

Communist Manifesto

- Date** ■ 1848
- Place** ■ Written in Brussels, first published in London
- Type of Source** ■ Political manuscript (original in German)
- Author** ■ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
- Historical Context** ■ The mid-1800s was a time of great turmoil in Europe. The Industrial Revolution had transformed skilled craftsmen into exploited laborers. Many predicted that governments would collapse and capitalism would fail as workers united to overthrow oppressive business owners. Labor organizations, such as the Communist League, which commissioned Marx and Engels to write their pamphlet, were formed to promote social reform. The *Communist Manifesto* inspired the communist revolutions of the 1900s as well as socialists, anarchists, and other anti-capitalists.
- Internal Context** ■ The following is from the first chapter and outlines the history of class struggle. They go on to discuss what the post-capitalist society will be like.

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

Freeman and slave, **patrician** and **plebeian**, lord and serf, guild-master 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.

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**.

From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered **burghers** of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed.

The discovery of America, the **rounding of the Cape**, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means

hitherto

until now

patrician

an aristocrat of ancient Rome

plebeian

a commoner of ancient Rome

manifold gradation

many degrees

bourgeois

related to the wealthy who benefit from capitalism

feudal society

See the social structure charts in the Atlas of World History, pages 68 and 98.

Proletariat

urban factory workers who are oppressed by capitalism

burghers

business owners in medieval towns (the origin of the word bourgeois)

rounding of the Cape

In 1488 Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias first rounded the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa, establishing a sea route to Asia.

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of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

The feudal system of industry, in which industrial production was monopolized by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The **manufacturing system** took its place. The guild-masters were pushed on one side by the manufacturing middle class; division of labor between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labor in each single workshop.

Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacturer no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionized industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, Modern Industry; the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of the whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois.

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange...

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralize the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle. And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their **miserable highways**, required centuries, the modern proletarian, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years.

This organization of the proletarians into a class, and, consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself.

Source: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels "Communist Manifesto," *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Translated by Samuel Moor), 2000, <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>> (June 3, 2011).

manufacturing system

In this context, manufacturing system means pre-industrial work done by hand.

miserable highways

Roads connecting medieval towns were often impassable, so information moved very slowly.