Defining Revolution:

An Examination of Marx and his Works

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Abstract:

Throughout his writings, Karl Marx speaks of revolution, and how this will allow for a transition towards a communist society. However, due to the language he uses, it has been easy for some people to misunderstand what he means by the term 'revolution.' Indeed, this has led some people to misrepresent his philosophy, citing Marx as a supporter of coup d'états and political revolutions when in reality he supports a more transformational process of social revolution. Although Marx uses the term revolution, there are many places in his work where he clarifies that he is referring to social revolution, not political revolution. The following sections will illustrate what Marx says on this subject by examining several of his works and by using textual evidence to determine his true opinion and philosophy on this issue. Several of Marx's texts will be examined, ranging from *On the Jewish Question* to *The Civil War in France*.

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Section 1: Introduction

Across socialist literature, one of the themes which presents itself consistently is the idea of revolution. Given the history of socialist revolution, many people might think that socialism and communism require some sort of forceful coup d'état to achieve their objectives. Indeed, many people have misconstrued and misunderstood the philosophy of Marx to advocate for such an event. For example, Shlomo Avineri points to Lenin's overly aggressive interpretation of Marxism as an example.[1] However, upon further examination it can be found that Marx does not advocate for this sort of forceful political revolution to achieve communism, and instead argues for a more transformational process of social revolution. This is precisely what Shlomo Avineri describes in his book *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx.* This view put forward by Avineri will be tested below. More specifically, what Marx means when he speaks of social revolution and political revolution, and why he prefers the former over the latter, will be addressed in the following sections.

This paper will examine Marx's writings as they relate to the transition towards a communist state, his definitions of social and political revolution, as well as related subjects such as his theory of historical materialism, the division between political and civil life, and the creation of a universal movement. Marx in particular is important to examine in this analysis, since he is considered the foundational thinker for socialist theory, and because socialist revolutionaries have incorrectly used his work as a justification for coup d'états and revolutions in the past. Thus, a refutation of these arguments must be made and Marx's true opinions on this subject must be clarified so that future and current socialist debate can be guided by more accurate discussions of socialism and social change.

For the purpose of this paper, several of Marx's texts that deal with the subjects of political and social revolution, as well as related subjects, will be examined. One text by Shlomo Avineri will also be examined because of its detailed analysis of much of Marx's work, providing a good outline of several of the arguments that will be examined later in

[1] Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 257.

this paper. First, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* by Shlomo Avineri will be examined. This section will confirm the premise of this paper and begin to explore the differences between social and political revolution. The second text that will be examined is *On the Jewish Question*. This section will explore the divide between political and civil life, as well as the difference between political and human emancipation. The third text that will be examined is *Critical Remarks on the Article: The King of Prussia and Social Reform*. This section will compare political reforms to structural change, examine Marx's argument for a combination of the political and civil spheres, and introduce the importance of having a movement that is universal in scope. The fourth text that will be examined is the preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*. This section will introduce the concept of historical materialism and explore the consequences of trying to 'speed up' this process. The fifth text that will be examined is *The German Ideology*. This section will expand on Marx's concept of historical materialism, provide several preconditions that are required for a revolution to occur, and address subjects such as the role of human agency, the role of technology, the limits of political reform compared to revolutionary changes, and expand on the creation of a universal movement. The sixth text that will be examined is *The Communist Manifesto*. This section will speak on the role of political organizing, the importance of democracy, the need to restructure instead of reform the state, and expand upon the creation of a movement that is universal in scope. The seventh text that will be examined is *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. This section will elaborate on Marx's opinion of political revolution in particular, as well as explore the role of the Proletariat as the universal class, the expansion of a universal movement of the Proletariat, the consequences of repeating old mistakes, and will further elaborate on the concept of historical materialism. The eighth and final text that will be examined is *The Civil War in France*. This section will further examine material conditions, explain the necessity for an international Proletariat movement, reiterate the status of the Proletariat as the universal class, demonstrate the consequences of failed political revolutions, and outline the limits of political reforms. After an analysis of these texts, it will become clear that Marx does not advocate for a coercive form of political revolution to achieve communism, but rather a more transformational process of social revolution. It will also become clear what Marx believes this sort of social revolution would look like.

Section 2: Review of Literature

Section 2.1: The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx

Before examining the work of Karl Marx himself, it is useful to first examine *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* by Shlomo Avineri. This text examines the work of Karl Marx and presents several of the ideas that will become important in the rest of this paper, such as the difference between social revolution and political revolution. Thus, this text serves as an introduction to the topics covered in the following paragraphs. Particular attention will be paid to the epilogue, titled "The Eschatology of the Present," as it deals explicitly with this subject.

In the epilogue of *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx,* Shlomo Avineri begins by reiterating that many people have misinterpreted Marx's philosophy. Avineri argues that Marx's philosophy is too complex, and therefore does not translate well into politics, leading to a "vulgarization" of Marx's philosophy.[2] For example, Avineri says "the intellectual achievements of Marx's philosophy cannot provide without modification an ideological basis for a political movement."[3] The philosophical complexity in differentiating Marx's two concepts of political and social revolution are simply too complicated to be quickly communicated for political ends. Because of this, "the vulgarization of Marx's theory thus becomes a necessary component"[4] of historical socialist movements. Since Marxist parties cannot communicate the depth of Marx's philosophy, they opt for something more easily understandable, which has tended to deal with the idea of coercive political revolution instead of more transformational process of social revolution. Indeed, Avineri says "Marxist parties may thus have become the gravediggers of Marxism"[5] and says that it is necessary to "rescue Marx from the hands of his disciples."[6] For example, Avineri mentions Soviet communism, the source from which many of the misconceptions surrounding Marx's philosophy and communism in

[2] Avineri 251
[3] Avineri 251
[4] Avineri 251
[5] Avineri 251
[6] Avineri 251

general have arisen, and refers to it as what Marx would call "crude communism."[7] This confirms the pretext that was mentioned in the introduction, stating that many people have misconstrued Marx's philosophy on this subject.

Avineri also speaks about what Marx means by revolution and clarifies what Marx's thoughts are on this topic. Avineri says that it is clear that "the implications of Marx's theory called for a proletarian movement."[8] However, Avineri also states that there is "an implicit tension between [Marx's] conviction that the revolution is imminent and his disinclination to be implicated in a coup that would try violently to usher in a new millennium."[9] Thus, although Marx does advocate for some form of movement or revolution, Avineri makes it clear that Marx distances himself from any form of forceful revolution which relies on coercion to sustain itself, which Marx would call a political revolution. In fact, Avineri points out that in *The Communist Manifesto*, it is clear that Marx "looked forward to a lengthy process of change rather than to a violent imminent revolution."[10] Avineri also states that Marx was "oriented far more toward organizational political work than toward revolutionary conspiracy."[11] From these quotes it is evident that Avineri is arguing that Marx envisioned a revolution that would be cooperative and transformational in nature instead of forceful and coercive. This is what Marx describes as a social revolution. Avineri quotes Engels, who was Marx's closest compatriot, saying "Engels remarks that some of these revolutionary adventurers, who time and again fail in their coups, should be caught and executed, so that this folly would stop."[12] This too suggests that forceful and coercive coups were not what Marx nor Engels intended when writing their philosophies. Thus, Avineri agrees that Marx does not advocate for political revolution, and instead advocates for a more cooperative and transformational form of social revolution.

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[7] Avineri 258
[8] Avineri 251
[9] Avineri 251
[10] Avineri 252
[11] Avineri 252
[12] Avineri 254

To summarize, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* argues the pretext that was mentioned in the introduction, which stated that many people have come to misinterpret Marx's philosophy as advocating for forceful and coercive political revolution. As evidenced here, the idea that Marx supports political revolution is misguided, as Marx consistently distanced himself from movements that espouse such tactics. This text also demonstrates that Marx advocated for a more cooperative and transformational social revolution instead of political revolution and includes several quotes wherein he explicitly denounces these harmful tactics.

Section 2.2: On the Jewish Question

In *On The Jewish Question,* Marx speaks of political and social revolution in the context of the divide between political and civil life in society. Marx argues that society is divided between the more public 'political realm,' and the more private 'civil realm,'[13] and that real change cannot occur by only addressing the political realm. Rather, the private or civil realm must also be considered. Furthermore, Marx argues that recognizing the interconnected nature of these two spheres of life is important, and he even argues that they must be combined into a single sphere to create real change in society.[14] This is indicative of a social revolution rather than a political revolution.

To illustrate this, Marx differentiates between political emancipation and human emancipation, clarifying that these are in fact two separate things.[15] Marx loosely describes political emancipation as obtaining certain liberties or changing certain policies,[16] whereas he describes human emancipation as emancipation from injustices by changing the existing system.[17] For example, political emancipation would mean changing the policies of capitalism whereas human emancipation would mean changing the capitalist system itself. When applied to the political and civil spheres of life, Marx argues that political emancipation would affect the political sphere whereas human

[13] Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton & Company, 1978), 39.
[14] Marx, 46.
[15] Marx, 30.
[16] Marx, 44.
[17] Marx, 35.

emancipation would affect both the civil sphere and the political sphere.[18] Thus, Marx argues that political emancipation alone cannot achieve human emancipation. Take human emancipation from capitalism as an example. Marx would argue that although society can be politically emancipated from capitalism, by removing the property qualification for public officials for instance,[19] this does not lead to human emancipation from capitalism, since the private relationships of private property and capitalism still exist.[20] The difference here is that capitalists are simply no longer given preference by the state,[21] but the underlying social relationships and the existence of property relations have not changed. Thus, political emancipation alone cannot achieve human emancipation. This can be related back to Marx's argument about political and social revolution as well. In the same way that political emancipation alone cannot achieve human emancipation from capitalism, so too is a purely political revolution incapable of achieving communism. In both situations the underlying relationships of capitalism remain unchanged, meaning that lasting change is not possible.

