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KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

To the memory of Raphael Samuel

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels:

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

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I. *Preface*

Through most of the twentieth century, the importance of *The Communist Manifesto* was uncontested. It was important not because of its intrinsic merits, but because of the brute facts of world politics. In the twenty or thirty years after 1950, millions in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Eastern Europe lived under communist rule. Millions more, whether engaged in civil wars in Southern Africa, Latin America and South East Asia or in political struggles in France, Greece, Italy or Portugal, lived in countries in which communism was a powerful and inescapable presence.

In Western Europe communism was rejected as unacceptably authoritarian. But, strange though it now seems, until the 1960s it continued to be identified with an image of ruthless and energetic modernity. At the time of the Soviet five-year plans in the 1930s it had been thought to possess an answer to mass unemployment. Through to the 1970s it was widely believed to have the most effective solutions to economic backwardness. In many parts of the Third World national liberation and anti-colonial movements concocted their creeds from a mixture of Marxism and nationalism, while even in Northern and Western Europe, a blend of Keynesianism and moderate versions of socialist planning appeared to be in the ascendant. In Britain in 1964, for example, the prime minister, Mr Wilson, as champion of the forces of modernity, believed he had to produce a 'national plan' to regenerate the country. Only in the United States – and even there, only after a sustained period of persecution in the McCarthy era – did the population appear

immune to the appeal of socialism. Clearly, therefore, an understanding of the modern world appeared to require a knowledge of Marx; and Marx's message was most memorably set out in *The Communist Manifesto*.

But in the 1980s and 1990s the political landscape of this mid twentieth-century world was transformed beyond recognition. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992 and the extinction of communist parties everywhere outside China and South East Asia brought to an abrupt end a 'Cold War' that most had come to accept as part of the order of things. No one had anticipated that communism would make such a rapid and undignified exit from history.

Socialist and Social-Democratic parties had also been forced onto the defensive. From the time of the events in Paris in May 1968 libertarian and anti-authoritarian movements had emerged both on the left and on the right. The rise of a new and more aggressive laissez-faire conservatism, spearheaded by Mrs Thatcher in Britain and President Reagan in the United States, brought to an end the post-Second World War consensus built upon exchange stability, full employment and social security. At the same time, the electoral basis of social democracy began to break up as traditional industrial occupations throughout the developed world disappeared in the face of a shift of manufacture to the Third World. In addition, developments in electronics and information technology led to the down-sizing of corporations, the casualization of office employment and yet more shedding of manual labour. In the new era, a growing prosperity of the majority of wage earners in the advanced economies was accompanied by increasing insecurity and the emergence of an underclass lacking any useful function in the post-industrial economy. Traditional socialist and social-democratic aspirations to shape the economy or to redistribute wealth were all but abandoned.

The increase in female employment has made the language of the *Manifesto* appear dated: appeals for the unity of 'working men' have all but ceased. The growth of more individualized political concerns and the proliferation of single-issue campaigns

have made the ambition to turn the working class into a party appear incomprehensible. Belief in the possibility or even the desirability of a future communist society has become extinct. In this new era the *Manifesto* can no longer command automatic attention and its importance needs to be thought out afresh. Will it become one of a very small number of political texts – Plato's *Republic*, Machiavelli's *Prince*, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Rousseau's *Social Contract* may be others – that even centuries after their original composition still retain their power to shock? Or will it, like the communist movement it once inspired, shrink in importance until it is little more than an object of curiosity for specialists in the history of political thought?

To this question, there is one simple answer. The *Manifesto* will remain a classic, if only because of its brief but still quite unsurpassed depiction of modern capitalism. Marx was the first to evoke the seemingly limitless powers of the modern economy and its truly global reach. He was first to chart the staggering transformation produced in less than a century by the emergence of a world market and the unleashing of the unparalleled productive powers of modern industry. He also delineated the endlessly inchoate, incessantly restless and unfinished character of modern capitalism as a phenomenon. He emphasized its inherent tendency to invent new needs and the means to satisfy them, its subversion of all inherited cultural practices and beliefs, its disregard of all boundaries, whether sacred or secular, its destabilization of every hallowed hierarchy, whether of ruler and ruled, man and woman or parent and child, its turning of everything into an object for sale.

In short, the *Manifesto* sketches a vision of reality that, at the start of a new millennium and against a background of endless chatter about globalization and deregulation, looks as powerful and contemporary a picture of our own world as it might have appeared to those reading it in 1848.

In the period before 1870, political economists were slow to recognize the transforming power of industrialization because they remained haunted by fears of overpopulation and the spectre of

diminishing returns.¹ It was left to socialists in the 1830s and 1840s, particularly the followers of Robert Owen, as apostles of what was then called 'social science', to identify themselves with the prospect of abundance and the possibility of a society freed from scarcity. But these potentialities were identified with science and cooperation. They were not usually associated with the market, which was denounced as a system of unequal exchange, of the 'war of all against all' or of 'buying cheap and selling dear'. From this position it was easy to slip back into a nostalgia for a 'simpler' society with predictable expectations and fixed needs. What was unusual, if not unique, about the *Manifesto* – and this is by no means true of all Marx's other writings – was its unflinchingly modernist vision, in which the capitalist world market was not simply identified with destabilization and exploitation but also with a liberating power, the power to release people from backwardness and tradition-bound dependence.

