

POLSC301: “The Communist Manifesto”—Guide to Responding

1. Who is the bourgeoisie? Who is the proletariat? How do they interact in capitalist society?

The authors' state that in a system of capitalism, the proletariat are the working class, fighting in the class struggle against the owners of the means of production, the bourgeois. The bourgeois constantly exploits the proletariat for its manual labor and cheap wages, ultimately to create profit for the bourgeois. The bourgeois exploits the proletariat by “constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation.” (*Chapter 1*)

2. Why did Marx and Engels believe that revolution was inevitable?

The most significant trait of the proletariat is that they have nothing to lose. By the nature of being proletarians, they have no power or privileges they must defend. Rather, to help themselves they must destroy the entire system, including private property. Proletarians will eventually rise to power as they increase in number, become stronger and more concentrated. Riots will occur. Unions will be formed. Proletarians assert that the bourgeois are unfit to rule, because they cannot guarantee “an existence to its slave within its slavery” and that with the development of Modern Industry, the bourgeois produces “its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.” The authors also state that there was an end to this process. At some point, the working class would eliminate all the remaining classes. If there were only one class, there would no longer be a class struggle. There would be no need for all the trappings of class warfare such as money, nation-states, and governments. The end result would be a classless society. (*Section 1*)

3. How is the proletariat different from past revolutionary classes?

The proletariat is a unique class in several ways. First, the exploitation it faces is more transparent than that of any previous class. Historically, class relationships were clouded by religious beliefs and sentimentality. People did not realize that their relationships were fundamentally economic and exploitative in nature. Capitalism exposes this exploitation, because it is based solely on ideals of self-interest and money. Thus, the proletariat are uniquely aware of their status as exploited peoples. Secondly, the proletariat are more interconnected than any previous revolutionary class. This is due to improved communication brought about by capitalism's technological advances, and because the proletariat all share an equally miserable existence. Proletarians are also the majority in society, whereas previous revolutionary classes were traditionally in the minority. (*Section 2*)

4. What are the objectives of communism?

Communists have no interests apart from the interests of the working class as a whole. Communists are distinguished from other socialist parties by focusing solely on the



common interests of all workers and not the interests of any single national movement. They appreciate the historical forces that compel the progress of their class and help lead the proletariat to fulfill their destiny. The authors state the following: "The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat." They also outline the 10 planks of communism:

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all rights of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
7. 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.
8. Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. 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.
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labor in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production. (*Chapter 2*)

5. Why isn't it possible to eliminate class antagonisms through political reforms that improve the workers' quality of life? How does "Manifesto" reply to such reformers?

Political reforms cannot eliminate class antagonisms because these antagonisms are due to the basic structure of society. Class is an outgrowth of the means of production. It is this economic structure that gives certain people the power to exploit others. As long as this structure exists, there will be a ruling class and an exploited class. Reforms might improve the standard of living of the exploited class, but they cannot alter the fact that they are powerless socially. Marx refers to the advocates of such reforms as conservative socialists. These socialists are misguided because they do not realize that class struggle is integral to history and is unavoidable in the capitalist system. They represent bourgeois interests, because they are trying to preserve bourgeois hegemony by dampening the revolutionary energy of the proletariat. These conservative socialists will ultimately fail, however, because the revolution is an unavoidable stage of history, and the proletariat will always be a revolutionary class. (*Section 3*)

