

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AN INTRODUCTION

Eric Hobsbawm

In the spring of 1847 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels agreed to join the so-called League of the Just [Bund der Gerechten], an offshoot of the earlier League of the Outlaws [Bund der Geachteten], a revolutionary secret society formed in Paris in the 1830s under French Revolutionary influence by German journeymen—mostly tailors and woodworkers—and still mainly composed of such expatriate artisan radicals. The League, convinced by their ‘critical communism’, offered to publish a Manifesto drafted by Marx and Engels as its policy document, and also to modernize its organization along their lines. Indeed, it was so reorganized in the summer of 1847, renamed League of the Communists [Bund der Kommunisten], and committed to the object of ‘the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the rule of the proletariat, the ending of the old society which rests on class contradiction [Klassengegensätzen] and the establishment of a new society without classes or private property’. A second congress of the League, also held in London in November–December 1847, formally accepted the objects and new statutes, and invited Marx and Engels to draft the new Manifesto expounding the League’s aims and policies.

Although both Marx and Engels prepared drafts, and the document clearly represents the joint views of both, the final text was almost certainly written by Marx—after a stiff reminder by the Executive, for Marx, then as later, found it hard to complete his texts except under the pressure of a firm deadline. The virtual absence of early drafts might suggest that it was written rapidly.¹ The resulting document of twenty three pages, entitled *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (more generally known since 1872 as *The Communist Manifesto*), was ‘published in February 1848’, printed in the office of the Workers’ Educational Association (better known as the *Communistischer Arbeiterbildungsverein*, which survived until 1914), at 46 Liverpool Street in the City of London.

In 1998 we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the publication of this small pamphlet, which is almost certainly by far the most influential single piece of political writing since the French Revolutionary *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*. By good luck it hit the streets only a week or two before the outbreak of the revolutions of 1848, which spread like a forest fire from Paris across the continent of Europe. Although its horizon was firmly international—the first edition hopefully, but wrongly, announced the impending publication of the Manifesto in English, French, Italian, Flemish and Danish—its initial impact was exclusively German. Small though the Communist League was, it played a not insignifi-

cant part in the German Revolution, not least through the newspaper *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (1848–49), which Karl Marx edited. The first edition of the Manifesto was reprinted three times in a few months, serialized in the *Deutsche Londoner Zeitung*, corrected and reset in thirty pages in April or May 1848, but dropped out of sight with the failure of the 1848 revolutions. By the time Marx settled down to his lifelong exile in England in 1849, the Manifesto had become sufficiently scarce for him to think it worth reprinting Section III (‘Socialistische and kommunistische Literatur’) in the last issue of his London magazine *Neue Rheinische Zeitung, politisch-ökonomische Revue* (November 1850), which had hardly any readers.

Nobody would have predicted a remarkable future for the Manifesto in the 1850s and early 1860s. A small new edition was privately issued in London by a German emigre printer, probably in 1864, and another small edition in Berlin in 1866—the first ever actually published in Germany. Between 1848 and 1868 there seem to have been no translations apart from a Swedish version, probably published at the end of 1848, and an English one in 1850, significant in the bibliographical history of the Manifesto only because the translator seems to have consulted Marx—or (since she lived Lancashire) more probably Engels. Both versions sank without trace. By the mid-1860s virtually nothing that Marx had written in the past was any longer in print.

Marx’s prominence in the International Working Men’s Association (the so-called ‘First International’, 1864–72) and the emergence, in Germany, of two important working-class parties, both founded by former members of the Communist League who held him in high esteem, led to a revival of interest in the Manifesto, as in his other writings. In particular, his eloquent defence of the Paris Commune of 1871 (commonly as *The Civil War in France*) gave him considerable notoriety in the press as a dangerous leader of international subversion, feared by governments. More specifically, the treason trial of the German Social-Democratic leaders, Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel and Adolf Hepner in March 1872 gave the document unexpected publicity. The prosecution read the text of the Manifesto into the court record, and thus gave the Social-Democrats their first chance of publishing it legally, and in a large print run, as part of the court proceedings. As it was clear that a document published before the 1848 Revolution might need some updating and explanatory commentary, Marx and Engels produced the first of the series of prefaces which have since usually accom-

panied new editions of the Manifesto.² For legal reasons the preface could not be widely distributed at the time, but in fact the 1872 edition (based on the 1866 edition) became the foundation of all subsequent editions. Meanwhile, between 1871 and 1873, at least nine editions of the Manifesto appeared in six languages.

