

communist manifesto paper for literature class

Understanding the Communist Manifesto for Your Literature Class Paper

Embarking on a literature class paper about the Communist Manifesto requires a deep dive into one of history's most influential and controversial texts. This foundational document, penned by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, offers a compelling critique of capitalist society and a vision for a classless future. For students tackling a Communist Manifesto paper for literature class, understanding its historical context, core arguments, literary style, and enduring impact is paramount. This comprehensive guide aims to equip you with the knowledge and structure needed to craft a superior academic essay. We will explore the historical backdrop against which the Manifesto was written, dissect its central themes of class struggle and historical materialism, analyze its persuasive rhetoric, and consider its legacy in literature and society. By delving into these key aspects, you can develop a nuanced and insightful paper that effectively addresses the complexities of this seminal work.

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Historical Context: The Genesis of the Communist Manifesto

To truly grasp the significance of the Communist Manifesto for a literature class paper, it is essential to situate it within its historical context. Written in 1848, a year of widespread revolution across Europe, the Manifesto emerged from a milieu of burgeoning industrial capitalism and the social upheaval it wrought. Marx and Engels were responding to the stark realities of the Industrial Revolution, witnessing firsthand the impoverished conditions of the proletariat, or working class, contrasted with the immense wealth accumulating in the hands of the bourgeoisie, or capitalist class. Understanding this socio-economic landscape – the rise of factories, the migration of rural populations to urban centers, and the attendant exploitation of labor – provides the bedrock for analyzing the Manifesto's arguments. The political climate, characterized by discontent with existing monarchies and a growing demand for democratic reforms, also played a crucial role in shaping the document's revolutionary fervor. The Communist Manifesto was not conceived in a vacuum but was a direct product of its time, a passionate call to action born from the perceived injustices of the era. This historical grounding is vital for any student writing a Communist Manifesto paper for literature class, allowing for a more informed and critical analysis of its content.

The Socio-Economic Conditions of the Mid-19th Century

The mid-19th century was marked by rapid industrialization, transforming societies from agrarian to industrial. This transition led to the creation of a new economic system, capitalism, which, while fostering innovation and wealth, also engendered significant social stratification. The concentration of capital in the hands of a few, the bourgeoisie, led to the exploitation of the many, the proletariat. This period saw the rise of factory systems where workers, including women and children, often toiled for long hours in dangerous conditions for meager wages. The ensuing class divide was stark, fueling social unrest and giving rise to various socialist and communist ideologies as responses to these perceived inequities. These conditions directly informed Marx and Engels' analysis of class struggle and their predictions about the inevitable overthrow of capitalism.

The Role of Revolutionary Movements

The year 1848 was a watershed moment for revolutionary movements across Europe, often referred to as the "Springtime of Peoples." Liberal and nationalist uprisings challenged established monarchies and demanded greater political representation and civil liberties. While many of these revolutions ultimately failed in the short term, they demonstrated a widespread

dissatisfaction with the status quo and a burgeoning desire for radical social and political change. Marx and Engels, deeply involved in socialist circles and contributing to revolutionary propaganda, saw these uprisings as potential precursors to a proletarian revolution. The Communist Manifesto was intended to provide a theoretical framework and a rallying cry for these burgeoning working-class movements, articulating a clear program for a communist society.

Key Themes and Arguments in the Communist Manifesto

At the heart of the Communist Manifesto lies a powerful and enduring critique of capitalist society, articulated through several interconnected themes. For any student preparing a Communist Manifesto paper for literature class, a thorough understanding of these central arguments is crucial. The most prominent theme is the concept of class struggle, positing that history is fundamentally a history of conflicts between different social classes. Marx and Engels famously declare, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." This foundational idea underpins their entire analysis, framing societal development as a dialectical process driven by the antagonism between oppressors and the oppressed. Another critical concept is historical materialism, which suggests that economic systems and the means of production are the primary drivers of historical change and social organization, rather than abstract ideas or political ideologies. The Manifesto also details the perceived inherent contradictions within capitalism, such as its tendency towards cyclical crises and its inevitable tendency to create a growing, increasingly impoverished proletariat. Finally, the document outlines the communist vision: a classless society characterized by the abolition of private property and the collective ownership of the means of production, leading to the emancipation of the proletariat.

