

Communist Organisation October of Spain
The Communist Manifesto
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

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On behalf of the International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organisations
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This year is the hundred fiftieth anniversary of the first publication of *The Communist Manifesto*, or as it was originally titled, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, at the request of the Communist League, a secret organization in which was grouped a handful of revolutionaries, mainly German, but also English, French, Swiss, Italian, Polish...

The Manifesto was not a work conceived by Marx and Engels to expound their theories, economic and philosophical findings and political conclusions. It arose out of the need to explain to the world who the communists were and what they wanted. The Congress of the League (London, December, 1847) entrusted them with the writing of that document. In the circular letter that the Central Committee of the League of the Just wrote to its members in February of that year, (the name of Communist League was adopted at the Congress), it stated:

“Humanity progresses by leaps and bounds, consciousness develops in every soul and along with it the desire for freedom. We have to submit to that necessity and not force the people to be subjected to laws that contradict their spirit. [...] we must draw up a brief communist confession of faith that will be printed in all the European languages and circulated in all countries. [...] What is communism and what do the communists want? 2) What is socialism and what do the socialists want? 3) How can communism be established as quickly and easily as possible? By way of

introduction, let us observe the following: [...] communism is a system in which the land should be common property of all, and everyone should work, 'produce,' according to their abilities and enjoy, 'consume,' according to their strengths; the communists intend, therefore, to overthrow all past social organizations and to raise a new one on their ruins." (1)

Months later, in 1848, this fundamental work appeared, conceived mainly as a weapon for the formation of a genuine revolutionary party capable of confronting the situation that was emerging in Europe, a revolutionary upsurge that foretold the confrontations and revolutions of 1848 and that put forth the need to put into practice the unity of socialism with the working class movement. It is an axiom to remember, that the Manifesto constitutes the clearest and most correct conception of the world, "consistent materialism, which also embraces the realm of social life; dialectics, as the most comprehensive and profound doctrine of development; the theory of the class struggle and of the world-historic revolutionary role of the proletariat." (2)

It was not, as we have seen, a coincidence that the Manifesto appeared in 1848, when the revolution was maturing all over Europe (in America, heroic struggles for liberation and independence were developing). In January, the people of Sicily rose up in Palermo and established a provisional Government; at the same time the people of Milan heroically stood up to the tyranny of the Hapsburgs; in Paris, the revolution broke out in February, and the first copies of the Manifesto arrived in Germany several weeks after the insurrection in Berlin had taken place. According to Engels, the first French edition of the Manifesto was published in Paris on the eve of the insurrection.

It seems to us that this was not a mere coincidence. It is not a matter of affirming glibly that the Manifesto exercised a **decisive** influence on the revolutionary movements of 1848; that would be to falsify facts. It is a matter of understanding how the historical conditions of that time, and their dialectical understanding, which would lead to the days of 1848, were correctly grasped by the communists and shaped by Marx and Engels into the Manifesto of the Communist Party. And the conclusion is **fully valid today**, that the achievement or realization of the communist ideals, will only be possible to the degree to which the communists unite in a communist party. This statement deserves greater merit when we realize that, at that time, the communists were a small minority, or as Engels called them in 1890, the "not at all numerous vanguard of scientific Socialism."

They knew perfectly well what they wanted and what they had to do. Three years before the appearance of the Manifesto, Marx in his *Thesis on Feuerbach*, expounded categorically his famous statement: "Until now the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to **change** it." And Engels later would write in *Revelations* that neither he nor Marx tried to create a work for scholars:

"We never thought of describing for the scholarly world, in thick volumes, the new scientific results of our investigations, so that others would not be informed. Nothing of the sort... We had the duty to lay a scientific basis for our doctrines; but for us, it was at least equally important to win the support of the European proletariat... And

scarcely had we come to clear conclusions ourselves than we began to work.”
[Translated from the Spanish.]