Over the next forty years the Manifesto conquered the world, carried forward by the rise of the new (socialist) labour parties, in which the Marxist influence rapidly increased in the 1880s. None of these chose to be known as a Communist Party until the Russian Bolsheviks returned to the original title after the October Revolution, but the title *Manifesto of the Communist Party* remained unchanged. Even before the Russian Revolution of 1917 it had been issued in several hundred editions in some thirty languages, including three editions in Japanese and one in Chinese. Nevertheless, its main region of influence was the central belt of Europe, stretching from France in the West to Russia in the East. Not surprisingly, the largest number of editions were in the Russian language (70) plus 35 more in the languages of the Tsarist empire-11 in Polish, 7 in Yiddish, 6 in Finnish, 5 in Ukrainian, 4 in Georgian, 2 in Armenian. There were 55 editions in German plus, for the Habsburg Empire, another 9 in Hungarian and 8 in Czech (but only ³ in Croat and one each in Slovak and Slovene), 34 in English (covering the USA also, where the first translation appeared in 1871), 26 in French and 11 in Italian-the first not until 1889.³ Its impact in southwestern Europe was small-6 editions in Spanish (including the Latin American ones): one in Portuguese. So was its impact in southeastern Europe (7 editions in Bulgarian, 4 in Serb, 4 in Romanian, and a single edition in Ladino, presumably published in Salonica). Northern Europe was moderately well represented, with 6 editions in Danish, 5 in Swedish and 2 in Norwegian.⁴

This uneven geographical distribution did not only reflect the uneven development of the socialist movement, and of Marx's own influence, as distinct from other revolutionary ideologies such as anarchism. It should also remind us that there was no strong correlation between the size and power of social-democratic and labour parties and the circulation of the Manifesto. Thus until 1905 the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD), with its hundreds of thousands of members and millions of voters, published new editions of the Manifesto in print runs of not more than 2,00-3,000 copies. The party's *Erfurt Programme* of 1891 was published in 120,000 copies, while it appears to have published not many more than 16,000 copies of the Manifesto in the eleven years 1895 to 1905, the year in which the circulation of its theoretical journal, *Die Neue Zeit*, was 6,400.⁵ The average member of a mass Marxist social-democratic party was not expected to pass examinations in theory. Conversely, the 70 pre-Revolutionary Russian editions represented a combination of organizations, illegal for most of the time, whose total membership cannot have exceeded a few thousand. Similarly, the 34 English editions were published by and for the scattering of Marxist sects in the Anglo-Saxon world, operating on the left flank of such labour and socialist parties as existed. This was the milieu in which 'the clearness of a comrade could be gauged invariably from the number of earmarks on his *Manifesto*'.⁶ In short, the readers of the Manifesto, though they were part of the new and rising socialist labour parties and movements, were almost certainly

not a representative sample of their membership. They were men and women with a special interest in the theory that underlay such movements. This is probably still the case.

This situation changed after the October Revolution-at all events, in the Communist Parties. Unlike the mass parties of the Second International (1889-1914), those of the Third (1919-43) expected all their members to understand - or at least to show some knowledge of-Marxist theory. The dichotomy between effective political leaders, uninterested in writing books, and the 'theorists' like Karl Kautsky-known and respected as such, but not as practical political decision-makers-faded away. Following Lenin, all leaders were now supposed to be important theorists, since all political decisions were justified on grounds of Marxist analysis-or, more probably, by reference to the textual authority of 'the classics': Marx, Engels, Lenin and, in due course, Stalin. The publication and popular distribution of Marx's and Engels's texts therefore became far more central to the movement than they had been in the days of the Second International. They ranged from series of the shorter writings, probably pioneered by the German *Elementarbucher des Kommunismus* during the Weimar Republic, and suitably selected compendia of readings, such as the invaluable *Selected Correspondence of Marx and Engels*, to *Selected Works* of Marx and Engels in two-later three-volumes, and the preparation of their *Collected Works [Gesamtausgabe]*; all backed by the-for these purposes-unlimited resources of the Soviet Communist Party, and often printed in the Soviet Union in a variety of foreign languages.

