



Study Guide on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*

The page numbers in this study guide refer to the 1992 Bantam Classics Edition.

1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels begin *The Communist Manifesto* with the following: "A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of Communism." What is a spectre and why is Communism described as a spectre?
2. In the introductory paragraphs after noting it is time for the Communists to openly publish their views, the authors write, "Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London, and sketched the following manifesto..." Why make this claim when it was only Marx and Engels (who were both German) in attendance at the writing of the Manifesto? Is this a rhetorical device?

3. Marx writes,

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to the division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him (20).

Does Marx confuse activity with essence?

4. Marx writes,

the lower strata of the middle class (small tradespeople, shopkeepers, retired tradesmen, handicraft and peasants) all sink gradually into the proletariat...partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production (21).

Does this make Marx a Luddite¹ or is he merely lamenting the use of new technology?

5. What's the relationship between Communists and proletarians?

¹ The term Luddite originated in 19th century England. In 1811 and 1812, angry workers concerned with loss of employment assaulted factories and smashed machines. These "Luddites" yearned for a return to the old economic and social order before industrialization. (History of Modern Europe p. 560)



6. Marx writes, "Hitherto every form of society has been based as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes" (25). Is there a third option, or only a binary division of existence into either oppressed or oppressor?
7. On inevitability, they write, "What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (26). In the Manifesto's view, what makes the fall of the bourgeoisie inevitable?
8. Further, is the inevitable triumph of proletariat over bourgeoisie simply the penultimate stage, one of many more stages of class struggle, or is this the final stage, i.e. the end of class struggle?
9. Why is revolution required rather than reform?
10. They note the importance of abolishing private property writing, "In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property" (27). As such, is property itself a form of oppression in Marx's view? If no one can own private property in the Marxist view, then who determines living conditions? Does the proletariat organized as the ruling class provide a better system of determining who should live where, what kind of work one should do, and how much subsistence one needs to survive? What would this look like practically?
11. Marx writes, "There are, besides, eternal truths such as Freedom, Justice, etc. that are common to all states of society. But Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience" (34). If one replaces eternal truths, religion, and morality, what is left? Is the physical, material world all that is?
12. Some definitions to consider:
 1. Means of production
 2. Means of exchange
 3. Bourgeois
 4. Proletariat
 5. Capital
 6. Class
13. The Manifesto provides 10 requirements for an "advanced" society (34-35):
 1. Abolition of private property
 2. Progressive income tax
 3. No right of inheritance
 4. Confiscation of the property of "all emigrants and rebels"



5. Centralization of credit in national bank
6. State centralized means of communication and transportation
7. All means of production owned by the state governed by a common plan
8. Equal liability of all to labour
9. End distinction between urban and rural areas – equable distribution of population
10. Free education, abolition of children's forced labour

Why these 10 requirements? Are there any areas he may have missed or any that are unworkable? In any such society that has implemented any or all these requirements, how has that society fared? How has the government fared? The people?

14. Why is the march of history inevitable? If this movement of history and the triumph of the Proletariat are inevitable, then what role does Marx think he is playing? Why actively seek revolution if it's inevitable? Why do anything at all?
15. Moreover, why not pursue reform? Why is revolution necessary?
16. *The Communist Manifesto* does have rhetorical power. Why is it so captivating?