In order to rectify this, Marx argues that the separation of political and civil life must end, and that they should instead be combined into one.[22] For example, Shlomo Avineri points out that in *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Marx sees universal suffrage as a way of combining the political and civil spheres in this way.[23] Avineri says that "in realizing the determination of the political sphere by the whole public, universal suffrage abolishes the distinction between state and civil society."[24] This line of thought can be further illustrated by Marx in the following quote from *On The Jewish Question*:

"Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday

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[18] Marx, 35.
[19] Marx, 32.
[20] Marx, 45.
[21] Marx, 32.
[22] Marx, 46.
[23] Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 204.
[24] Avineri, 204.

life, in his work, and in his relationships, has become a species-being; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (forces propres) as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as political power."[25]

What Marx means by this is that instead of focusing on political emancipation, society should focus on human emancipation and on combining the political and civil spheres. As Avineri mentions, Marx believes that one way this can be done is by implementing universal suffrage.[26] This is because Marx argues that political emancipation itself divides society into the political and civil spheres.[27] For example, the liberal revolution that overthrew the monarchy created a division between political and civil life. Conversely, Marx argues that human emancipation combines the political and civil spheres.[28] Building on the example in the previous paragraph, Marx would argue that although political emancipation can emancipate society from the rule of those with property (by eliminating the property qualification for elected officials), it does not emancipate society from property relations. Instead, political emancipation gives citizens new rights to own property,[29] thereby fostering the creation of new property relations. Thus, although society may have been emancipated from property in the political sphere, it has become further entangled in property relations in the civil sphere. Because of this, Marx argues that "political emancipation is the reduction of man"[30] and that "the political revolution dissolves civil society into its elements without revolutionizing these elements."[31] Marx believes that universal suffrage can be of help here, since allowing all citizens to vote will begin deconstructing the barrier between the political and civil spheres, allowing for more transformational changes to occur. Thus, Marx argues that focusing on the human emancipation of society from property relations altogether (by

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[25] Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton & Company, 1978), 46.
[26] Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 204.
[27] Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton & Company, 1978), 35.
[28] Marx, 46.
[29] Marx, 44.
[30] Marx, 46.
[31] Marx, 46.

combining the political and civil spheres) is a better strategy than simply attempting to emancipate society politically. This can be applied to the concepts of political and social revolution as well. In the same way that political emancipation only creates surface-level changes, so too does political revolution fail to change the underlying injustices in society. Similarly, by focusing on social revolution (and thereby combining the political and civil spheres) the relationships within society itself can be changed, leading to a state of true human emancipation. Thus, only by social revolution, and therefore changing the relationships within society itself, can society achieve true human emancipation from capitalism and begin transitioning towards communism.

To summarize, the key element to understand in this section is that there is a division between political and civil society and therefore any attempts to achieve only political emancipation will not achieve true human emancipation. Similarly, attempts to create a purely political revolution would ignore the civil or social aspects of such a movement, ultimately leading to failure. Instead, Marx advocates for a social revolution that would change the relationships within society itself, combining both civil and political society.

Section 2.3: Critical Remarks on the Article: The King of Prussia and Social Reform

In *Critical Remarks on the King of Prussia*, Marx responds to Ruge, his former co-editor from a German newspaper.[32] Their disagreement centers on a dispute about an 1844 uprising in Silesia of weavers against their superiors.[33] The point of discontent between Ruge and Marx arises from their understanding of the nature of revolution, and how it applies in the case of this uprising. Ruge argues that political revolution is required to achieve communism, whereas Marx argues for a more transformational social revolution instead, which would redefine the role of the state and the relationships of society in general.[34] Marx writes a letter addressed to Ruge expressing his disagreement, which is what created *Critical Remarks on the King of Prussia*.

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[32] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 134.
[33] Marx, 134.
[34] Marx, 134.

In *Critical Remarks on the King of Prussia*, Ruge argues that the uprising in Silesia was based on a social revolution, but that social revolution alone was not enough to be sustainable.[35] Ruge further suggests that social revolution arises from political revolution and not the other way around, essentially asserting that political revolution is a prerequisite for social revolution.[36] Marx quotes Ruge as saying "A social revolution without a political soul… is impossible."[37] In the case of the Silesian uprising, Ruge specifically argues that there was not a sufficiently developed political consciousness in Germany to carry a revolution to term, and that the conditions for political and therefore social revolution were not present.[38]

Marx takes issue with this and takes a stance similar that which he took in *On the Jewish Question.* Marx again asserts that political revolution is not sufficient to achieve communism, and that instead a social revolution is needed. In particular Marx emphasizes the importance of revolutionizing the elements of society and the relationships within society, instead of simply changing regimes. To illustrate this, Marx reiterates his line of thought from *On the Jewish Question* in which he describes the division between public and private life (Marx also calls this political and civil life), and advocates for a combination of these two spheres of life.[39] From the beginning, Marx states that "from the political point of view the state and any organization of society are not two distinct things."[40] This exemplifies Marx's view that the public and private spheres are connected, and that therefore a purely political revolution would not suffice.

Marx also states that society often seeks to find "administrative" problems with government, but then seeks to use equally "administrative" solutions to rectify these problems.[41] Here Marx is calling attention to the contradiction between political problems

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[35] Marx, 134.
[36] Marx, 134.
[37] Marx, 136.
[38] Marx, 134.
[39] Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton & Company, 1978), 46.
[40] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 134.
[41] Marx, 135.

and political solutions. In other words, if there is a problem with the state, the state cannot also be expected to be the solution to this problem, because the state itself is the problem.[42] Marx elaborates on this, stating that a major reason why this would not be possible is because the state is often incapable of seeing its own flaws, making a true solution to a problem unlikely.[43] "The state cannot believe in the intrinsic impotence of its administration, i.e. itself. It can appreciate only its formal, accidental defects, and try to remedy them."[44] Furthermore, Marx states that "the more powerful the state, and thus the more political a country is, the less it is inclined to look in the state itself… for the cause of social evils."[45] This shows that Marx does not believe that a political solution can solve a political problem. Take capitalism and property relations as an example. If the state upholds and legitimizes capitalism and property relations, simply creating new regulations limiting or regulating these activities will not solve the underlying problem, which is capitalism itself. Instead, the relationships within society must be revolutionized and the structure of the state itself reorganized to eliminate capitalism entirely and replace it with communism. This also applies to Marx's beliefs concerning political and social revolution. Because a political problem cannot be solved by a purely political solution, it must be solved by a social solution instead. Thus, a social revolution is required to solve these problems, not a political revolution.

To rectify this division between public and private life that he describes, Marx again advocates for the combination of the public and private spheres.[46] On this point, Marx says "if the modern state wished to do away with the impotence of its administration, it would have to do away with the contemporary private sphere for it only exists in contrast to the private sphere."[47] Indeed, Marx says that the state "rests on this contradiction. It rests on the contrast between public and private life, on the contrast between general and particular interests."[48] Again, one way that Marx argues this can be

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[42] Marx, 135.
[43] Marx, 135.
[44] Marx, 135.
[45] Marx, 135.
[46] Marx, 135.
[47] Marx, 135.
[48] Marx, 134.

done is by implementing universal suffrage,[49] since allowing private individuals to become more involved with public politics will begin reducing the division between the private and public spheres. By eliminating the division between the private and public spheres, the relationships within society could be more easily revolutionized and the elements of society could be changed to free society from capitalism and property relations, creating lasting change. This is how Marx would describe a social revolution, not a political revolution.

Another important point that Mark makes in this text regards the collectivist and individualist natures of social and political revolutions, respectively. Marx argues that a social revolution operates "from the standpoint of the whole."[50] What Marx means by this is that a social revolution addresses inequalities for everyone by revolutionizing the system, rather than shifting their standing within the system. Marx also argues that "the human essence is the true collectivity of man."[51] Here Marx is arguing that people are naturally cooperative and that therefore social movements would encounter more success due to their universal and cooperative nature.[52] Conversely, Marx argues that political revolutions involve only "a tendency of the classes without political influence to end their isolation from the top positions in the state."[53] In other words, political revolutions seek to change their position relative to other classes within the existing system, instead of changing the system itself. Marx continues, saying that "a revolution with a political soul also organizes… a ruling group in society to society's detriment."[54] In these quotes, Marx is saying that contrary to social revolutions, which aim to emancipate everyone, political revolutions often only focus on changing the status of a certain class of people relative to other classes. However, this has the effect of leaving the class structure in place, whereas

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[49] Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 204.
[50] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.
[51] Marx, 136.
[52] Marx, 136.
[53] Marx, 136.
[54] Marx, 136.

Marx intends to abolish class entirely in order to achieve communism.[55] Thus, a political revolution addresses inequality for a specific class, whereas social revolution addresses inequality for all. Marx re-iterates this point, saying "An industrial revolution can therefore be as impartial as it likes; it contains within it a universal soul: a political revolt can be as universal as it likes, even under the most colossal form it conceals a narrow soul."[56] The narrow vision of political revolution is therefore incompatible with Marx's goals, and is clearly not what he advocates for. Thus, it is clear that Marx supports a social and not a political revolution.

In summary, this text is important because it illustrates several of Marx's views on political and social revolution. First, Marx re-iterates his opinion that a purely political revolution would not succeed and relates this to the division between public and private life. Marx also argues that political problems cannot be solved by political solutions (i.e., political revolution) and must instead be addressed by social solutions (i.e., social revolution). To rectify this, Marx argues that the public and private spheres must be combined. Finally, Marx argues that the narrow focus of political revolution further proves its inability to create lasting change. These points all show that Marx does not approve of political revolution, and instead approves of social revolution.

Section 2.4: Preface to A Critique of Political Economy

Although *A Critique of Political Economy* itself is not as important for the purposes of this paper, the preface to this text provides a good overview of Marx's concept of historical materialism, which will become important to understanding his opinions on social and political revolution in the following sections. Thus, this text will serve as an introduction to the subject of historical materialism, before delving into it more deeply in the next section.

The preface to *A Critique of Political Economy* briefly details Marx's concept of historical materialism. A central theme of Marx's concept of historical materialism is that

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[55] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2021), 89.
[56] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.

material conditions influence the structure and relationships of society.[57] Marx describes material conditions as the resources available, the level of development of the means of production, and the relationships which organize them[58] Marx generally defines the means of production as factories or industrial centres which produce goods.[59] The level of development of the means of production influences the relations of production, which then have effects on the economics, politics, and social relations of a state.[60] For example, Marx begins by remarking that "my investigation led to the result that legal relations as well as forms of state… have their roots in the material conditions of life."[61] Marx elaborates on this, stating that at the most basic level "men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces."[62] Thus, material conditions and the level of development of the productive forces influence the relationships of production within society. From these first material conditions, Marx states that "the sum of these relationships of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness."[63] Thus, material conditions and the level of development of the means of production influence the relations of production within society, which in turn influence the economy, politics, and social relationships within society. Marx summarizes this view, saying "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being."[64]

This concept is important to understand since it can be related back to Marx's ideas of political and social revolution. Although it will be elaborated upon further in the following sections, another of the reasons that Marx disapproves of political revolution is

[57] Marx, 425.
[58] Marx, 425.
[59] Marx, 425.
[60] Marx, 425.
[61] Marx, 425.
[62] Marx, 425.
[63] Marx, 425.
[64] Marx, 425.

because it does not take into consideration the material conditions of society, and the effect that these would have on the success of a revolution. Instead, Marx advocates for a more transformational and longer-lasting process of social revolution. Marx explains this, saying that "At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or… with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto."[65] Thus, Marx says that "from forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters,"[66] which then leads to "an epoch of social revolution."[67] These quotes show that Marx sees revolution as beginning with changes in material conditions. Only when these material conditions permit the creation of change can society change as well.[68] Indeed, Marx says that "no social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself."[69] More definitively however, Marx says that a revolution "arises only when the material conditions for its solutions already exist or are at least in the process of formation."[70] In other words, Marx argues that a revolution that will truly change the economic, political, and social conditions of society requires that certain material conditions arise from a transformational process over a longer period of time, and that this process cannot be rushed.

