1-Page Book Summary of The Communist Manifesto

Manifesto of the Communist Party, better known as The Communist Manifesto, was originally published in German in 1848. It was commissioned by the "Communist League," a worker's party, and written by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Its goal was to explain the beliefs of the Communists and the program of the Communist League. It was translated into many languages and printed in many editions over the years. This summary is of the 1888 English translation.

Class Struggles

In early human history, there were many different hierarchical classes. The class that controlled the economy—which, in the earliest times, was mainly the food supply—was the most powerful class. For example, in the Middle Ages, in order of least to most powerful, there were serfs, apprentices, journeymen, guild-masters, vassals, and lords. The lords owned the agricultural land that produced food. Anyone who wanted to grow or buy food had to serve the lords.

According to Marx, all of human history is based in class struggles between oppressors and the oppressed. For example, serfs struggled against lords. Each conflict ended in either change to the social system or ruin for both classes involved in the struggle. By the time the manifesto was written, however, the multi-class system had narrowed into two main classes—the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie.

The Bourgeoisie employ laborers and own private property and businesses such as factories. This class can only maintain its existence by constantly improving production and growing the market, which they do by taking advantage of laborers, finding new markets, and more thoroughly exploiting old markets. None of this is sustainable, and the social conditions the Bourgeoisie have created will lead to their downfall.

The Proletariat is made up of people who sell their labor for wages. These wages are minimal and aren't equal to the value of the work laborers produce. For example, if laborers build tables for a bourgeois company, the company will sell the tables for far more than what it paid for the materials and labor. The majority of people are members of the Proletariat.

The Proletariat will eventually revolt and overthrow the Bourgeoisie through a series of events: First, as the Bourgeoisie strives to
improve production, they'll decrease wages, push the lower middle class into the Proletariat, increasing its numbers, and concentrate laborers in central locations where they can organize. The Bourgeoisie will even give the Proletariat political power so that the Proletariat can support the Bourgeoisie's political agenda against other classes. Then, the Proletariat will later use this power to oppose the Bourgeoisie. Finally, certain members of the Bourgeoisie will realize the Proletariat is the future and join them. There will be a revolution and the Proletariat will win.

Communists and the Proletariat

The Communists support the Proletariat and want to forcibly overthrow the Bourgeoisie. The defining feature of Communism is the desire to abolish bourgeois private property. Bourgeois private property wasn't made or earned by a bourgeois individual—it was made by many laborers working together. Therefore, property should be common.

The Path Forward

Once the Proletariat has acquired political power, they'll take the following ten measures:

1. Abolish the ownership of land and put all land to public use. This will eliminate oppression and class conflict.
2. Create a progressive or graduated income tax. This will spread wealth more equally among all members of the population and eliminate classes.
3. Abolish inheritance. This will eliminate wealth being held by a few instead of distributed among everyone.
4. Take away the property of emigrants and rebels. Emigrants who are living abroad and left possessions behind obviously aren't currently using them, so they can be better used by the general population. Rebels who oppose the Proletariat also shouldn't be allowed to have property.
5. Create a national bank using state capital. Private banks simply hold money. A national bank could use money to improve social conditions.
6. Put the state in charge of communication and transportation. If the state controls these things, rather than an oppressor, everyone will have access to them.
7. Expand and improve the state's control of infrastructure and land. Currently, people aren't making good use of resources. The state can allocate resources in a way that most benefits everyone.
8. Require everyone to work and require working conditions to be decent. This will result in everyone contributing to society.
9. Decentralize jobs from cities by combining agriculture and manufacturing. This will reduce geographic inequity and make better use of resources.
10. Abolish child labor, create public schools, and give all children free education. This will improve the lives of children.

(Shortform note: We've added explanations of each measure, based on widely-held interpretations.)

Responses to Criticism

Here are some criticisms of Communists and how they respond:

- **Communism encourages universal laziness.** If abolishing private property led to universal laziness, everyone would already be lazy, because laborers make up most of the population and don't have any private property.
- **Communism abolishes culture, freedom, family structures, and countries.** The Proletariat already lacks these things. The Bourgeoisie has abolished them all in the course of viewing laborers as commodities rather than people.
- **Communism upheaves the educational system.** The Communists simply want school to be available to everyone, not just the Bourgeoisie.
- **Communism makes women collective property.** This criticism is rooted in misdefinition. Because the Bourgeoisie consider their wives to be property or tools, when they hear the Communists say they want to abolish private property and use tools for the common good, the Bourgeoisie think that their wives are included. However, the Communists don't consider women to be property or tools.
- **Communism destroys religion.** Religion's ideas and values always change and evolve over time. Communism isn't changing anything that isn't already editable.