The continual process of innovation, the incessant invention of new needs and the creation of new markets have not ceased since the time the *Manifesto* was written. The tendency towards limitless expansion remains, even if it is now hindered by environmental dangers, as it once was by diminishing returns. Communism, as subsequent history was to prove, was not the answer to the contradictory tendencies at work in the world depicted by the *Manifesto*. But, whatever is said about the rest of the *Manifesto*, its great achievement was to have built its theory upon a highly distinctive and strikingly novel vision of the modern world that, for all the immense changes of a century and a half, still remains visibly our own.

The case for the historical importance of the *Manifesto* is also powerful. For a century or more, its now seemingly extraordinary theory of history as a class struggle leading inevitably towards the triumph of world communism constituted a credo embraced by tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, of adherents in every

1. On the continuing fear of diminishing returns, see in particular E. A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: the Character of the Industrial Revolution in England*, Cambridge, 1988; on the lateness of a recognition of an 'industrial revolution' among economists, see D. C. Coleman, *Myth, History and the Industrial Revolution*, London, 1992, pp. 1–42.

part of the world. Enunciated not as a statement of principle or an expression of desire, but as a set of predictions, the formulations of the *Manifesto* underpinned the creation of a worldwide labour movement in the last third of the nineteenth century and, in the twentieth century, fuelled many of the political struggles – and not a few of the wars – that tore the world apart from 1917 to 1989.

A more diluted form of the view of history expressed in the *Manifesto* also made an impact far beyond the ranks of socialists and communists. It profoundly affected both the writing of history and the understanding of society among those without any direct acquaintance with the works of Marx. In place of a battle of ideas and creeds, it substituted the clash of social forces judged according to the goal of imminent or eventual social revolution. The ‘materialist conception of history’ that Marx and Engels applied to the history of communism in the *Manifesto* also gained wide acceptance beyond the ranks of communists, and it was to generate a mode of social and historical understanding which continues even after communism itself has begun to fade into history.

Even now, for example, a spectrum stretching from despairing veterans of the ‘old left’ to brash new champions of the free-enterprise right have appeared to agree that the development of world capitalism encountered only one major challenge in its history, that of revolutionary socialism representing the industrial working class. Both groups appear to conclude that with the final overcoming of this challenge, the future progress of an unconstrained and fully globalized capitalism will proceed unimpeded.

If this short-term stocktaking after the Cold War reveals the lingering after-effects of the *Manifesto*, so perhaps at a more stylish level does the stance adopted by a certain strand of post-modernist writing. This is the approach of all those French and American theorists who have concluded that because the class struggle over communism is over, history itself must have come to an end. One way to counter such conclusions is to point out that challenges to the global development of laissez-faire capitalism did not begin with industrialization and revolutionary socialism. Nor is it likely that the collapse of communism and the end of the industrial epoch will bring about their disappearance.

Already the end of the old millennium has witnessed the beginnings of other and differently inspired attempts to set the global economic system within a more sustainable and ethically acceptable framework.

But the best answer to this kind of post-modernism is to draw attention to the now forgotten sequence of events which resulted in the construction of the grand historical narrative associated with Marx. An investigation into the construction of the *Manifesto* can explain how this still compelling vision of the world was first stitched together. Such an explanation requires the telling of a rather lengthy and complicated story. But the story is important because it makes clear that much of what was first put forward in the *Manifesto* and later accepted as a commonsense understanding of the making of the modern world belongs more to the realm of mythology than fact.

In particular, such an account will show that what became Marxian socialism in Germany in the beginning had nothing to do with industrialization or the social and political aspirations of industrial workers. On the contrary, it emerged from debates among radical disciples of the German philosopher Hegel, about what should replace Christianity or Hegel's rationalized variant of it, 'absolute spirit'. Furthermore, when seen in a larger European perspective this emergence of German socialism out of a movement of religious reform was not particularly surprising. Socialism had also emerged out of post-Christian movements of religious reform in Britain and France at the beginning of the nineteenth century.²

2. In France, the origins of what came to be called socialism went back to the 1790s, the decade of the French Revolution, and the search for a replacement for the Christian religion, which, it was hoped, would disappear like the monarchy. Socialism – the 'harmony' of Fourier or 'the religion of Newton' (later 'the new Christianity' of Saint-Simon) – was to provide 'the spiritual power' once possessed by the Catholic Church. In Britain, 'the new moral world' promised by Robert Owen was presented without irony as a message from the second Messiah. The 'rational religion' of the Owenites was a direct extension of the eighteenth-century tradition of rational dissent. It was put forward as the scientific replacement of traditional Christianity based upon original sin. What distinguished the German path from religious reform to Marxian socialism was not a difference in kind from the process that had produced so-called 'utopian socialism' in France and Britain, but a difference between preceding religious and philosophical traditions. This account of the origins of socialism is elaborated in my forthcoming work, *Before God Died: The Rise and Fall of the Socialist Utopia*.