Thus the Manifesto of the Communist Party corresponds to certain clear and determined objectives, not only for the moment as some would try to have us believe, particularly the social-democrats and reformists of all types and hues, but its precious pages established a program of action and thought (always in development) for the whole historic process that can not be limited. It is the direct union between theory and practice, thought and action, that today, one hundred fifty years later, continues to be necessary, vital to achieve, perhaps more than ever before. The plans of Marx and Engels in this “little book” show that not only were they theoreticians of genius, but also leaders and organizers of the world proletariat, standard-bearers of their struggles and yearnings.

Origins of the Manifesto

The Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations decided at its last meeting on the publication of the Manifesto and the elaboration of this common introduction. This was done with the clear understanding of the need to develop a new campaign of study and discussion in our ranks and beyond, of this work which symbolizes what we fight for with our (scarce) forces, and (limited) means, in order to arrive at the point where it ceases to be a utopia.

The wealth of this work is such that it needs an extensive and well-documented study of its origins, the historic conditions in which it arose, the people involved, etc.; however, an introduction is not adequate for this. Therefore, we will just try to briefly present some of the main data and facts.

The French Revolution (1789), having overthrown feudalism and established the power of the bourgeoisie, laid the bases for socialism. It was in Paris, where the conspiracy of Babeuf, based on an egalitarian, primitive communism, failed in 1791, that the center of the proletarian movement was situated. It is true that English Chartism profoundly shook up bourgeois society, but it barely extended to the Continent. In Germany, feudal oppression savagely persecuted the artisans' associations, whose members were imprisoned, killed and forced into exile, mainly to Paris, which made this city the concentration point of the European revolutionaries. It was there that the embryonic communists first met up with socialist theories. But, as Engels himself pointed out, the English Owenists and the French Fourierists called themselves “socialists,” as did:

“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... 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. It was still a rough-hewn, only instinctive and frequently somewhat crude communism. Yet, it was powerful enough to bring into being two systems of utopian communism — in France, the ‘Icarian’ communists of Cabet, and in Germany that of Weitling. Socialism in 1847 signified a bourgeois movement, communism a working-class movement.” (3)

Engels evolved towards the philosophical ideas of communism, while he was still in the ranks of the radical neo-Hegelians of Berlin, through his comrade Moses Hess, who was the first to understand that communism was the logical development of neo-Hegelianism. At that time, in France, the revolutionary aspirations took form in the Society of the Friends of the People and in the Society for the Rights of Man; these were radical organizations of petty-bourgeois and proletarians. In 1834, the second revolt of the weavers of Lyon was crushed and their leaders, the ones who were able to escape the ferocious monarchical repression, fled abroad. The members of the "base" continued their secret activities, led mainly by Blanqui and Barbés. They created the "Society of Families," which was quickly destroyed by the police, and then the "Society of the Seasons," which was predominantly proletarian. Its ideology was the utopian communism of Babeuf, based on the petty-bourgeois idea of "equality" and the belief that a handful of determined men sufficed to do away with Authority.

Directly related to the latter, and sometimes allied with it, there arose the League of the Just. This League developed quickly under the leadership of the German artisans Bauer and Weitling. The failure of the uprising of May of 1839, in which the League of the Just and the Society of the Seasons acted together, led to the death penalty (later commuted to prison terms) of Blanqui, Barbés and others who, after long years in prison, were expelled from France. Some took refuge in London, others in Switzerland. It was in London, in 1843, that Engels made contact with them, particularly with Bauer (a shoemaker), Moll (a watchmaker) and Shapper (printer). Of them Engels said:

"They were the first revolutionaries who boasted to me, and although our ideas, at that time, did not totally coincide, far from it, in contrast to their petty egalitarian communism, I still nourished at that time a good dose of philosophical arrogance that was no less petty. I will never forget the imposing impression that those three men really made on me when I had barely ceased to be a child." (4)

In 1840, the German exiles in London formed a legal mass organization which served as a transmission belt and for recruiting members for the League of the Just. From London they maintained direct contacts with Germany, and with the groups of refugees in Switzerland, France, Brussels, etc. This was the scene when Marx and Engels, then living in Brussels, were working on their revolutionary theory. They were attracted by the League of the Just, but they had not taken the step of joining it. They were greatly influenced, it seems, by the work of the tailor Weitling, "Guarantees of Harmony and Freedom" (1842), that Marx described as "a gigantic and brilliant debut of the German workers... the first original theoretical activity of the German proletariat." (5)

