



America: Land of the Free?

One hundred seventy years ago, Europe was a continent in ferment. Dissatisfied with the feudal/monarchical system that had sustained most of the continent since the collapse of the Roman Empire, many European intellectuals and agitators wanted to completely overturn the old order. The French Revolution had spawned many imitators, and a number of movements, known collectively as “socialists,” worked to sow unrest and urge their fellow Europeans toward revolution. The most extreme of these was the “scientific socialism” of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and a circle of leftist intellectuals and malcontents who called themselves the League of the Just. In seeking to differentiate themselves from the many brands of “Utopian socialism” then in vogue, Marx and his collaborators eventually hit on a new name for their program: communism. Before long, the term was on the lips of every informed European, and young Karl Marx soon produced a statement of the communist ideology, the *Communist Manifesto*.



The *Communist Manifesto*, a brief and very accessible piece of political pamphleteering, was once required reading in high-school civics classes across the land — in a day when many of its claims still had the power to shock. But nowadays, the *Manifesto* is seldom read except by political science majors. The reason for this is not hard to discern: The *Communist Manifesto*, indisputably one of the most influential pieces of writing ever produced, no longer offends or surprises, because nearly all of its philosophical underpinnings have been accepted, and nearly all of its program adopted, in whole or in part, in the formerly free nations of the West, including the United States.

Profession of Faith

The *Manifesto* was published in 1848, a time of social upheaval across Europe (1848 was Europe’s famous “year of revolutions,” which saw socialist uprisings in dozens of states large and small, including the many Italian states, France, Ireland, the Hapsburg Empire, Poland, the German states, Denmark, western Ukraine, Switzerland, and Belgium). Monarchies, including the Capetian dynasty in France, were overthrown, and other reforms that allegedly broke with Europe’s feudal, aristocratic past were instituted. But it was not so much against the entrenched political elites that the *Communist Manifesto* was directed; instead, it aimed to abolish the “bourgeoisie,” the rough equivalents of the



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entrepreneurial and mercantile classes that constituted Europe's budding capitalist classes, whom Marx termed "the middle class owner[s] of property." These were the men who had brought about the Industrial Revolution, with its exquisite division of labor and productive factories and mills, as well as the shopkeepers, merchants, and traders who found markets for the fruits of Europe's miraculous new productivity. They were also the people and corporations who fomented international trade, beginning the process of enriching and improving the lot of the entire human race through such trade — a process that continues apace in our day, with Western modes of manufacture and capital accumulation now being spread to the nations of Asia and Africa. The *Manifesto* rejected all of these things, proclaiming instead the ascendancy of the so-called working class, and railing against the material blessings of what Marx termed capitalism. In an age of optimism, prosperity, and relative freedom — at least, in contrast with what Europe had known for centuries — the *Manifesto's* ranting pessimism did not sit well with many enlightened minds.

Marx's central talking point, the need to abolish private property, had little appeal in a Europe and America where private property had formed the base for the greatest surge of economic growth the world had ever seen. Inequalities in ownership there were, and remain, but the critical right to own and control property (including one's own person) is the legal doctrine upon which a free-market economy is founded. It allows men to take ownership of their lives and work to improve their situation, instead of expecting masters to provide for them. Private property, in other words, is one of the most important discoveries of Western Civilization, and is the basis for the progress we have enjoyed for five centuries.

The 19th century, though it did not aspire to medieval levels of piety, was still an age of faith (at least relative to the 21st) when even the brightest skeptics were reluctant to embrace atheism (the great French mathematician and physicist Pierre Simon Laplace, when asked whether he believed in God, replied coyly that he had "had no need of that hypothesis" in his work). But Marx's *Manifesto* raged against God and religion, assuring his readers that a future communist order would eradicate them altogether.

If such talking points were shocking to most mid-19th-century readers, they are no longer. In our day, Christianity has become all but extinct in many parts of Europe, and not only in former redoubts of Soviet Communism. For while atheism was official policy in nearly all of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (and remains so today in Communist China, Cuba, and North Korea) — a policy that effectively secularized countries from Central Europe to the Asian Far East — the former and current communist regimes in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere are little less secular than those European nations that were not drawn into the communist sphere. While many recent surveys have attempted to gauge the degree of religiosity in European countries, with somewhat varying results, the overall picture is stunning: Irreligiosity and outright atheism are close to becoming the norm across much of formerly Christian Europe. For example, according to a 2010 Eurobarometer poll, as many as 34 percent of all Swedes, 37 percent of Czechs, and 40 percent of French do not believe "there is any sort of spirit, God, or life force." The same poll reported that 30 percent of Dutch, 27 percent of Belgians, 29 percent of Estonians, 25 percent of residents of the U.K., and 20 percent of the EU overall, believed likewise.

