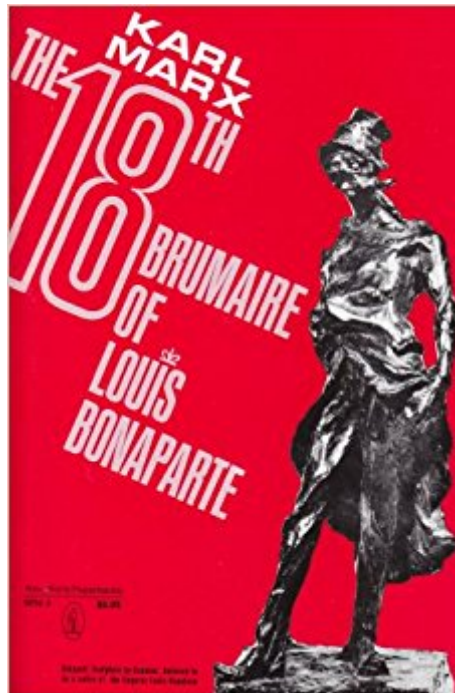




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The Eighteenth Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte



Synopsis

This collection chronicles the fiction and non fiction classics by the greatest writers the world has ever known. The inclusion of both popular as well as overlooked pieces is pivotal to providing a broad and representative collection of classic works.

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Customer Reviews

This collection chronicles the fiction and non fiction classics by the greatest writers the world has ever known. The inclusion of both popular as well as overlooked pieces is pivotal to providing a broad and representative collection of classic works.

Karl Marx, the self-proclaimed revolutionary socialist, almost never wrote about socialism. Instead, virtually everything he wrote and theorized about concerned the society of modern capitalism and how it worked on various levels: economic, political, social, cultural and ideological. There may be no better example of this basic reality about Marx's Marxism than this little book, originally published as a series of newspaper articles about the circumstances behind the French coup d'etat of December 1851 that overthrow a democratic republic and ushered in a the authoritarian regime of Charles-Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (nephew of his more famous name-sake). This book should be read for its literary qualities along. The wit, style and humor is unmatched. It also serves as a primer on several key Marxian conceptions including social psychology and political ideology in its treatment of how ideology and political illusions function as self-deceptions hiding underlying motivations decades before Freud developed the concepts of the unconscious and repressed

meaning; how and why under certain circumstances the ruling classes of modern capitalism opt for authoritarianism over democracy; the complex interplay of individual temperament and broad historical realities that lead most people to think that their opinions, prejudices and politics are unique expressions of themselves outside and independent from the social context in which they were formed; and the problems of a relatively late-developing and uneven form of capitalism that help explain why the 19th century French bourgeoisie had such difficulty consolidating its position as ruling class compared with its British and later, American, counter-parts. Thus the repeated revolutionary upheavals and political crises expressing their retarded hegemony that are not fully exhausted until the failed military uprising by right-wing elements of the French army in 1958! Or perhaps the left-wing Student Revolution of 1968?"The Eighteenth Brumaire" is the definitive reply to the legions of anti-Marxists of political creeds from the neo-cons to the post-modernists who sincerely and desperately wish to believe that Marx is today irrelevant; that he is one-dimensional or reductionist in his understanding of social complexity; that his ideas were "utopian nonsense to which an end must be put" (Marx on the propertied classes' treatment of agitation for social reform leading up to the 1851 coup). I use this text often in classes I teach on modern European history, and am invariably bemused by how it reduces to dumb-founded silence all such allegations by those who have never read a line of Marx, often followed by befuddled efforts to nit-pick this or that aspect of Marx's analysis, and the broader theory of modern capitalist society it expresses, worthy of the most pusillanimous Scholasticism of the later Middle Ages or the most precious post-structuralist textual exegesis. Unfortunately for them the end of history proclaimed a generation ago is still a long way off.

Get this translation. I recommended this book to my sister who found the Kindle translations impossible. This is a great book.

There is an abundance of information as well as keen insights into the actual practice of governance and gaining and holding political power in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. The edition I have is only sixty-nine pages, but it is quite complex and requires close reading and re-reading. Marx's pamphlet is especially difficult for those of us who lack a specialized scholar's knowledge of Nineteenth Century French history, and I imagine that includes most readers. In addition, Marx was never one to write for the ease of his audience. In the Eighteenth Brumaire he seems even more inclined than usual to use irony, paradox, word play, obscure figures of speech, and time-dependent witticisms. He also proceeds from the assumption that readers have at least a passing familiarity