The *Communist Manifesto* benefited from this new situation in these ways. Its circulation undoubtedly grew. The cheap edition published in 1932 by the official publishing houses of the American and British Communist Parties in 'hundreds of thousands' of copies has been described as 'probably the largest mass edition ever issued in English'.⁷ Its title was no longer a historical survival, but now linked it directly to current politics. Since a major state now claimed to represent Marxist ideology, the Manifesto's standing as a text in political science was reinforced, and it accordingly entered the teaching programme of universities, destined to expand rapidly after the Second World War, where the marxism of intellectual readers was to find its most enthusiastic public in the 1960s and 1970s.

The USSR emerged from the Second World War as one two superpowers, heading a vast region of Communist states and dependencies. Western Communist Parties (with the notable exception of the German Party) emerged from it stronger than they had ever been or were likely to be. Although the Cold War had begun, in the year of its centenary the Manifesto was no longer published simply by communist or other Marxist editors, but in large editions by non-political publishers with introductions by prominent academics. In short, it was no longer only a classic Marxist document-it had become a political classic *tout court*.

It remains one, even after the end of Soviet communism and the decline of Marxist parties and movements in many parts of the world. In states without censorship, almost certainly anyone within reach of a good book shop, and certainly within reach of a good

library, can have access to it. The object of a new edition on its 150th anniversary is therefore not so much to make the text of this astonishing masterpiece available, and still less to revisit a century of doctrinal debates about the 'correct' interpretation of this fundamental document of Marxism. It is to remind ourselves that the Manifesto still has plenty to say to the world on the eve of the twenty-first century.

II

What does it have to say ?

It is, of course, a document written for a particular moment in history. Some of it became obsolete almost immediately—for instance, the tactics recommended for Communists in Germany, which were not those in fact applied by them during the 1848 Revolution and its after-math. More of it became obsolete as the time separating the readers from the date of writing lengthened. Guizot and Metternich have long retired from leading governments into history books; the Tsar (though not the pope) no longer exists. As for the discussion of 'Socialist and Communist Literature', Marx and Engels themselves admitted in 1872 that even then it was out of date.

More to the point: with the lapse of time, the language of the Manifesto was no longer that of its readers. For example, much has been made of the phrase that the advance of bourgeois society had rescued 'a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life'. But while there is no doubt that Marx at this time shared the usual townsman's contempt for—as well as ignorance of—the peasant milieu, the actual and analytically more interesting German phrase ('dem Idiotismus des Landlebens entrissen') referred not to 'stupidity' but to 'the narrow horizons', or 'the isolation from the wider society', in which people in the countryside lived. It echoed the original meaning of the Greek term 'idiotes', from which the current meaning of 'idiot' or 'idiocy' is derived: 'a person concerned only with his own private affairs and not with those of the wider community'. In the course of the decades since the 1840s—and in movements whose members, unlike Marx, were not classically educated—the original sense and evaporated, and was misread.

This is even more evident in the Manifesto's political vocabulary. Terms such as 'Stand' ('estate'), 'Demokratie' ('democracy') or 'Nation/national' either have little application to late-twentieth-century politics, or no longer retain the meaning they had in the political or philosophical discourse of the 1840s. To take an obvious example: the 'Communist Party' whose Manifesto our text claimed to be had nothing to do with the parties of modern democratic politics, or the 'vanguard parties' of Leninist Communism, let alone the state parties of the Soviet and Chinese type. None of these as yet existed. 'Party' still meant essentially a tendency or current of opinion or policy, although Marx and Engels recognized that once this found expression in class movements, it developed some kind of organization ('diese Organization der Proletarier zur Klasse, und damit zur politischen Partei'). Hence the distinction in Section IV between the 'existing working-class parties... the Chartists in England and the agrarian reformers in America' and the others, not yet so constituted.⁸ As the text made clear, at this stage Marx's and

Engels's Communist Party was no kind of organization, nor did it attempt to establish one—let alone an organization with a specific programme distinct from that of other organizations.⁹ Incidentally, nowhere is the actual body on whose behalf the Manifesto was written, the Communist League, mentioned in it.

Moreover, it is clear not only that the Manifesto was written in and for a particular historical situation, but also that it represented one phase—a relatively immature phase—in the development of Marxian thought. This is most evident in its economic aspects. Although Marx had begun to study political economy seriously from 1843 onwards, he did not set out to develop the economic analysis expounded in *Capital* until he arrived in his English exile after the 1848 Revolution, and acquired access to the treasures of the British Museum Library in the summer of 1850. Thus the distinction between the proletarian's sale of his *labour* to the capitalist and the sale of his *labour-power*, which is essential to the Marxian theory of surplus-value and exploitation, had clearly not yet been made in the Manifesto. Nor did the mature Marx hold the view that the price of the commodity 'labour' was its cost of production—that is, the cost of the physiological minimum of keeping the worker alive. In short, Marx wrote the Manifesto less as a Marxian economist than as a communist Ricardian.