Here lies Marx's problem with political revolution. Political revolutions occur very quickly and attempt to impose new political solutions onto an already political problem, without taking into consideration the material conditions of society. Revolutions that attempt to seize control of the state and force new relationships upon it ignore the development of these material conditions, in an attempt to essentially 'rush' the process that Marx describes above. Marx would argue that this is doomed to fail, since the material conditions of society and the level of development of the forces of production

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[65] Marx, 425.
[66] Marx, 425.
[67] Marx, 425.
[68] Marx, 425.
[69] Marx, 425.
[70] Marx, 425.

would not be well suited to accommodate these changes. Instead, Marx argues that a longer transformational social revolution is required, one which will change the material conditions, relations of production, economics, politics, and social relations of society to allow for lasting change.

To summarise, the preface to *A Critique of Political Economy* is relevant since it provides an introduction to historical materialism, which relates to Marx's philosophy on political and social revolutions. Because political revolutions do not consider the broader implications of material conditions on the success of their revolution, Marx does not believe political revolutions will achieve lasting change, since the process of changing material conditions cannot be 'sped up.' Instead, Marx advocates for a longer transformational process of social revolution that relies on the proper material conditions being present before a revolution takes place, thus allowing for the revolutionization of the elements of society, beginning with the relations of production and extending into economics, politics, and social relations.

Section 2.5: The German Ideology:

The German Ideology was written in 1845-1846 and acts as a collection of many of Marx and Engel's early works.[71] In this text, Marx provides several insights into the difference between political and social revolution, as well as his concept of historical materialism. What is most important here is that Marx expands on his concept of historical materialism and outlines several general material conditions and resulting preconditions that would be required for a revolution to occur. For example, he speaks of the creation of an intolerable power and the universalization of the means of production. Marx also speaks on subjects such as the role of human agency, the role of technology, the limits of political reform compared to revolutionary changes, and the elimination of the antagonism between town and country to permit a movement that is universal in scope.

[71] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 1.

Perhaps the most important theme that Marx mentions in *The German Ideology* is his idea of a historical materialist interpretation of history. This idea is key to understanding much of Marx's other thoughts in *The German Ideology* and is the basis of his concept of social revolution. Although this was previously mentioned in the preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*, this concept is expanded upon significantly in this text. According to Marx, history is influenced and evolves based on material conditions.[72] Marx articulates this view, saying "history is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations."[73] These material conditions shape the history of each generation by creating the relationships between individuals and within society. More specifically, material conditions influence the level of development of the means of production and the resulting relations of production, which in turn influence the economics, politics, and social relations of society.[74]

For example, if a generation inherits fairly rudimentary material conditions, this would cause the level of development of the means of production to be relatively unadvanced (i.e., no factories). Without factories, the relations of production would likely consist of peasants working the land, instead of workers working in factories, which would have economic, political and social effects. Economically this generation would be poorer, politically there would be a centralization of power within the hands of landowners, and socially a class divide would appear between serfs and lords. This would result in a form of feudalism. In contrast to this, if a generation inherits material conditions that are more rewarding and translated these into means of production with an advanced level of development, the result would be different. These more sophisticated means of production would lead to the creation of factories, with workers being employed by factory owners. This would have different economic, political, and social effects than in the first situation. Economically, the ruling class would be richer,

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[72] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425.
[73] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 57.
[74] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425.

politically there would be a centralization of power in the hands of those with capital, and socially there would be a divide between worker and capitalist. This would result in a form of capitalism. As this example demonstrates, Marx argues that "all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc."[75] as well as "the formation of ideas"[76] stem from material conditions. In other words, Marx's materialist concept of history argues "that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances."[77]

It is important to understand Marx's materialist concept of history since he argues that material conditions shape society, and that therefore communism can only be brought about by changing material conditions.[78] Marx argues that change can occur only through "the practical overthrow [of] actual social relations,"[79] which are determined by material conditions. In other words, a specific set of material conditions are required before a social revolution can occur. Marx explains this, saying that "if these material elements of a complete revolution are not present… it is completely immaterial whether the idea of this revolution has been expressed a hundred times already."[80] For example, if the "sum of productive forces, capital funds, and social forms of intercourse"[81] are not in place, a social revolution will not be possible. In the following paragraphs and sections, several specific examples of material conditions and preconditions will be elaborated upon. More generally though, Marx believes that the relations of production, as well as economic, political, and social factors, must appear in order to provide the proper conditions for a social revolution to take place.

Marx argues in *The German Ideology* that in order to have a social revolution there are several preconditions that are important to fulfill, one of which is the

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[75] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 58.
[76] Marx and Engels, 58.
[77] Marx and Engels, 59.
[78] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425.
[79] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 59.
[80] Marx and Engels, 59.
[81] Marx and Engels, 59.

appearance of an "intolerable power."[82] Marx defines an intolerable power as "a power against which men make a revolution."[83] Thus, in general terms, an 'intolerable power' represents something which sparks a countermovement and convinces people to mobilize against it. Marx conceptualizes this 'intolerable power' as the series of injustices which are present under capitalism.[84] One such example is capitalism's ability to force "a great mass of humanity"[85] to become propertyless, in juxtaposition to creating a "world of wealth and culture"[86] for the rich bourgeoise. This demonstrates the severe inequality that the Proletariat is faced with under capitalism. There are many other conditions under capitalism that Marx points to as being unjust. The exploitation of the Proletariat, the worker's lack of control over the production process, and the commodification of nature are a few examples. Although these problems are not unique to capitalism, they become acute under capitalism and therefore pose a serious problem. For instance, the commodification of nature (i.e. the exploitation of nature's resources) is present in other economic systems through the use of natural resources, but under capitalism these resources are exploited beyond their limit and at the expense of the environment, leading to an acute problem. Thus, the inequalities, unjust relationships, and acute problems present under capitalism represent the 'intolerable power' to which Marx is referring, which he sees as a necessary precondition for the creation of a social revolution.

Marx sees the "universalization"[87] of the means of production as another precondition necessary for a social revolution. Here it is again important to understand what Marx means by the 'means of production.' As the name would suggest, Marx generally defines the means of production as factories or industrial centres which produce goods.[88] Marx argues that the development of the means of production is necessary for a revolution since capitalism can only be brought about by means of production with a high

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[82] Marx and Engels, 56.
[83] Marx and Engels, 56.
[84] Marx and Engels, 56
[85] Marx and Engels, 56.
[86] Marx and Engels, 56.
[87] Marx and Engels, 56.
[88] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425.

level of sophistication. Thus, only by developing the means of production can capitalism and its injustices be actualized and therefore only then can the 'intolerable power' of capitalist society become fully evident.[89] For example, in reference to the juxtaposition of the propertyless man and the wealthy man mentioned above, Marx says that "both of [these] conditions presuppose a great increase in productive power, a high degree of its development."[90] Here Marx argues that only through the development of the means of production can this inequality be created, and therefore only though developing them can the inherent inequality of capitalism be exposed.

Building on this, Marx argues that the means of production must be "universalized," (i.e. adopted everywhere) for two reasons. The first reason is so that the detrimental effects of capitalism can be shown everywhere, thus inspiring revolution everywhere. "Only with the universal development of productive forces is a universal intercourse between men established, which produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the 'propertyless man.'"[91] The exposition of capitalism's flaws first-hand, around the globe, would create a global countermovement against capitalism, fuelling an international Proletariat movement which Marx believes is key in securing a communist future. "Communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples 'all at once' and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of the means of production."[92] Marx elaborates on this idea in the following sections, where he argues that an international communist revolution is necessary for a sustainable social revolution.

The second reason why Marx argues that the universalization of the means of production is necessary for the creation of a sustainable social revolution has to do with the conquest of scarcity. The conquest of scarcity refers to the attempt to provide everyone with enough materials to meet their needs. Further developing the means of production will help to ensure that the material conditions for a social revolution are met,

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[89] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 56.
[90] Marx and Engels, 56.
[91] Marx and Engels, 56.
[92] Marx and Engels, 56.

since the means of production will be able to achieve the conquest of scarcity and provide the proper resources and material conditions for everyone to have a good quality of life. In the pursuit of a transition to communism, Marx argues that further technological progress can serve as a means of both overcoming scarcity and shaping the material conditions mentioned above.[93] Specifically, Marx argues that innovation and new technologies, when harnessed correctly, can lead to the salvation of the working class rather than its enslavement.[94] To articulate this point, Marx writes that "slavery cannot be abolished without the steam-engine and the mule and spinning jenny,"[95] the same way that "serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture."[96] Marx recognizes that there is a conquest of scarcity that must be overcome, and that "in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity."[97] Thus, in order for a revolution to be sustainable, the conquest of scarcity must be achieved, and the means of production must be universalized. Marx sees technological advances as a way of ensuring that these needs are met.[98] Furthermore, Marx argues that technological advancement can help to revolutionize elements of society to achieve a social revolution.[99] For example, Marx states that "only with big industry does the abolition of private property become possible."[100] This is relevant since Marx views the abolition of private property as a necessary change that communism must make and the increasing levels of technology and the increasingly universal spread of the means of production can make this easier to achieve.

Thus, from these passages we can see that Marx believes there are two major preconditions that are required for a social revolution to occur. These include the creation of an 'intolerable power,' represented by capitalism's inequality, and the

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[93] Marx and Engels, 61.
[94] Marx and Engels, 61.
[95] Marx and Engels, 61.
[96] Marx and Engels, 61.
[97] Marx and Engels, 61.
[98] Marx and Engels, 61.
[99] Marx and Engels, 91.
[100] Marx and Engels, 91.

'universalization' of the means of production. The universalization of the means of production is significant for two reasons, including universalizing the injustices and therefore the countermovement against capitalism, as well as sustaining the conquest of scarcity.

However, when speaking of the conditions required for a revolution, Marx still leaves some room for human agency. For example, Marx argues that in order to create change, one must act rather than simply wish or think.[101] Indeed, in regard to the transition from capitalism to communism, Marx emphasizes that criticism of the capitalist system can only do so much, and that action is required to make change.[102] Marx expands on this, stating that "circumstances are changed by men"[103] and not ideas. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."[104] Marx sums this up, saying that "not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history."[105] However, Marx also reiterates that the proper material conditions are ultimately necessary before a social revolution can occur, and that no amount of action will bring about a sustainable revolution without first satisfying these conditions.[106] In other words, when Marx speaks of 'action' he does not mean staging a coup or a revolution before the material conditions for its success are available. This is a common flaw in people's understanding of Marx. Rather, Marx is referring to the political organizing and the development of social relations beforehand which are required for a revolution to be sustainable.[107] (Political organizing and the role of democracy in Marx's concept of social revolution will be discussed in more detail in *The Communist Manifesto).* These can be thought of as further prerequisites or preconditions for revolution, instead of hasty actions that would seek to impose changes on society prematurely. Thus, Marx concedes that there is some space for agency in the process of

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[101] Marx and Engels, 121.
[102] Marx and Engels, 121.
[103] Marx and Engels, 121.
[104] Marx and Engels, 123.
[105] Marx and Engels, 59.
[106] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425.
[107] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2021), 53.

historical materialism, but that it takes the form of political and social organizing rather than direct action.[108]

Another theme that Marx explores in *The Paris Manuscripts*, which is later reflected in The German Ideology, is the importance of revolutionizing the elements of society rather than using political solutions to reform its policies. Marx believes there are several elements of society and relationships within society that need to be restructured. Several examples of these will be examined in the following paragraphs to get a better sense of what Marx envisions for a social revolution, and why mere political reforms would be insufficient to address these problems.