In 1845, Marx and Engels, who were beginning to have an influence on the revolutionary movement, moved from Brussels to London, where they (mainly Engels) began a period of collaboration with the left wing of the Chartist movement and with the League of the Just (these organizations worked with each other). Upon returning to Brussels, Marx completed his work "The Poverty of Philosophy," in which he relentlessly lashed out at Proudhon. At the same time, he did not cease his revolutionary activity and together with Engels, his intimate Silesian friend Guillermo Wolf and others, he formed the "Association of Workers' Culture," through which they

carried on an intense labor of criticism, statements and elaboration of concepts, and “we mercilessly criticized the hotchpotch of Franco-English socialism or communism and German philosophy, which formed the secret doctrine of the ‘League’ at that time.” (6)

In the spring of 1847, according to Engels (Marx in *Herr Vogt* gives the date as the end of 1846), they joined the League of the Just, after a period of discussions and when the organization had already overcome its conspiratorial conceptions and the pseudo-theoretical communism of the artisans. Engels described it as follows:

“Moll [sent from London by the League] met with Marx in Brussels and me in Paris, inviting us repeatedly in the name of their comrades to join the League. He told us that they were convinced of the correctness of our ideas in general, as well as of the need to free the League from old traditions and conspiratorial forms.”

In the summer of 1847 the First Congress of the League was held in London. Guillermo Wolf attended as delegate of the Brussels Commune (Marx could not attend) and Engels as representative of all the communes in Paris. At the end of November the II Congress was held, which Marx and Engels attended with the draft of the Manifesto, whose writing they had previously been assigned. It was in the form of a “confession of faith,” something that apparently was traditional among the French socialists. But Engels was not in agreement with that form and wrote to Marx, at the same time that he invited him to Ostende to attend the Congress together:

“Think over the confession of faith a bit. I believe we had better drop the catechism form and call the thing: Communist *Manifesto*. As more or less history has got to be related in it the form it has been in hitherto is quite unsuitable.” (7)

The II Congress lasted until December and ended by assigning Marx and Engels the writing of the definitive edition of the **Manifesto of the Communist Party**. Weeks later, the text was sent to be printed in German, English and French, at the same time that the revolution broke out in Paris.

Since then, the world proletariat could rely on a treasure which has resisted the passage of time, the transformations and changes, and which continues to be young and fully valid in its general lines. In the Manifesto, the old humanist and quite confused slogan, used by the League, of “All men are brothers,” was replaced by the class cry, “Workers of the world, unite!” Despite general opinion, it was not in the Manifesto that this slogan was used for the first time. Actually, according to Marxist researchers, the Austrian Grünberg and the German Meyer (the biographer of Engels), it was in September of 1847, months before the publication of the Manifesto, that the League in London put out the first (and only) issue of its newspaper, under the name “Communist Review,” which put the famous slogan on its masthead. (8)

Present Validity of the Communist Manifesto

The Manifesto certainly appeared in a specific historic context and between 1848 and our day many things have changed. The authors themselves recognized this (see the foreword to the German edition of 1872):

“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.... But then, the Manifesto has become a historical document which we have no longer any right to alter.”

This was an idea that Engels would subsequently repeat on many occasions. What would we say today, one hundred fifty years later! Changes in industry, in the development of capitalism that they could not have predicted; the era of cybernetics and the conquest of space... In this period there took place the first attempt at the seizure of power by the proletariat, the Paris Commune; two cruel world wars and the longest conquest of power until now by the proletariat led by the communists (the Great October Revolution of 1917). The independence of numerous countries and the almost total disappearance of colonialism of the old type; the world supremacy of U.S. imperialism; the ever greater and more shameful betrayal of social-democracy; the rise of what is known as revisionism in the country of Lenin and Stalin and the errors, lacks and deficiencies that have provoked the stagnation of the 1960s and the disappearance of the USSR and the so-called eastern countries...