In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels made a successful effort to cover over these religious tracks and to set in their place a socio-economic genealogy appropriate to their new communist self-image. In fact, as this introduction will show, they not only wrote out the religious prehistory of communism, but also *any* form of intellectual prehistory. There was therefore no mention of the *Manifesto*'s intellectual debt to German classical historians, nor to the so-called 'German Historical School of Law' on the history of forms of ownership, to Adam Smith or Simonde de Sismondi on the operation of commercial society, to Proudhon's criticism of both property and community, to the development within the seventeenth-century natural law tradition of a historical conception, both of community and of private property. In the drafting of the *Manifesto*, any reference to these ideas, religious or secular, disappeared. Attention was deflected from socialist or communist ideas to the social forces supposedly represented by them. In this way, the history of socialism or communism appeared to become synonymous with the emergence of the industrial proletariat and the transition to modern society, starting from the industrial revolution in Britain and spreading to Europe and North America. Wars and revolutions became by-products of the social and political struggles engendered by the global industrializing process.

But despite the *Manifesto*, socialism or communism was never to become synonymous with the outlook of the 'proletariat'. The speculative or quasi-religious origins and character of socialist creeds, including that built upon the pronouncements of the *Manifesto* itself, continued to shine through the laboriously elaborated socio-economic façade. It was not the mere fact of proletarianization that generated the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century, but the experiences of social and political upheaval, shaped and articulated through the militant and apocalyptic languages of communism or revolutionary socialism. For this reason, historians have rightly likened the passions, intransigence and extremism of twentieth-century revolutions to the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Similar reasoning also needs to be applied to the question of socialist decline in the second half of the twentieth century. Although

the crises of socialist doctrine and the collapse of communist states were clearly hastened by political, military and socio-economic factors, the marked secularization of political beliefs in the decades after 1950 was equally important. The end of communism was not 'the end of history', but the end of an epoch in which criticism of global capitalism overlapped with the rise and fall of a powerful and organized post-Christian religion that, in the name of science, addressed itself to the oppressed.

The last general point to be made about the continuing historical importance of the *Manifesto* concerns its power as a text, its rhetorical force. Its claims and slogans were remembered even by those who had never read it – 'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism' . . . 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' . . . 'Proletarians have nothing to lose except their chains' . . . 'WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!'

But the power of the *Manifesto* did not simply consist of these memorable phrases. Nor could it be claimed that its impact derived from its overall design. The last section was hurriedly jotted down and looks unfinished, while the third section, despite its occasionally brilliant jibes, is arbitrary and sectarian. Undoubtedly, then, its power is concentrated in the first two sections. Propelled forward by the caustic and apparently undeviating logic of its argument, and enlivened by its startling rhetorical shifts, each paragraph still preserves the capacity to surprise and disconcert.

Even now – and certainly in the 1840s – readers of a 'manifesto' might have expected to find (as they would have found in an earlier draft composed by Frederick Engels) a declaration of 'The Principles of Communism', or even (in a yet earlier version proposed by another member of the Communist League, Moses Hess) 'A Communist Confession'.³ In the 1840s, as will become clear, communism was overwhelmingly identified either with radical traditions of Christianity or

3. See F. Engels, 'Principles of Communism', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, London, 1976 – (hereafter *MECW*), vol. 1, pp. 341–58; Moses Hess, 'Kommunistisches Bekenntniss in Fragen und Antworten', in W. Mönke (ed.), *Moses Hess, Philosophische und Sozialistische Schriften 1837–1850*, Vaduz, 1980, pp. 359–71.

with the extremes of Jacobin rationalism deriving from the French Revolution. The starting point of the *Manifesto* is quite different. It opens with a sustained tribute to its declared antagonist – the very epitome of private property and egoism – the ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘modern bourgeois society’. The ‘bourgeoisie’ had ‘accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals’. In a mere hundred years, it had ‘created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together’. If ‘modern bourgeois society’ were now approaching its end and about to yield to its opposite, communism, it was not because of the failings of the bourgeoisie, but because of its triumphs.

This end was nigh. ‘Like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells’, the bourgeoisie, through the very magnitude of the material advance which it had accomplished, had ‘forged the weapons that bring death to itself’. It had also ‘called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons – the modern working class – the proletarians’. The first section then concludes with an account of the formation of the proletariat into a class. Modern industry or the industrial revolution, the great bourgeois achievement, had replaced the isolation of the labourers with their ‘revolutionary combination’ into a group. The fall of the bourgeoisie and the victory of the proletariat ‘are equally inevitable’.

The second section is no less striking, though wholly different in tone. In a remarkable switch from epic to bathos, the scene shifts from the factory and the counting house to the bourgeois interior. There the bourgeois stands, no longer a herculean artificer, a world-transformer, rather a self-pitying paterfamilias, a wheedling householder, wiping the cold sweat of fear from his brow and wringing his pudgy hands in an entreaty to escape the retribution which communism is sure to bring.