First, Marx argues that society must be restructured to ensure the abolition of alienation. Throughout *The Paris Manuscripts*, Marx mentions different forms of alienation and argues that a social revolution must seek to abolish them. Here it is important to understand what Marx means by the term 'alienation.' Marx most often uses the term 'alienation' when referring to the alienation of labour. According to Marx, alienation occurs when "the worker relates to the product of his labour as to an alien object."[109] Marx goes on to explain that when a worker performs labour, his labour becomes commodified and turned into wage labour, and that this labour then becomes objectified.[110] 'Objectification' occurs when labour "has solidified itself into an object, [or] made itself into a thing."[111] For example, when a worker builds a car, the worker's labour is objectified because it has manifested itself in the creation of a physical product, the car. By becoming objectified, the worker's labour then becomes alienated, because the worker's objectified labour is taken away without the worker having any say in the production process. For example, although the worker created the car, the car does not belong to him, because it belongs to the capitalist who owns the factory. In other words, "his own activity [is] something that is alien and does not belong to him."[112] By selling

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[108] Marx and Engels, 53.
[109] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 87.
[110] Marx, 86.
[111] Marx, 86.
[112] Marx, 89.

the car to someone else, keeping the profits, and not giving the worker any say in the production process, the capitalist alienates the worker from his objectified labour. Therefore, "alienated labour tears from man the object of his production."[113] Marx argues that this relationship of objectification, commodification, and alienation between workers and their labour is one example of a relationship within society that needs to be revolutionized. Although reforms can be implemented to offer workers higher wages, better working conditions, etc., this does not change the underlying relationship between them and their labour. Therefore, in order to change this relationship, a revolutionary restructuring of the relationships within society is required, one that will give workers control over the production process. Marx argues that this would only be possible with a social revolution, which would be transformational in nature, as opposed to a political revolution, which would seek to reform the existing system without changing its structure.

Marx also mentions several other forms of alienation that he believes should be abolished through social revolution. In addition to alienating the worker from their labour, Marx argues that "alienated labour alienates (1) nature from man, and (2) man from himself."[114] The alienation of labour alienates nature from man through the commodification of nature. By only viewing nature as a resource to be exploited, nature becomes objectified in the same way that labour does.[115] In Marx's eyes, this reduces the importance of man's relationship with nature, since "man is part of nature."[116] Marx believes that the commodification and alienation of nature has no place in a communist society and argues that simply using political reforms to limit the amount of exploitation would not be sufficient. Instead, a social revolution is needed that could revolutionize the elements of the state and change this exploitative relationship between society and nature.

Furthermore, Marx argues that society alienates "man from himself"[117] due to the competitive and private nature of labour and production. This too is something that Marx

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[113] Marx, 91.
[114] Marx, 90.
[115] Marx, 90.
[116] Marx, 90.
[117] Marx, 90.

believes should be changed under communism. Marx sees humans as being naturally cooperative and social beings.[118] However, during the labour process these characteristics are often missing. For example, many industries in Marx's time were structured competitively, with firms competing against each other, and privately, meaning that workers had little say in the production process. Marx sees this as problematic, since it goes against what he sees as human nature. By denying workers the ability to be cooperative and by denying them control over the labour process, they become alienated from their human nature, and therefore from themselves. Instead, Marx suggests in *The Civil War in France* that it would be better to give workers ownership over the means of production, making their labour more cooperative and giving them control over the production process.[119] This is another example of how the relationships within society must be revolutionized, instead of simply reformed.

Marx builds on this theme in *The German Ideology* and relates it to his opinions on the division of labour. The division of labour refers to the separation of different tasks within society. For example, the separation of a steel manufacturer's work from that of a carpenter represents a division of labour. Marx argues that from the division of labour, workers must choose one career, which they may not necessarily enjoy, and pursue it for the duration of their lifetime.[120] On this subject, Marx says "as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape."[121] Marx argues that man must continue to pursue this source of labour "if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood."[122] Thus, in order to sustain their means of living, workers must compromise on their own preferences to pursue a specific career, even if they have no control over the production process or do not enjoy their labour.

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[118] Marx, 90.
[119] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in France* (New York: International Library Publishing Company, 1900), 55.
[120] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 53.
[121] Marx and Engels, 53.
[122] Marx and Engels, 53.

Marx recognizes there are problems regarding the alienating aspects of labour, but he also views the division of labour as essential to maintaining the conquest of scarcity. He values the division of labour in the same way that he values technology, in that they both provide the material conditions necessary to achieve the conquest of scarcity, as well as create the preconditions for a social revolution.[123] However, Marx argues that social revolution can change the nature of work so as to prevent it from being alienating, and also argues that the division of labour can become more flexible.[124] For example, Marx argues that changing the relationship between managers and workers by giving the workers ownership over the means of production could eliminate the alienation that workers face and could help to make their labour more social and creative. Furthermore, Marx imagines that under communism, "nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes."[125] Here Marx is advocating for a more flexible division of labour, one where "it is possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow."[126] Instead of choosing one career and sticking to it forever, Marx imagines a world where workers can change their labour freely.[127] For example, Marx writes that under communism someone might "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, [and] criticize after dinner,"[128] thus performing a multitude of functions and making their labour more flexible, without eliminating the division of labour itself. These changes are further examples of elements of society that Marx believes need to be changed, and which can only be changed through a process of social revolution. These problems are ingrained within the relations of the means of production and within the labour process, and thus simple reforms will not be enough to solve them. Instead, a larger transformation of the relationship between workers, the means of production, and the labour process must be undertaken, which would only be possible with social revolution.

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[123] Marx and Engels, 61.
[124] Marx and Engels, 53.
[125] Marx and Engels, 53.
[126] Marx and Engels, 53.
[127] Marx and Engels, 53.
[128] Marx and Engels, 53.

A final example of an element of society that Marx believes needs to be restructured is private property. Marx believes that the existing relations of private property cannot be reformed and must instead be revolutionized. Indeed, Marx says "at the present time individuals *must* abolish private property."[129] Marx defines private property as the opposite of public or communal property. Instead of something being owned collectively, it is owned by an individual. In particular Marx defines private property as private capital, including land, money, and the means of production.[130] For example, individual title to land is a form of private property, whereas the commons in England were a form of communal property, before they were enclosed. Furthermore, Marx defines private property as something that can be sold for a certain amount of capital.[131] "In reality I possess private property only insofar as I have something vendible."[132] Although possessions like coats and books may have personal value to certain individuals, they are not a source of capital, and thus "no economist would think of classing [them] as my private property, since [they] [do] not enable me to command any, even the smallest, amount of other people's labour."[133]

Marx sees the abolition of private property and the revolutionizing of the relations of private ownership as important because of the way private property contributes to other aspects of capitalism. For example, Marx says that "the productive forces and forms of intercourse have developed so far that, under the domination of private property, they have become destructive forces."[134] Marx continues, arguing that the abolition of private property is important because "the contradiction between the classes has reached its limit."[135] These quotes show that Marx believes private property is linked to other aspects of capitalism, including the alienation of labour, which has already been discussed above. Marx explains that private property contributes to the alienation of labour, saying

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[129] Marx and Engels, 117.
[130] Marx and Engels, 102.
[131] Marx and Engels, 101.
[132] Marx and Engels, 101.
[133] Marx and Engels, 102.
[134] Marx and Engels, 117.
[135] Marx and Engels, 117.

"private property alienates the individuality not only of people but also of things."[136] It is on the basis of private property that capitalists are allowed to purchase worker's labour and claim the products of their work as their own, thus taking the alienated and objectified labour of the workers to create capital. Likewise, Marx argues that by abolishing private property, this alienation could be abolished too.[137] "The abolition of the basis of private property"[138] will lead to "the destruction of the alien relation between men and what they themselves produce."[139] Thus, we can see from these passages that Marx sees the abolition of private property and the revolutionizing of the relations of private ownership as necessary. Marx does not think that these relations can be reformed. Rather, they must be revolutionized and changed altogether, which can only be achieved through a process of social revolution.

Next, Marx speaks on the importance of having a movement that is universal in scope. Because of this, Marx sees the elimination of the antagonism between town and country as an important aspect of social revolution. Indeed, Marx believes that "the abolition of the antagonism between town and country is one of the first conditions of communal life."[140] As shown in *Critical Remarks on the Article: The King of Prussia and Social Reform*, Marx argues that a social revolution is by definition universal in nature.[141] This requires breaking down barriers between classes and forming a universal movement. However, the antagonism between town and country prohibits this. For example, Marx points to existing differences between these two groups, labelling one group as "town-animals"[142] and the other as "country-animals."[143] He then makes distinctions between the two, specifically as to how their labour is divided under capitalism. 'Country-animals'

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[136] Marx and Engels, 102.
[137] Marx and Engels, 55.
[138] Marx and Engels, 55.
[139] Marx and Engels, 55.
[140] Marx and Engels, 69.
[141] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.
[142] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 69.
[143] Marx and Engels, 69.

possess landed property, whereas 'town-animals' possess accumulated capital.[144] Marx finds this division problematic, as it essentially creates two separate classes, one holding "the instruments of production, of capital, of pleasures, of needs,"[145] whereas the other has only "isolation and separation."[146] Thus, the separation of town and country into different classes leads to a further class division. This class division turns "one man into a restricted town-animal, [and] the other into a restricted country-animal."[147] As a result, this "daily creates anew the conflict between their interests."[148] This exacerbates class conflict, whereas Marx seeks a classless communist society.[149] These quotes show that Marx compares the antagonism between town and country to class divisions, and that Marx believes these divisions must be eliminated in order to create a movement that is universal in scope, thus allowing for the creation of a social revolution.

