

communist manifesto chapter impact

chapter 4

The Communist Manifesto, penned by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, remains a seminal document in political and economic thought, despite its age. While the entire work offers a profound analysis of history and society, Chapter 4, often titled "Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties," holds particular significance. This chapter delves into the practical strategies and alliances the nascent communist movement intended to forge. Understanding the impact of Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto requires examining its context, its proposed tactics, and its enduring legacy in shaping political discourse and revolutionary movements. This article will explore the key elements of Chapter 4, dissecting its significance for understanding communist strategy and its lasting influence on the broader landscape of political engagement.

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The Communist Manifesto Chapter 4: Navigating the Political Landscape

Chapter 4 of The Communist Manifesto, often referred to as "Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties," serves as the practical roadmap for the communist movement. It moves beyond theoretical pronouncements to outline concrete strategies for engaging with the diverse

political forces of the mid-19th century. This chapter is crucial for understanding how Marx and Engels envisioned the communists operating within existing political structures, identifying allies, and distinguishing themselves from other revolutionary and reformist groups. Its focus on tactical maneuvering and strategic alliances underscores the pragmatic, albeit often radical, approach advocated by the authors.

Understanding the Historical Context of Chapter 4

To fully grasp the impact of Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto, it is essential to situate it within its historical milieu. The year 1848 was a period of immense social and political upheaval across Europe, famously known as the Year of Revolutions. Across the continent, burgeoning liberal and nationalist movements challenged established monarchies and aristocratic orders. The Industrial Revolution was rapidly transforming societies, creating new social classes, most notably the industrial proletariat, and exacerbating existing inequalities. It was against this backdrop of widespread discontent and revolutionary fervor that Marx and Engels penned their influential work. Their analysis of historical development, particularly their theory of class struggle, informed their understanding of the various political factions present at the time, from the liberal bourgeoisie to various shades of socialism.

The Political Climate of 1848

The political climate of 1848 was characterized by widespread calls for constitutional government, national self-determination, and social reforms. In France, the monarchy was overthrown and replaced by the Second Republic. In Germany, attempts were made to unify the various states into a single liberal nation. Austria saw uprisings in Vienna and Hungary, demanding greater autonomy. These revolutions, while varied in their specific aims and outcomes, shared a common thread of challenging the old order. Marx and Engels observed these events closely, believing them to be manifestations of the historical dialectic they had theorized. Chapter 4, therefore, is a direct response to this dynamic political environment, offering a guide for how communists should position themselves amidst these unfolding struggles.

The Rise of the Proletariat

The growing industrial working class, the proletariat, was a key focus of Marx and Engels. As capitalism expanded, so did the numbers and perceived power of this class. However, the proletariat was also experiencing harsh working conditions, low wages, and a lack of political representation. The Manifesto itself argues that the proletariat is the revolutionary class

destined to overthrow the bourgeoisie. Chapter 4, then, is about how this new revolutionary force should engage with other groups who also sought change, even if their ultimate goals differed. It's about identifying common enemies and understanding the limitations of potential allies.

The Core Principles Outlined in Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto is built upon several core principles that guide the communists' approach to political engagement. These principles are rooted in the fundamental tenets of historical materialism and the theory of class struggle. The chapter emphasizes the unwavering commitment of communists to the immediate and ultimate aims of the working-class movement, while simultaneously adopting a strategic and flexible approach to alliances.

Unwavering Commitment to Communist Goals

The primary principle articulated in Chapter 4 is the absolute dedication of communists to the cause of the proletariat and the eventual establishment of a communist society. Marx and Engels stressed that communists should never compromise on their fundamental objective: the abolition of private property, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the creation of a classless society. This commitment meant that while alliances could be formed, they should never lead to a dilution of communist principles or a diversion from the ultimate revolutionary goal. Communists were to be the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties, constantly pushing forward.

Strategic Alliances with Other Opposition Parties

A significant portion of Chapter 4 is dedicated to outlining the strategic alliances communists should pursue. Marx and Engels recognized that the communist movement, in its early stages, needed to work with other groups that opposed the existing order. These could include liberal democrats, petty-bourgeois socialists, and even segments of the national bourgeoisie, depending on the specific political context. The key was to identify parties that, even if for different reasons, were fighting against the same oppressive forces. The communists were to support these movements wherever they found them, not out of altruism, but as a means to advance the cause of the proletariat.

