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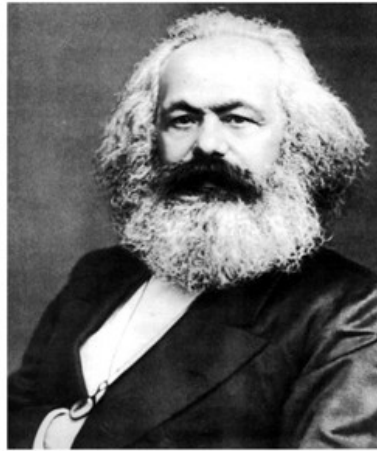
May 2010

From the Annals of the World History

Karl Marx

- May 5, 1818 - March 14, 1883

Karl Marx, the son of Hirschel and Henrietta Marx, was born in Trier, Germany, in 1818. Hirschel Marx was a lawyer and to escape anti-Semitism decided to abandon his Jewish faith when Karl was a child. Although the majority of people living in Trier were Catholics, Marx decided to become a Protestant. He also changed his name from Hirschel to Heinrich. After schooling in Trier (1830-35), Marx entered Bonn University to study law. At university he spent much of his time socializing and running up large debts. His father was horrified when he discovered that Karl had been wounded in a duel. Heinrich Marx agreed to pay off his son's debts but insisted that he moved to the more sedate Berlin University. The move to Berlin resulted in a change in Marx and for the next few years he worked hard at his studies. Marx came under the influence of one of his lecturers, Bruno Bauer, whose atheism and radical political opinions got him into trouble with the authorities. Bauer introduced Marx to the writings of G. W. F. Hegel, who had been the professor of philosophy at Berlin until his death in 1831.



Marx was especially impressed by Hegel's theory that a thing or thought could not be separated from its opposite. For example, the slave could not exist without the master, and vice versa. Hegel argued that unity would eventually be achieved by the equalising of all opposites, by means of the dialectic (logical progression) of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. This was Hegel's theory of the evolving process of history. Heinrich Marx died in 1838. Marx now had to earn his own living and he decided to become a university lecturer. After completing his doctoral thesis at the University of Jena, Marx hoped that his mentor, Bruno Bauer, would help find him a teaching post. However, in 1842 Bauer was dismissed as a result of his outspoken atheism and was unable to help.

Marx now tried journalism but his radical political views meant that most editors were unwilling to publish his articles. He moved to Cologne where the city's liberal opposition movement was fairly strong. Known as the Cologne Circle, this group had its own newspaper, The Rhenish Gazette. The newspaper published an article by Marx where he defended the freedom of the press. The group was impressed by the article and in October, 1842, Marx was appointed editor of the newspaper. While in Cologne he met Moses Hess, a radical who called himself a socialist. Marx began attending socialist meetings organised by Hess. Members of the group told Marx of the sufferings being endured by the German working-class and explained how they believed that only socialism could bring this to an end. Based on what he heard at these meetings, Marx decided to write an article on the poverty of the Mosel wine-farmers. The article was also critical of the government and soon after it was published in The Rhenish Gazette in January 1843, the newspaper was banned by the Prussian authorities.

Warned that he might be arrested, Marx quickly married his girlfriend, Jenny von Westphalen, and moved to France where he was offered the post of editor of a new political journal, Franco-German Annals. Among the contributors to the journal was his old mentor, Bruno Bauer, the Russian anarchist, Michael Bakunin and the radical son of a wealthy German industrialist, Friedrich Engels. In Paris he began mixing with members of the working class for the first time. Marx was shocked by their poverty but impressed by their sense of comradeship. In an article that he wrote for the Franco-German Annals, Marx applied Hegel's dialectic theory to what he had observed in Paris. Marx, who now described himself as a communist, argued that the working class (the proletariat), would eventually be the emancipators of society. When published in February 1844, the journal was immediately banned in Germany. Marx also upset the owner of the journal, Arnold Ruge, who objected to his editor's attack on capitalism.



Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

In 1844 Marx wrote Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts. In this work he developed his ideas on the concept of alienation. Marx identified three kinds of alienation in capitalist society. First, the worker is alienated from what he produces. Second, the worker is alienated from himself; only when he is not working does he feel truly himself. Finally, in capitalist society people are alienated from each other; that is, in a competitive society people are set against other people. Marx believed the solution to this problem was communism as this would enable the fulfillment of "his potentialities as a human."

While in Paris he became a close friend of Friedrich Engels, who had just finished writing a book about the lives of the industrial workers in England. Engels shared

Marx's views on capitalism and after their first meeting Engels wrote that there was virtually "complete agreement in all theoretical fields". Marx and Engels decided to work together. It was a good partnership, whereas Marx was at his best when dealing with difficult abstract .