Despite its title, ‘proletarians and communists’, this section mainly consists of an imaginary dialogue between the communist and the bourgeois, a dialogue in which the physiognomy of the communist ‘spectre’ is delineated in all its most lurid and flesh-creeping detail. The passage is both bitter and teasing. Most of the wild charges

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against communists – that they practised the community of women, the abolition of nationality, the destruction of property and civilization – are thrown back at the bourgeois' feet. A few, the communists cheerfully accept. If, therefore, the 'spectre' is exorcized, it is in a wholly unreassuring manner. For the bourgeois is invited to cast away his childish fears only to confront the real and grown-up terrors of a coming revolution.

The playful sadism of this passage is in turn only made possible by a third and equally arresting feature of the *Manifesto*, the changed identity of 'the communist'. It is no longer 'the communist' who threatens the bourgeois. Communists take no personal responsibility for the imminent expropriation of the bourgeoisie and even the proletariat will only be playing the role which history has assigned to it. Communists are no longer those who espouse a particular set of 'ideas or principles', they 'merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes'. This 'historical movement' is an expression of

the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and of its rule.

The sole defining feature of the communist is a clear awareness of this fact.

The communist, therefore, is one who has the advantage of 'clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement'. Among these 'ultimate general results' are the disappearance of 'class distinctions' and the concentration of all production in the hands of 'the associated individuals' or, as the later English version termed it, of 'a vast association of the whole nation'. Eventually, 'the public power will lose its political character' and in place of 'the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms' there will arise 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

*

PREFACE

Were these audacious claims the product of a single process of reasoning, or did a semblance of theoretical unity conceal a more contingent and ad-hoc assemblage of propositions derived from different sources? Why should a declaration of communism have placed such emphasis upon the world-transforming achievements of the 'bourgeoisie'? Why should it have been imagined that existing social and political systems were unreformable or that periodic economic crises were signs of the impending end of the property system as a whole? Why should it have been assumed that there was a particular affinity between the grievances of workers and the goals of communism? Finally, why should it have been believed that a historical process, governed not by ideals but by the clash of materially contending interests ('the class struggle'), would nevertheless deliver such a morally desirable result?

2. *The Reception of the Manifesto*

Until recently, straightforward answers to these rather obvious questions would have been hard to find. A history of the reception of the *Manifesto*, both of its changing political uses and of the changing meaning attached to its theory, will help to explain why these questions were so rarely put.

From the very beginning, interest in promotion of the *Manifesto* seems to have been governed by a concern with its immediate political goals rather than its ultimate communist ends. Hurriedly written up by Marx on the basis of earlier drafts by Engels in the first few weeks of 1848, the *Manifesto* appeared within days of a general European revolution stretching from the Baltic to the Balkans. But despite, or perhaps because of, this accident of timing, its immediate impact was muffled. Written in German, only one edition appeared in 1848.⁴ Amid the uncertainties of revolutionary upheaval, plans to

4. Two other editions of the *Manifesto* exist, dated 1848 and printed in London. One of these like the original edition was supposedly printed by J. E. Burghard of 46 Liverpool St, Bishopgate; the other by R. von Hirschfeld, 'English and Foreign Printer, 48 Clifton Street, Finsbury Square'. It was therefore supposed that three editions appeared in 1848. In the light of recent research, however, it appears that neither of the latter editions belonged to that year. The first was published illegally in Cologne around the end of 1850; the second could not have appeared before 1856 and more likely in 1861. See *Das Kommunistische Manifest (Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei) von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels*, Internet-Version, Bearbeitet und mit Vor- und Nachbemerkung sowie editorischen Anmerkungen versehen von Thomas Kuczynski, 1996, <http://www.fes.de/marx/km/vesper.html>. This text was originally published as No. 49 der Schriften aus dem Karl-Marx-Haus Trier in 1995.

translate the document into five languages announced at the beginning of the text were soon abandoned, and in Germany the authors themselves found good reason to downplay both the proposals of the *Manifesto* and the 'party' it was supposed to represent.⁵ Indeed, almost as soon as the revolutions of 1848 had broken out – in Paris in February, in Vienna and Berlin in March – the Communist League, the organization that had commissioned the *Manifesto*, was disbanded.

It was the newly chosen head of the Central Committee of the Communist League, Marx himself, who took this step. For once the revolution had spread to Germany and Marx was able to return from exile in Brussels and Paris, his first aim was to resume his political career as editor of the radical Cologne-based *Rheinische Zeitung* (Rhenish Gazette), broken off five years earlier in 1843 by the forced closure of the newspaper by the Prussian government. Now, once more editor of the renamed *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (New Rhenish Gazette), Marx considered that in Germany the political aims outlined in the *Manifesto* – 'formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat' – were premature. The subtitle of the new paper