And yet, though Marx and Engels reminded readers that the Manifesto was a historical document, out of date in many respects, they promoted and assisted the publication of the 1848 text, with relatively minor amendments and clarifications.¹⁰ They recognized that it remained a major statement of the analysis which distinguished their communism from all other projects for the creation of a better society. In essence this analysis was historical. Its core was the demonstration of the historical development of societies, and specifically of bourgeois society, which replaced its predecessors, revolutionized the world, and in turn necessarily created the conditions for its inevitable supersession. Unlike Marxian economics, the 'materialist conception of history' which underlay this analysis had already found its mature formulation in the mid-1840s, and remained substantially unchanged in later years.¹¹ In this respect the Manifesto was already a defining document of Marxism. It embodied the historical vision, though its general outline remained to be filled in by fuller analysis.

III

How will the Manifesto strike the reader who comes to it for the first time in 1998? The new reader can hardly fail to be swept away by the passionate conviction, the concentrated brevity, the intellectual and stylistic force, of this astonishing pamphlet. It is written, as though in a single creative burst, in lapidary sentences almost naturally transforming themselves into the memorable aphorisms which become known far beyond the world of political debate: from the opening 'A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism' to the final 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.'¹² Equally uncommon in nineteenth-century German writing: it is written in short, apodictic paragraphs, mainly of one to five lines—in only five cases, out of more than two hundred, of fifteen or more lines. Whatever else it is,

The Communist Manifesto as political rhetoric has an almost biblical force. In short, it is impossible to deny its compelling power as literature.¹³

However, what will undoubtedly also strike the contemporary reader is the Manifesto's remarkable diagnosis of the revolutionary character and impact of 'bourgeois society'. The point is not simply that Marx recognized and proclaimed the extraordinary achievements and dynamism of a society he detested—to the surprise of more than one later defender of capitalism against the red menace. It is that the world transformed by capitalism which he described in 1848, in passages of dark, laconic eloquence, is recognizably the world in which we live 150 years later. Curiously, the politically quite unrealistic optimism of two revolutionaries, twenty-eight and thirty years of age, has proved to be the Manifesto's most lasting strength. For though the 'spectre of Communism' did indeed haunt politicians, and though Europe was living through a major period of economic and social crisis, and was about to erupt in the greatest continent-wide revolution of its history, there were plainly no adequate grounds for the Manifesto's belief that the moment for the overthrow of capitalism was approaching ('the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution'). On the contrary. As we know, capitalism was poised for its first era of triumphant global advance.

Two things give the Manifesto its force. The first is its vision, even at the outset of the triumphal march of capitalism, that this mode of production was not permanent, stable, 'the end of history', but a temporary phase in the history of humanity—one due, like its predecessors, to be superseded by another kind of society (unless—the Manifesto's phrase has not been much noted—it founders 'in the common ruin of the contending classes'). The second is its recognition of the necessary *long-term* historical tendencies of capitalist development. The revolutionary potential of the capitalist economy was already evident—Marx and Engels did not claim to be the only ones to recognize it. Since the French Revolution some of the tendencies they observed were plainly having substantial effect—for instance, the decline of 'independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation' before nation-states 'with one government, one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier and one customs tariff'. Nevertheless, by the late 1840s what 'the bourgeoisie' had achieved was a great deal more modest than the miracles ascribed to it in the Manifesto. After all, in 1850 the world produced no more than 71,000 tons of steel (almost 70 per cent of that in Britain) and had built less than 24,000 miles of railroads (two-thirds of these in Britain and the USA). Historians have had no difficulty in showing that even in Britain the Industrial Revolution (a term specifically used by Engels from 1844 on)¹⁴ had hardly created an industrial—or even a predominantly urban—country before the 1850s. Marx and Engels did not describe the world as it had already been transformed by capitalism in 1848; they predicted how it was logically destined to be transformed by it.