- [History](#)
- [Aims](#)
- [Concept](#)
- [Parenting](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Training Programmes](#)
- [Expansion](#)
- [Development](#)
- [Syllabus](#)
- [Bal Vikas Administration](#)
- [Past Students](#)
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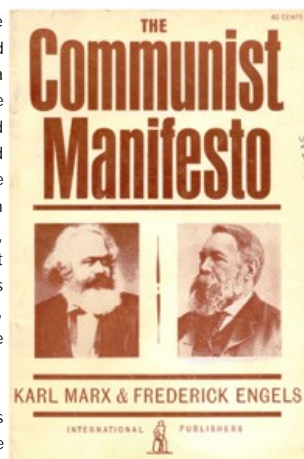
While working on their first article together, The Holy Family, the Prussian authorities put pressure on the French government to expel Marx from the country. On 25th January 1845, Marx received an order deporting him from France. Marx and Engels decided to move to Belgium, a country that permitted greater freedom of expression than any other European state. Marx went to live in Brussels, where there was a sizable community of political exiles, including the man who converted him to socialism, Moses Hess. Friedrich Engels helped to financially support Marx and his family. Engels gave Marx the royalties of his recently published book, Condition of the Working Class in England and arranged for other sympathizers to make donations. This enabled Marx the time to study and develop his economic and political theories. Marx spent his time trying to understand the workings of capitalist society, the factors governing the process of history and how the proletariat could help bring about a socialist revolution. Unlike previous philosophers, Marx was not only interested in discovering the truth. As he was to write later, in the past "philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it".

In July 1845 Marx and Engels visited England. Marx also visited London where he met the Chartist leader, George Julian Harney and political exiles from Europe. When Karl Marx returned to Brussels he concentrated on finishing his book, The German Ideology. In the book Marx developed his materialist conception of history, a theory of history in which human activity, rather than thought, plays the crucial role. Marx was unable to find a publisher for the book, and like much of his work, was not published in his lifetime.

In January 1846 Marx set up a Communist Correspondence Committee. The plan was to try and link together socialist leaders living in different parts of Europe. Influenced by Marx's ideas, socialists in England held a conference in London where they formed a new organisation called the Communist League. Marx formed a branch in Brussels and in December 1847 attended a meeting of the Communist League' Central Committee in London. At the meeting it was decided that the aims of the organisation was "the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the domination of the proletariat, the abolition of the old bourgeois society based on class antagonisms, and the establishment of a new society without classes and without private property".

When Marx returned to Brussels he concentrated on writing The **Communist Manifesto**. Based on a first draft produced by Friedrich Engels called the Principles of Communism, Marx finished the 12,000 word pamphlet in six weeks. Unlike most of Marx's work, it was an accessible account of communist ideology. Written for a mass audience, the book summarised the forthcoming revolution and the nature of the communist society that would be established by the proletariat. The Communist Manifesto begins with the assertion, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." Marx argued that if you are to understand human history you must not see it as the story of great individuals or the conflict between states. Instead, you must see it as the story of social classes and their struggles with each other. Marx explained that social classes had changed over time but in the 19th century the most important classes were the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. By the term bourgeoisie Marx meant the owners of the factories and the raw materials which are processed in them. The proletariat, on the other hand, own very little and are forced to sell their labour to the capitalists. Marx believed that these two classes are not merely different from each other, but also have different interests. He went on to argue that the conflict between these two classes would eventually lead to revolution and the triumph of the proletariat. With the disappearance of the bourgeoisie as a class, there would no longer be a class society. As Engels later wrote, "The state is not abolished, it withers away."

The Communist Manifesto was published in February, 1848. The following month, the government expelled Marx from Belgium. Marx and Engels visited Paris before moving to Cologne where they founded a radical newspaper, the New Rhenish Gazette. The men hoped to use the newspaper to encourage the revolutionary atmosphere that they had witnessed in Paris. Marx's excitement about the possibility of world revolution began to subside in 1849. The army had managed to help the Emperor of Austria return to power and attempts at uprisings in Dresden, Baden and the Rhur were quickly put down. On 9th May, 1849, Marx received news he was to be expelled from the country. The last edition of the New Rhenish Gazette appeared on 18th May and was printed in red. Marx wrote that although he was being forced to leave, his ideas would continue to be spread until the "emancipation of the working class".



Marx now went to France where he believed a socialist revolution was likely to take place at any time. However, within a month of arriving, the French police ordered him out of the capital. Only one country remained who would take him, and on 15th September he sailed for England. Soon after settling in London Jenny Marx gave birth to her fourth child. The Prussian authorities applied pressure on the British government to expel Marx but the Prime Minister, John Russell, held liberal views on freedom of expression and refused.