Distinguishing Communists from Other Movements

Crucially, Chapter 4 also highlights the need for communists to distinguish themselves clearly from other political factions. While advocating for temporary alliances, Marx and Engels warned against the dangers of merging with or becoming indistinguishable from other socialist or reformist

movements. They were critical of those who sought only superficial reforms or who were content with gradual change. Communists were to constantly remind the working class of the fundamental antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and to ensure that the ultimate revolutionary goal remained paramount. This dual approach – of alliance and distinction – was central to their strategy.

Communists and Their Relationship with Various Opposition Parties

Chapter 4 of The Communist Manifesto provides a detailed analysis of how communists should interact with the diverse array of opposition parties prevalent in mid-19th century Europe. This section is particularly insightful as it reveals the pragmatic, yet fiercely ideological, approach of Marx and Engels to political maneuvering. They did not advocate for isolation but for a calculated engagement designed to advance the proletarian cause.

Alliance with the Bourgeois-Democratic Parties

In countries where the bourgeois-democratic revolution was not yet accomplished, the communists were to support these movements. This meant aligning with liberal and radical parties who were fighting against feudalism, absolutism, and aristocratic privilege. Marx and Engels saw these struggles as necessary preconditions for the further development of capitalism, which in turn would accelerate the growth of the proletariat and the conditions for a socialist revolution. However, this support was always conditional; communists were to seize every opportunity to transform their bourgeois allies into opponents of the working class, pushing them to adopt more radical stances and thereby exposing their limitations.

Support for Reformist Socialist Parties

Chapter 4 also addresses the relationship between communists and various socialist and reformist parties. These groups often advocated for social reforms, such as improved working conditions, universal suffrage, or cooperative ownership, but typically within the framework of the existing capitalist system. Marx and Engels criticized these parties for their perceived lack of revolutionary fervor and their failure to recognize the fundamental conflict between capital and labor. Nevertheless, they advocated for temporary alliances with these groups when they genuinely advanced the interests of the working class, particularly in their opposition to the common enemy – the ruling class.

Critique of Reactionary Movements

Conversely, Chapter 4 explicitly warned against any association with reactionary movements. These were groups that sought to turn back the clock, restore old regimes, or represent the interests of declining feudal or aristocratic classes. The communists were to be vehemently opposed to such movements, as they posed a direct threat to the progress of the proletariat and the broader revolutionary movement. Their immediate goal was to fight against these reactionary forces, recognizing that their defeat was a prerequisite for any genuine social progress.

Strategic Alliances and Necessary Compromises in Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of The Communist Manifesto is perhaps most renowned for its detailed exposition on strategic alliances and the nuanced approach to compromise. Marx and Engels understood that revolution was not a solitary endeavor but a process that required navigating complex political terrains. This chapter articulates a finely tuned strategy that balances unwavering ideological commitment with pragmatic political action.

Tactical Support for Progressive Movements

The communists, as articulated in Chapter 4, were to offer tactical support to all revolutionary or progressive movements that opposed the existing social and political order. This support was not a sign of ideological agreement but a calculated move to destabilize the ruling class and create opportunities for the proletariat. For instance, in France, they would support the radical democrats against the monarchical and conservative parties, while in Germany, they would support the bourgeoisie against the feudal aristocracy. The goal was always to push the process of change forward, regardless of the specific immediate aims of the allied parties.

The Importance of Maintaining an Independent Working-Class Party

While advocating for alliances, Chapter 4 strongly emphasized the paramount importance of maintaining the distinct identity and independent political organization of the working class. Communists were to act as the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties, constantly educating the proletariat about the ultimate aims of their struggle. They were not to allow their identity to be subsumed by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois movements. This meant that any alliances had to be on terms that preserved the autonomy and ideological clarity of the communist movement. The working class, they argued, must develop its own class consciousness and its

own political power.