We now live in a world in which this transformation has largely taken place, even though readers of the Manifesto in the third millennium of the Western calendar will no doubt observe that it has

advanced even further since 1998. In some ways we can even see the force of the Manifesto's predictions more clearly than the generations between us and its publication. For until the revolution in transport and communications since the Second World War, there were limits to the globalization of production, to 'giv[ing] a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country'. Until the 1970s industrialization remained overwhelmingly confined to its regions of origin. Some schools of Marxists could even argue that capitalism, at least in its imperialist form, far from 'compel[ling] all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production', was by its nature perpetuating—or even creating—'underdevelopment' in the so-called Third World. While one-third of the human race lived in economies of the Soviet Communist type, it seemed as though capitalism would never succeed in compelling all nations 'to become bourgeois themselves'. It would not 'create a world after its own image'. Again, before the 1960s the Manifesto's announcement that capitalism brought about the destruction of the family seemed not to have been verified, even in the advanced Western countries where today something like half of all children are born to or brought up by single mothers, and half of all households in big cities consist of single persons.

In short, what might in 1848 have struck an uncommitted reader as revolutionary rhetoric—or, at best, as plausible prediction—can now be read as a concise characterization of capitalism at the end of the twentieth century. Of what other document of the 1840s can this be said?

IV

However, if at the end of the millennium we must be struck by the acuteness of the Manifesto's vision of the then remote future of a massively globalized capitalism, the failure of another of its forecasts is equally striking. It is now evident that the bourgeoisie has not produced 'above all... its own grave-diggers' in the proletariat. 'Its fall and the victory of the proletariat' have not proved 'equally inevitable'. The contrast between the two halves of the Manifesto's analysis in its section on 'Bourgeois and Proletarians' calls for more explanation after 150 years than it did at the time of its centenary.

The problem lies not in Marx's and Engels's vision of a capitalism which necessarily transformed most of the people earning their living in this economy into men and women who depend for their livelihood on hiring themselves out for wages or salaries. It has undoubtedly tended to do so, though today the incomes of some who are technically employees hired for a salary, such as corporation executives, can hardly count as proletarian. Nor does it lie essentially in their belief that most of this working population would consist of a workforce of *industrial* labour. While Great Britain remained quite exceptional as a country in which wage-paid manual workers formed the absolute majority of the population, the development of industrial production required massive and growing inputs of manual labour for well over a century after the Manifesto. Unquestionably this is no longer the case in modern capital-intensive high-tech production, a development not considered in the Manifesto, though in fact in his more manure economic studies

Marx himself envisaged the possible development of an increasingly labourless economy, at least in a post-capitalist era.¹⁵ Even in the old industrial economies of capitalism, the percentage of people employed in manufacturing industry remained stable until the 1970s, except for the USA, where the decline set in a little earlier. Indeed, with very few exceptions—such as Britain, Belgium and the USA—in 1970 industrial workers probably formed a larger proportion of the total occupied population in the industrial and industrializing world than ever before.

In any case, the overthrow of capitalism envisaged by the Manifesto relied not on the prior transformation of the *majority* of the occupied population into proletarians but on the assumption that the situation of the proletariat in the capitalist economy was such that, once organized as a necessarily political class movement, it could take the lead in, and rally round itself, the discontent of other classes, and thus acquire political power as ‘the independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority’. Thus the proletariat would ‘rise to be the leading class of the nation.. constitute itself as the nation’.¹⁶

Since capitalism has not been overthrown, we are apt to dismiss this prediction. Yet—utterly improbable though it looked in 1848—the politics of most European capitalist countries were to be transformed by the rise of organized political movements basing themselves on the class-conscious working class, which had barely made its appearance outside Great Britain. Labour and socialist parties emerged in most parts of the ‘developed’ world in the 1880s, becoming mass parties in states with the democratic franchise which they did so much to bring about. During and after World War, I, as one branch of ‘proletarian parties’ followed the revolutionary road of the Bolsheviks, another branch became the sustaining pillars of a democratized capitalism. The Bolshevik branch is no longer of much significance in Europe, or parties of this kind have assimilated to social-democracy. Social-Democracy, as understood in the days of Bebel or even Clement Attlee, is fighting a rearguard action in the 1990s. As this is being written (late 1997), however, the descendants of the social-democratic parties of the Second International, sometimes under their original names, are the parties of government in all except two European states (Spain and Germany), in both of which they have provided the government in the past, and are likely to do so again.

