

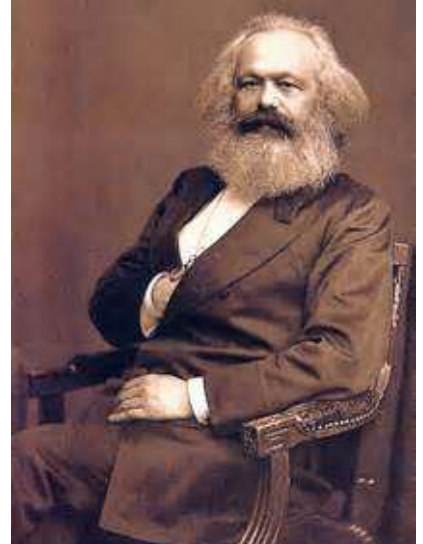
## Communism 101

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many ideas would come together to give rise to a new idea about how economics and government should interact within a country. First, from the Enlightenment, the idea that all mankind deserves certain rights, regardless of his class or occupation. From the American and French Revolutions, the idea that in order to gain these rights, you must be willing to fight and upset the current system. Finally, from the Industrial Revolution, the idea that all men can increase greatly their quality of life if they are willing to work for it. These ideas would all converge to create a new system of economic and political theory called Communism.

### Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

Marx and Engels were both German writers, philosophers, and economists. Together they would create the ideas for the economic system known as communism. They were reacting to the conditions of the industrial revolution where they saw that business owners, especially the factory owners, were getting rich off the labor of the workers. They realized that if it wasn't for the hard-working people, the owners wouldn't have any products to sell. They didn't feel that was fair for people to profit from the hard work of others.

One of the policies that they advocated for was the establishment of labor unions. They believed that labor unions were an essential balance to the power of the factory owner. During this time, labor unions rights were not always protected by the government, which meant that the unions needed to be willing to use violence in order to protect their jobs. A strike is a group of workers refusing to do their jobs in order to pressure the owners to change their policies. Strikes would take on the form of a blockade, with armed workers surrounding the factory to prevent the factory owner from hiring new workers to replace the ones who were striking. Marx and Engels would take this idea, and apply it more universally as well.



Karl Marx



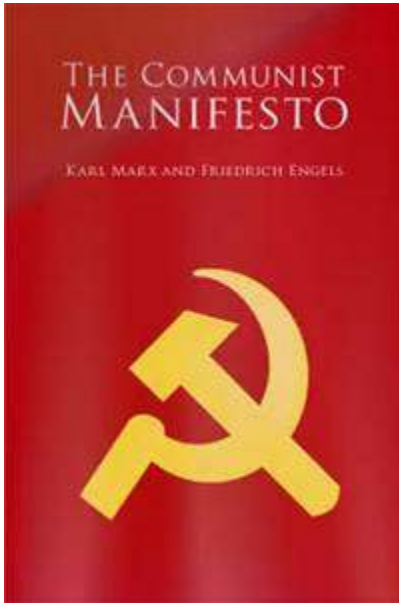
*The first goal of communism is to get the workers to unite against the factory owners.*

### Revolution

Marx and Engels believed that in order for change to come at a national level that a fundamental shift would have to happen in the society. For all of human history, there have been a small number of elite citizens at the top of each society that used their money, power, and influence to maintain power. These people are the bourgeoisie, and the enemies of communism. The vast majority of people

in any society are workers, called the proletariat. It is the labor of this group of people that build wealth for the society. Since the wealth is being produced by the proletariat, Marx and Engels argued that it should also be available to the proletariat. Since the elites were using the government and their money to continually change laws to be in their favor, Marx and Engels realized that this kind of change could not happen without being willing to use force, like the American and French Revolutions.

## Communism is born



In 1848, Marx and Engles co-authored a book called *The Communist Manifesto*. In it, they made several points that would come to be the basis for all future communist thought. They claimed that the reason why the bourgeoisie is able to exploit the proletariat is because of private property. If all property is held in common (owned by everyone, through the government) then nobody can get ahead of anyone else. Through class struggle, the proletariat should seek to create a system of government where the production and labor of everyone is used for the mutual benefit of all. Obviously, in order for everyone to be equal, this would require a strong government to first take in all of the goods that people made, and then redistribute them to everyone else in equal parts.

They also believed that all banking and credit should be run by the government. There would be no other banks that would lend or make money. All land would be owned by the government, and used for the common good of all. Communication and transportation should be controlled by the government, since these represent access to information and transport of goods, both of which could result in inequality between the classes. Education should also be controlled by the government, since if everyone does not receive the opportunity of the same education, it could result in inequality among the classes as well.

## Communism in Modern Fictional Literature

Many popular fictional books have been released in recent years that take on many of the aspects of a communistic society. The Hunger Games establishes a world in which the government (The Capital—bourgeoisie) exploits most of the other people (proletariat), organized into Districts. Each district specializes in providing necessary materials and goods to the society as a whole, which exemplifies the communist ideals. The Matched series also displays communist principles, since the entire system is controlled by the



### Comprehension Questions

1. Why does a communist society require the government to own everything?
2. Communists sometimes refer to the “haves” and “have nots.” Who would Marx say are the haves and the have nots?
3. What factors contributed to the formation of the communist perspective of economics?

Write about it. Describe in a detailed 3-5 paragraph summary how one of the movies or books listed displays communist ideas.

government. All the people work for the government and are placed in careers based on how they can best serve the society. George Orwell’s books Animal Farm and 1984 are both written as cautionary tales of what the result of communist societies ends up being, with individual rights being sacrificed while the ruling elite continue to live better than everyone else. The Maze Runner also discusses how communist societies deal with those individuals who are a threat to the collective and balance of power between the elites (bourgeoisie) and the working class (proletariat.)