Conditional Support and the Goal of Revolution

The support offered to other parties was always conditional and viewed through the lens of the ultimate communist revolution. Marx and Engels were clear that these alliances were temporary and instrumental. The communists would support these parties as long as they genuinely fought against the common enemy. However, the moment these parties began to betray the interests of the working class or sought to stifle the revolutionary momentum, the communists were to withdraw their support and even oppose them. The ultimate objective of establishing a socialist or communist society remained the guiding principle behind all tactical decisions.

Critique of Other Socialist and Bourgeois Movements

Chapter 4 of The Communist Manifesto is not only about forging alliances but also about critically differentiating the communist project from other contemporary political and social movements. Marx and Engels were highly critical of various forms of socialism and liberalism that they believed failed to grasp the fundamental nature of class struggle and the necessity of proletarian revolution.

Critique of "Feudal Socialism"

Marx and Engels sharply criticized what they termed "feudal socialism." This was a movement that, while opposing the rising bourgeoisie, did so from the perspective of the aristocracy and the old feudal order. They appealed to the working class by highlighting the exploitative nature of capitalism, but their aim was not to liberate the proletariat but to restore the dominance of the landed gentry. The Manifesto dismisses this as a form of romantic, medieval sentimentality that failed to recognize the historical inevitability of capitalism's progression and the proletariat's role within it.

Critique of "Petty-Bourgeois Socialism"

Another significant target of criticism was "petty-bourgeois socialism." This ideology emerged from the ranks of the middle class – shopkeepers, small artisans, and the like – who were threatened by the ascendant power of big capital. While they often spoke of justice and fairness, their primary concern was to preserve their own precarious economic standing. Marx and Engels saw them as inherently reformist, seeking to moderate the extremes of capitalism rather than abolish it. They cautioned communists against fully

aligning with these groups, as their ultimate goals were not revolutionary but aimed at maintaining a modified form of the existing class structure.

Critique of "German Socialism" or "True Socialism"

The chapter also takes aim at "German socialism" or "True Socialism," a movement prevalent in Germany at the time. This intellectual current often philosophical and humanitarian in its discourse, attempted to transplant French socialist ideas onto German soil without fully understanding the material conditions and class struggles that gave rise to them. Marx and Engels derided it for its abstract pronouncements and its failure to engage with the concrete realities of the proletariat's fight for emancipation. They saw it as a retreat from the materialist analysis of history and class struggle.

Critique of Bourgeois Liberalism

While advocating for tactical alliances with liberal-democratic forces in certain contexts, Chapter 4 implicitly and explicitly critiques bourgeois liberalism itself. The Manifesto argues that bourgeois liberalism, in its pursuit of reforms, ultimately seeks to preserve the capitalist system and its inherent inequalities. The communists, by contrast, sought the complete abolition of this system. Therefore, while they might collaborate for specific objectives, the fundamental antagonism between the communist goal of a classless society and the liberal aim of a regulated capitalist society remained.

The Communist Manifesto Chapter 4: Key Arguments Summarized

Chapter 4 of The Communist Manifesto distills the theoretical framework of the preceding chapters into practical political action. It is a strategic document that outlines how communists should position themselves within the complex and often volatile political landscape of the 19th century. The key arguments presented offer enduring insights into the dynamics of revolutionary movements and political alliances.

Unity in Action, Distinction in Principle

One of the central tenets of Chapter 4 is the dual strategy of achieving unity in action while maintaining distinction in principle. Communists were to actively participate in and support any movement that opposed the existing oppressive regimes, thereby creating opportunities for further class struggle. Simultaneously, they were to consistently highlight their own

distinct goals and advocate for the complete overthrow of the bourgeoisie, ensuring that the working class did not lose sight of its ultimate revolutionary purpose.

Support for Revolutionary Bourgeois Movements

The chapter argues for supporting bourgeois-democratic revolutions when they were directed against feudal or absolutist powers. This support was strategic, aiming to clear the ground for capitalist development, which in turn would foster the growth of the proletariat and the conditions for a socialist revolution. However, this support was never to be uncritical; communists were always to press for more radical measures and expose the limitations of bourgeois aspirations.