5. An English translation of the first section of the *Manifesto* by Helen McFarlane, writing under the pseudonym, 'Howard Morton', did appear in *The Red Republican*, edited by the Chartist G. J. Harney. See *The Red Republican*, vol. 1, no. 21 (9 November 1850), pp. 161–2; vol. 1, no. 22 (16 November), pp. 170–72. In the introduction, it was stated that 'the turmoil' following the February Revolution of 1848 in France 'made it impossible to carry out, at that time, the intention of translating it into all the languages of civilized Europe' and also that two French translations existed in manuscript, but that it was 'impracticable' to publish them under 'the present oppressive laws of France', *ibid.* p. 161. Some notice was taken of the English version of the *Manifesto* in the press. The *Manifesto* was cited without being named in a leading article in *The Times*, 3 September 1851, bemoaning 'the number and infamy' of cheap publications in which 'disorganising and demoralising principles' were preached to the people. Further notice was taken in a review of 'revolutionary literature' which appeared in *The Quarterly Review* of September 1851, vol. lxxxix, p. 523. The anonymous author picked out passages proclaiming 'the destruction of your property' and denouncing 'middle class marriage' as 'in reality, a community of wives', as particularly horrible instances of the genre. I am grateful to Chimen Abramsky for drawing my attention to these passages.

was 'organ of democracy', its aim to represent the radical flank of a 'bourgeois revolution', comparable to the French Revolution of 1789. Even if the *Manifesto* had confidently predicted that 'the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution', Marx considered that in these new circumstances it would be quite inappropriate to follow the *Manifesto*'s injunction 'to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat'. The goal was to establish representative government and the liberal freedoms associated with the French Revolution of 1789. Only then would it be possible to proceed to a further revolution that would abolish private property. Marx, therefore, opposed the separate workers' programme proposed by another member of the Communist League, the leader of the Cologne Workers' Society, Andreas Gottschalk. But since it proved impossible to stifle this untimely display of working-class independence, Marx dissolved the League itself as a means of marginalizing Gottschalk and his supporters.

By December 1848 however, Marx was forced to concede the failure of his strategy of supporting a 'bourgeois' revolution and blocking the development of an independent proletarian party. Representative institutions had not overcome the entrenched powers of autocracy embedded in the armies and aristocracies of the principal German states. The German bourgeoisie had proved incapable of accomplishing its revolution, was primarily fearful of the threat from below and was sliding into reaction. In early 1849, Marx accordingly changed his position and began actively to encourage the development of proletarian independence. But by that time the main concern was no longer to proceed from a 'bourgeois' to 'proletarian' revolution. It was rather to save what little had been gained during the spring of 1848 in the face of the increasingly certain victory of reaction.

Between 1850 and 1870, the *Manifesto* was remembered by no more than a few hundred German-speaking veterans of the 1848 revolutions. It was first republished in significant numbers in Bismarck's newly constituted German empire as a result of the trial for treason in 1872 of the Social-Democratic leaders August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht (another veteran of the Communist League)

for their opposition to the war with France. In search of treasonable evidence, the prosecution entered into the records of the court the hitherto forgotten *Manifesto*, hoping to make the most out of its anti-patriotic claim that 'the working men have no country'. The unintended effect of this initiative was to enable socialist publishers to evade the censorship laws and embark upon the *Manifesto's* republication. Hence the new German edition of 1872.

Thereafter, with the extraordinary growth of socialist and social-democratic parties across much of the world, numbers of translations and new editions rapidly increased. By 1914 these had amounted to several hundred, including translations into Japanese, Yiddish, Esperanto, Tartar and all the other major languages of the Russian empire.⁶

At first sight, the political crisis in France following the defeat and abdication of Napoleon III in 1870-71 looked as if it might bring about another round of revolutions similar to that of 1848. The first attempts in the 1840s to establish international associations of radicals, democrats or socialists had been followed in 1864 by the formation in London of the International Working Men's Association. Its secretary was Karl Marx. This association, now known in history books as the First International, began as a modest collaboration between English and French trade unionists designed to prevent the use by employers of foreign workmen in trade disputes in the building trades.⁷ Marx attempted to use his position as secretary to mould the association into a vehicle of international working-class solidarity. Although never much more than a paper-organization, an increase in its geographical reach and an enlargement of its

6. For a comprehensive catalogue of editions and translations, see B. Andréas, *Le Manifeste Communiste de Marx et Engels: Histoire et Bibliographie 1848-1918*, Milan, 1963; for a discussion of the diffusion of the *Manifesto* in the years before 1914, see Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (Verso), London, 1998.

7. On the origins of the First International, see H. Collins and C. Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International*, London, 1965. The First International was formally disbanded at a Congress in Philadelphia in 1876, but was effectively defunct from the time that Marx and Engels moved its headquarters to New York after the Hague Congress of 1872.

political aspirations through a series of well-publicized congresses had by the end of the 1860s ensured the International worldwide fame. In the unstable period that followed the Franco-Prussian war and the collapse of the Second Empire, many in Europe thought that it had masterminded the six-week radical and 'working class' takeover of Paris – the Paris Commune – in the spring of 1871. In the industrializing regions of Western Europe it was thought to have been responsible for a large strike wave, while in Germany it was believed to have been behind the emergence of the first mass working-class parties committed, in part at least, to a socialist programme. Not surprisingly, this string of events brought Marx international notoriety. His defence of the Commune, *The Civil War in France*, written in London in 1871 in his capacity as Secretary of the International Working Men's Association, led the conservative press everywhere to denounce him as leader of a secret communist international workers' conspiracy. Coming on top of his growing reputation as the author of *Capital*, first published in 1867, Marx became established almost overnight as the great revolutionary architect of 'scientific' socialism.

