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www.afgazad.com

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By Alfredo Iglesias Diéguez
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The Communist Manifesto 175 years later



Sources: Rebellion [Image: The Plebeu Cabinet of Leitura, directed by Professor Adelaide Gonçalves, from the University of Ceará (Brazil), contains an exhibition of more than 200 editions of the *Communist Manifesto* in different languages, among which are German, English, Chinese, Vietnamese ... Credit: Romário Bastos/Brasil de Fato]

On February 21, 1848, the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels, a classic of communist thought, came out of the printing press of the Association of Education Workers, located at number 46 Liverpool Street in London.

The year 1848 was a year of revolutionary outbreaks in Europe: on February 25 the French Second Republic was proclaimed, the same one that had Louis Blanc as Minister of Labor,

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who launched the *Ateliers Nationaux*; between January 1848 and February 1849 there were revolutionary outbreaks in Palermo, Milan, Venice and Rome; and between March 1848 and July 1849, in the German cities of Munich, Berlin, Dresden and, among others, Frankfurt. Likewise, this revolutionary wave – the ghost of which Marx and Engels spoke – spread to other European cities (Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Krakow, Bucharest ...), where there were revolutionary outbreaks of lower intensity, and London, where on April 10, 1848 the last of the great demonstrations of the Chartist movement took place. Now, in all these processes the people were the great protagonists of the barricades, but who consolidated the political power of those States was the big bourgeoisie.

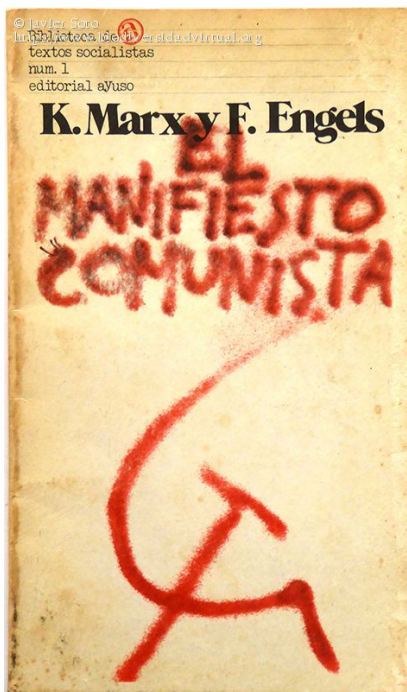


In this context, on February 21, 1848, Marx and Engels published in London the *Communist Manifesto*, a text for the struggle of ordinary people, for the nobody in history, as Eduardo Galeano said; Now, as a text of combat for the people who always put the dead in revolutionary processes, but is immediately left out of the political power that contributes to conquer, it is a text of a philosophical nature in which they address that communist part (party, we usually translate) of society: those exploited people who, Excluded from history, it must become aware that 'it has *nothing to lose, other than its chains, but instead it has a whole world to gain*', to put it in the same words that Marx and

Engels used to put an end to the Manifesto, apart from the well-known slogan *Proletarians of the world, unite!*

In this sense, today, 175 years after its publication, we must ask ourselves: does it make sense to continue reading the *Manifesto*? The answer will always be positive to the extent that it is pertinent to ask whether there is any alternative to capitalism (not just neoliberalism, as many people on the left think); if it makes sense, in the context of the exacerbation of social inequalities, the degradation of representative democracy, the triumph of libertarian and selfish individualism, the rise of interclassist and exclusionary national identities, the ecological destruction of nature..., to ask ourselves about the end of oppression, which we sing in the *International*, for human emancipation.

Of course it makes sense!



The *Manifesto* is a classic of political thought, as can Machiavelli's *Prince*. Now, how do you read a classic? Like exegetes who limit themselves to a closed reading of the text, without its context..., or as interpreters of reality who seek to '*change the base world*'? Obviously, without despising the first reading, it is the second way of reading the Manifesto that has the most to tell us and the one that remains most faithful to the spirit of the authors, since although it is a universal classic, it is -preferably- a classic of the communist tradition, which implies that it is necessary to read the *Manifesto* from the perspective of those who have nothing. That is, to read the *Manifesto* with a historical perspective -because the class struggle exists..., and as Warren Buffet said a few years ago in an interview with the *New York Times*, '*the class struggle not only exists, but it is my*

class that is winning it'-; Read the text from the sociological analysis of today's world, identifying the class structure, the unequal exchange... and the strategies and mechanisms of oppression that ensure that the interests of the ruling class are the dominant interests of society; And, in short, to read the text from a political perspective, which allows us to understand that as long as the proletariat does not become class-conscious, does not fight to transform the bourgeois regime and does not conquer political power to build democracy, no social conquest will be definitive and freedom and equality will remain a chimera.

That is the first task: to rebuild the proletariat! Yes, obviously the proletariat exists, the working class, the class that does not own the means of production, the class that has only one commodity to sell: its labor power..., it exists; it exists in all workplaces, it exists in the relations of production, it exists in its relation to capital...; However, it is disarmed, disorganized and demobilized. That is our task, to reverse the situation both in the labor struggle and in the political struggle and in the battle of ideas.

A final warning. Indispensable! The *Manifesto* is not a single text..., it is a text that inaugurates a way of interpreting the world, it is a text consistent with the eleventh thesis - "*Philosophers have done nothing but interpret the world in different ways, but what it is about is to transform it*"-; It is a text that lays the first stone to begin to transform it: it speaks to us of class struggle, alliances, political consciousness... But as a foundational text, it has a continuation in texts that show us how to interpret history and the present moment (*The class struggle in France*, 1850; *The Civil War in France*, 1871...), how to discover the mechanism of production and social reproduction in capitalist society (*Capital*, 1867...), how to analyze the ideology of the ruling class and its role in the domination of society (*The German ideology*, 1846...) ..., in short how to understand the world in which we live with the intention of transforming it.

For this reason, 175 years later, the *Manifesto* maintains its strength, because it calls us to action, to build our own destiny, free of oppression, 'in an association of people in which the free development of each or every one conditions the free development of all'. And today, 175 years later, that need is still imperative.

Note:

This text is a version in Spanish, slightly modified, of a text published in the supplement *Faro das Culturas del Faro de Vigo*.

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