Opposition to Reactionary Forces

A clear directive within Chapter 4 is the absolute opposition to all reactionary forces. These were groups seeking to reverse historical progress or to maintain the dominance of outdated social classes. Communists were to engage in a united front against these elements, recognizing that their defeat was essential for any advancement of the working class.

Critique of Other Socialist Tendencies

The chapter also dedicates significant space to critiquing various forms of socialism that were not aligned with the revolutionary trajectory of the proletariat. By dissecting "feudal socialism," "petty-bourgeois socialism," and "true socialism," Marx and Engels sought to clarify the unique position of scientific communism and to prevent the working class from being misled by reformist or idealistic alternatives.

Impact and Legacy of Chapter 4

The impact of Chapter 4 of The Communist Manifesto is profound and far-reaching, extending well beyond its immediate historical context. Its strategic prescriptions and critical analyses have shaped the course of revolutionary movements and political thought for over a century, influencing the development of communist parties and socialist organizations worldwide.

Shaping Communist Party Strategy

For nascent communist parties and movements throughout the 20th century, Chapter 4 served as a foundational text for developing political strategies.

The emphasis on tactical alliances, the critique of reformism, and the importance of maintaining an independent working-class political line directly informed the organizational and strategic decisions of parties in Russia, China, Vietnam, and numerous other nations. The principles outlined in this chapter provided a framework for navigating diverse political landscapes and engaging with a variety of opposition forces.

Influence on Revolutionary Movements

Beyond formal communist parties, the ideas within Chapter 4 have influenced broader revolutionary movements. The concept of united fronts, albeit with varying interpretations, has been a recurring theme in many anti-colonial, anti-fascist, and liberation struggles. The strategic approach to identifying common enemies and forging temporary alliances, while always pushing for radical transformation, resonates in various historical instances of coalition-building for social change.

Enduring Relevance in Political Analysis

The critical distinctions drawn in Chapter 4 between different ideological currents remain relevant for understanding contemporary political discourse. The analysis of how various groups respond to economic and social change, and the ways in which they define their opposition to the status quo, can still be illuminated by the categories and critiques presented by Marx and Engels. The chapter's emphasis on the need to differentiate true revolutionary aims from reformist or reactionary agendas offers a timeless lens for political analysis.

Debates and Adaptations

The legacy of Chapter 4 also includes ongoing debates and adaptations of its strategies. Over time, communist movements have grappled with the practical application of these principles in different socio-economic and political contexts. The flexibility and conditional nature of the alliances, as well as the emphasis on the "most advanced" section of the party, have been subjects of intense discussion and, at times, revision, as movements sought to adapt to changing historical realities.

The Communist Manifesto Chapter 4 in Modern Politics

While The Communist Manifesto was written in a vastly different era, the strategic considerations and analyses presented in Chapter 4 retain a surprising degree of relevance in modern political discourse. The fundamental

dynamics of political alliances, the critique of reformism, and the challenge of maintaining ideological purity while engaging with broader movements are perennial issues in political strategy.

Contemporary United Fronts

The concept of the "united front," a key theme in Chapter 4, continues to be a significant strategy in contemporary politics. While the specific historical context of the 19th century has changed, many progressive and left-leaning movements still seek to build broad coalitions to achieve specific political goals. The debates within these coalitions often mirror the tensions described by Marx and Engels: how to cooperate on immediate objectives without compromising long-term vision, and how to distinguish one's own movement within a larger alliance.

Critique of Populism and Reformism

The chapter's critiques of reformist and petty-bourgeois movements offer a valuable lens through which to analyze contemporary political phenomena, including certain forms of populism and reformist initiatives. The tendency of some movements to offer superficial solutions to deep-seated systemic problems, or to prioritize the interests of a particular segment of the population over broader class solidarity, can be understood in light of the arguments presented in Chapter 4. The enduring challenge for progressive movements is to avoid being co-opted by forces that do not share their ultimate emancipatory goals.