Class Struggle as the Engine of History

The central thesis of the Communist Manifesto is that societal development is driven by the inherent conflict between social classes. Marx and Engels identify the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the defining classes of the capitalist era. The bourgeoisie, the owners of the means of production, are seen as the revolutionary class that overthrew feudalism, but in doing so, they created a new oppressor. The proletariat, the working class, whose labor creates the wealth for the bourgeoisie, are perpetually exploited. The Manifesto argues that this inherent antagonism cannot be resolved within the capitalist system and will ultimately lead to a revolutionary transformation. This concept of perpetual class conflict is a cornerstone of Marxist thought and a key analytical tool for understanding the Manifesto's critique of society.

Historical Materialism and Economic Determinism

Historical materialism provides the theoretical framework for understanding the Communist Manifesto's claims about societal evolution. This perspective posits that the economic base of society – the forces and relations of production – determines its superstructure, which includes politics, law, culture, and ideology. Marx and Engels argue that as the forces of production develop, they eventually come into conflict with the existing relations of production, leading to social revolutions and the emergence of new economic systems. For example, they argue that capitalism arose from the contradictions of feudalism and that a socialist revolution will inevitably arise from the contradictions of capitalism. This deterministic view of history, where economic factors are seen as the primary drivers, is a critical element to analyze in a literature paper.

Critique of Capitalism and its Contradictions

The Manifesto offers a scathing indictment of capitalism, highlighting its perceived inherent contradictions and exploitative nature. Marx and Engels criticize the bourgeoisie for transforming "all the relations of production into relations of slavery." They point to the alienation of labor, where workers are estranged from the products of their work, the process of work, themselves, and their fellow human beings. Furthermore, they identify the tendency of capitalism towards overproduction and economic crises, which they argue destabilize the system and further immiserate the proletariat. The global reach of capitalism, "which has pitilessly torn from the feudal roots all that which still remained," is also acknowledged as both a force of progress and a harbinger of its own demise.

The Vision of a Communist Society

While primarily a critique, the Communist Manifesto also presents a vision for a future communist society. This society is characterized by the abolition of private property, particularly the private ownership of the means of production. Instead, the community would collectively own and control these resources. The Manifesto envisions a society where the division between classes is eradicated, leading to the "free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." It predicts the eventual "withering away of the state," as it is seen as an instrument of class oppression, becoming unnecessary in a classless society. This utopian vision, while vaguely sketched, serves as the ultimate goal of the proletarian revolution advocated in the text.

Literary Analysis: Style, Rhetoric, and

Persuasion

Beyond its ideological content, the Communist Manifesto is a masterclass in persuasive writing, making it a rich subject for a literature class paper. Marx and Engels employ a potent and often dramatic literary style, characterized by its clarity, urgency, and rhetorical force. Analyzing their use of literary devices – such as vivid imagery, powerful metaphors, and appeals to emotion – can reveal much about their persuasive strategies. The Manifesto is structured to build a compelling argument, moving from historical analysis to a critique of capitalism and culminating in a call to action. The authors utilize antithesis to contrast the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and personification to imbue abstract concepts like "Capital" with agency. The concluding call to arms, "Workers of all countries, unite!", is a powerful example of their use of direct address and exhortation to galvanize the reader. Understanding these literary elements is crucial for a comprehensive Communist Manifesto paper for literature class, allowing for an examination of how the message is conveyed as much as what the message is.

The Power of Evocative Language and Imagery

Marx and Engels masterfully employ evocative language and striking imagery to convey the harsh realities of capitalist exploitation and the transformative potential of communism. Phrases like the bourgeoisie having "plunged the family relations into the mere money relation" or the proletariat being reduced to "a commodity, like every other article of trade" paint vivid pictures of dehumanization and alienation. The Manifesto's descriptions of the bourgeoisie as a class that has "revolutionized the instruments of production" and "drawn all nations into civilization" are juxtaposed with equally powerful portrayals of the proletariat's suffering. This use of strong, often emotionally charged language is central to their persuasive appeal, aiming to elicit a visceral reaction from the reader.

