

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS

*With an Introduction by
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SIGNET CLASSICS

AFTERWORD

KARL MARX'S CRYSTAL BALL

In February 1848, Karl Marx was a twenty-nine-year-old university-educated journalist; his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, was twenty-seven. Their *Communist Manifesto*, published that month, was composed in Brussels—the capital of today's European Union—and printed in London. Marx, consulting some prior writings of Engels, wrote the text.* He barely made his deadline (and may have pulled some all-nighters); in fact, he did not even finish the last section. Largely ignored in its day, the book has had an astonishing afterlife.

Most readers would associate *The Communist Manifesto* with its denunciation of private property and wage labor, as well as its political prescriptions for radical revolution—which proved catastrophic for humanity. Murderous Communist regimes in the twentieth century must factor into any assessment of Marx's ideas and their role in

*Terrel Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1983), chap. 3.

history.* Still, *The Communist Manifesto* brims with lyricism about the magic of modern capitalism, and remains perhaps the greatest tribute ever to capitalism's power.

Admittedly, such a distinction is usually bestowed upon Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), which offered enduring arguments on behalf of competition, specialization (the division of labor), and the power of self-interest to increase social betterment. Marx read Smith's influential treatise on markets and morals, as did many contemporaries of Smith, such as James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson. Smith's overall perspective has triumphed historically. And yet his lengthy masterpiece is filled with sometimes difficult, archaic eighteenth-century prose. Marx's short, snappy text is more accessible, and his vision of capitalism more global.

Let us listen:

Steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, modern industry, the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires. . . . 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 . . . as indus-

*Leszek Kołakowski, "Marxist Roots of Stalinism," in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Norton, 1977), 283–98; Kołakowski "New York Times: Editorial of May 8, 1975: 30th Anniversary of the New Order in Europe: Victory for Common Sense!" *Survey*, 21/4 (1975): 87–9.

try, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, [and] increased its capital. (pages 64–65)

What is most remarkable about this and other such vivid passages is that their descriptions were mostly *of the future*. When Marx was writing, "giant, modern industry" and the "world market" were in their infancy. But he grasped the structural drivers pushing toward the first great globalization. Marx also captured the disruption inherent in modern capitalism's ability to destroy and to create. In both those senses—globalization and capitalism's relentless upheaval—*The Communist Manifesto* speaks directly to our time.

THE FIRST GREAT GLOBALIZATION (1870s–1920s)

"The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere."

—*The Communist Manifesto* (page 67)

The verb "globalize" is first attested by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* in 1944, but even into the 1970s writ-

ers who employed the term considered it novel.* As for the noun “globalization,” it has only been commonplace since the 1990s: Still, the phenomenon of globalization is older than the terminology.

Some analysts date the onset of the first great globalization from the invention of steam: by the 1830s, steam-powered ships (soon made of iron) operated on rivers and oceans, using coaling stations that would be deployed around the world. In 1869, the Suez Canal—connecting the Mediterranean and the Red seas, and thereby vastly shortening travel from Europe to Asia—was opened primarily for steamships.†

Other analysts point to the first transatlantic (underwater) telegraph cable laid in 1866, followed by similar cables in the 1870s from Britain to India, China, Japan, and Australia, East and South Africa. By 1880, big shots in London could communicate, in real time, with the United States or any part of the British Empire. This also had huge implications for the relaying of news, and the onset of war. In 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia by telegraph, setting off the First World War.

Still others look to the development of overseas markets. In 1851, Isaac Merritt Singer established his sewing machine company and four years later set up an affiliate in Paris, launching one of the first U.S. multina-

*George Modelski, *Principles of World Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1972).

†Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1983).

tional corporations. Within six years, foreign revenues of Singer Sewing Co. exceeded U.S. revenues. Other American companies would soon beat the global path, too, like John Rockefeller’s Standard Oil. By 1913, *World-Economy Archive* was founded, in Kiel, Germany, as the first journal with a focus on genuinely global economics.

Whatever marker we select for the beginnings of the first great globalization, it is clear that by the 1870s—when *The Communist Manifesto* happened to be republished—new technologies were dramatically lowering transportation and communication costs.* Marx had caught the long-term direction and scope of this transformation.

