

Hope Tsai
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Cycles of struggles between the oppressor and the oppressed can change the course of history, and one such cycle is brewing in Europe. In “The Communist Manifesto,” Marx and Engels note that for the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie, the proletariat must unite. They identify the bourgeoisie as those who control the means of production; on the other hand, the proletariat are at a disadvantage. They use (but don’t own) the means of production to work for the bourgeoisie, thus losing the full value of their labor.

In their manifesto, Marx and Engels point out the “incoherent mess scattered over the whole country” (16). The proletariat are disorganized, and thus easily swayed and confused by outside opinion. To overthrow their oppressors, the proletariat must avoid the trap of forming unions under the bourgeoisie. Why shouldn’t they form unions under the bourgeoisie? Since the heads of those unions would lead them to fight the “enemies of their enemies,” such as landowners, their true enemy would escape unnoticed (17). Marx and Engels stress that for the proletariat to succeed, they must not be misled about who the enemy is; thus, to avoid being swayed by outside opinion, they must form a union with fellow proletariats as the leaders.

In addition, forming multiple trade and national unions fractures the proletariat, and increases the chances of them fighting each other. Therefore, to avoid fighting the wrong enemy, the proletariat must form one international union, without the bourgeoisie’s involvement. As the union increases in population, so does its strength; if the proletariat communicate effectively, then they may have a chance at political power (19). They would gain the capacity to have those in power represent their interests. Ultimately, uniting in one international union, consisting solely of proletariats, brings them closer to seizing the means of production and abolishing classes.