The Communist Manifesto reflects an attempt to explain the goals of Communism, as well as the theory beneath this movement. It argues that class struggles, or the exploitation (unfair treatment) of one class by another, are the motivating force behind all historical events. Interactions and the relationship between the classes (wealthy and poor) are defined by an era's ability to produce goods. However, eventually these relationships cease (end) to be compatible with the developing forces of production. At this point, a revolution occurs and a new class emerges as the ruling one. This process represents the "march of history" as driven by larger economic forces.

Modern Industrial society is characterized by class conflict between the bourgeoisie (affluent middle-class people) and proletariat (working class). However, the productive forces of capitalism are quickly ceasing (ending) to be compatible with this exploitative relationship (unfair treatment). Thus, the proletariat will lead a revolution. However, this revolution will be of a different character than all previous ones: previous revolutions simply reallocated property in favor of the new ruling class. However, by the nature of their class, the members of the proletariat have no way of appropriating property. Therefore, when they obtain control they will have to destroy all ownership of private property, and classes themselves will disappear.

The Manifesto argues that this development is inevitable, and that capitalism (economic system based on private ownership of production of goods and motivation of profit) is unstable. The Communists intend to promote this revolution, and will promote the political parties that are moving history towards its natural conclusion, an overthrow of the rich and privately owned economy. They argue that the elimination of social classes cannot come about through reforms or changes in government. Rather, a revolution will be required.

The Communist Manifesto has four sections:

- In the first section, it discusses the Communists' theory of history and the relationship between proletarians (working class) and bourgeoisie (wealthy class).
- The second section explains the relationship between the Communists and the proletarians.
- The third section addresses the flaws in other, previous socialist literature (other peoples ideas)
- The final section discusses the relationship between the Communists and other political parties.

Other Key Summary Points: taken from a letter Marx wrote to a colleague explaining his ideas. Marx’s comments are significant because they indicate what he saw as important in the Manifesto and, at the same, they provide a useful starting point for a consideration of the work.

1. Existence of classes is only bound up with particular, historic phases in the development of production;
2. Class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat;
3. Dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to classless society.