To summarize, several themes can be extrapolated from *The German Ideology* regarding what Marx believes a transition to communism should look like and what this means for political and social revolution. Marx believes that in order for a communist society to be created the material conditions and resulting preconditions for a revolution must be present, including the creation of an intolerable power and the universalization of the means of production. The development of new technologies can also make these material conditions more attainable. Marx does leave some room for human agency as it relates to political or social organizing and reiterates the importance of having the proper material conditions in place for a revolution. Furthermore, Marx provides several examples of elements of society which require revolutionary changes instead of political reform. These areas include the objectification, commodification, and alienation of labour, the socially alienating nature of labour, the inflexible nature of the division of labour, and the concept of private property. Finally, Marx touches on the importance of

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[144] Marx and Engels, 69.
[145] Marx and Engels, 69.
[146] Marx and Engels, 69.
[147] Marx and Engels, 69.
[148] Marx and Engels, 69.
[149] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2021), 89.

having a universal movement and relates this to the antagonism between town and country.

Section 2.6: The Communist Manifesto:

The Communist Manifesto outlines the policies and goals of communism. Indeed, in the opening pages of the manifesto, it is written "it is high time that communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, [and] their tendencies."[150] *The Communist Manifesto* offers several more direct insights into Marx's views on how the transition to a communist state should occur and what this means for his definitions of social and political revolution. This text speaks on the role of political organizing, the importance of democracy, the need to restructure instead of reform the state, and the creation of a movement that is universal in scope.

First, Marx builds on what was described in *The German Ideology*, providing some clarity regarding the extent of human agency in the process of historical materialism. Marx maintains that hasty action to 'speed up' the means of production will end in failure, but seems to look favorably on activities such as the creation of unions and political organizing, which may lay the groundwork for the political and social conditions required for a revolution. Indeed, one of the first things that Marx discusses in this text is how the Proletariat should be organized. For example, Marx elaborates on the importance of the creation of unions.[151] He agues that these can be used to balance the effects of capitalism by "[keeping] up the rate of wages"[152] and "[founding] permanent associations."[153] Marx also views them as schools of socialism, which can help to lay the groundwork for the creation of a political party of the Proletariat. However, while unions are useful in some ways, Marx notes that unions alone cannot achieve communism.[154] Marx articulates this viewpoint, saying "now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time."[155] What Max sees as more important is the "ever-expanding union of the

[150] Marx and Engels, 26.
[151] Marx and Engels, 51.
[152] Marx and Engels, 51.
[153] Marx and Engels, 51.
[154] Marx and Engels, 51.
[155] Marx and Engels, 51.

workers."[156] In other words, Marx sees the "organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party"[157] as a necessary step in the development of communism. Workers must first identify with their class in order to band together as a united Proletariat. Once this has been accomplished, they will be in a better position to achieve their goals, such as the "overthrow of the Bourgeois supremacy"[158] and the "conquest of political power by the Proletariat."[159] Marx also specifies that in the organization of the communist movement, the communist party itself will be "that section which pushes forward all others,"[160] and that has "the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the Proletarian movement,"[161] which will help to democratize all other aspects of society. Thus, although Marx maintains that the process of historical materialism cannot be sped up, he seems to view the creation of unions and acts of political organizing as necessary steps that lay the groundwork for a future social revolution.

Second, Marx highlights the role of democracy in the process of social revolution. Contrary to what some may believe, Marx does not support forceful autocrats, and instead sees democracy playing an important role in social revolution. Marx argues that in order for the goals of their movement to be achieved, the Proletariat "must first of all acquire political supremacy,"[162] thereby becoming the "ruling class."[163] This would entail winning what Marx dubs "the battle of democracy."[164] Winning the battle of democracy essentially mean that the revolution's ideologies must be diffused amongst a majority of the population, the Proletariat must be organized into a cohesive political party, and this party must receive the support of a majority of the population. Ideally, Marx sees this manifesting itself by giving the Proletariat a majority of the seats in parliament,[165] thus

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[156] Marx and Engels, 51.
[157] Marx and Engels, 53.
[158] Marx and Engels, 67.
[159] Marx and Engels, 67.
[160] Marx and Engels, 67.
[161] Marx and Engels, 67.
[162] Marx and Engels, 80.
[163] Marx and Engels, 85.
[164] Marx and Engels, 85.
[165] Marx and Engels, 85.

winning 'the battle of democracy.' Once this occurs, it will be much easier for the Proletariat to begin a social revolution and revolutionize the elements of the state. Thus, the battle of democracy that Marx describes relates to Marx's theory of social revolution, since it depends on cooperative and transformational democratic change instead of force and coercion.

Once the Proletariat becomes the ruling class, Marx cites several specific changes that they should make to the elements of the state. Here what Marx says in *The Civil War in France* is again important. "The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."[166] Instead, it must revolutionize its elements. As mentioned previously, one of the elements that Marx argues must be revolutionized is the concept of private property.[167] Similar to what is outlined in *The German Ideology*, Marx argues that the Proletariat must abolish private property.[168] Here it is again important to understand precisely what Marx means by private property. Marx clarifies his definition of private property, saying "the distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of Bourgeois property."[169] To clarify further, Marx says that there is no need to abolish the property of "the petty artisan and of the small peasant,"[170] since "the development of industry has to a great extent already destroyed it."[171] Rather, Marx argues that communists seek to abolish the exploitative property relations created by the Bourgeoisie.[172] Those property relations which have left "nine-tenths"[173] of the population propertyless. Marx assures the reader that "communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society: all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation."[174] Thus, while communism seeks to abolish the exploitative relations of private property, it does not seek to eliminate property in general. To abolish

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[166] Marx and Engels, 11.
[167] Marx and Engels, 56.
[168] Marx and Engels, 56.
[169] Marx and Engels, 69.
[170] Marx and Engels, 69.
[171] Marx and Engels, 69.
[172] Marx and Engels, 69.
[173] Marx and Engels, 74.
[174] Marx and Engels, 74.

private property, Marx argues that a social revolution must "destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property,"[175] and must "use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the Bourgeoisie."[176] This is because "the Proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation."[177] In other words, until private property and the modes of appropriation used to accumulate it are abolished, the Proletariat is at continued risk of being exploited. This cannot be achieved by simply implementing political reforms, and instead a social revolution is required to revolutionize the relationships of private property within society.

In the place of private property, Marx argues that communism will instead promote public property. This means that property will serve the community rather than the individual. For example, Marx states that the "abolition of property in land"[178] will lead to the "application of all rents of land to public purposes."[179] Marx also states that any property owned by "emigrants and rebels"[180] will be confiscated for use by the state. Once this redistribution and confiscation of lands has been accomplished, and once the Proletariat has "[centralized] all instruments of production in the hands of the state,"[181] the state will be able to manage land, property, and the means of production for the public good. This would entail the "extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of wastelands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan,"[182] as well as "[increasing] the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible."[183] Thus, an optimization of the means of production would occur under the centralized control of the state. Marx also envisions the "centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state,"[184]

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[175] Marx and Engels, 56.
[176] Marx and Engels, 85.
[177] Marx and Engels, 56.
[178] Marx and Engels, 87.
[179] Marx and Engels, 87.
[180] Marx and Engels, 87.
[181] Marx and Engels, 85.
[182] Marx and Engels, 88.
[183] Marx and Engels, 85.
[184] Marx and Engels, 88.

which would represent another sector of the economy that would be made public rather than private. This would be a massive change for society and could not occur within a capitalist state. Because of this, Marx reiterates the importance of dismantling the state and revolutionizing its elements, instead of trying to use political reforms to fix what he argues is a flawed system. Although these are more state-centered initiatives, Marx ultimately seeks to redefine the relationship between the state and society by merging the public and private spheres, as articulated in *On the Jewish Question*.

In addition to regulations surrounding private property and centralizing the economy, Marx argues that communists should implement several other economic reforms. For example, Marx mentions the "Bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying"[185] with distaste, and announces that he would prefer a "communistic abolition of buying and selling."[186] More concretely however, Marx states that communists should institute "a heavy progressive or graduated income tax."[187] This would ensure that wealth is distributed equally in society and make sure that everyone is taxed fairly. The "abolition of all right of inheritance"[188] would reduce inequalities further, as each individual would start from the same economic standing, needing to create a living for themselves rather than relying on their inheritance. Marx also envisions the "centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly."[189] This would allow the government to control interest rates, avert market fluctuations, avoid predatory lending practices, and rectify any of the other ways in which private finance can be used improperly. These changes too, although perhaps less revolutionary than the previous examples, would still be difficult to accomplish within the confines of a capitalist state, and therefore points to the importance of dismantling and transforming the elements of the capitalist state instead.

In addition to economic reforms, Marx views several social reforms as necessary for a transition to communism. These social reforms would be conducted in an effort to

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[185] Marx and Engels, 73.
[186] Marx and Engels, 73.
[187] Marx and Engels, 87.
[188] Marx and Engels, 87
[189] Marx and Engels, 87.

eliminate class antagonisms, and ultimately to abolish the divisions of class themselves. This relates to what Marx speaks of in the preface to *A Critique of Political Economy* regarding the creation of a movement that is universal in scope. Marx articulates this goal, arguing that if the Proletariat "sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and of classes generally."[190] Marx adds that this would include "[abolishing] its own supremacy as a class."[191] There would be no Proletariat and no Bourgeoise, there would simply be one mass of people working towards a common goal. In order to achieve this goal, Marx argues that communists would implement "free education for all children in public schools."[192] This would eliminate any financial barriers preventing working class families from accessing education, thus standardizing the level of education and reducing class antagonisms. Additionally, reforming the education curriculum to include a "combination of education with industrial production"[193] will further eliminate class distinctions as educational institutions become pathways to academia and trades alike. Furthermore, the progressive income tax and the abolishment of any right to inheritance, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, would ensure that all workers receive a comparable income, thereby eliminating the wealthy Bourgeoisie class. This would allow for the elimination of class antagonisms and the creation of a movement with a universal scope, which is one of the factors Marx values in the creation of a social revolution.

More than just eliminating class however, Marx also seeks to eliminate the antagonism between town and country.[194] This would have a similar goal of creating a movement with a universal scope. Social reforms similar to the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph would be used to achieve this. For example, Marx argues that the

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[190] Marx and Engels, 89.
[191] Marx and Engels, 89.
[192] Marx and Engels, 88.
[193] Marx and Engels, 88.
[194] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 69.

"combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries"[195] will lead to the "gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of population over the country."[196] This would essentially integrate the economies and populations of the town and country until they become similar enough that distinctions between the two will not be noticeable. Moreover, the "equal liability of all to labour"[197] would ensure that workers living in the town and the country would share in the labour process, reducing class antagonisms as well as antagonisms between town and country. This too would contribute to the creation of a movement that would be universal in scope, which is essential for the success of a social revolution.