But the political circumstances in which the *Manifesto* had been republished were very different from those in which it had been written. In the period between the 1870s and 1914 the significance attached to the *Manifesto* among the mainstream socialist parties of Western and Central Europe was mainly emblematic. Critical questions about the larger ideas of the *Manifesto*, about the viability of its conception of communism, and about the plausibility of a supposed transition from all-powerful socialist state to stateless communist society had been raised in the debates of the First International in the mid 1860s. But Marx's success in expelling the Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin and his followers from the International in 1872 meant that preoccupation with such issues was henceforth mainly confined to 'anarchists'.⁸ Furthermore, by the

8. The term 'anarchist' was used in France in 1840 by P.-J. Proudhon. See P.-J. Proudhon, *What is Property?*, eds: D. R. Kelley and B. G. Smith, Cambridge, 1994, p. 205. On Proudhon, see below. Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76), from the Russian landed nobility, went to Berlin in 1840 to study philosophy, was a contemporary of Marx in

time of the formation of the Second International in 1889, the exclusion of anarchism, both at a doctrinal and at an institutional level, was becoming a defining feature of the new socialist orthodoxy.⁹ The new European socialist parties of the 1870s and 1880s were based upon the participation of organized labour within the existing political system.

In these circumstances the political programme outlined in the *Manifesto* could no longer be accepted as relevant. Speculation about the world after the supersession of private property now appeared increasingly remote, while an insistence upon 'the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions' seemed positively dangerous. Similarly, the notion of a party bore little relation to those current in the 1840s.¹⁰ The language of the *Manifesto* had pointed back to the

Paris in the 1840s and a participant alongside the composer Richard Wagner in the Dresden revolution of 1849. Captured by the royalist forces, he was sent back for a long spell of prison in Russia and exile in Siberia. Having joined the International in 1864, he built up a following based mainly in Switzerland and was increasingly opposed to Marx's direction of the Association. Anarchists believed the state was as great an oppressor as private property. They were therefore strongly opposed both to 'state Socialism' and to participation within the existing political system. In opposition to Marx and his supporters, whose aim to transform the proletariat into a political party and gain power as a prelude to 'the withering away of the state', anarchists urged abstention from electoral politics. For Bakunin's objections to Marxian socialism, see M. Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (1873), ed. M. Schatz, Cambridge, 1990.

9. The Second International was founded at a congress in Paris in 1889. It was a mainly European confederation of parties and trade unions, dominated by the German Social-Democratic Party. It was much larger than its predecessor and by 1914 incorporated 4 million members and 12 million parliamentary votes. Issues were debated at congresses, held every two to four years. Its effective existence was brought to an end by the outbreak of the First World War, which it was unable to prevent. But it was reconstituted in various successor organizations down to the Socialist International (founded 1951), which still exists today. Anarchists unsuccessfully challenged its position on political participation in 1893 and 1896, after which they were excluded from its proceedings.

10. It was in response to these changes that Engels changed the title of the 1872 edition from 'The Manifesto of the Communist Party' to 'Communist Manifesto'. See Kuczynski, *Kommunistische Manifest*, footnote 1.

cosmopolitan, free masonic and illuminist associations of an invisible church: 'the Communists' did not form 'a separate party', they pointed out 'the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality' and clearly understood 'the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement'.¹¹ Alternatively, the term had referred to a small group of like-minded spirits: for instance, 'our party' as it was used by Marx in the 1850s to refer to the former editorial team of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848.¹² By contrast, in the 1870s, 'party' was coming to mean a national organization, with a democratic constitution and policies decided at annual congresses, an organization geared towards elections and increasingly towards participation in representative institutions. It was mainly for these reasons that the new parties preferred to describe themselves as 'socialist' or, even better, 'social-democratic' rather than 'communist'.

Insofar as *The Communist Manifesto* was studied in the decades after 1870, it was mainly as a pioneering example of 'scientific' socialism. But here again, its approach appeared dated. It had been written as an intervention in an 1840s debate about 'communism'. Its specific point, as we shall see, had been the promise of a viable conception of communism on the basis of a historicization of the notion of private property. By the 1870s and 1880s, however, this text was beginning to be presented to a socialist readership as but one part of the creation of an ever more cosmic and gargantuan theory, whose ultimate point was no longer political, but methodological and ontological. This was a 'scientific' conception of the world, even of being itself, which was to acquire ever larger and more billowy dimensions in the following seventy years. From 'the materialist conception of history', through 'Marxism' to 'historical materialism' and 'dialectical materialism', the process reached a grandiloquent and banal climax in 1940 with the enunciation of Joseph Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*: 'the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party'.

11. For the links between eighteenth-century freemasonry and nineteenth-century secret societies, see A. Lehning, 'Buonarroti and his international secret societies', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 1, 1956, pp. 112-40.

12. See R. N. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, vol. 1, 'Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy 1818-1850', London, 1975, pp. 278-83.

The trend had been initiated in the late 1850s by Engels with collusion from Marx in an effort to present their work in fresh terms that might appeal to a new, post-1848 generation of secularist and positivist radicals. Marx's work was to be represented as a great scientific discovery, the beginning of a new and entirely unprecedented 'materialist conception of history'. 'Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature', Engels proclaimed at Marx's graveside in 1883, 'so Marx discovered the law of development of human history.'¹³ This claim was not only remote from the issues at stake in the political debates of the 1840s, but it also effectively uncoupled the new 'science' from all that connected it with antecedent political and social thought.