Marx was also prescient about the onset of “giant, modern industry.” Huge changes followed not only the advent of steam power but also the invention in the 1850s of processes to manufacture steel, a strong and elastic form of iron. New industrial chemicals, too, were invented and mass manufactured in the decades after *The Communist Manifesto*: chlorine bleach for making cotton, synthetic dyes for coloring clothes, synthetic fertilizers for increasing crop yields. In 1866, the father of the Nobel Peace Prize, Alfred Nobel, invented nitroglycerine (dynamite), an explosive that transformed railroad construction and mining. World steel production—which was predicated upon mining iron ore and coking coal—skyrocketed from 71,000 tons in 1850 to 500,000 tons in 1870 and 28 million tons by 1900. Steel would

*Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1975).

revolutionize war, with artillery and tanks, as well as civilian life, with skyscrapers and subways.

As for Marx's "world market," world trade had doubled between 1800 and 1850, but between 1850 and 1913 it expanded *tenfold*.

Marx's comments on the revolution of the railroads deserve special mention as well. The world of Marx and Engels had no coordinated time. Time differences between locales were set without rhyme or reason, according to the whims of local officials. In the 1880s, Helmuth von Moltke, the great German general, called for the introduction of a global standard time, arguing that it was necessary to have reliable time to coordinate troop movements and operational plans for wars. Moltke's desires were enacted by railroad companies.

Prospective passengers (customers) had to know when the trains would arrive and depart any given station, but New York was a crazy eleven minutes and forty-five seconds behind Boston. At noon in Chicago, it was eleven fifty a.m. in St. Louis and twelve eighteen p.m. in Detroit. In 1883, however, railroads in the United States divided North America into four time zones with standardized clocks throughout each zone—what became known as "railroad time." The next year, an international conference in Washington, D.C., called for Greenwich, England, to be made "zero time," and for the rest of the world to be divided into twenty-four units, each one hour apart. At first, twenty-five countries agreed to the world time zones. By 1913, the system had been adopted almost everywhere.

Marx was not the only observer to recognize incipient globalization, but he was among the earliest. Sixty-three years after *The Communist Manifesto*, Norman Angell, a British-born writer, published his own manifesto about how world integration could not be stopped. Appearing in twenty-five languages and selling more than 2 million copies worldwide, the book was entitled *The Great Illusion*, which referred to the diminishment of military power compared with newfound economic power. A few years later, the First World War broke out. Millions of people died, as would the first great globalization.* Still, Angell's work testified to the profound impression made by the deep global integration that Marx's manifesto saw coming.

The stepped-up global interconnectedness after 1870 led to a stark division between a few advantaged industrializers (western Europe, North America, Japan) and legions of raw material suppliers (sub-Saharan Africa, South America, much of Asia)—an unequal form of specialization, different from the kind described by Adam Smith. True, the world's division into a richer North and a poorer South, paradoxically, enhanced the sense of there being one interconnected world. But such inequality was then, and is again today, one of the bases for critiques of globalization, or at least of certain types of globalization—an ongoing multisided debate.†

*Harold James, *The End of Globalization: Lessons from the Great Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2001).

†David Held et al., *Debating Globalization* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005).

THE RELENTLESS UPHEAVAL OF CAPITALISM

“The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production . . . and with them the whole relations of society.”

—*The Communist Manifesto* (page 67)

The “bourgeois” Angell was born in England, attended lycée in France, did further studies in Switzerland, and at age seventeen emigrated to California, where he planted vines, prospected for gold, and became a journalist, before resettling in Paris and then moving back to England. His life was extraordinary—he would win one of Nobel’s Peace Prizes—yet fully in keeping with the radical possibilities Marx described. The period not long after *The Communist Manifesto* was an epoch of profound global mobility of goods, but also of people.

Nowadays, amid the second great globalization (1950s–present), which many people mistakenly regard as unprecedented, most of the world’s people have never lived or worked in another country. As of 2000, only about 3 percent of the global population lived outside their country of birth or citizenship (a little over 200 million out of more than 6.5 billion). Many millions of those outside their countries of origin were tempo-

rary refugees, driven out by war or natural disaster, and hoping to return.