Rhetorical Devices and Persuasive Strategies

The Communist Manifesto is replete with rhetorical devices that enhance its persuasive power. The use of antithesis, as seen in the stark contrast between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, is a recurring strategy. They employ hyperbole to emphasize the extent of capitalist dominion, stating that capitalism has "shattered the feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations." The document also makes direct appeals to the reader's sense of justice and their self-interest, particularly the proletariat. The repetitive structure of certain phrases and the confident, declarative tone contribute to the sense of inevitability and authority. Understanding these techniques allows for a deeper appreciation of the Manifesto as a work of persuasive literature, a key aspect for any Communist Manifesto paper for literature class.

The Structure of Argument and Narrative

The Communist Manifesto follows a logical, albeit polemical, argumentative structure. It begins with a historical overview, establishing the concept of class struggle. It then moves to a critique of existing oppositionist literature, particularly various forms of socialism, before launching into its own analysis of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The document culminates in a clear statement of communist principles and a direct call to action. This narrative progression, from historical context to theoretical exposition to practical application, effectively guides the reader toward the authors' desired conclusion. The Manifesto's ability to weave together historical analysis, economic critique, and revolutionary advocacy into a cohesive and compelling narrative is a testament to its literary skill.

Structure of a Communist Manifesto Literature Paper

Crafting a successful Communist Manifesto paper for literature class requires a clear and logical structure. Typically, your essay will begin with an introduction that sets the stage, states your thesis, and provides a roadmap of your argument. This should be followed by body paragraphs, each dedicated to exploring a specific theme, argument, or literary element of the Manifesto. For instance, you might have separate sections analyzing class struggle, historical materialism, or the rhetorical strategies employed. Each body paragraph should begin with a clear topic sentence, followed by supporting evidence from the text (direct quotes or detailed paraphrases) and your own analysis. Conclude your paper with a strong conclusion that summarizes your main points and reiterates your thesis in a new light, perhaps reflecting on the Manifesto's enduring relevance. A well-organized structure ensures clarity and coherence, making your analysis of the Communist Manifesto for literature class more impactful.

Crafting a Strong Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement is the central argument of your entire paper. For a Communist Manifesto paper for literature class, it should offer a clear, specific, and arguable claim about the text. For example, instead of stating "The Communist Manifesto discusses class struggle," a stronger thesis might be: "Through its potent blend of historical analysis and impassioned rhetoric, the Communist Manifesto persuasively constructs a narrative of inevitable class conflict, arguing that the inherent contradictions of capitalism necessitate a proletarian revolution to achieve a classless society." Your thesis should guide the entire essay and be supported by evidence and analysis throughout.

Developing Body Paragraphs with Textual Evidence

Each body paragraph in your paper should focus on a single idea or aspect of the Communist Manifesto, directly supporting your thesis. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that clearly states the main point. Then, provide concrete textual evidence – direct quotations or specific paraphrases – from the Manifesto to substantiate your claim. Crucially, follow this evidence with your own analytical interpretation. Explain how the evidence supports your point and connects back to your overall thesis. Avoid simply summarizing; instead, engage critically with the text, demonstrating your understanding of its meaning and significance for your literature class paper.

Integrating Quotes and Paraphrases Effectively

When incorporating evidence from the Communist Manifesto into your paper, smooth integration is key. Introduce quotes or paraphrases with signal phrases that set them in context, such as "Marx and Engels argue that..." or "The authors illustrate this point by stating...". Ensure that the quoted material directly supports your argument and is followed by your analysis. Avoid "dropping" quotes into your text without explanation. Remember to cite your sources correctly according to your instructor's preferred citation style (e.g., MLA, Chicago). Proper integration of textual evidence is crucial for building a credible and well-supported Communist Manifesto paper for literature class.

Writing a Compelling Conclusion

Your conclusion should not merely summarize your body paragraphs but offer a final insight or reflection on the Communist Manifesto. Restate your thesis in a new way, synthesizing the main points you have discussed. You might consider the enduring impact of the Manifesto, its influence on subsequent literature and political thought, or its continued relevance in contemporary discourse. Avoid introducing new information or arguments in your conclusion. The goal is to leave the reader with a strong, lasting impression of your analysis and the significance of the text for your literature class paper.

