

American Government and Politics

The Communist Manifesto Reading Guide

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Answer each of the following questions in your notebook. Be prepared to answer these questions during class, either in the form of a quiz or in the form of participation. If you do not think about these questions and your answers, you will not get the information out of the Communist Manifesto that you should. Enjoy!

Marx's Introduction

1. What did Marx mean when he said “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism” (49)? Come up with two answers to this.
2. Also on page 49, Marx wrote, “Where is a party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power?” Comment on this quote, especially relative to the history of the United States vis-à-vis ‘communism’ and also relative to today’s ‘liberal’.

Section One

3. What is Marx’s thesis for this first section?
4. According to Marx, how did the bourgeoisie come into existence?
5. How does this fit with Marx’s view of history as moved by conflict, not peace?
6. From where did the proletariat originate?
7. Has capitalism really turned every noble professional into a wage laborer as Marx warned? While you answer this, think about servers at restaurants and how people tend to treat them.
8. According to Marx, what drove the era of discovery? Do you agree with this? If not, what do *you* think drove exploration? Think of concrete examples supporting your position but not Marx’s?
9. How does globalization fit into Marx’s theory, or does it?
10. Is economic gain the ultimate end and goal of capitalism (59)? Explain.

Section Two:

11. Marx places class as being more important than nationality; that is, the proletariat parties from separate nations should never work against each other as they share something more fundamental than nationality (66). This does not necessarily mean that Marx believed nationality did not matter, only that the proletariats from different nations had more in common than they did with the bourgeoisie in their own nation. How true is this statement in general? Give examples.

12. One of the most important goals for the communists was the abolition of private property (67). This is anathema to Americans and to capitalists. However, he does lay out an interesting argument suggesting that we really have no private property now (then). How persuasive is his argument? Did he convince you? Please note that 'private property' includes land, housing, etc., and not clothes, books, etc.
13. Marx also states that capital is not a personal power; it is a social power (68). What does he mean by this? Is there evidence today that he was correct? While answering this, think about who 'runs' the United States.
14. In Marx's time, children often worked in factories that were quite dangerous (71). Since then, all industrialized countries have passed child labor laws. These laws make illegal the hiring of children (usually younger than 12) and restrict hiring of adolescents (younger than 16) in all areas except farm labor. Today, it is almost a given that children do not work 12 hour days in factories. Would Marx be happy that the child labor laws were passed? Explain.
15. Also in Marx's time, education was private and only for those who could afford it (71). Do you agree with Marx's assertion that education should be social, that is, in the realm of state control? Explain.
16. Marx asserts, "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class" (73). Is this true in America today? Do the ideas that move the country originate from its ruling class, or do the people in America actually rule?
17. Marx lays out ten measures that the Communists would support in any country (75–76). How many of them are true in today's United States? Does this mean that the United States is on its way to being communist?

Section Three:

18. According to Marx, it is very easy to show strong connections between communism and Christianity (79). And yet, most hold that Christianity and communism are incompatible. Are they?

Section Four:

19. Who are the Social Democrats today? (This needs to be answered for the world, not for the United States, as we do not have Social Democrats. You will probably have to do a little quick research into Social Democrats in today's world.)
20. Today, who do the Communists support in France? ...in the United Kingdom? ...in Germany? ...in the United States? (Again, you may have to do a little quick research to answer this question.)

Final Thoughts:

21. All of Marx is based on class. Who were the two classes? Upon what was the distinction based? Is this an effective distinction? Actually, you will want to find the definition of 'class' before you answer this question.
22. Does his use of these two classes mean that he does not believe in other class structures?
23. Why does the United States not have a Social Democrat party of any strength, yet all Western European states do?
24. Most people consider Marx, Marxism, and the Communist Manifesto to be proven wrong by history (specifically the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991). Yet, much of what Marx called for has been granted. Is history moving us in the direction of having even more of what Marx wanted come true?
25. Does the spectre of communism still haunt the world?