For those particularly attracted by such claims, the first generation of 'Marxists' who entered political life in the 1870s, Marx's *Capital* or, even better, Engels' *Anti-Dühring* of 1877, were considered more reliable guides to the new world outlook than the *Manifesto*.¹⁴ Thus, no longer the outline of a current political programme and not quite definitive as a résumé of 'scientific socialism', the status of the *Manifesto* in the late nineteenth century was increasingly that of an honoured political relic, the cherished but somewhat dusty birth certificate of revolutionary socialism and an early and abiding symbol of the political and intellectual independence of the working class. Mindful of the constraints placed upon socialists in Bismarck's new German Empire, Marx and Engels had themselves unintentionally reinforced this view in their Preface to the 1872 German Edition. 'The Manifesto', they wrote, 'has become a historical document that we have no longer any right to alter.'¹⁵

Strangely perhaps it was therefore in the twentieth century rather

13. F. Engels, 'Karl Marx's Funeral', *MECW*, vol. 24, p. 467.

14. Karl Kautsky, the most influential Marxist theorist of the 1880-1914 period, wrote, 'judging by the influence that *Anti-Dühring* had upon me, no other book can have contributed so much to the understanding of Marxism. Marx's *Capital* is the more powerful work, certainly. But it was only through *Anti-Dühring* that we learnt to understand *Capital* and read it properly.' *F. Engels Briefwechsel mit K. Kautsky*, Vienna, 1955, pp. 4, 77.

15. *MECW*, vol. 23, p. 175.

than the nineteenth that *The Communist Manifesto* acquired its greatest political importance. Only then, galvanized into motion by the upheaval of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, was the *Manifesto* able to call up, as if from its own nether world, real 'communists' prepared to act out an apocalyptic scenario of world revolution to the letter.

Even back in the 1870s, there had been those prepared to follow the injunctions of *The Communist Manifesto* in more literal ways than those found acceptable by mainstream socialist parties. In an autocratic regime such as the tsarist empire, without a previous history of representative government, socialism or labour organization, 'the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions' made far greater sense, while in western Europe and North America, a host of militant and intransigent break-away groups, frustrated by the apparent docility of the parliamentary socialist parties, minutely disputed the meanings and implications of the prescriptions of the *Manifesto*. The triumph of the Bolshevik-led revolution in Russia in 1917 transported these hardened sectaries from the periphery to the centre of socialist politics.¹⁶

The formation of the Third International established an unprecedented and global form of Marxist orthodoxy and imbued *The Communist Manifesto* with a quite novel canonical status.¹⁷ Upon the

16. For a description of such groups in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century, see W. Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921*, London, 1969; S. Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain 1917-1933*, Cambridge, 1980; J. Rée, *Proletarian Philosophers: Problems in Socialist Culture in Britain, 1900-1940*, Oxford, 1984.

17. The Third International (1919-43) was founded by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Moscow in the aftermath of the October Revolution of 1917. Lenin defined its fundamental principles as 'recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat and Soviet power in place of bourgeois democracy'. According to its 'Twenty-one Conditions of Affiliation', laid down in 1920, parties wishing to affiliate had to remove 'reformists and centrists' from their leaderships and combine legal and illegal work. These conditions were to form the basis for the foundation of Communist Parties throughout the world in a period that was defined as one of 'acute civil war' demanding 'iron discipline and the maximum degree of centralization'.

The Third International, otherwise known as the Comintern, remained throughout its existence the ideological creature of the Soviet Union. Its hostility towards social-democratic parties reached a height between 1928 and 1933, during which social-democracy was denounced as 'social Fascism', and the distinction between Fascism and 'bourgeois democracy' was abandoned. After this policy had helped to secure

philosophical *naïveté* of post-1870 'Marxism' was superimposed the leaden weight of a dogmatic and intolerant 'Marxism-Leninism'. The numerous but limited runs of *The Communist Manifesto* associated with the socialist parties and Marxist sects of the pre-1914 period were all but engulfed by the global editions of Marxist-Leninist classics that poured forth from Moscow's Foreign Languages Publishing House. The new parties, expressly formed to support the October revolution and apply its principles in all other countries, were to be called Communist Parties. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, to give it its full and original name, became a text whose propositions all communists were expected to learn, understand and accept. Orthodox glosses and manuals helpfully ironed out discrepancies. The only sanctioned change was that suggested by Marx and Engels in 1872. Their cursory observation, originally enunciated by Marx in relation to the Paris Commune – that the working class could not 'simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes' – was elevated to *ex-cathedra* status by Lenin and decreed to mark the frontier between socialism and communism. The opportunist socialist parties of the pre-1914 era, it was declared, had evaded the revolutionary consequence of this truth: communists must 'smash the state'.¹⁸

In the struggle over communism, which dominated the world between 1917 and 1992, the *Manifesto* was treated as a wholly contemporary document. Obsessive importance was now attached to some of its formulations and its general interpretation was carefully

the victory of Nazism in Germany, it was abandoned in favour of a broad 'popular front' against Fascism. After the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, the Comintern once again dropped the distinction between parliamentary and Fascist regimes and denounced the war as imperialist and reactionary. But after the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, it reverted to support for the war against the Axis powers. In 1943, Stalin dissolved the Comintern in an effort to please his new-found allies in the West.

