

Questions for Marxist Politics readings and Short Guide to the 18th Brumaire

1. From *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, watch the distinctions that Marx draws between “the social production of their lives” [otherwise called “the mode of production of material life”], the relations of production, the “economic structure of society,” and “the legal and political superstructure of society.” How are these concepts related to each other? What causes what? In the other readings, follow how he uses these foundational concepts.
2. In the *Communist Manifesto*: what is the basic unit of analysis?
3. What is the mode of production under capitalism? What are the relations of production under capitalism? What are the major classes? What exactly is a class? How are they different from preceding historical periods?
4. How does Marx’s understanding of the evolution of capitalism differ from our understandings today of the evolution of globalization?
6. What is the state? What is the relationship to civil society?

18th Brumaire

This essay is difficult to read unless you have had a good French history course. For those who have not (or not recently), start by making a list with two columns. In the left column, list the major social classes in the action that Marx identifies with the conflicts of the mid-1850s in France (e.g., landed property owners, high finance, petty bourgeoisie (shopowners, artisans), etc.). In the right column, list the political actors (e.g., Bourbon legitimists, Orleanists, Republicans, Democrats, “The Mountain,” and so forth.) Your basic task is to figure out (along with Marx) what the relationship is between the classes and the political actors and finally—the big objective—what these relationships end with making Louis Bonaparte the ruler of France.

1. What does it mean for a political party or actor to “represent” a class?
2. Why can’t the bourgeoisie just take power—isn’t this capitalism after all?
3. How ever does the bourgeoisie get the workers to go along with them and fight their battles? Why can’t this alliance continue?
4. What role does ideology play in this analysis? Is it an independent force? (If so, what happens to the Marxist paradigm?)