Why Revolution?

Trace an argument about class power and social change

TOT.C.1.5 "Explain the proposition that violent revolution is needed to overthrow the oppressive classes and abolish exploitative institutions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the institutions the authors want changed, circle their reasons for rejecting peaceful reform, and number the steps they expect to follow an overthrow. Use your marks to trace how their argument connects violence to ending exploitation.

The Argument for Overthrow

1. In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published The Communist Manifesto amid rapid industrial growth and unrest in Europe. Many factory owners controlled machines and buildings, while workers depended on wages to survive. Marx and Engels called owners the bourgeoisie and wage workers the proletariat. They argued that owners gained wealth from workers' labor while paying them less than the value their work produced. In their account, this was not simply a problem of cruel individuals. Ownership of factories and control over production gave one class lasting power over another. They saw this arrangement as an exploitative institution.

2. The manifesto claimed that governments and laws often protected the owners' position. Even when workers asked for better conditions, the owning class could use its economic influence and state power to defend the existing system. Marx and Engels therefore argued that reforms would not end class exploitation: the institutions supporting it had to be removed. Their proposal called for workers to overthrow the bourgeoisie through revolution and end private ownership of the means of production, such as factories and large-scale machinery. This meant changing who controlled production, not taking away every personal possession.

3. Why insist on violence? The manifesto declared that the ruling classes would not surrender power voluntarily and ended by calling for their "forcible overthrow." In this argument, force was necessary because those benefiting from the system would resist losing control of wealth and government. After overthrow, revolutionaries expected workers to take political power and replace institutions built around owners' control, aiming for a society without exploiting classes. This explains their proposition, but it does not prove that violence was inevitable or justified. Critics have questioned whether peaceful change might work and whether revolutions can create new forms of oppression.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Marx and Engels describe factory ownership as an exploitative institution rather than just a problem caused by cruel owners?

2. Why did Marx and Engels argue that better working conditions alone would not end exploitation?

3. What made force seem necessary to supporters of the manifesto's argument?

4. According to the passage, why would overthrowing the owners not be enough unless institutions also changed?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a fictional community with an oppressive class and an institution that benefits it. In five to six sentences, explain how a supporter of the manifesto's proposition would argue for violent revolution, what institution would change afterward, and one reason a critic might challenge that argument.

ANSWER KEY

Why Revolution?

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.1.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the institutions the authors want changed, circle their reasons for rejecting peaceful reform, and number the steps they expect to follow an overthrow. Use your marks to trace how their argument connects violence to ending exploitation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Marx and Engels describe factory ownership as an exploitative institution rather than just a problem caused by cruel owners?	**They argued that ownership and control of production gave owners lasting power to profit from workers' labor. The problem was built into the arrangement, not limited to individual behavior.**
2	Why did Marx and Engels argue that better working conditions alone would not end exploitation?	**They believed owners could use economic influence and state power to defend the system. Reforms would leave the institutions supporting owners' control in place.**
3	What made force seem necessary to supporters of the manifesto's argument?	**They believed the ruling classes would resist losing control of wealth and government rather than surrender power voluntarily.**
4	According to the passage, why would overthrowing the owners not be enough unless institutions also changed?	**The goal was to end class exploitation, not merely replace leaders. Workers would need to take political power and replace institutions based on owners' control of production.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In a fictional mountain town, a small group of mine owners controls the only heating fuel supply. Town rules allow those owners to set prices and keep workers in debt. A supporter of the manifesto's proposition would say the owners will use their influence over officials to block reforms. That supporter would claim workers must overthrow the owners by force because the owners will not give up control willingly. The workers would then replace the ownership rules with shared control of fuel production. A critic might argue that violence could harm residents and that organized voting could change the rules.

Accept responses that connect the proposed use of force to a ruling class's expected resistance and explain which institution would be abolished or replaced. Students should present the proposition as an argument, not as an established necessity.