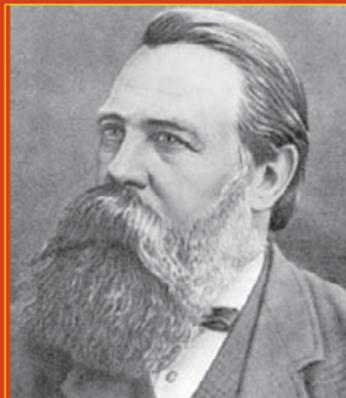
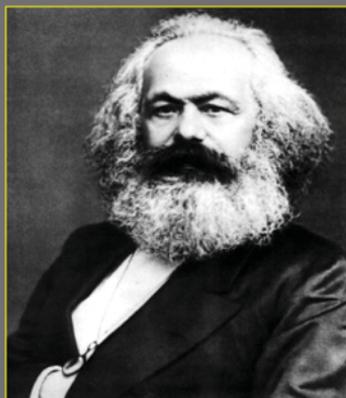


# The Neo- Communist Manifesto



Filip Spagnoli





THE  
NEOCOMMUNIST  
MANIFESTO



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MANIFESTO

Filip Spagnoli

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For Pauline



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## INTRODUCTION

Some questions to start with. Is the metaphor of the dust heap of history correct and is the demise of communist states (or their transformation into hyper-capitalist ones) the ultimate proof of the inadequacy of the communist worldview? Is communism today no more than the private insanity of a few Peruvian and Nepalese extremists and the hypocritical sugar-coating of the Chinese government's practice of extreme capitalist exploitation? And is the study of the communist worldview useful only for a better understanding of 20th century history and of some of the worst disasters that occurred during that century and that were inspired by this worldview? Or does communism, against all odds, still have something interesting to say to us today? Can it be useful for making the future as well as understanding the past?

The way in which these questions are framed already gives an indication of the kinds of answers this book will try to defend. I think the time has come to admit that the simultaneous rejection of communist states and communist theory,

culminating just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the USSR but already apparent at the time when the atrocities of these states first became known, was an example of intellectual laziness.

True, one should not separate theory from practice. Many of the errors and crimes of communist states were caused, at least in part, by flaws in communist theory. But communist states did not simply implement communist theory. Their failings were to a certain extent caused by other elements, e.g., extreme interpretations of the theory, economic and social circumstances, inclinations and personalities of communist leaders, etc. Not everything that went wrong in communist states should discredit the theory. Parts of this theory do not necessarily or automatically incite crime and error but remain very relevant and useful to us today. The purpose of this book is to identify those elements.

Communist theory indeed contains elements, core elements, that make its integral implementation impossible and undesirable. And anyway, life or society can and should never be the simple implementation of a theory. Society isn't a piece of carpentry, crafted out of raw materials and according to a plan. In fact it is likely that the biggest mistake or even crime of communist states was their belief that society is a construct. Like carpenters, they went ahead with the construction of a new society, and in order to do so, they had to use force on their raw materials, i.e., human beings.

When you believe that society should be constructed according to a plan, politics cannot be democratic. It has to be in the hands of experts who know the plan and the best ways to implement it. Centralized planning of the economy and all other sections of society has proven to be dictatorial and ultimately catastrophic for communist societies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also H. Arendt, *Condition de l'homme moderne*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1983, *passim*.

But at the same time every honest and unprejudiced reader should admit that parts of communism deserve to be rescued and that is the purpose of book. This, however, requires a substantial rethinking of communism, a drafting of a kind of neo-communism in which everything that is impossible and/or undesirable is deleted. What remains will not constitute a closed theory, a complete worldview or a blueprint for society — as the original communist theory was claimed to be — but a loose collection of ideas and recommendations. And it will no longer be a scientific description of social and historical laws; merely a set of opinions on social life and proposals for reform.

With this purpose of rescuing parts of communism in mind, I will start by trying to give a description of the worldview of communism, but of communism in a simplified sense because I assimilate communism to Marxism and to the teachings of his most orthodox followers. I do not intend to analyze the sometimes subtle differences between Marx and Engels, nor do I plan to study the way in which their followers have or have not transformed or respected the original theory. Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism, etc. are, somewhat simplistically, considered as minor variations of the main theme. This is certainly incorrect, but necessary for a concise first step in bringing communism up to date.

However, within these confines, I will try to give an account of communism that is fair and complete and that would have allowed Marx or any other “orthodox” communist to recognize him- or herself, warts and all.

A description is of course not enough to frame a neo-communist theory. The descriptive part is followed by a final chapter in which I evaluate the theory in the light of the historical experience in communist states, current needs and my own convictions. What has to be rejected and what continues

to be useful or even necessary? The latter will constitute the core of a new, purified communist manifesto. (Those readers who already have a thorough understanding of communist and Marxist theory can safely skip the first chapters and go straight to the last one).

Some have jokingly called this approach “supermarket Marxism”: one chooses from the shelves what takes one’s fancy. But why not? Saving what’s worth saving is better than either orthodoxy or the dustbin of history.

Of course, neo-communism or neo-Marxism isn’t anything new in itself. Since the horrors of “actually existing socialism” have come to light, people have attempted to purify communist theory. Some, calling themselves post-communists or post-Marxists no longer believe the supermarket building is standing upright, but see some useful remnants in the rubble. Whatever the metaphor, the important thing is to save what is worth saving, and I believe that I can offer a new review of communism.

This “choice-approach” implies that communism will not or no longer be the sole worldview, providing an overall view of society or offering answers to all important questions of life. What we take from communism, we put together with what we take from elsewhere.

In the same vein, the word “manifesto” should not be understood in the British sense of the policy program of a political party, because such a program typically offers a worldview. The goal is not to create new neo-communist political parties proposing a coherent and all-encompassing ideology. The improvements in social life, proposed in this book, are piecemeal and can be promoted and implemented by any existing political party, left or right, without any inconsistency.

All this may sound a bit too post-modern and post-ideological, but whatever the merits and faults of post-modern-

ism, the two things I've always liked about it are its rejection of all-encompassing theories and its eclecticism. I really do believe that even conservatives and extreme anti-communists can realistically and coherently adopt many of the communist ideas that I try to rescue from the dustbin of history. After all, there's also a conservative anti-capitalist tradition. When I tell you in advance that I will focus on the communist ideas about work, production and self-development and will try to redirect communism towards more respect for human rights — including property rights — and democracy — including corporate democracy — then all this may no longer seem as far-fetched as it sounds.



## CHAPTER I. POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY

### The Priority of the Economy

The word “communism” refers to three different things:

- A theory about society and its different stages of evolution.
- A political movement with the goal of bringing about a new, perfected and final form of society as it is described in the theory.
- And a form of government as it emerged and largely disappeared in several countries throughout the 20th century.

I will focus on the first. Communism as a political movement will only be discussed from the point of view of communist theory: what does this theory require from a communist political movement? The different communist political movements and governments as historical phenomena will be absent from this book.