18. V. I. Lenin, 'The State and Revolution', in V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, London, 1969, p. 289 and *passim*.

policed. Pioneering research into its historical origins made a promising beginning in the 1920s, but then shrivelled.¹⁹ As a result, large and rudimentary questions about the definition of communism and the position of the *Manifesto* disappeared beneath an ever denser overlay of Marxist-Leninist monologue.

As the history of the *Manifesto*'s reception demonstrates, attention to the text was always dominated by particular political circumstances. In 1848, political circumstances dictated that the prescriptions of the *Manifesto*, even its existence, be downplayed. After its republication in the 1870s it became a public document. But the way in which it was read always remained extremely selective. An insistent emphasis upon the supposedly critical condition of capitalism and bitter argument about the role of a political party in the revolution that would bring it to an end was accompanied by bland and unquestioning assumptions about the shape of post-capitalist society and the transition to communism. Virtually unanimous endorsement of Marx's dismissal of communist blueprints indicated a general unwillingness to probe the misty contours of what seemed a remote future.²⁰ But,

19. Notably, the work of The Marx-Engels Institute under the directorship of David Riazanov in Moscow in the 1920s and early 1930s. Riazanov was the first to publish a complete edition of the Marx-Engels correspondence and began a *Collected Edition* of Marx and Engels' works, the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, generally abbreviated *MEGA*, which appeared between 1927 and 1932. Riazanov fell from favour and disappeared under Stalin.

20. The murkiness of what was called 'the final goal of socialism' was one of the criticisms raised by Eduard Bernstein in his criticisms of 'orthodox Marxism', which set off the so-called 'revisionist' controversy in Germany in 1896. Bernstein argued that Marx's empirical predictions of the progressive worsening of the condition of the proletariat (its so-called 'immiseration') and the increasing polarization between two great classes in modern capitalist society had not come to pass. He then pointed to the vagueness of the idea of communist society. 'It is meaningless to say that in the communist future, "society" will do this or that . . . "Society" is . . . an indeterminate concept . . . and yet this metaphysical entity, this infinite unit . . . brings into being and guarantees the most complete harmony and the most wonderful solidarity imaginable.' Bernstein remarked of this 'final goal', 'this goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me, the movement is everything'. See H. and J. M. Tudor (eds.), *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898*, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 85, 168-9.

as the twentieth century was to demonstrate, such questions were not academic.

With the fall of communism and the disintegration of Marxism, consideration of such questions is no longer obscured by deference to a sacred doctrinal tradition according to which capitalism and communism formed part of a single historical process, a zero-sum game in which the defeat of one was the triumph of the other. What was obscured by this idea was the possibility that socialism or communism formed only one strand of the criticism that has accompanied the growth of a world economy in the last three hundred years. To define socialism as the critique of political economy was to obscure the fact that socialism was one of a cluster of highly idiosyncratic forms of that criticism since it was directed not at the defects of an exchange economy but at the exchange economy itself. What was also obscured was the fact that most of the major economic criticisms of the exchange economy, even when taken over by socialists, emanated from outside the socialist or communist tradition. Therefore, if socialism or communism are to be understood, they must be located not in the history of the economy but in the broader history of political thought.

In the case of the *Manifesto*, this means starting out from the same place from which its authors had started – from the questions raised about communism as it emerged at the beginning of the 1840s. Was communism a justified inference from Christian theology, the true basis of a republic or the ultimate social form appropriate to the human species? What was the difference between socialism and communism? Did communism stand for absolute equality or allocation according to need? How could progressive taxation, the abolition of inheritance, the equalization of wages or the communal appropriation of the land lead to a stateless society? How could human need be defined outside or beyond what the market recognized as consumption or demand? How would the hegemony of private property eventually be overcome? By collective living and the community of goods? By collective ownership, equality of possession or some form of ‘negative community’ reminiscent of the period antecedent to the establishment of law, private property and

INTRODUCTION

the state? These were the questions posed about communism in the 1840s, questions to which the *Manifesto* offered a provocative and highly unstable answer.

'An astonishing masterpiece ...
It has an almost biblical force'

ERIC HOBSBAWM

The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels' revolutionary 1848 summons to the working classes, is one of the most influential political theories ever formulated. After four years of collaboration, the authors produced this incisive account of their idea of Communism, in which they envisage a society without classes, private property or a state. They argue that increasing exploitation of industrial workers will eventually lead to a revolution in which capitalism is overthrown. Their vision transformed the world irrevocably, and remains relevant as a depiction of global capitalism today.

P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

Edited with an Introduction by Gareth Stedman Jones



Cover: Detail from *Fighting on the Barricades, Berlin, 18 March 1848*, lithograph by an unknown artist, in the Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museum zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo BPK, Berlin

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