The Role of the Vanguard Party

The notion that communists should be the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties has also been a point of contention and adaptation. While the concept of a vanguard party has been highly debated and, in many instances, reinterpreted or rejected, the underlying idea of a core group with a clear understanding of systemic change remains a factor in various activist and political organizations. The question of leadership, ideological clarity, and strategic direction continues to be central to the effectiveness of any political movement.

Navigating a Fragmented Political Landscape

In today's fragmented political landscape, understanding the principles of strategic engagement outlined in Chapter 4 can be illuminating. The need to identify common ground with diverse groups, to recognize potential contradictions and limitations in alliances, and to articulate a clear alternative vision are all skills that remain crucial for any political actor seeking to effect meaningful change. The chapter's enduring lesson is that

political action requires both strategic pragmatism and unwavering ideological commitment.

Conclusion: The Enduring Significance of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of The Communist Manifesto, titled "Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties," stands as a testament to the practical, strategic thinking of Marx and Engels. It is more than just a theoretical treatise; it is a guide for action, outlining how a nascent revolutionary movement should navigate the complex web of political forces. Its impact has been undeniable, shaping the strategies of communist parties and influencing revolutionary movements globally for over a century. The chapter's core arguments—the necessity of tactical alliances, the imperative of maintaining ideological distinction, and the critique of reformist and reactionary movements—continue to resonate in contemporary political analysis and activism. The enduring significance of Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto lies in its timeless exploration of the challenges and opportunities inherent in political struggle, offering valuable insights into the art of building coalitions for systemic change while holding firm to revolutionary principles.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the primary focus of Chapter 4 of The Communist Manifesto?

Chapter 4, titled 'Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Opposition Parties,' outlines the communists' strategic approach to working with and within existing political movements of their time, emphasizing their distinct goals and ultimate aim of socialist revolution.

How did Marx and Engels advise communists to interact with other opposition parties?

They advised communists to support, wherever possible, all revolutionary movements against the existing social and political order. However, they stressed that communists should never lose sight of their own ultimate aims and should always emphasize the fundamental antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

What distinction did Marx and Engels make between

communist goals and the goals of other parties?

The key distinction was that other parties, while opposing the current order, often sought reforms within the existing capitalist system. Communists, conversely, aimed for the abolition of private property and the establishment of a classless society, a far more radical and transformative objective.

Can you explain the concept of 'all the powers of the past' as mentioned in Chapter 4?

This refers to the established institutions, ideologies, and traditions of the past (feudalism, monarchism, etc.) that various opposition parties might be trying to either restore or adapt to their own agendas. Communists, however, sought to dismantle all vestiges of the old order.

How is Chapter 4 relevant to understanding historical communist movements and their alliances?

Chapter 4 provides a theoretical framework for understanding why communist parties often allied with other, less radical socialist or even liberal groups during revolutionary periods. It highlights the strategic, albeit temporary, nature of these alliances, driven by the ultimate goal of proletarian victory.

What are some criticisms or debates surrounding the strategy outlined in Chapter 4?

Debates often center on the potential for communists to be co-opted or diluted by broader movements, or conversely, for their radicalism to alienate potential allies. Historical examples of communist parties either failing to maintain their distinctiveness or becoming isolated due to their uncompromising stance are often cited.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to the impact of Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto, along with their descriptions:

1.

The Specter Haunting Europe: A Global Legacy of 1848

This book examines the immediate and far-reaching consequences of the ideas presented in the Communist Manifesto, particularly the call for international proletarian solidarity. It explores how the concepts outlined in Chapter 4, which discusses the various opposition parties, resonated with revolutionary movements across Europe and beyond in the wake of 1848. The author analyzes the nascent socialist and communist parties that emerged and how their

strategies, though varied, were fundamentally shaped by Marx and Engels' foundational text. Ultimately, it traces the long-term impact of this call to action on the development of global political thought.

2.

From Manifesto to Millions: The Spread of Communist Ideology

This work delves into the historical dissemination and adaptation of the Communist Manifesto, with a specific focus on the practical implications of Chapter 4's strategic guidance. It investigates how the manifesto's analysis of class struggle and its proposed alliances with other "progressive" parties were interpreted and implemented by various communist and socialist organizations throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The book showcases case studies of how these theories translated into actual political action and party formation, highlighting both successes and failures. It underscores the enduring influence of Marx and Engels' strategic insights on the global communist movement.