Outside of Europe, other modern "Western" countries show similar trends, with Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay (three of South America's four most-developed countries) reporting rates of irreligiosity or outright atheism of 25, 11, and 17 percent, respectively. Results in Canada vary, but rates of atheism north of the border have been reckoned at anywhere from a quarter to a third of the population. In the



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United States, the picture is not quite so bleak, with slightly less than 10 percent of Americans self-identifying as atheists, although around 20 percent have no religious affiliation as such. Still, for the billions of residents of Europe, East Asia, North America north of Mexico, the wealthier nations of South America, Australia, and New Zealand, godlessness has become mainstream.

Urged on by articulate advocates such as biologist Richard Dawkins, who have used the Internet to amplify their message, atheism is on ever surer footing in the United States and elsewhere, especially among the young, while traditional religiosity of every kind is routinely ridiculed in the media and marginalized by legislators and policymakers. Karl Marx, were he alive today, would no doubt be pleased.

Another part of Marx's program was — and remains — abolition of the family. Marx saw the "bourgeois" institution of the family as indissolubly connected with capital and private property. When the latter disappeared, he argued, so would the former:

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.

Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty.

The decline of marriage and the traditional family is so universally acknowledged as to be almost cliché. Even as divorce rates have risen, the number of unmarried couples cohabiting and bearing children has skyrocketed across the Western world. The number of American children born out of wedlock is now higher than 40 percent, a figure that was in the single digits until the end of World War II. At the same time, the drive to legalize, legitimize, and make ubiquitous "same-sex marriage" is turning millennia-old Judeo-Christian culture on its ear. Similar trends are in evidence across the formerly Christian West, from Catholic Latin America to Orthodox Eastern Europe. And for those who, in Marx's day or our own, protest the calculated destruction of the traditional family and the Judeo-Christian morality associated with it, the *Manifesto*, echoing modern secularists, dismisses their "disgusting" concerns as "bourgeois claptrap about the family [and] about the hallowed co-relation of parents and child."

But the abolition of God, church, marriage, and family are, in Marx's view, subordinate to the overarching goal of Marxism, the radical leveling of society by the elimination of private property and the middle class (the "bourgeoisie"). This Marx justified by claiming that, under bourgeois capitalism, private property was already a fiction for the proletariat or working classes:

You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths. You reproach us, therefore, with intending to do away with a form of property, the necessary condition for whose existence is the non-existence of any property for the immense majority of society.

In one word, you reproach us with intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend.



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Not only that, but the bourgeois conceit of “freedom” was nothing more than a justification for an unjust system of property rights:

The abolition of this state of things is called by the bourgeois, abolition of individuality and freedom! And rightly so. The abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence, and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly aimed at.

By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying.

But if selling and buying disappears, free selling and buying disappears also. This talk about free selling and buying, and all the other “brave words” of our bourgeois about freedom in general, have a meaning, if any, only in contrast with restricted selling and buying, with the fettered traders of the Middle Ages, but have no meaning when opposed to the Communistic abolition of buying and selling, of the bourgeois conditions of production, and of the bourgeoisie itself.

While private property has not yet been altogether abolished, private property rights have become so diluted as to render almost meaningless once-robust legal protections on the formerly sacrosanct private sector. From confiscatory taxes on income, property, and capital and corporate gains, to ever-expanding regulatory regimes controlling every conceivable aspect of commercial activity and property use, the modern world has become, for the most part, implacably hostile to the principles of laissez-faire economics that once inspired Western governments to deregulate commerce and broaden property rights. That Americans have not yet been herded into full-blown Soviet-style kolkhozes is hardly the issue; American farms are *already* largely collectivized in the name of environmental and occupational safety, government control of farm prices and food supplies, and countless other rationales. To the extent that they still operate on American soil, factories and corporations are *already* owned by the state in that they pay the highest corporate taxes in the Western world and are subject to constant oversight and control by a welter of government agencies on the lookout for the slightest perceived breach of politically correct etiquette or any whiff of what our government overlords can characterize as unfair competitive practices. The modern American workplace is literally papered with communist-style government edicts warning of the penalties for any unfair employment or workplace practices, for safety violations, or any of countless other crimes against the regulatory Nanny State. These types of things have become accepted because we cannot imagine a workplace in which, for example, we are not warned of the consequences of “unequal employment practices,” but such things are as much in the spirit of Marx’s program as they are antithetical to individual liberty and private property rights.