Analyzing Specific Sections for Your Literature Essay

To produce a truly insightful Communist Manifesto paper for literature class, you must move beyond generalities and delve into specific sections of the text. Consider focusing on key passages that exemplify the authors' arguments or literary techniques. For instance, the section detailing the bourgeoisie's revolutionary role or the critique of "feudal socialism" offers rich material

for analysis. The Manifesto's discussion of the proletariat's historical mission and the proposed measures for achieving communism are also prime candidates for in-depth study. By selecting specific passages and analyzing them closely, you can support your broader claims with concrete textual evidence, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the Communist Manifesto for literature class.

The Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat: A Detailed Examination

One of the most impactful sections of the Communist Manifesto for literary analysis is the detailed portrayal of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Examine how Marx and Engels characterize the bourgeoisie – their relentless drive for innovation, their globalizing influence, and their role in creating the conditions for their own eventual downfall. Conversely, analyze their depiction of the proletariat as an increasingly exploited, alienated, yet ultimately revolutionary class. The stark contrast drawn between these two classes, using vivid language and powerful imagery, is a key persuasive strategy that warrants close attention in your literature paper.

Critique of Other Forms of Socialism

The Manifesto dedicates significant space to critiquing various existing socialist movements. For a literature paper, analyzing these critiques can reveal much about Marx and Engels' own distinct ideology and their polemical style. For example, their dismissal of "feudal socialism," "petty-bourgeois socialism," and "German socialism, or 'True' Socialism" highlights their commitment to a radical, proletarian-centered revolution. Examine the specific criticisms they level against these movements and the rhetorical strategies they employ to discredit them. This analytical approach will deepen your understanding of the Manifesto's place within the broader landscape of 19th-century political thought.

The Proposed Communist Measures

While often abstract, the list of ten measures proposed at the end of the Manifesto offers tangible points for analysis in your literature class paper. These measures, such as the abolition of inheritance, the centralization of credit, and free education, represent the practical steps towards establishing a communist society. Discuss the implications of these proposals, their potential impact on society, and how they reflect the core principles of historical materialism and class abolition articulated earlier in the text. Analyzing these concrete proposals can provide a grounded perspective on the Manifesto's transformative vision.

The Communist Manifesto's Impact and Legacy

Understanding the Communist Manifesto for literature class extends beyond its immediate content to its profound and multifaceted legacy. This document has served as a foundational text for socialist and communist movements worldwide, profoundly influencing political thought, social activism, and revolutionary history. Its impact can be traced through various literary genres, including political theory, social commentary, and even fictional narratives that engage with its themes. Many authors have responded to, critiqued, or been inspired by the Manifesto's ideas. For your paper, consider how its concepts have permeated discourse, both positively and negatively, and how it continues to be a touchstone for debates about economic inequality, class, and societal transformation. Examining its enduring influence solidifies the importance of the Communist Manifesto for literature class.

Influence on Political Movements and Revolutions

The Communist Manifesto is arguably one of the most influential political documents ever written. It served as a primary ideological inspiration for socialist and communist parties and movements throughout the 20th century. Its call for proletarian revolution resonated with working-class populations globally, contributing to significant historical events, from the Russian Revolution to various anti-colonial movements. Analyzing this direct link between the text and real-world political actions is crucial for understanding its historical weight, especially for a literature paper that aims for a comprehensive grasp of the Manifesto's significance.

The Manifesto in Literature and Culture

The ideas and rhetoric of the Communist Manifesto have left an indelible mark on literature and culture. Many authors, philosophers, and artists have engaged with its concepts, either in support or in opposition. You might explore how literary works have depicted class struggle, critiqued capitalism, or imagined utopian or dystopian societies inspired by or reacting against the Manifesto's vision. Its powerful language and analytical framework have also influenced journalistic and academic discourse. Understanding these broader cultural reverberations will enrich your analysis for your Communist Manifesto paper for literature class.