Marx also uses *The Communist Manifesto* to explain how women's rights and the restructuring of the family is a necessary step towards further enhancing the universality of the Proletariat movement. For example, Marx explains that under the rule of the Bourgeoisie, having a wife is viewed as having "a mere instrument of production."[198] Marx disagrees with this objectification of women, stating that communism seeks "to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production."[199] Similarly, Marx argues that under capitalism the structure of the family has been manipulated. Just as capitalism makes women into 'mere instruments of production' so too are "all family ties among the Proletarians [torn] asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour."[200] According to Marx, this has led to "the practical absence of the family among the Proletarians."[201] Marx disagrees with this state of things and promises that communists will cause the "abolition of children's factory labour in its present form,"[202] thus contributing to a restructuring and restoration of

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[195] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2021), 88.
[196] Marx and Engels, 88.
[197] Marx and Engels, 88.
[198] Marx and Engels, 78.
[199] Marx and Engels, 78.
[200] Marx and Engels, 78.
[201] Marx and Engels, 77.
[202] Marx and Engels, 88.

familial relations among the Proletariat, and a further universalization of the scope of the Proletarian movement.

Furthermore, Marx examines the international scope of the communist movement and sees yet another opportunity to make the movement of the Proletariat more universal. Marx recognizes that "the struggle of the Proletariat with the Bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle."[203] This is because "The Proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own Bourgeoisie."[204] However, Marx does not intend for the struggle of communism to end at the national level. While the reforms mentioned in the previous paragraphs are occurring at the national level, the struggle of the Proletariat must simultaneously be elevated to an international level.[205] Marx believes that the common hardships endured by workers under capitalism "has stripped him of every trace of national character,"[206] paving the way for an international communist movement. This point is reiterated when Marx writes that "the working men have no country."[207] This prompts Marx to issue his famous statement, "working men of all countries, unite!"[208] Once the working peoples of various nations have initiated their struggles against their respective Bourgeoises, an international communist movement can occur.[209] Marx elaborates on this, saying "the national struggles of the Proletarians [of] different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire Proletariat independently of all nationality."[210] This would effectively eliminate conflict between nations, because "as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put [an] end to."[211] Likewise, "as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to

[203] Marx and Engels, 58.
[204] Marx and Engels, 58.
[205] Marx and Engels, 80.
[206] Marx and Engels, 56.
[207] Marx and Engels, 80.
[208] Marx and Engels, 124.
[209] Marx and Engels, 80.
[210] Marx and Engels, 66.
[211] Marx and Engels, 80.

another will come to an end."[212] This would create a movement of the Proletariat which would be truly universal in scope, thus allowing for a universal social revolution to occur.

Thus, to summarize, The Communist Manifesto offers several insights into how Marx believes the transition to communism should occur and how this relates to social and political revolution. First, Marx argues that the formation of unions and a political party by the Proletariat lays the groundwork for social revolution. Second, Marx highlights the importance of democracy to the creation of a social revolution. Third, Marx argues that the Proletariat cannot simply inherit the capitalist structure of the state and hope to reform it. Instead, it must deconstruct the state and revolutionize its elements as they relate to things like private property. Fourth, Marx argues for the creation of a movement of the Proletariat which is universal in scope by restructuring the state socially and economically, eliminating the antagonism between town and country, restructuring the family, and creating an international movement.

Section 2.7: The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte:

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx describes the events spanning from the French elections of December 10th, 1848, to the coup d'état of December 2nd, 1851.[213] Through this text we can see the application of several of Marx's thoughts on political revolution in particular. For example, this text presents the theme of the Proletariat as the universal class, the creation of an international Proletarian movement, the antagonism of town and country, the repetition of old mistakes, and Marx's concept of historical materialism. All of these have relevance in regard to Marx's concepts of social and political revolution.

First, one of the themes that is evident in this text is Marx's concept of the universal class. Elsewhere in his work, Marx speaks of the Proletariat as the universal class, which essentially means that it is the class that must improve the conditions of all

[212] Marx and Engels, 81.
[213] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), 11.

other classes and incorporate them into the Proletariat to form a universal class.[214] Marx argues that this would require abolishing class divisions entirely, thus creating a truly universal body of society.[215] This is relevant to social revolution because the concept of the universal class is closely connected to Marx's opinions on social and political revolution. Marx's opinions on the scope of the vision of social and political revolutions is particularly important here. As mentioned in *Critical Remarks on the Article: The King of Prussia and Social Reform,* Marx sees political reform as being narrow in vision whereas social revolution is universal in its vision.[216] Political revolution only seeks to change its position in regard to other classes, whereas social revolution seeks to universalize its struggle by abolishing the class structure entirely. Thus, Marx's support for social revolution can be illustrated by his argument for the formation of a universal class of the Proletariat, which would be inherently universal in nature.

This text also illustrates another reason why Marx does not support political revolution. Because of the proletariat's designation as the universal class, Marx argues that the Proletariat must be the class that embodies and leads the revolution.[217] If this does not occur, Marx believes the revolution is bound to fail, since other classes will only change their position within the existing class system, instead of changing the class system as a whole. Marx does not think this will create lasting change. As mentioned in Critical Remarks on the Article: *The King of Prussia and Social Reform,* this is one of the factors Marx uses to define political revolution.[218] Thus, by definition, Marx does not support political revolution since he does not believe its narrow vision will result in lasting change.

The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte offers a compelling case study that further illustrates Marx's support for social revolution and opposition to political revolution.

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[214] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.
[215] Marx, 136.
[216] Marx, 136.
[217] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in France* (New York: International Library Publishing Company, 1900), 51.
[218] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.

Marx argues that a political revolution with a narrow vision will ultimately fail because it will be incapable of creating lasting change. This is precisely what occurred during the events of 1848-1851. The Proletariat aligned itself with allies that only sought to change their relative positions to each other instead of abolishing the class system overall. This ultimately ended in the betrayal of the Proletariat.[219] As Marx outlines in the text, prior to the elections of December 10th, 1848, the Proletariat had allied itself with other factions and classes to dethrone the monarchy, thus increasing their status in relation to the monarchy. However, once this goal was achieved, the various factions of this alliance quickly began to turn on each other, ultimately reversing many of the gains that the movement had made. Marx writes that while the republic and the national assembly were being formed, there was a struggle where "all other classes and parties united against the proletariat,"[220] which led the revolutionary Proletarian movement to be "defeated, to the accompaniment of the cry: 'property, the family, religion, order!'"[221] The defeat that Marx refers to here is the June Insurrection, wherein the Proletariat attempted to intervene to limit Bourgeoisie power but was defeated.[222] Thus, because the proper preconditions were not met, i.e. the Proletariat was not developed as the universal class and as the sole leader of the revolution, it instead allied itself with rival factions. As a result, it attached itself to its rivals and shared in their defeat, reversing its progress. Marx highlights this point, saying "as soon as a revolutionary ferment occurred on one of the higher social strata, the proletariat joined forces with the members of this stratum, and thus became involved in all the defeats of the various parties."[223] Marx continues, saying that during the 1848 revolution "the Proletarian party shows itself as the mere annex of the petty bourgeoisie Democratic Party"[224] and is "betrayed and abandoned by the petty bourgeois on April 16, May 15, and in the June days."[225] As a result, the Proletariat once again ended up on the bottom. The Bourgeoisie were allowed to consolidate power in

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[219] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), 33.
[220] Marx, 33.
[221] Marx, 34.
[222] Marx, 34.
[223] Marx, 32.
[224] Marx, 50.
[225] Marx, 50.

their own hands via a new constitution, replacing the monarchy as the subjugator of the Proletariat.[226] The Bourgeoisie then went on to eliminate other rivals to their rule, such as the republicans and the petty bourgeoisie,[227] and even infringed upon universal suffrage.[228] The Bourgeoisie were then replaced in turn by Louis Bonaparte and a new empire,[229] which further oppressed the Proletariat.

To Marx, this highlights the failure of a political revolution with a narrow vision. Although the necessary preconditions for revolution were also lacking, another factor that was missing here was that the Proletariat did not form the universal class. Because the Proletariat was not developed as the universal class and the sole leader of the revolution, and instead chose to ally itself with unreliable partners that sought to change their position relative to each other, the achievements made during the revolution were reversed and the Proletariat ended up on the bottom once again. However, if the Proletariat had been developed as the universal class and had been allowed to lead the revolution, this betrayal and reversal could have been avoided since the overarching class structure that separated the Proletariat from its allies would have already been deconstructed. This highlights Marx's support for a social revolution because of the importance he places on recognizing the Proletariat as the universal class and the leader of the revolution. Thus, Marx's support for the development of the Proletariat as the universal class is further evidence that Marx supports social revolution (which is universal in nature) and not political revolution (which only changes the position of classes relative to each other).

Second, another recurrent theme that is evident in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* is Marx's argument for an international Proletarian movement. As articulated in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx believes that a Proletarian movement which arises by itself is doomed to fail.[230] This is because Bourgeois forces in other

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[226] Marx, 37.
[227] Marx, 37.
[228] Marx, 38.
[229] Marx, 43.
[230] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2021), 80.

countries will unite to eliminate any Proletarian movement. This can be related to Marx's opinions on social and political revolution as well, again as it relates to the universal nature of social revolution. Marx's argument about eliminating the class structure and creating a universal social movement can originally be applied at the national level, but also applies to the international level. In the same way that political revolutions that only change their status relative to other classes are unsustainable, revolutions that limit the universality of their movement to a single country are equally unsustainable.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx provides several examples explaining why this is important. He states that when Italy rose up in revolution, the French intervened against the revolutionary Roman republic and bombed the city of Rome.[231] He also mentions that around this time period there was a "simultaneous victory of the counter-revolution throughout the continent of Europe,"[232] which pushed back against individual Proletariat movements, further demonstrating the importance of a universal and international Proletariat movement. Marx gives another example of this when he speaks of feudalism. When the bourgeoisie and its capitalist system was just beginning to establish itself in France, at the expense of the nobility and their feudal system, Marx says that "across the frontiers [Napoleon] everywhere made a clearance of feudal institutions, in so far as this was requisite to provide French Bourgeoisie society with a suitable environment upon the continent of Europe."[233] Because feudalism represented a threat to the Bourgeoisie, the Bourgeoisie intervened in international affairs to promote Bourgeois interests and Bourgeois structures of governance instead of feudal institutions.[234] This shows that this it is not the first time that the Bourgeoisie has aggressively involved itself in international affairs and is willing to intervene against the Proletariat the same way that it did against feudalism. Thus, a simultaneous international movement of the Proletariat is necessary to achieve success in order to avoid becoming isolated and overwhelmed by the Bourgeoisie.

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[231] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), 59.
[232] Marx, 53.
[233] Marx, 24.
[234] Marx, 24.

These examples demonstrate the importance of having an international Proletarian movement. As evidenced here, if a movement appears in one or several isolated locations, it will be easily overwhelmed by outside pressures. Thus, a series of simultaneous movements on an international scale are required to achieve what Marx envisions for a social revolution. This is linked to Marx's argument that a movement with a universal focus will be more effective than a movement with a narrow focus. In this situation, focusing a movement in only one country is too narrow a focus, whereas a movement that focuses on building an international movement has an appropriately universal focus. Since Marx defines social revolution as having a universal focus and political revolution as having a narrow focus, these paragraphs serve to further demonstrate Marx's support for social revolution and not political revolution.