Planks to Build a Marxist Society

Marx’s *Manifesto* is more than just a screed, however. It sets forth 10 specific measures — often known informally as the “Ten Planks of Communism” — for bringing about communism. In our day, these “planks” no longer appear radical to most, because all but one of them have now been implemented, in whole or in part, by the United States of America. The “Ten Planks” are:

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy, progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all rights of inheritance.



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4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of waste-lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the populace over the country.
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, &c, &c.

Plank #1 we have already discussed. While property taxes have long been a feature of American law, current levels found in many parts of the United States have not. According to the Tax Foundation, the heavily populated states of New York and New Jersey have the highest property taxes in the United States. An average resident of Westchester County, New York, for example, paid \$9,044 in property taxes in 2009 — the highest in the country. Many other counties in the urban northeast were not far behind, however, with Nassau County, New York, exacting an annual tribute of \$8,940 and Bergen County, New Jersey (where this writer's ancestors first settled in the mid-1600s to find freedom from religious oppression in Holland) shaking down property owners to the tune of \$8,708. Overall, New Jersey has the highest median property taxes (\$6,579), followed by Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Illinois, Vermont, Wisconsin, and California (\$2,893).

Added to such impositions are the innumerable federal, state, and local regulations controlling everything from excavating a new pond, building a treehouse for children, and repairing a porch roof. Permits for even mundane house repairs and upgrades have become so routine that few Americans can now imagine a time when a homeowner, contemplating the need for a new patio, would simply build it, or wanting to construct a clubhouse or treehouse for his children and their friends, would take no thought except to purchase the lumber and nails. Treehouses and clubhouses are among the many by-products of private property rights that have all but disappeared from American neighborhoods, because, in most places, they are no longer legal in a nation where private property rights have become a fiction.

Plank #2, a heavy, progressive income tax, has been with us since 1913. Originally urged upon Congress and the American people as a new and innovative way to raise revenue for necessary state functions, the permanent, heavy, graduated income tax was originally inspired by communist and socialist theorists such as Marx as a handy tool for wealth confiscation and redistribution. And the income tax, enforced by the authoritarian and almost unaccountable IRS (and its counterparts in other Western countries), has lived up to Marx's expectations, subjecting Americans to inquisitorial annual or quarterly tax returns that are scrutinized by agents unrestrained by any legal presumption of innocence. The IRS and the income tax have ruined the lives of countless Americans and continue to make the month of April a time of fear and loathing, especially for the most productive and heavily-taxed among us. As no doubt intended, income tax levies are most onerous for those who choose to be



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self-employed, since the FICA exaction is double what an employee is required to pay. This has had the effect of encouraging more and more Americans to seek employment with large corporations or in the public sector rather than to start their own businesses. And for many plucky entrepreneurs who do persist in being self-employed, being in permanent debt to the IRS is a fact of life.

Planks #3 and #4 are likewise being carried out via heavy taxation. While the right of inheritance has not been abolished outright, the confiscatory levels of state and federal inheritance taxes on estates of any significant size are having a comparable effect. The first permanent federal estate tax (better known colloquially as the “death tax”) was instituted in 1916, just three years after the permanent income tax. In its original form, the estate tax law permitted the federal government to harvest a 10-percent impost on all estates exceeding \$50,000. Subsequent legislation extended taxation to gifts, so that wealthy estate holders could not avoid taxes by giving away their assets before death. As of 2011, federal estate taxes were levied on all estates valued at \$1,000,000 or more, with a mind-boggling maximum rate of 55 percent, while a paltry \$11,000 per year is subject to exclusion from the gift tax. This means, in principle, that the federal government now has the power to confiscate more than one-half of all the property of wealthy decedents. This has created a strong disincentive for the wealthy and successful to save money and other capital assets (the true basis for economic growth, as every free market economist understands), and strong incentives to spend their wealth (in keeping with the Keynesian bias for spending over saving).

The confiscation of the property of emigrants is being accomplished by heavy “expatriation taxes” now inflicted on any American who seeks to renounce his American citizenship and transfer his assets abroad. Current U.S. law imposes very heavy exactions on any American with assets of \$2 million or more who seeks expatriation.

The confiscation of the property of “rebels” has taken the form of applying noxious “asset forfeiture” laws — whereby the federal government has the power to seize assets from anyone suspected of drug trafficking, money laundering, racketeering, and other criminal offenses — to individuals or institutions suspected of involvement with financing terrorism. In 2001, the Patriot Act spelled out sweeping new federal powers to confiscate money, real estate, and other assets from terrorist suspects and their enablers, including banks and other financial institutions. As with other types of asset forfeiture, such things once seized by the state are seldom if ever relinquished, even if charges are dropped or overturned. Moreover, the definitions of “terrorism” and “terrorist-related activities” are sufficiently nebulous that, in the near future, it is not at all improbable that such provisions will be used to confiscate the property of people labeled as “anti-government” — the Newspeak version of “enemies of the state.”

