements in the prevailing form of society" (99) pressures the underdevelopment of the Communist systems. In their infancy, the societal construct pertaining to the development of class antagonism and industry is not pronounced but the economical situation " does not...yet offer to them the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat." (99) Therefore, there is freedom to " search after a new social science, after new social laws, that are to create these conditions." (99) In place of the useless ideologies of philosophy, and religion, there is encouragement to better living standards and fight for social equality by going after valuable laws and concepts that will ground the communist system and strengthen the unity of its people. While that may sound utopian, it is crucial to realize that the lifespan of this system is short-lived and history's inevitable habit of repeating itself is testament to the fact that

the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class. As the wheel of the world rises and falls, the tumultuous nature of communism can never be free from the ruling ideas of its time and will thus rise and fall to its rhythm.

Just like how the German philosophers borrowed and translated the French ideas into their own form of ' True Socialism', we as readers today of The Communist Manifesto are also reading this book out of the context of its times and bringing in many of our own thoughts and ideas in accordance with the social construct of our times. Preserved in the unassuming bindings are ideas that once shook entire nations and upset whole societies from the root up and are still to this day analyzed and explored for the power of its writing. The Communist Manifesto serves as a reminder of the fragility of relationships and the deep-rooted social ladder of class distinctions that can never be truly free of its own binds. Those who struggle against their fetters and may eventually burst asunder, only to renew the cycle once more perhaps with different people, in a different context, but always in the same chains and with the same determination for freedom.