In short, what is wrong is not the Manifesto’s prediction of the central role of the political movements based on the working class (and still sometimes specifically bearing the class name, as in the British, Dutch, Norwegian and Australasian Labour Parties). It is the proposition: ‘Of all the class that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class’. whose inevitable destiny, implicit in the nature and development of capitalism, is to overthrow the bourgeoisie: ‘Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable’.

Even in the notoriously ‘hungry forties’, the mechanism which was to ensure this—the inevitable pauperization¹⁷ of the labourers—was not totally convincing; unless on the assumption, implausible even then, that capitalism was in its final crisis and about to be *immedi-*

ately over-thrown. It was a double mechanism. In addition to the effect of pauperization on the workers’ movement, it proved that the bourgeoisie was ‘unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him’. Far from providing the profit which fuelled the engine of capitalism, labour now drained it away. But—given the enormous economic potential of capitalism so dramatically expounded in the Manifesto itself—why was it inevitable that capitalism could not provide a livelihood, however miserable, for most of its working class or, alternatively, that it could not afford a welfare system? That ‘pauperism [in the strict sense; see Note 17] develops even more rapidly than population and wealth’?¹⁸ If capitalism has a long life before it—as became obvious very soon after 1848—this did not have to happen, and indeed it did not.

The Manifesto’s vision of the historic development of ‘bourgeois society’, including the working class which it generated, did not *necessarily* lead to the conclusion that the proletariat would overthrow capitalism and, in so doing, open the way to the development of communism, because vision and conclusion did not derive from the same analysis. The aim of communism, adopted before Marx became ‘marxist’, was derived not from the analysis of the nature and development of capitalism but from a philosophical—indeed, an eschatological—argument about human nature and destiny. The idea—fundamental for Marx from then on—that the proletariat was a class which could not liberate itself without thereby liberating society as a whole first appears as ‘a philosophical deduction rather than a product of observation’.¹⁹ As George Lichtheim put it: ‘the proletariat makes its first appearance in Marx’ writings as the social force needed to realise the aim of German philosophy’ as Marx saw in 1843–44.²⁰

The ‘*positive possibility of German emancipation*’, wrote Marx in the *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of law*, lay: in the formation of a class with *radical chains*.. a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which claims no *particular right* because the wrong committed against it is not a *particular wrong*, but wrong *as such*... This dissolution of society as a particular class is the *proletariat*.. The emancipation of the German is the emancipation of the human being. *Philosophy* is the *head* of this emancipation and the *proletariat* is its *heart*. Philosophy cannot realise itself without abolishing the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality.²¹

At this time Marx knew little more about the proletariat than that ‘it is coming into being in Germany only as a result of the rising industrial development, and this was precisely its potential as a liberating force, since, unlike the poor masses of traditional society, it was the child of ‘a drastic dissolution of society’, and therefore by its existence ‘proclaim[ed] the *dissolution of the hitherto existing world order*’. He knew even less about labour movements, though he knew a great deal about the history of the French Revolution. In Engels he acquired a partner who brought to the partnership the

concept of the 'Industrial Revolution', an understanding of the dynamics of capitalist economy as it actually existed in Britain, and the rudiments of an economic analysis.²² all of which led him to predict a future social revolution, to be fomented by an actual working class about which, living and working in Britain in the early 1840s, he knew a great deal. Marx's and Engels's approaches to 'the proletariat' and communism complemented one another. So did their respective conceptions of the class struggle as a motor of history-in Marx's case derived largely from the study of the French Revolutionary period; in Engels's from the experience of social movements in post-Napoleonic Britain. It is no surprise that they found themselves (in Engels's words) 'in agreement in all theoretical fields'.²³ Engels brought to Marx the elements of a model which demonstrated the fluctuating and self-destabilizing nature of the operations of the capitalist economy-notably the outlines of a theory of economic crises²⁴ -and empirical material about the rise of the British working-class movement and the revolutionary role it could play in Britain.

In the 1840s the conclusion that society was on the verge of revolution was not implausible. Nor was the prediction that the working class, however immature, would lead it. After all, within weeks of the publication of the Manifesto a movement of the Paris workers overthrew the French monarchy, and gave the signal for revolution to half of Europe. Nevertheless, the tendency for capitalist development to generate an essentially revolutionary proletariat could not be deduced from the analysis of the nature of capitalist development. It was one possible consequence of this development, but could not be shown to be the only possible one. Still less could it be shown that a successful overthrow of capitalism by the proletariat must necessarily open the way to communist development. (The Manifesto claims no more than it would then initiate a process of very gradual change.)²⁵ Marx's vision of a proletariat whose very essence destined it to emancipate all humanity, and end class society by its overthrow of capitalism, represents a hope read into his analysis of capitalism, but not a conclusion necessarily imposed by that analysis.