Plank #5 was accomplished in full with the creation of the Federal Reserve, America’s central bank, which has enjoyed a monopoly over the money supply since December 1913. The Fed, along with other comparable central banks abroad, such as the Bank of England and the European Central Bank, is arguably the most powerful tool for central economic planning and wealth redistribution ever devised. Since the economic collapse of 2008, for example (a catastrophe encouraged by Fed policies), the Federal Reserve has presided over the largest transfer of wealth in human history, from the more than 99 percent of Americans who do not own controlling interests in the megabanks and other financial corporations that constitute the Fed’s “primary dealers” into the pockets of the few thousand oligarchs who do. That such a consummate tool of revolutionary Marxism should now be hailed as the very



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linchpin of the entire U.S. “free market” economy is without doubt one of the supreme ironies of our age.

Not many years ago, few Americans aside from economists and bankers had any notion of what the Federal Reserve is or how it works, and fewer still appreciated the threat it poses. Nowadays, things have changed, with popular and congressional awareness of the Fed and anger over its destructive activities at an all-time high. Thanks to the tireless labors of former congressman Ron Paul to expose the Fed for what it is, bills to audit the Fed and curtail its powers are now a fixture in the House, and criticism of the organization is par for the course in congressional debate and in the mainstream news media. While abolition of the Fed does not appear imminent, it is under scrutiny and on the defensive as never before.

Plank #6 has been mostly accomplished as well, at least as far as the mainstream media are concerned. However, with the arrival of the Internet (ironically, a government creation), it has become much more difficult for the American establishment to “control the narrative,” so to speak. The Internet has made possible many things that were once unthinkable, such as the diffusion of the doctrines of liberty and the disclosure of news that the government-controlled media ignore or actively try to stifle.

Of course, lest we forget, the U.S. government retains the power to shut down the Internet should it become too much of a threat. The Internet has also become an instrument of comprehensive and essentially unchecked state surveillance. As we have but lately found out, no e-mail is sent unremarked, no Facebook post unnoticed, and no forum posting truly anonymous in a day when the federal government no longer acknowledges any restraints on its authority to spy on its own citizens. And other media are just as surely under the federal government’s thumb, with television, radio, telephone, and cable networks all under government control, if not outright ownership (yet). Since 1934, the FCC has tightly regulated all forms of electronic media, allegedly to ensure that use of the airwaves was equitably allocated. But in 2006, the FCC dispelled any doubts about whose interests it truly serves when it declined to investigate allegations (later revealed to be true) that the NSA had been compelling telecommunications corporations to assist them in illegal espionage on American citizens.

But in the meantime, Americans still enjoy the freedom of the press, and nearly unfettered access to the great writings of all ages that constitute our heritage. The Internet continues to be exploited by the private sector to magnificent effect, bringing about marvelous new means to buy and sell products, to create and maintain social and professional networks, and to store, disseminate, and access information.

Planks #7 and #9 have been implemented piecemeal since the late 19th century, when the newly formed Department of Agriculture (USDA) began subsidizing farming and farm research. Beginning with the Great Depression and FDR’s New Deal, the USDA became one of the federal government’s most important instruments for promoting socialism via massive farm subsidies, price controls, and manipulation of commodity supplies. Today, nearly all commercial farmers accept government subsidies in exchange for government control over their fields and their harvests. Moreover, ranchers in the West must graze their cattle on federal lands, subject to federal rules and regulations that, over the last several decades, have been directed at driving cattle off government lands altogether and putting an end to ranching in the name of environmental concerns. For all intents and purposes, then, both ranching and farming is altogether under the micromanagement of the federal government’s social engineers, just as Marx had advocated.



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Moreover, the distinction between country and city has been blurred by the creation of vast sprawling suburbs made possible by massive freeways (the interstate highway system) created by the federal government under President Eisenhower. The rise of the “burbs” and the people who live in them (while mostly working in the city) has contributed to the dilution of rural and small town America and its distinctive culture by city values. Big cities generally have been centers of government growth (New York City passed the first modern American gun control law, the Sullivan Act, in 1911, for example, generations before such legislation could ever be contemplated in more rural areas), because with the much larger concentrations of people living in cities, the demands for government dispute mediation and controls are correspondingly greater. For this and other reasons, city dwellers tend to be much more “liberal” than their rural counterparts; would-be social engineers within government are therefore constantly trying to impose urban values and lifestyles on rural and small-town America, which has always been instinctively hostile to Big Government.