In the decades following *The Communist Manifesto*, however, the world experienced radical mass migration without return. Between 1870 and 1925, probably up to one-seventh of the world’s working-age population moved permanently to another country. The first great globalization not only created a world economy, but fundamentally altered people’s sense of opportunity.

Migrants from Europe traveled mostly to the United States (some 32 million), but many went to Brazil, Argentina, and Cuba; as well as to Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Four million Italians crossed to Argentina in the 1880s and 1890s; some worked and went home, but most stayed. About 1.4 million Swedish first- and second-generation immigrants were listed as living in the U.S. as of 1910, when Sweden’s population was 5.5 million. So roughly one-fifth of all Swedes alive in the world had their permanent homes in America.

This great European migration to the Americas is well-known. Less known may be the fact that between the 1840s and 1940s, 50 million people flowed into the Malay Peninsula and Burma (both British colonies), the Dutch Indies (Indonesia), and the South Pacific. These migrants came from India (29 million) and China (19 million), with a few million coming from Africa and the Middle East.*

*Adam McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846–1940,” *Journal of World History*, 15/2 (2004): 155–90.

Asians resettled permanently in the Americas, too. Japanese laborers migrated to Peru to mine guano for fertilizer and to Hawaii to harvest sugar, while Chinese and Koreans also went to Hawaii (and to Siberia). A few million Asians uprooted themselves on indentured-labor contracts (“coolies”) to California, as well as to South Africa, Cuba, British Columbia, the Guyanas, the Dutch Indies, and elsewhere, to work on plantations or in construction.

Movement within the largest countries was no less spectacular: about 30 million Chinese moved to Chinese-controlled Manchuria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; about 10 million Russian subjects moved inside the Russian empire to Siberia and Turkestan (Central Asia). Whether migrants ventured on the high seas or roughed it across land, the vast majority were looking for opportunity. They took big risks.

Increased risk and disruption constituted one of the great themes of *The Communist Manifesto*, and here, too, Marx was on target. The advent of electricity initially meant soaring demand for copper (wires), drawing Montana, Chile, and Southern Africa into the world economy, offering a possible path to prosperity. But if copper became oversupplied in any given year, or demand suddenly slackened, those places would be thrown into turmoil. The same was true for Bolivia (tin), Ivory Coast (cocoa), Cuba (sugar), Indonesia (rubber): all these places became linked to global markets, and therefore subject to wild commodity price swings—radically affecting livelihoods, up and down.

The consequences of global integration were enormous: the collapse of one bank in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1873 triggered a depression that spread as far as the United States, causing mass unemployment. A phenomenal wealth machine, capitalism under conditions of global interdependence was also destabilizing, often for better, but also for worse, giving rise to what Marx labeled a new “everlasting uncertainty” (page 67).

Uncertainty escalated for peasants as much as, if not more than, for bankers. Three waves of drought, famine, and disease (1876–79, 1889–91, 1896–1900) claimed the lives of 30 to 60 million people in India, China, and Brazil. The 15 million people who died of famine in British India were equivalent to half the population of England at the time. Florence Nightingale, the famous nurse, wrote in 1877 of “a hideous record of human suffering and destruction the world has never seen before.” Had such mass death—the equivalent of thirty Irish famines or sixty Battles of the Somme (WWI)—occurred in Europe, it would be regarded as a central episode of world history.*

What happened? Something Marx did not grasp, but that we, in our climate-sensitive age, can easily appreciate. The airflows of El Niño—the recurrent warming of the Pacific Ocean—export heat and humidity to other parts of the world, creating an unstable climate for farming. The resulting torrential rains, floods, landslides, severe

*Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño, Famines, and the Making of the Third World* (London and New York: Verso, 2001).

droughts, and wildfires often devastated peasant crops. Still, the Victorian-era starvation need not have been so bad. In fact, many places had food surpluses, but these regions had recently experienced commercialization—that is, a deeper involvement in the world-market economy, including specialization away from subsistence agriculture. Progress (the spread of the market) had made possible generous increases in production in good times, but progress also undermined traditional methods for coping with cyclical drought. In addition, colonial rulers compounded the new market uncertainties with inept and racist rule, preventing adequate famine relief.