What the Manifesto's analysis of capitalism could undoubtedly lead to-especially when it is extended by Marx's analysis of economic concentration, which is barely hinted at in 1848-is a more general and less specific conclusion about the self-destructive forces built into capitalist development. It must reach a point-and in 1998 it is not only Marxists who will accept this-where:

Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world, whom he has called up... The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to encompass the wealth created by them.

It is not unreasonable to conclude that the 'contradictions' inherent in a market system based on 'no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment", a system of exploitation and of 'endless accumulation' can never be overcome;

that at some point in a series of transformations and restructurings the development of this essentially self-destabilizing system will lead to a state of affairs that can no longer be described as capitalism. Or-to quote the later Marx-when 'centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument', and that 'integument is burst asunder'.²⁶ By what name the subsequent state of affairs is described is immaterial. However-as the effects of the world economic explosion on the world environment demonstrate-it will necessarily have to mark a sharp shift away from private appropriation to social management on a global scale.

It is extremely unlikely that such a 'post-capitalist society' would correspond to the traditional models of socialism, and still less to the 'really existing' socialisms of the Soviet era. What forms it might take, and how far it would embody the humanist values of Marx's and Engels's communism, would depend on the political action through which this change came about. For this, as the Manifesto holds, is central to the shaping of historical change.

V

In the Marxian view, however we describe that historic moment when 'the integument is burst asunder', politics will be an essential element in it. The Manifesto has been read primarily as a document of historical inevitability, and indeed its force derived largely from the confidence it gave its readers that capitalism was inevitably destined to be buried by its grave diggers, and that now-and at no earlier era in history-the conditions for emancipation had come into being. Yet-contrary to widespread assumptions-inasmuch as it believes that historical change proceeds through men making their own history, it is not a determinist document. The graves have to be dug by or through human action.

A determinist reading of the argument is indeed possible. It has been suggested that Engels tended towards it more naturally than Marx, with important consequences for the development of Marxist theory and the Marxist labour movement after Marx's death. However, though Engels's own earlier drafts have been cited as evidence,²⁷ it cannot in fact be read into the Manifesto itself. When it leaves the filed of historical analysis and enters the present, it is a document of choices, of political possibilities rather than probabilities, let alone certainties. Between 'now' and the unpredictable time when, 'in the course of development', there would be 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' lies the realm of political action.

Historical change through social praxis, through collective action, is at its core. The Manifesto sees the development of the proletariat as the 'organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party'. The 'conquest of political power by the proletariat' ('the winning of democracy') is 'the first step in the workers' revolution', and the future of society hinges on the subsequent political actions of the new regime (how 'the proletariat will use its political supremacy'). The commitment to *politics* is what historically, distinguished Marxian socialism from the anar-

chists, and the successors of those socialists whose rejection of all political action the Manifesto specifically condemns. Even before Lenin, Marxian theory was not just about 'what history shows us will happen', but also about 'what must be done'. Admittedly, the twentieth-century Soviet experience has taught us that it might be better not to do 'what must be done' under historical conditions which virtually put success beyond reach. But this lesson might also have been learned from considering the implications of the *Communist Manifesto*.

But then, the Manifesto-and this is not the least of its remarkable qualities-is a document which envisaged failure. It hoped that the out-come of capitalist development would be 'A revolutionary reconstitution of society at large' but, as we have already seen, it did not exclude the alternative; 'common ruin'. Many years later, another marxian rephrased this as the choice between socialism and barbarity. Which of these will prevail is a question which the twenty-first century must be left to answer.