Plank #10 has been fully realized for generations. Government schools have been around since the 19th century, and since the creation of the Department of Education by President Jimmy Carter, all public schools have effectively been under federal government control. The implementation of national curricular standards often hostile to traditional values and tried-and-true methods of effective pedagogy — such as the controversial Common Core being foisted upon public schools right now — shows just how important government control over education is to carrying out the social revolution Marx and his epigones advocate. It is public schools whose anti-American curricula now militate against religion (especially Christianity), family values, and sexual restraint, and which regularly distort American history and slander many of our noble forebears, such as the Founders, whose views do not square with the agenda of messianic Marxism. American public schools have been at the vanguard of the effort to indoctrinate Americans in the beliefs of the Marxist counterculture.

Fortunately, Americans still have options for educating their children. Private and online schools offer a range of alternatives to public school, and homeschooling, once illegal across the land, is now legal in all 50 states. Many homeschooling families can now take advantage of online education programs such as FreedomProject Education, whose online student body numbers nearly 600 after only a few years of operation. And government-sponsored initiatives to consolidate control over public school curricula, especially Common Core, have been met with strong resistance from a public finally awakened to the fact that our school system is slipping from our control.

Even the child-labor legislation contemplated by the 10th plank has long since become the law of the land, in many cases preventing responsible young adults from entering the workforce when they wish.

Only the eighth plank, with its call for industrial armies, has not been implemented in any significant degree, it being one of the final steps undertaken in the transition from socialism to unalloyed communism.

Retreat From the Marxist Rabbit Hole

In very many respects, American government and society are now aligned with the vision of the *Communist Manifesto*. Unlike the former Soviet Union, Red China, Cuba, Cambodia, North Korea, and other nations that can or could truly be characterized as communist, we have not reached the ultimate phase. Instead, we are in a transitional phase, which we might term “American socialism,” in which our political leaders pretend to uphold individual liberty, free markets and trade, and the rule of law, but do



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precisely the opposite. Like the many flavors of socialism that Marx identified near the conclusion of the *Manifesto* as ideological allies and necessary precursors to true communism (such as “German socialism,” “feudal socialism,” bourgeois socialism,” and “critical-Utopian socialism”), American socialism tries to subvert liberty and Christian culture via appeals to nationalism, patriotism, humanitarianism, and class equality — socialism wrapped in the American flag, as it were.

Appearances to the contrary, the consummation of the communist program in America is not inevitable. But nothing less than a veritable American Renaissance will prevent it. Such a national rebirth would entail a restoration of constitutional federal government, confining it to its limited, defined powers. It would mean a repudiation of destructive, nonsensical social innovations such as same-sex “marriage” and abortion on demand. It would require the abolition of the Federal Reserve, the IRS, and myriad other unconstitutional federal agencies and departments. And it would require a return to sound money and liquidation of the national debt by deep cuts in government spending. If these things do not soon come to pass, we may soon find out just how far our leaders are willing to take us down the Marxist rabbit hole.

Fortunately, Americans still have the means to reverse the trend toward Marxist absolutism. We still have the freedom to express and disseminate our political opinions and to practice our religious faith. The Internet has proven more powerful even than the printing press for making our voices heard and changing hearts and minds about liberty. Americans are still very well armed (unlike the countless captive millions who have endured Marxist totalitarianism), and, despite an energetic campaign by media and government in recent years to rethink our right to self-defense enshrined in the Second Amendment, show more devotion than ever to this right — a powerful disincentive for would-be putschists in Washington, who have perhaps so far refrained from imposing martial law, under one pretext or another, because they still fear the wrath of a well-armed citizenry. As perilous as our state has become, we do not yet reside in Stalinist Russia or modern North Korea.

But we must not be lulled into complacency. After all, few of the denizens of states where communists seized control imagined such a thing happening to them. And as Arthur Thompson, the CEO of The John Birch Society, notes, the government that a people has is a reflection of the attitudes that the people hold:

Government is always a reflection of society and will change as its society changes. The communists understand this better than anyone, and it is why they are working to change American society away from being based on morals and constructed around individual freedom. If this process should be successful, our government would follow. Civic as well as individual morality is important. If we lose a moral society, we will not be able to stop a communist style government. This is why Marx always called for social revolution.

Since the days of Marx and Engels, the drive toward communism has been orchestrated by men and women with subtlety, enormous patience, and a long-range plan. If we wish to restore freedom to our shores, we must be no less organized, dedicated, and zealous.

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