In addition to being related to Marx's views on the universality of the Proletariat movement, this point is also related to Marx's theory of historical materialism. The creation of an international Proletariat movement can be seen as one of the preconditions necessary for a social revolution to be sustainable. As mentioned in *The German Ideology*, Marx lists the universalization of the means of production as one of two major preconditions required for revolution. This will make the flaws of capitalism evident everywhere, thus allowing for the mobilization of a greater international movement of the Proletariat.[235] The relationship between historical materialism and the creation of an international Proletariat movement further demonstrates Marx's belief in social revolution rather than political revolution.

Third, the elimination of the antagonism between town and country is another theme that can be illustrated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Marx argues that it is important for a movement to be universal in nature. In this text, Marx points to this theme again. During his explanation of Louis Bonaparte's success and popularity with French peasants, Marx draws on the antagonism between town and country. He argues that the election of Louis Bonaparte to the position of president on December 10, 1848, was largely because of the

[235] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 56.

votes he received from peasants.[236] He deemed this to be "a reaction of the countryside against the town."[237] If the differences between country and town had been reconciled, perhaps the election of Louis Bonaparte as president and the events that followed could have been avoided. Thus, in this situation, the antagonism between town and country created a reactionary movement that was narrow in focus, playing the country and the town off one another, leading to their collective defeat and exploitation. Marx would argue that this antagonism must be broken down and replaced with a universal movement encompassing both the country and the town. This can also be seen through the lens of historical materialism, with the elimination of the antagonism between town and country being another precondition that is required before a social revolution can occur. Both of these points show Marx's support for social revolution instead of political revolution.

Fourth, a new theme that Marx mentions in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is the importance of not repeating old mistakes. He relates this back to the concepts of social and political revolution as well. To illustrate this point, Marx argues that revolutionaries tend to draw too much on forceful and coercive political revolutions and ideologies of the past, often to their own detriment.[238] For example, he states that revolutionaries "are eager to press the dead into their service, borrowing the names of the dead, reviving old war cries, [and] dressing up in traditional costumes."[239] However, Marx sees this as problematic, since it can inhibit a movement from breaking new ground or can predispose it towards making the same mistakes that previous movements made. He articulates this using a metaphor, stating that "the learner of a new language begins by translating every word and every phrase into his mother tongue. He does not acquire the freedom of the city in his new speech… until he can use the new instrument without thinking of the old."[240] What Marx means by this is that a new movement should do more than simply imitate past movements, it should learn from them instead. Marx makes another, more direct statement, which helps to further illustrate this point. He says, "the social

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[236] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), 44.
[237] Marx, 44.
[238] Marx, 23.
[239] Marx, 23.
[240] Marx, 24.

revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its figurative embellishments from past; it must create them anew out of the future."[241] He continues, saying "the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead, for thus only can it discover its own true meaning."[242] By this Marx means that revolutionaries should stop trying to perform coup d'états and political revolutions because it is clear that these have not worked in the past. Instead, Marx argues that they should recognize their own unique circumstances and wait for the appropriate material conditions and preconditions for a social revolution to emerge, thus allowing them to create lasting change.

Fifth, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte* also serves to illustrate Marx's views on historical materialism more broadly. Indeed, Engels points out in his preface to the third German edition that Marx has discovered "the great law which governs the motion of history,"[243] by which he means historical materialism. He goes on to state that "all historical struggles, although they seem to take place on the political, religious, philosophical or any other ideal plane, are, in reality, nothing else than the more or less clear expression of struggles between social classes"[244] which in turn are "determined by the degree of development of the economic situation, by the prevailing mode of production, and by the methods of exchange which result."[245] In other words, Engels is articulating Marx's view that history is influenced by class struggle, which is in turn influenced by the relations of production and material conditions within which these classes exist. Marx makes similar comments on historical materialism in the text, saying "men make their own history, but not just as they please. They do not choose for themselves, but have to work upon circumstances as they find them, have to fashion the material handed down by the past."[246] More directly however, Marx states that in order for a revolution to occur, "it must first create the point of revolutionary departure"[247] consisting of "the situation, the relationships, [and] the conditions, under which alone a

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[241] Marx, 26.
[242] Marx, 26.
[243] Marx, 22.
[244] Marx 22.
[245] Marx, 22.
[246] Marx, 23.
[247] Marx, 27.

modern revolution can become a serious matter."[248] Here Marx is again arguing that material conditions shape the outcomes of historical struggles, and that revolutions which lack the appropriate material conditions will not be sustainable. This returns to Marx's philosophy from his preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*, where he argues that historical materialism and the creation of the appropriate material conditions cannot be 'sped up' by political revolutions.[249] Indeed, Engels states that Marx's theory is tested in the Eighteenth Brumaire and says that "now, after the lapse of thirty three years, we have to admit that the proof has stood the test of time."[250] For example, in the case of the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, a universal movement was not created, the universalization of the means of production had not been accomplished, etc., which ended in defeat for the Proletariat. Thus, this text provides further evidence regarding Marx's opposition to political revolutions, as he does not believe that a revolution that tries to enforce a set of material conditions onto society prematurely will succeed in the long term.

Thus, from an examination of the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, several of Marx's ideas concerning social and political revolution are evident. First, Marx argues that the Proletariat must act as the universal class to abolish the class structure and allow for a truly universal movement, indicative of social revolution. Second, Marx argues for the creation of an international Proletarian movement, which relates to the creation of a universal movement and to historical materialism, both of which are indicative of social revolution. Third, Marx argues for the elimination of the antagonism between town and country, which also relates to the creation of a universal movement and to historical materialism. Fourth, Marx advocates that revolutionaries should stop repeating the mistakes of previous political revolutions. Fifth, Marx elaborates on his concept of historical materialism, which is indicative of social revolution.

Section 2.8: The Civil War in France:

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[248] Marx, 27.
[249] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425.
[250] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), 22.

The next text that will be examined here is *The Civil War in France*. *The Civil War in France* is Marx's commentary on the rise and subsequent collapse of the Paris commune of 1871.[251] Although the commune ultimately failed, Marx gives some insights into why, and illustrates some of his opinions on political and social revolution. This text examines material conditions, the necessity for an international Proletariat movement, the status of the Proletariat as the universal class, the consequences of failed political revolutions, and the limits of political reforms.

First, Marx (and Engels in his introduction) touch on the material conditions of the Paris Commune and of revolution in France more generally. Both of them agree that the material conditions to achieve communism in France on a larger scale did not exist at the time of the Paris commune in 1871 and that the time was therefore not yet ripe for revolution.[252] For example, the universalization of the movement had not occurred, thus leaving Paris as the isolated bastion of the revolution. The lack of the appropriate material conditions for a sustainable revolution ultimately led to the defeat of the commune. Indeed, Engels states in his introductory section that the many struggles of the working class in France's political and economic context would always "[end] with the defeat of the working class."[253] The repeated failures of these revolutions would suggest that the material conditions to create a sustainable social revolution were not yet present. Marx argues that an attempt to create a revolution before the material conditions for its success are present amounts to a political revolution. Thus, it is clear from this that Marx does not support political revolution.

The lack of the material conditions for revolution in France can be exemplified in several ways. Here it is again necessary to review what Marx means by material conditions. Marx believes that material conditions influence the level of sophistication of the means of production, which in turn affect the relations of production.[254] These

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[251] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in France* (New York: International Library Publishing Company, 1900), 3.
[252] Marx and Engels, 3.
[253] Marx and Engels, 3.
[254] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425.

relations then influence the economics, politics, and social relationships of a society.[255] Thus, when Marx argues that the material conditions or preconditions for revolution were not present in France, there are several elements that can be pointed to. As articulated in *The German Ideology*, and again in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, one of the preconditions required for revolution is the universalization of the means of production, which will then allow for the creation of an international Proletariat movement.[256] The fact that the Paris commune arose alone and without simultaneous movements in the rest of France or in other countries, as well as the commune's subsequent defeat, is evidence enough that this precondition was not met. France also lacked several other preconditions that Marx believes are required for a social revolution. In the case of the Paris commune, the ideology of the revolution was not diffused amongst a large enough portion of the population for a social revolution to emerge. The revolutionary ideology was contained to the city of Paris, where the commune was proclaimed, and therefore the time was not ripe for a revolution to take place in France. This was partly due to the fact that the government in Versailles had placed a blockade around the city which prevented anyone from getting in or out,[257] but the diffusion of the revolution's ideology should have occurred long before the commune was declared in the first place. This means that the proper social discourse within France had not been achieved, which can be considered another precondition of revolution stemming from material conditions. However, these are only a couple of examples. The universalization of the means of production had also not been achieved, a universal movement was not created, etc. These all point to the conclusion that the material conditions or preconditions for revolution in France were not present.

Marx argues that any revolution that occurs prematurely (i.e., before the appropriate material conditions are present) cannot last, and in this case he was correct. Here again Marx distinguishes between social revolution and political revolution. Marx

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[255] Marx, 425.
[256] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 56.
[257] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in France* (New York: International Library Publishing Company, 1900), 54.

defines political revolution as attempting to impose a set of conditions onto a society where the material conditions or preconditions for their development are not yet present. In other words, it is a revolution which tries to 'speed up' the process of historical materialism. For example, a coup d'état tries to enforce a set of conditions which do not exist, such as the universalization of the means of production and resulting intolerable power that inspires a revolution. However, if these material conditions and preconditions do not already exist, society will find it difficult to accommodate to these changes, resulting in the imposition of coercive measures and a failure of the political revolution. Thus, political forms of revolution cannot be sustainable since the material conditions for their success have not yet developed.

By this definition, the Paris commune would be considered a political revolution, however it also offers a glimpse into what Marx believes a social revolution should look like. Initially, this movement managed to occupy the Hotel De Ville and the rest of Paris fairly easily and without resistance, thereby taking "undisputed sway of Paris."[258] This occupation of Paris was also relatively peaceful.[259] Marx even states that "the proletariat revolution remained so free from [acts] of violence… that no facts were left to its opponents to cry about."[260] It was as if the city had collectively agreed it needed change and had the means to do so, so it simply took action. Some would argue that the cooperative nature, relative passivity, and collective action seen during the rise of the Paris commune represents a good example of what Marx means by social revolution. However, even though the commune met with some initial successes, it failed to satisfy several other material conditions and preconditions necessary to sustain a social revolution, instead attempting to 'speed up' the process of history. For example, it lacked a broader international and national movement. Thus, the Paris commune is in truth a political revolution. As a result, the Paris commune was defeated. This example illustrates the importance of Marx's theory of social revolution and also provides some insight into what Marx believes a social revolution should look like.

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[258] Marx and Engels, 31.
[259] Marx and Engels, 31.
[260] Marx and Engels, 31.

