Looking for a New Economic Order

Tensions across Europe mounted in the 1830s and 1840s, as republican (anti-royalist) movements resisted the reigning monarchies. The monarchy in France had been restored after Napoleon Bonaparte's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815, albeit with great divisions and debate throughout the country. Italy, Germany, and Austria were likewise ruled by monarchies, but faced growing protest.

In addition to tensions about forms of government and freedoms, workers were becoming more vocal and unified in protesting conditions in factories, mines, and mills.

The Birth of Communism

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are regarded as the founders of Marxist ideology, more colloquially known as communism. Both were concerned about the ill effects of industrialism. Marx was an economist, historian, and philosopher. Engels was a German journalist and philosopher.

After a two-year stay in Manchester, England, Engels wrote his first book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, which was published in 1845. It was in Manchester that Marx and Engels met for the first time. Although they did not like each other at first, they ended up forming a life- and world-changing partnership. Marx was the more public figure of the partnership, but Engels did much of the supporting work, including providing financial assistance to Marx and editing multiple volumes of their publications.

In 1847, a group of Germans, working in England, formed a secret society and contacted Marx, asking him to join them as they developed a political platform. At Engels's suggestion, the group was named the Communist League. Marx and Engels began writing the pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*, composed between December 1847 and January 1848. It was published in February, as the wave of revolutions began to roll across Europe.

The Communist Manifesto

The Communist Manifesto is considered one of the world's most influential political documents. In it, Marx and Engels address class disparities, which they claim were exacerbated by the Industrial Revolution. They translate history into a series of class struggles and argue that the current situation was the breaking point of the old ways. The pressures that industrialism placed on the working class would, according to Marx and Engels, push the working class to a breaking point. The workers would rebel and create a new socialist society. This socialist society would then evolve into a communist society, in which the means of production were owned communally and private property ceased to exist.

It is important to note that the communism envisioned by Marx and Engels bears no resemblance to what is called communism today. Today's communism is totalitarian socialism. True communism, as described by Marx and Engels, envisions a free society—not one governed by a dictator or dictatorial party. In fact, Marx and Engels envisioned a communist society as one without any government at all, in which people made decisions together for the good of the community.