A theory often repeated by the social-democrats and reformists is that the “Manifesto” is an obsolete document, overtaken by events. These people sang praises both to the “Manifesto” and to Marx (always less often, and some, such as the Spanish socialists and others, have removed it from their literature), but now they claim that since 1848 the world has changed and that Marx’s conclusions are no longer valid. Naturally, the “Manifesto” is not valid for them, the renegades and revisionists of all types and all over. If we analyze the world in 1998, as Marx and Engels did in 1848, is it not clear that everywhere social-democracy and the socialist leaders are following a policy of treason, of abandonment of the interests of the working class, the proletariat, and of vile subjection to their bourgeoisie and/or to imperialism? What and whom do Jospin in France, the “Olives” in Italy, Felipe González in Spain, etc., etc. represent but their own bourgeoisie with interests opposed to those of the proletariat? Clearly those people have an interest in shouting high and low that the “Manifesto” is obsolete...! It is people of that kind who are currently falsifying history, modifying it in accordance with their interests, and having launched a furious anti-communist campaign, they lie shamelessly.

As a result of this, one must insist that the “Manifesto” is **not** just a product of the conditions of that time, nor is it the **precursor** of experiences to come. We agree with the Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola (1842-1903?), who said that:

“In reality the only historic experiences are those which history itself creates, and those experiences can neither be anticipated nor brought into existence by premeditated design or decree.”

The Manifesto was the result of continuous progress in the history of thought which, with Marx and Engels made an extraordinary, qualitative leap in its theoretical development. The “Manifesto” made the leap from socialism as a somewhat confused and inexact idea, to socialism as a science. As a science in continuous

development (which inevitably will make more qualitative leaps), it allowed its authors to conclude that capitalism digs its own grave:

“The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”

This is perhaps the main conclusion of Marx and Engels, that the collapse of capitalism is inevitable. That statement continues to be valid. The passage of time confirms this and what happened in the USSR in no way invalidates it. Capitalism will not collapse in and of itself. But that is another question. What is important is to prove that despite the scientific and technical advances, the transformations that have taken place, the changes, etc., capitalism is incapable of solving the serious problems of humanity, such as hunger, misery, the exploitation of man by man, wars of plunder, oppression. The terrible conditions in which the people of Africa live are a consequence of capitalism, not of some backwardness or lack of culture of those peoples, but a direct result of brutal capitalist exploitation. The same can be said of America and Asia... Even in the main imperialist country in the world, the U.S.A., are there not terrible pockets of poverty, is there not social marginalization, is there not hunger? Does “prosperous and cultured” Europe not know misery, unemployment and the other ills of capitalism? The bourgeoisie can never solve those problems. Today, 150 years later, the statement of Marx and Engels that the Government is nothing more than a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie is just as true as when it was formulated. The cynical statement of French Prime Minister Guizot in 1847 still holds for the big bourgeoisie:

“Any man with a greater than average intelligence, who does not have property, nor industry, should be considered dangerous from the political point of view.”

The [leading] role that the working class is called upon to play is another of the conclusions of the Manifesto. It is of particular importance to keep in mind that this conclusion, which has been confirmed, was made at a period in history when the working class was not the majority of the population in Europe and when the artisans were the most active class and the most educated politically. The distinction between artisans and proletarians is essential to better understand the passage from “utopian communism” to “scientific communism.” It is in the Manifesto in which for the first time the **proletariat** steps onto the stage as the protagonist, as the force which will give all its soul to the class struggle. Thus we see how Marx and Engels knew how to distinguish between the predominant force at a given moment, but without possibilities of development, such as the artisans, and the force in development, on the rise, as the proletariat was and continues to be. As for the class struggle, it is necessary to point out that it was not Marx and Engels who discovered it, but they were the ones who placed it as the determining factor in the progress of history. Marx explained it clearly:

“... no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that

the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular, historic phases in the development of production*; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*.” (Marx’s emphases) (9)

Thus he made clear the principal role of the proletariat in the class struggle; another essential point that the Manifesto made is that one of the principal features and characteristics of capitalism is the exploitation of the worker, an exploitation that will only disappear with capitalism itself.