with his theoretical perspective. I read the Eighteenth Brumaire twice before I felt ready to write a review. I was left wondering how Marx's influence would have been enhanced if he had truly written for the people. Nevertheless, I was struck by the parallels and contrasts, not fully developed but suggestive, that Marx saw between Mid-Nineteenth Century America (presumably excluding the slave states) and French society of the same time. Both were fractionated into classes and class fragments, much as one would expect of developing capitalist societies, but America still had plenty of room geographically, socially, and economically within which citizens could move in search of improved prospects. Perhaps this is one reason why those in power in France readily transported those they wanted to get rid of to California to dig for gold. When reading the Eighteenth Brumaire, one is struck by the lack of heroism or even compelling evidence of common decency among the many individuals and social categories involved in Marx's account. Marx seems convinced of the stupidity of most and the lack of political acumen of all but a few. If one were to identify the most shamelessly despicable but nevertheless effective manipulator of persons, groups, and circumstances, it would be the loathsome Louis Bonaparte himself. I think it's quite likely that a contemporary reader of the Eighteenth Brumaire would conclude that, in very fundamental ways, not much in the world of politics has changed between then and now. The lies, endless intrigue, mindless resurrection of long-abandoned ideologies now opportunistically rearing their ugly heads in difficult times, frightening many of us while filling others with boundless zeal, the lack of communitarian interest in the general welfare, except insofar as it serves political and self-interested economic ends ... All this is pertinent to American political life today. Crises and catastrophes, 9-11 included, are treated as bourgeois opportunities, as in reduce corporate income taxes and capital gains taxes in deference to the fight against terror. If the connection seems dubious, so what? Just give voice to the right slogans, as in Louis Bonaparte's "Order, Religion, Family, Property." To think otherwise marks one a "socialist." Remarkable that political discourse, even down to the level of epithets, has changed so little over the past century and a half, and that it has trans-Atlantic staying power. It's useful to recall that the Eighteenth Brumaire was written during a time when monarchists with conflicting allegiances to different royal factions had substantial political clout. A return to royal rule was championed by a substantial number of politically active Frenchmen. The primary difference among competing royal houses, the Bourbons and the Orleans, was the segment of the bourgeoisie with which it was aligned, especially in the conflicts among the industrialists, the aristocracy of finance, and the large land holders. The reader searches for ideals that are more than cynical ideological slogans. Not to be found in the Constitutive Assembly. Not to be found in the National Assembly. Not to be found in the judiciary, with its moistened finger raised in the air to see

which way the wind was blowing. Not to be found in the state bureaucracy, which serves as an instrument of the executive branch and the class and class fragments it represents. Not to be found in the army, which proved to be erratic, indecisive, and eventually willing to be cheaply bribed. The proletariat played the decisive role in the fall of Emperor Louis Philippe and the grand pronouncement that France was a republic. But the proletariat was socially, politically, and ideologically unprepared and ill-equipped to make the most of its victory. As a result, it was soon stripped of the leverage that came with universal suffrage by a legislature that wrote and re-wrote the constitution as the interests and power of members, supporters, and detractors coalesced to dictate. Ironically, the coup d'état that made Louis Bonaparte president (declaring himself emperor in 1852) was largely the work of the "Society of December 10th," his own political creation -- a coup d'état through speculation -- constituted of what Marx elsewhere referred to as the lumpen-proletariat: jackboots, picaroons, thieves ... characterized collectively in the Eighteenth Brumaire as the "slum proletariat." Marx's contempt for them seems boundless, not so much for what they do but for what they are. However, how one picks and chooses among members of the laboring class to determine which ones are honorable and merit reprieve from domination and exploitation by capital, and which ones are loafers, tramps, rogues, and rouses is not at all clear. Nor is the social provenance of their differing characteristics. The Eighteenth Brumaire is not the only work in which Marx sometimes forgets that we are all products of our place in the social relations of production, a formulation he first stated explicitly in 1846 in *The German Ideology*. Unexplained, too, are the circumstances of the peasant farmers, once the beneficiaries of land reforms instituted by Napoleon Bonaparte, but then heavily mortgaged and onerously taxed. Marx insightfully explains why this large sector of the population was unable to merge into one effective political force. But how their small holdings became so cripplingly encumbered remains a mystery. It could be a manifestation of state-mandated capitalist organization of agriculture. Whatever the case, Marx must have concluded that a history of the circumstances of the peasant recipients of the imperial largesse of the first Bonaparte need not be recounted. Suffice it to say that it roughly parallels the demise of the under-capitalized family farm in the U.S. Tip O'Neill, a former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives is given credit for the observation that "all politics is local." Maybe so. Given the opportunity, however, Marx might have countered with "all politics is corrupt and corrupting." Idealists who read the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte will feel the earth shift beneath them. Mid-Nineteenth Century French politics was heavy-laden with parallels with the contemporary U.S. Maybe being President really is just another line on Barack Obama's resume'.

Many consider this work as Marx's best effort towards political philosophy. While the Communist Manifesto and the Critique of the Gotha Programme are also classics in marxian political thought, this book presents the best and most profound theoretical analysis. Just as the two pamphlets above mentioned, this one came up as an "writing of occasion", but more than a pamphlet this is a book, and a classical one. If the Manifesto should be the gateway to marxian political thought, the Brumaire is the book for those who wish to deepen their knowledge on marxian political conceptions. A must for anyone concerned with politics in general.

Must read, gives the basic tools to understand history. Slow going at times, but buckle down and do it. This is a specific case study of how, if you "follow the money", the driving forces of events become clear and the most absurd happenings make sense.

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