Second, building on what he says in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx reiterates in *The Civil War in France* that a social revolution needs to be international in scope. This is touched on in previous sections but is expanded on in this text with a specific case study. As *The Civil War in France* shows, a proletarian movement which springs up in isolation will likely be overwhelmed by opposition Bourgeoisie forces. The Paris Commune of 1871 successfully wrested political control from the Bourgeoisie, but it did so in a very limited sphere of influence and without assistance from sympathetic movements in foreign nations. For example, when the National Guard occupied the Hotel de Ville in Paris and proclaimed the creation of the Paris Commune, similar movements in Prussia or even in other parts of France did not occur. As a result, the Paris Commune was easily surrounded, overpowered, and ultimately defeated. However, if a similar communist movement had occurred in Prussia for example, this could have prevented the Prussians from releasing imprisoned Bonapartist soldiers, and thus slowed the fall of the commune. Likewise, if Proletarian movements had occurred elsewhere in France, the Paris commune would not have been as isolated and could have perhaps expanded to a national movement, making it harder to defeat, although ultimately an international movement would have been required for the long-term sustainability of such a movement. The fall of the Paris commune illustrates Marx's argument that a simultaneous international movement is necessary for communism to be achieved, because a sustainable social revolution must be universal in scope.

Marx goes on to highlight the importance of this factor by illustrating the extent to which rival bourgeois factions went to maintain the subjugation of the proletariat. For example, Marx states that following the revolution of 1848, "all the rival factions of the ruling class conspired together to crush the people."[261] This phenomenon occurred again during the Paris commune in 1871, since the cooperation between the bourgeoisie governments of Prussia and of Versailles is what allowed Paris to be crushed, despite the fact that they had recently been enemies. Indeed, Marx says that even "after the most tremendous war of modern times, the conquering and the conquered hosts [did] fraternize

[261] Marx and Engels, 21.

for the common massacre of the proletariat,"[262] and that "the national governments are [as] one against the proletariat."[263] The government in Versailles was able to negotiate a deal with Prussia that saw the release of many Bonapartiste prisoners,[264] which resulted in Paris being overrun. This highlights the importance of a simultaneous international movement, since rival factions of the bourgeoisie will put aside their differences in order to maintain their subjugation of the proletariat. Without simultaneous movements springing up in other nations, the movement of the proletariat is prone to being overwhelmed by bourgeois forces, even if they would otherwise be opposed to each other. This further underscores the importance of having a social revolution of the Proletariat that is international in scope, something that the Paris Commune lacked.

Third, Marx also reiterates the importance of having the Proletariat lead the revolution as the universal class. This is as true of the Paris commune as it is for any other revolution because if the proletariat does not lead, then other factions can take advantage of the movement and betray the proletariat. Indeed, Marx points to several other instances in history where revolutions were not led by the Proletariat and were subsequently betrayed and subjugated once more. This was the case in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* since the bourgeoisie betrayed the Proletariat after they had removed the monarch and secured power for themselves.[265] However, in the case of the Paris commune, the outcome was somewhat different. Marx states that during the Paris commune the Proletariat was successful in elevating itself as the leader of the revolution and as the universal class.[266] To illustrate this, Marx says, "this was the first revolution in which the working class was acknowledged as the only class capable of social initiative."[267] Because of this, the Paris commune was able to achieve initial victories, underscoring the importance of the proletariat's leadership as the universal class.

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[262] Marx and Engels, 76.
[263] Marx and Engels, 76.
[264] Marx and Engels, 61.
[265] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), 56.
[266] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in France* (New York: International Library Publishing Company, 1900), 51.
[267] Marx and Engels, 51.

However, in the end the Proletariat's success in this category was overshadowed by its failure in other categories, such as a failure to develop the appropriate material conditions and preconditions, the lack of an accompanying international movement, etc.

Fourth, meeting the preconditions mentioned above is vitally important since the absence of any one of them could lead to the brutal defeat of the Proletariat. This was the case with the Paris Commune, which lacked several of these factors and was punished severely for their attempted revolt.[268] Thus, defeat for Proletariat movements often carries a high cost. Marx outlines several examples of this. In the case of the Paris commune, the defeat of the Proletariat movement led to a particularly inhumane slaughter of its defenders. Indeed, before Thiers and the government in Versailles stormed Paris, Thiers declared "I will be pitiless."[269] Marx articulates a similar point, mockingly stating that "the civilization and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters,"[270] and further states that "each new crisis in the class struggle… brings out this fact more glaringly."[271] Marx goes on to apply this to the siege of Paris, describing it as "undisguised savagery and lawless revenge,"[272] which resulted in "heaps of corpses [being] made after the battle was over."[273] The bourgeoise's backlash against the Paris commune was particularly draconian, as "even the atrocities of the bourgeois in June, 1848, vanish before the ineffable infamy of 1871."[274] Indeed, Marx concedes that this was uncommonly harsh treatment and that most other countries in this time period respected the laws of warfare, saying this was an "unparalleled breach of the law of nations, even as understood by the old world lawyers."[275] This slaughter of the commune seemed to be motivated and justified simply by the fact that it was a movement that challenged bourgeoisie rule.

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[268] Marx and Engels, 68.
[269] Marx and Engels, 68.
[270] Marx and Engels, 68.
[271] Marx and Engels, 68.
[272] Marx and Engels, 68.
[273] Marx and Engels, 68.
[274] Marx and Engels, 68.
[275] Marx and Engels, 76.

All of this goes to articulate Marx's argument that the material conditions for a revolution must, and should, be met before a sustainable social revolution can occur. The result of attempting to 'speed up' the development of these material conditions or attempting to enforce material conditions which do not yet exist, will lead to defeat. Furthermore, once defeated, these movements often face terrible retribution. Thus, Marx is saying that political revolutions such as the one represented by the Paris commune must cease in order to prevent such bloody retaliation from the Bourgeoisie. This serves to further exemplify Marx's opposition to political revolution and support for social revolution instead.

Fifth, in *The Civil War in France* Marx also remarks upon the limits of political reform. This is relevant to social and political revolution because social revolutions are supposed to revolutionize elements of society, whereas political revolutions only aim to reform society. Initially, Marx illustrates some of the more political reforms implemented by the commune, and later details some of the more revolutionary changes with approval. Marx seems to approve of many of these reforms, saying "wonderful, indeed, was the change the commune had wrought in Paris!"[276] For example, one of the reforms the Paris commune implemented was to provide free education for all,[277] something which Marx advocates for in *The Communist Manifesto*. The Paris commune also supported a progressive income tax to pay for the costs of the country's war debt, as opposed to a regressive tax that would target the peasants,[278] as well as the secularization of the state and the expropriation of land from the church.[279] This too is reminiscent of the economic and social reforms that Marx advocates for in *The Communist Manifesto*. However, these reforms are relatively political, and simply focus on reforming capitalism within the existing state structure. This is not ideal, since Marx argues that a revolution would not be able to inherit the existing state structure since it is predicated upon capitalism and must therefore be broken down and its pieces revolutionized.

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[276] Marx and Engels, 58.
[277] Marx and Engels, 44.
[278] Marx and Engels, 51.
[279] Marx and Engels, 44.

Marx does point out some more promising reforms that the Paris commune planned on implementing. For example, the Paris commune planned to provide universal suffrage to its citizens.[280] In the Paris commune, citizens would not only elect representatives for their districts but would also elect the members of the civil service.[281] This would be organized through a system of local communes, which would each send delegates to parliament.[282] This would have the effect of decentralizing the power of the state, and would help to eliminate the separation between political and civil life that Marx speaks of in *On The Jewish Question*. Marx also seems to be supportive of the commune's plan to give ownership of the means of production to the workers,[283] forming what sound like workers cooperatives based on his description. Indeed, Marx approvingly states that the Paris commune declared "the surrender to associations of working men… all closed workshops and factories."[284] This would help to abolish the alienation of labour that Marx speaks of in *The German Ideology*. These reforms seem to be more transformational in nature and would result in changes to the structure of the state itself, instead of simply reforming its policies. To re-iterate, Marx believes that revolutions cannot simply inherit the existing state and hope to reform its policies, since the state itself needs to be reformed.[285] Thus, these more transformational reforms are more in line with what Marx advocates for in regard to social revolution, since they would revolutionize the elements of the state.

Thus, *The Civil War in France* provides several insights into why the Paris commune failed and illustrates Marx's views on social and political revolution more broadly. First, Marx touches on historical materialism and argues that the material conditions for revolution were not present in France, even though the Paris commune initially provided a good example of what he believes a social revolution could look like. Second, Marx reiterates the importance of creating an international Proletariat movement.

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[280] Marx and Engels, 43.
[281] Marx and Engels, 43.
[282] Marx and Engels, 45.
[283] Marx and Engels, 49.
[284] Marx and Engels, 55.
[285] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx Selected Writings: Second Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 135.

Third, Marx reiterates the importance of having the Proletariat lead the revolution as the universal class. Fourth, Marx speaks on the consequences of failed political revolutions. Fifth, Marx examines the limits of political reform and argues instead for the revolutionization of the elements of society.

Section 3: Conclusion

In conclusion, despite what some people have come to believe, Marx does not advocate for forceful or coercive political revolution in the form of a coup d'état. As Avineri points out, this is a 'vulgarized' interpretation of Marxism that overly forceful revolutionaries such as Lenin have endorsed. Instead, Marx advocates for a more cooperative and transformational process of social revolution. This can be seen throughout many of Marx's texts. First, in The *Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx,* Shlomo Avineri suggests that Marx is often misinterpreted and begins to show the differences between Marx's definitions of social and political revolution. Second, in *On the Jewish Question*, Marx explores the divide between political and civil life, and describes the difference between political and human emancipation. Third, in *Critical Remarks on the Article: The King of Prussia and Social Reform,* Marx compares political reforms with structural change, argues for a combination of the political and civil spheres, and introduces the importance of having a movement that is universal in scope. Fourth, in the *Preface to A Critique of Political Economy,* Marx introduces the concept of historical materialism and explores the consequences of trying to 'speed up' this process. Fifth, in *The German Ideology*, Marx expands on his concept of historical materialism, provides several preconditions that would be required for a revolution to occur including the creation of an intolerable power and the universalization of the means of production, and speaks on subjects such as the role of human agency, the role of technology, the limits of political reform compared to revolutionary changes, and the importance of reconciling the antagonism between town and country to create a movement that is universal in scope Sixth, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx examines the role of political organizing, explains the importance of democracy, argues for the need to restructure instead of reform the state, and elaborates upon the creation of a movement that is universal in scope. Seventh, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* Marx

elaborates on his opinion of political revolution, explores the role of the Proletariat as the universal class, the expansion of a universal movement of the Proletariat, the consequences of repeating old mistakes, and elaborates on his concept of historical materialism. Eighth, in *The Civil War in France*, Marx further examines material conditions, explains the necessity for an international Proletariat movement, reiterates the status of the Proletariat as the universal class, demonstrates the consequences of failed political revolutions, and outlines the limits of political reforms. After examining these texts, it is clear that Marx does not advocate for forceful or coercive political revolution and instead advocates for a more transformational process of social revolution.

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