Enduring Debates and Relevance Today

Despite the fall of many communist states, the Communist Manifesto continues to be a subject of intense debate and holds surprising relevance in contemporary discussions. Issues of economic inequality, the concentration of wealth, the exploitation of labor, and the role of global capitalism, all

central themes in the Manifesto, remain pertinent today. Your literature paper could explore how the Manifesto's critique of capitalism, even if rooted in 19th-century conditions, offers a framework for analyzing modern economic challenges. This exploration of its continuing relevance adds significant depth to any Communist Manifesto paper for literature class.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid in Your Paper

When writing your Communist Manifesto paper for literature class, several common pitfalls can detract from its quality. One major error is merely summarizing the text without offering critical analysis. Remember, your task is not just to report what the Manifesto says but to interpret its meaning, explore its implications, and evaluate its arguments. Another frequent mistake is neglecting to use specific textual evidence to support your claims. Without direct quotes or precise paraphrases, your arguments will lack substance. Furthermore, ensure you maintain a focus on the literary aspects of the text, as required for a literature class paper, rather than solely focusing on its political or economic history. Avoid anachronisms by understanding the historical context and avoiding imposing modern interpretations onto the 19th-century text. Finally, proofread meticulously for grammatical errors and clarity to present a polished and professional Communist Manifesto paper for literature class.

Avoiding Simple Summarization

A common trap for students writing about foundational texts like the Communist Manifesto is to fall into the trap of mere summarization. Your literature paper should go beyond simply retelling the ideas presented in the text. Instead, focus on analyzing how these ideas are presented, what rhetorical strategies are employed, and what the deeper implications of these arguments are. Engage critically with the material, offering your own interpretations and arguments, supported by robust textual evidence.

The Importance of Textual Evidence

Your analysis of the Communist Manifesto for literature class will only be as strong as the evidence you provide from the text itself. Do not make claims or assertions without backing them up with direct quotations or specific references to passages in the Manifesto. These pieces of evidence serve as the foundation for your arguments, demonstrating your engagement with the source material and lending credibility to your interpretations. Ensure your quotes are integrated smoothly and analyzed effectively.

Maintaining a Literary Focus

While the Communist Manifesto is undeniably a political and economic document, remember that your assignment is for a literature class. This means your paper should emphasize literary analysis: the style, rhetoric, structure, tone, and persuasive techniques used by Marx and Engels. While discussing the political and economic ideas is necessary, always connect them back to how these ideas are conveyed through language and literary construction. This literary focus distinguishes your paper from a history or political science essay on the same topic.

Conclusion: Mastering Your Communist Manifesto Literature Paper

Successfully completing a Communist Manifesto paper for literature class requires a synthesis of historical understanding, thematic analysis, and literary interpretation. By thoroughly exploring the text's historical context, dissecting its core arguments concerning class struggle and historical materialism, and appreciating its powerful literary style and rhetorical devices, you can construct a compelling and insightful essay. Remember to structure your paper logically, support your claims with precise textual evidence, and avoid common pitfalls like simple summarization. Whether you are analyzing the bourgeoisie's revolutionary role, critiquing opposing socialist ideas, or examining the proposed communist measures, a close reading and critical engagement with the Communist Manifesto will undoubtedly lead to a superior academic output for your literature class. Embrace the challenge, delve deep into the text, and articulate your informed perspective on this profoundly impactful document.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the primary themes of the Communist Manifesto that are most relevant for analysis in a literature class?

The most relevant themes for literary analysis include the concept of class struggle as a driving force of history, the critique of capitalism and its alienating effects on individuals, the portrayal of the proletariat as a revolutionary class, and the idealistic vision of a classless society. These themes can be explored through the Manifesto's powerful rhetoric, its use of historical narrative, and its stark depiction of social and economic conditions.

How can the historical context of the Communist Manifesto inform its interpretation in a literature class?

Understanding the mid-19th century industrial revolution, the rise of factory labor, widespread poverty, and the nascent socialist movements of Europe is crucial. This context illuminates Marx and Engels' critiques of existing power structures and their predictions for societal change. Literary analysis can then focus on how the Manifesto's language and arguments are shaped by these specific historical pressures and anxieties.

What literary devices do Marx and Engels employ in the Communist Manifesto, and how do they contribute to its impact?