3.

The Unfinished Revolution: Communist Movements and Their Challenges

This book offers a critical retrospective on the global trajectory of communist movements, placing significant emphasis on the foundational strategies articulated in Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto. It analyzes how the manifesto's assessment of different opposition parties and its call for coordinated action guided the formation and evolution of communist parties worldwide. The author explores the internal debates, strategic shifts, and the inherent difficulties faced by these movements in achieving their revolutionary goals, often stemming from the very principles of alliance and opposition discussed by Marx and Engels. The work critically evaluates the practical application of these early theoretical frameworks in real-world political landscapes.

4.

Beyond the Barricades: The Intellectual Afterlife of Chapter 4

This scholarly volume explores the intellectual legacy and ongoing relevance of the theoretical and strategic pronouncements found in Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto. It moves beyond a purely historical account to examine how contemporary scholars and activists continue to engage with Marx and Engels' analysis of political alliances and opposition strategies. The book discusses how these ideas have been reinterpreted and applied to modern political challenges, even in contexts far removed from 19th-century Europe. It probes the enduring power of the manifesto's call for a united front of

the working class and its influence on contemporary critiques of capitalism and strategies for social change.

5.

The Many Faces of Opposition: Communist Party Evolution in the 20th Century

This book traces the diverse paths taken by communist parties across the globe throughout the 20th century, demonstrating how their foundational strategies were shaped by the principles outlined in Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto. It examines the varying interpretations of "opposition parties" and the shifting alliances formed by communist groups in different national and historical contexts. The author analyzes how these strategic decisions, often rooted in Marx and Engels' early political guidance, impacted the success, failures, and evolution of these parties. The book provides a comparative study of how communist movements adapted or adhered to the manifesto's initial prescriptions for gaining political power.

6.

Class Warfare and Political Alliances: A Historical Analysis of Communist Strategy

This in-depth study provides a historical examination of the strategic approaches employed by communist movements, focusing on the vital role of Chapter 4 in the Communist Manifesto. It dissects the manifesto's counsel regarding the relationship between the proletariat and other opposition parties, analyzing how this informed the tactical decisions of various communist organizations. The book explores the complexities of forging and maintaining political alliances, the ideological compromises involved, and the impact of these strategies on the broader class struggle. It offers a nuanced understanding of how the manifesto's strategic foresight shaped the practical implementation of communist goals.

7.

The Global Echo of the Manifesto: Repercussions of Chapter 4's Call

This book investigates the worldwide impact of the specific recommendations and analyses presented in Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto. It highlights how Marx and Engels' assessment of various opposition groups and their calls for unity resonated with nascent revolutionary movements in diverse geographical and political landscapes. The author traces how these ideas influenced the formation and strategies of communist and socialist parties, contributing to significant political upheavals and ideological debates throughout the 20th century. The work emphasizes the transnational influence of the manifesto's strategic framework on global political action.

8.

Interpreting the Opposition: Communist Parties and Their Tactics Since Marx

This book critically examines how communist parties have historically interpreted and applied the principles of political opposition and alliance outlined in Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto. It analyzes the diverse strategies adopted by these parties, from united fronts to vanguard party doctrines, and how these decisions were often informed by the manifesto's foundational guidance. The author explores the evolving nature of "opposition" in different socio-political contexts and the impact of these tactical choices on the success and trajectory of communist movements. The work offers a comparative perspective on the practical implementation of Marx and Engels' strategic insights.

9.

The Strategic Architectures of Revolution: Chapter 4's Blueprint for Change

This book focuses on the strategic thinking embedded within Chapter 4 of the Communist Manifesto, examining its role as a foundational blueprint for revolutionary political action. It analyzes how Marx and Engels' insights into identifying and collaborating with diverse opposition forces provided a tactical framework for early communist movements. The author explores the lasting influence of these ideas on the formation of political parties, the development of coalition politics, and the broader discourse on achieving systemic change. The book delves into how the manifesto's call for pragmatic alliances shaped the very architecture of revolutionary movements.

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