Notes

1. Only two items of such material have been discovered-a plan for Section III and one draft page. Karl Marx Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (London 1976), pp. 576-7.
2. In the lifetime of the founders, they were: (1) Preface to the (Second) German edition, 1872; (2) Preface to the (Second) Russian Edition, 1882-the first Russian translation, by Bakunin, had appeared in 1869, understandably without Marx's and Engels's blessing; (3) Preface to the (third) German edition, 1883; (4) Preface to the English edition, 1888; (5) Preface to the (fourth) German edition, 1890; (6) Preface to the Polish edition, 1892; and (7) Preface 'Italian Readers', 1893.
3. Paolo Favilli, *Storia del marxismo italiano. Dalle origini; alla grande guerra* (Milan 1996), pp. 252-4.
4. I rely on the figures in the invaluable Bert Andreas, *Le Manifeste Communiste de Marx et Engels. Histoire et Bibliographie 1848-1918* (Milan 1963).
5. Data from the annual reports of the SPD *Parteitage*. However, no numerical data about theoretical publications are given for 1899 and 1900.
6. Robert R. LaMonte, 'The New Intellectuals,' *New Review* II, 1914; cited in Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the USA: from 1870 to the Present Day* (London 1987), p.56.
7. Hal Draper, *The Annotated Communist Manifesto* (Center for Socialist History), Berkeley, CA 1948), p. 64.
8. The original German begin this section by discussing 'das Verhältniss der Kommunisten zu den bereits konstituierten Arbeiterparteien... also den Chartisten', etc. The official English translation of 1887, revised by Engels, attenuates the contrast. A more faithful rendition would compare the 'already constituted workers' parties' such as the Chartists, etc., with those not yet so constituted.
9. 'The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties... They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement' (Section II).
10. The best-known of these, underline by Lenin, was the observation, in the 1872 preface, that the Paris Commune had shown 'that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.' After Marx's death Engels added the footnote modifying the first sentence of Section I to exclude prehistoric societies from the

universal scope of class struggle. However, neither Marx nor Engels bothered to comment on or modify the economic passages of the document. Whether Marx and Engels really considered a fuller 'Umarbeitung oder Ergänzung' of the Manifesto (Preface to German edition of 1883) may be doubted, but not that Marx's death made such a rewriting impossible.

11. Compare the passage in Section II of the Manifesto ('Does it require deep institution to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of this material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?') with the corresponding passage in the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy, ('It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.')

12. Although this is the English version approved by Engels, it is not a strictly correct translation of the original text:

13. For a stylistic analysis, see S.S. Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford, New York, Melbourne 1978), pp. 148-9. The translations of the Manifesto known to me do not have the literary force of the original German text.

14. In 'Die Lage Englands. Das 18. Jahrhundert' (Marx-Engels *Werke* I, pp. 566-8).

15. See, for example, the discussion of 'fixed capital and the development of the productive resources of society' in the 1857-58 manuscripts. *Collected Works*, vol. 29 (1987), pp. 80-99.

16. The German phrase 'sich zur nationalen Klasse erheben' had Hegelian connotations which the English translation authorized by Engels modified presumably because he thought it would be understood by readers in the 1880s.

17. Pauperism should not be read as synonym for 'poverty'. The German words, borrowed from English usage, are 'Pauper' ('a destitute person...one supported by charity or by some public provision': *Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary*) and 'Pauperismus' (pauperism: 'state of being a pauper': *ibid.*)

18. Paradoxically, something like the Marxian argument of 1848 is widely used today by capitalists and free-market governments to prove that the economies of states whose GNP continues to double every few decades will be bankrupted if they do not abolish the systems of income transfer (welfare states, etc.) installed in poorer times, by which those who earn maintain those who are unable to earn.

19. Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1 *The Founders* (Oxford 1978), p. 130.

20. George Lichtheim, *Marxism* (London 1964), p. 45.

21. *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (1975), pp. 186-7. In this passage I have generally preferred the translation in Lichtheim, *Marxism*. The German word translated by him as class' is 'Stand', which is misleading today.

22. Published as *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* in 1844 (*Collected Works*, vol. 3, pp. 418-43).

23. 'On the History of the Communist League' *Collected Works*, vol. 26, (1990), p. 318.

24. 'Outlines of a Critique' (*Collected Works*, vol. 3, pp. 433 ff). This seems to have been derived from radical British writers, notably John Wade, *History of the Middle and Working Classes* (London 1835), to whom Engels refers in this connection.

25. This is even clearer from Engels's formulations in what are, in effect, two preliminary drafts of a Communist Confession of Faith' (*Collected Works*, vol. 6, p. 102) and 'Principles of Communism' (*ibid.*, p. 350).

26. From 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation', in *Capital*, vol. I (*Collected Works*, vol. 35, 1996), p. 750.

27. Lichtheim, *Marxism*, pp. 58-60.