The Manifesto utilizes powerful rhetorical devices such as powerful metaphors (e.g., 'spectre haunting Europe'), direct address to the reader, stark contrasts, and a sense of historical inevitability. They also employ a confrontational and often polemical tone. These devices aim to persuade, mobilize, and create a sense of urgency, making it a compelling piece of political literature rather than a dry academic text.

How can students approach analyzing the 'literary' qualities of the Communist Manifesto, even though it's a political document?

Students can analyze the Manifesto's narrative structure (the historical progression), its characterizations (bourgeoisie vs. proletariat), its symbolic language, and its persuasive argumentation. Examining the cadence of its prose, its use of irony, and its appeals to emotion and logic allows for a literary reading that transcends its purely political function.

What are the enduring legacies of the Communist Manifesto that continue to resonate in contemporary literature and society, making it a relevant topic for a literature class?

The Manifesto's enduring legacies lie in its profound influence on 20th and 21st-century political thought, literature, and art. Its exploration of alienation, class inequality, and the critique of consumerism continues to be relevant in novels, films, and critical essays. Analyzing the Manifesto allows students to understand foundational texts that have shaped discourse on social justice, economic systems, and the human condition.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to the Communist Manifesto for a literature class, each with a brief description:

1.

The Communist Manifesto: A Critical Edition

This edition of Marx and Engels' foundational text provides not only the original writings but also extensive scholarly annotations and historical context. It delves into the intellectual currents that shaped the Manifesto and explores its enduring impact on political thought and revolutionary movements. Understanding this edition is crucial for grasping the nuances and historical significance of the original work.

2.

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

In this work, Marx applies his theories to a specific historical event, analyzing the rise of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte to power in France. He demonstrates how the class struggle and the machinations of different social strata led to the establishment of an authoritarian regime. This book showcases the practical application of Marxist analysis to real-world political developments.

3.

The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State

Friedrich Engels, drawing on anthropological research, extends Marxist theory to examine the historical development of social institutions. He argues that the family and the state, far from being natural, emerged from the need to manage class conflict and protect private property. This book provides a historical materialist perspective on gender, kinship, and political power.

4.

State and Revolution

Written by Vladimir Lenin shortly before the October Revolution, this book outlines a Marxist theory of the state and the conditions necessary for a successful socialist revolution. Lenin elaborates on Marx's ideas concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat and the eventual "withering away" of the state. It is a crucial text for understanding the practical implementation of Marxist ideas in 20th-century revolutions.

5.

The Poverty of Philosophy

This work by Karl Marx is a direct critique of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's economic and philosophical ideas. Marx argues that Proudhon's approach, while critical of capitalism, fails to grasp the underlying dynamics of class struggle and historical materialism. It highlights Marx's development of his own dialectical method and critique of utopian socialism.

6.

Das Kapital, Vol. 1

While a monumental work, Volume 1 of Marx's magnum opus is essential for understanding the economic underpinnings of his critique of capitalism, which the Communist Manifesto also addresses. It meticulously analyzes the production of commodities, surplus value, and the inherent contradictions within the capitalist system. Reading this volume provides a deep dive into the economic analysis that fuels the Manifesto's revolutionary call.

7.

Capitalism and Freedom

Authored by Milton Friedman, this influential book presents a strong libertarian and free-market counterpoint to the ideas found in the Communist Manifesto. Friedman argues that economic freedom is intrinsically linked to political freedom and that government intervention in the economy leads to inefficiency and the erosion of individual liberties. It offers a contrasting perspective essential for understanding debates sparked by Marxist thought.

8.

The Condition of the Working Class in England

Friedrich Engels' powerful account provides a detailed, firsthand sociological study of the harsh realities faced by the proletariat in industrializing Britain. It vividly illustrates the exploitation and suffering that Marx and Engels identified as central to capitalism. This book serves as empirical evidence supporting the claims and urgency expressed in the Communist Manifesto.

9.

The Road to Serfdom

Friedrich Hayek's seminal work argues that central planning and government control, often associated with socialist and communist ideologies, inevitably lead to totalitarianism. He contends that the concentration of economic power in the hands of the state destroys individual liberty and fosters widespread social and economic decline. This book serves as a key critique of the collectivist principles that the Communist Manifesto advocates.

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