The Communist League and Other Groups

At the time of publication, the Manifesto of the Communist Party wouldn't have been described as socialist. In 1848, Marx defines
“socialists” as non-working class members who look for help from classes other than the ones they belong to. Socialists are interested in improving social conditions, and they think it's possible to do so by improving the existing political system, rather than through the total social change the Communists call for. The manifesto discusses several kinds of socialism:

- Feudal and petty bourgeois (lower middle class) socialism...

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The Communist Manifesto Summary Chapter 1

Manifesto of the Communist Party, better known as The Communist Manifesto, was originally published in German in 1848. It was commissioned by the "Communist League," a worker's party, and written by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels with the goal of explaining the beliefs of the Communists and the program of the Communist League. It was translated into many languages and many editions were printed over the years. This summary is of the 1888 English translation.

At the time of writing, Europeans are terrified of Communism and many want to stamp it out—the Pope, French radicals, and German police spies, to name a few. However, people use the descriptor "Communist" for anything they want to discredit. According to the authors, this means two things:

- All European powers acknowledge that Communism is powerful.
- People don’t understand the definition of "Communism" because it’s so misused.

The manifesto aims to deal with this second point—it explains what Communism really is and what Communists believe. Chapter 1 will address one of the major themes of the work, the struggle between oppressors and the oppressed.

(Shortform note: Manifesto of the Communist Party was organized into a preface, preamble, and four parts. For concision and clarity, we have combined the preface, preamble, and part 1 into Chapter 1, and combined parts 3 and 4 into Chapter 3.)

Class Struggles

In early human history, there were many different hierarchical classes. The class that controlled the economy—which, in the earliest times, was mainly the food supply—was the most powerful class. For example, in the Middle Ages, in order of least to most powerful, there were serfs, apprentices, journeymen, guild-masters, vassals, and lords. The lords owned the agricultural land that produced food. Anyone who wanted to grow or buy food had to serve the lords.

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The Communist Manifesto Summary Chapter 2: Communists and the Proletariat
Now that we've learned about the class struggle between the Proletariat and Bourgeoisie, what is the role of the Communists? The Communists support the Proletariat and want to forcibly overthrow the Bourgeoisie. The defining feature of Communism is the desire to abolish bourgeois private property. Bourgeois private property wasn't made or earned by a bourgeois individual—it was made by many laborers working together. Therefore, property should be common.

The Path Forward

Once the Proletariat have acquired political power, they'll take the following ten measures. (Some of the measures along this path are unsustainable but unavoidable. Problems will iron themselves out naturally.)

1. Abolish the ownership of land and put all land to public use. This will eliminate oppression and class conflict.
2. Create a progressive or graduated income tax. This will spread wealth more equally among all members of the population and eliminate classes.
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The Communist Manifesto Summary Chapter 3: The Communist League and Other Groups

Now that Marx has explained the values and aims of the Communist League, he turns his focus to how they compare to those of socialism and other working class parties.

Types of Socialism

At the time of publication, the Manifesto of the Communist Party wouldn't have been described as socialist. In 1848, Marx defines “socialists” as non-working class members who look for help from classes other than the ones they belong to. Socialists are interested in improving social conditions and they think it's possible to do so by improving the existing political system, rather than through the total social change the Communists call for. While socialism of the time has some things in common with Communism, such as opposing the Bourgeoisie and supporting the Proletariat, its goals are different. The manifesto discusses three kinds of socialism: reactionary, conservative/bourgeois, and critical-utopian.

Reactionary Socialism

Reactionary socialism evolved as a response to the domination of the bourgeoisie class and its ruination of the other classes. There are three sub-types:

- **Feudal socialism.** These socialists are French and English aristocrats. They oppose the Bourgeoisie because it took away their power and support the Proletariat because it's the only class that can attack the Bourgeoisie. Politically, however, feudal socialists oppose the Proletariat because they don't want revolution. They're supported by clerical socialists, who spin Christianity to a socialist angle—helping the poor, providing charity, and so on.
- **Petty bourgeois socialism.** The petty bourgeoisie are made up of tradespeople and small business owners who evolved
from peasant proprietors and medieval burgesses. Members of the petty bourgeoisie are constantly being pushed down into the Proletariat class because they can't compete with the Bourgeoisie. Petty bourgeois socialism criticizes the Bourgeoisie for similar reasons as the Communists but proposes different solutions. Petty bourgeois socialism strives to either completely restore old social systems or reframe...

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This is the best summary of The Communist Manifesto I've ever read. I learned all the main points in just 20 minutes.

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Shortform Exercise: Reflect on Communism

Communism supports the working class and aims to abolish private property.

Do you think the world can still be organized into two classes, Proletariat or Bourgeoisie, or the oppressors and the oppressed? Why or why not?

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