Marx would have blamed capitalism itself. In this he would have been wrong: the tyranny of imperialism was separate from capitalism. (Capitalism has thrived following global decolonization.) Nonetheless, Marx understood that capitalism was radical in its power to destroy and to create. “All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed,” he wrote. “They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations” (page 68). In other words, not only did industries compete in a struggle to survive, but countries needed to have the most competitive industries—or risk being conquered.

Capitalism’s volatility and disruption could be brutal, but Marx recognized that competitive destruction allowed for great innovation and material advance. Ultimately, he, along with many others, dreamed of removing capitalism’s devastating displacements and

risk, while retaining its fantastic creative force. Today, various possible steps for melioration are put forth by people of liberal persuasion. For people of conservative persuasion, curbing capitalism’s built-in excesses is generally viewed as near impossible, and even to try is seen as causing more harm than good.

HISTORY’S MIDDLE CLASSES

In the end, what are we to make of *The Communist Manifesto*? We should never forget that it was a political tract, spirited but full of wishful thinking (imminent revolution), influential but based on a dangerously flawed theory of history.

That a self-styled “scientific socialist” such as Marx championed capitalism’s productive power was no accident. He followed the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in believing that history moved in stages through contradictions toward an end goal (telos). Specifically, Marx thought history entailed a progression from feudalism to capitalism, then capitalism to socialism, and finally the telos of history—communism. That is why he called himself a Communist while advocating for socialism: a Communist first had to build socialism. But before that, capitalism had to make socialism possible by achieving high-level economic development.

The transition to socialism (and on to communism), therefore, was supposed to occur in the most advanced, already prosperous countries. Marx never fully explained what would then happen to the less advanced countries—would they have to go through a full stage of capitalism before being able to make the transition to socialism? Or, would they be able to leap straight from primitive capitalism, or even semifeudalism, directly to socialism? The latter answer was adopted by Lenin and his successor, Stalin, and by Mao. Their Soviet Communist and Chinese Communist regimes, respectively, killed tens of millions in civil wars, famines, and state-led social engineering.

No advanced country has ever made “a transition” to the kind of socialism called for by Marx—the socialism without private property, wage labor, or a market economy. Instead, in the kind of competition celebrated in *The Communist Manifesto*, the capitalist market economies of countries like the United States crushed the socialist economies of the Communist Soviet Union and its satellite states in Eastern Europe. With the 1991 Soviet collapse, the specter of *The Communist Manifesto* ceased to haunt humanity.

Capitalism seems as powerful as ever. The key to that power has not been some narrow “bourgeoisie” (or “capital”), as Marx imagined, but broad middle classes. And the latter did not act as some unified class pursuing its class interests—such a collective actor is a fiction—but rather, as Adam Smith suggested, people of the middle classes mostly pursued individual self-interest.

Marx erred even more grievously in forecasting the disappearance of the middle classes. Following *The Communist Manifesto*, middle-class life would enter a golden age. In 1859, drilling for oil began and kerosene (a petroleum derivative) soon became widely available for artificial lighting (lamps). But in 1879, Thomas Edison invented the electric light—an incandescent bulb with a carbon filament—which burned one hundred times brighter than kerosene.* Inside homes and shops, the distinction between day and night was overcome. By 1912, 16 percent of American houses had electricity, but by 1927 the proportion had risen to 63 percent. With electricity coursing through their walls, the middle classes began to acquire toasters, washers, refrigerators, and, eventually, televisions and computers.

Such inventions, regardless of where they originated, spread throughout the world. “As in material, so also in intellectual production,” Marx wrote. “The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property” (page 68). That circumstance will be more and more true for growing middle classes in places like China and India, especially if the second great globalization that began after the Second World War endures.

—Stephen Kotkin

*A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: Norton, 2005).