All this continues to be valid, it has not been superseded. What happened in the USSR, Albania, etc., does not invalidate any of the above. This is not the place to deal with that problem, but we maintain that despite the errors, misconceptions and deformations (as well as betrayals) that led to the collapse of those countries, the fact that wrong answers were given does not mean that the questions were erroneous. Or, as the philosopher L. Peña stated:

“As a result of the difficulties of giving a Marxist explanation of what has happened on our Planet in the last decades some have been led to conclude that communism is bankrupt [...] Communism has a long history. Communism is a proposal, the proposal of organizing human society without private property [...] The collapse affects only some of its forecasts. It does not affect the proposal.”

The “Manifesto”, no matter how much the enemies of communism and its horde of pseudo-theoreticians and pseudo-philosophers insist, is not a museum piece. One hundred fifty years later, it continues to be a weapon that the proletariat must grasp, a weapon which serves the international revolutionary movement. Because they are aware of this, international reaction furiously attacks the ideas contained in the Manifesto; the international anti-communist campaign does not let up or cease. Why this fury, if communism has already been finally defeated as they claim? However, they join forces, they support each other and cheer each other on in this campaign, from the reactionaries to the modern revisionists, including the always treacherous social-democrats, not to mention all those that make up the *industry of the repented* (Benedetti). All the reactionary forces of the world are united in slandering the ideas of communism, fighting and trying to liquidate the communist parties. They have set loose a pack of “new historians,” who distort and grotesquely, vilely falsify the history of the workers’ movement.

The anti-communist campaign particularly includes the efforts to bury the Manifesto by making it a kind of mouldy archive document. This “*first mature work of Marxism*” (Lenin) clearly stated what the present situation of the world confirms, that “*the bourgeoisie... is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery.*”

We are aware, as Marx and Engels were, that **not all of the Manifesto**, its propositions, are currently valid. The fundamental thing in it is the role of the proletariat in the class struggle; the sense of internationalism (“the workers have no country”), and the affirmation that the proletariat can only reach its objective by *overthrowing by force* the whole social order and establishing the *dictatorship of the*

proletariat. It is well understood that the bourgeoisie trembles before the communist revolution, in which the workers have nothing to lose but their chains!

The Manifesto is neither obsolete, nor outdated, nor will it be as long as it is still necessary to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to carry out the proletarian revolution, to abolish the exploitation of man by man, the oppression and looting of one country by another, the subjection of the people by force of arms... Those who claim that the Manifesto has been left behind are the ones who have been left behind by history.

That all the above is possible has been proven clearly by the Great October Revolution of 1917, as earlier in 1871 by the glorious Paris Commune. That it could not be consolidated was due to subjective factors not attributable to the Manifesto.

Today, one hundred fifty years after the appearance of the **Manifesto of the Communist Party**, with all the vicissitudes and problems that the world communist movement has gone through, to us the attitude taken towards it is a dividing line between revolutionaries and reformists, between communists and social-traitors.



1. Ernest Drahn, *Neue Zeit*, XXXVII, 2. p. 131ff, translated from the Spanish.
2. Lenin, *Karl Marx*
3. F. Engels, *Prologue to the Manifesto of 1890*.
4. F. Engels, *Revelations*, translated from the Spanish.
5. K. Marx, in "Vorwaerts," Paris, 1844, translated from the Spanish.
6. K. Marx, *Herr Vogt*, Marx/Engels Collected Works, vol. 17.
7. Marx and Engels, *Correspondence*, Engels to Marx, Paris, 23-24 November, 1847.
8. Karl Grünberg and Gustav Meyer, *Die Londoner Kommunistische Zeitschrift und andere Urkunden aus den Jahren 1847-1848*, Leipzig, 1921.
9. Letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, March 5, 1852