In 1852, Charles Dana, the socialist editor of the New York Daily Tribune, offered Marx the opportunity to write for his newspaper. Over the next ten years the newspaper published 487 articles by Marx (125 of them had actually been written by Engels). Another radical in the USA, George Ripley, commissioned Marx to write for the New American Cyclopaedia. With the money from Marx's journalism and the £120 inherited from Jenny's mother, the family were able to move to 9 Grafton Terrace, Kentish Town.

By the 1860s the work for the New York Daily Tribune came to an end and Marx's money problems returned. Engels sent him £5 a month but this failed to stop him getting deeply into debt. Ferdinand Lassalle, a wealthy socialist from Berlin also began sending money to Marx and offered him work as an editor of a planned new radical newspaper in Germany. Marx, unwilling to return to his homeland and rejected the job. Lassalle continued to send Marx money until he was killed in a duel on 28th August 1864.

Despite all his problems Marx continued to work and in 1867 the first volume of **Das Kapital** was published. A detailed analysis of capitalism, the book dealt with important concepts such as surplus value (the notion that a worker receives only the exchange-value, not the use-value, of his labour); division of labour (where workers become a "mere appendage of the machine") and the industrial reserve army (the theory that capitalism creates unemployment as a means of keeping the workers in check).

In the final part of Das Kapital Marx deals with the issue of revolution. Marx argued that the laws of

capitalism will bring about its destruction. Capitalist competition will lead to a diminishing number of monopoly capitalists, while at the same time, the misery and oppression of the proletariat would increase. Marx claimed that as a class, the proletariat will gradually become "disciplined, united and organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production" and eventually will overthrow the system that is the cause of their suffering.

Marx now began work on the second volume of *Das Kapital*. By 1871 his sixteen year old daughter, Eleanor Marx, was helping him with his work. Taught at home by her father, Eleanor already had a detailed understanding of the capitalist system and was to play an important role in the future of the British labour movement. Marx was encouraged by the formation of the Paris Commune in March 1871 and the abdication of Louis Napoleon. Marx called it the "greatest achievement" since the revolutions of 1848, but by May the revolt had collapsed and about 30,000 Communards were slaughtered by government troops. This failure depressed Marx and after this date his energy began to diminish. He continued to work on the second volume of *Das Kapital* but progress was slow, especially after Eleanor Marx left home to become a schoolteacher in Brighton.

Eleanor returned to the family home in 1881 to nurse her parents who were both very ill. Marx, who had a swollen liver, survived, but Jenny Marx died on 2nd December, 1881. Karl Marx was also devastated by the death of his eldest daughter in January 1883 from cancer of the bladder. Karl Marx died two months later on the 14th March, 1883.

Philosophy

Fundamentally, Marx assumed that human nature involves transforming nature. To this process of transformation he applies the term "labour", and to the capacity to transform nature the term "labour power." Marx's analysis of history focuses on the organization of labor and depends on his distinction between: the means / forces of production, literally those things (like land, natural resources, and technology) necessary for the production of material goods; and the relations of production, in other words, the social relationships people enter into as they acquire and use the means of production.

Together these compose the mode of production, and Marx distinguished historical eras in terms of distinct modes of production. For example, he observed that European societies had progressed from a feudal mode of production to a capitalist mode of production. Marx believed that under capitalism, the means of production change more rapidly than the relations of production. Marx regarded this mismatch between (economic) base and (social) superstructure as a major source of social disruption and conflict.

As a scientist and materialist, Marx did not understand classes as purely subjective (in other words, groups of people who consciously identified with one another). He sought to define classes in terms of objective criteria, such as their access to resources-that is, whether or not a group owns the means of production.

For Marx:

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

- (The Communist Manifesto, Chapter 1)

Marx had a special concern with how people relate to that most fundamental resource of all, their own labour power. He wrote extensively about this in terms of the problem of alienation. As with the dialectic, Marx began with a Hegelian notion of alienation but developed a more materialist conception. Capitalism mediates social relationships of production (such as among workers or between workers and capitalists) through commodities, including labour, that are bought and sold on the market. For Marx, the possibility that one may give up ownership of one's own labour-one's capacity to transform the world-is tantamount to being alienated from one's own nature; it is a spiritual loss. Marx described this loss as commodity fetishism, in which the things that people produce, commodities, appear to have a life and movement of their own to which humans and their behavior merely adapt.

Political Economy

Marx argued that the alienation of human work (and resulting commodity fetishism) functions precisely as the defining feature of capitalism. Prior to capitalism, markets existed in Europe where producers and merchants bought and sold commodities. According to Marx, a capitalist mode of production developed in Europe when labor itself became a commodity-when peasants became free to sell their own labor-power, and needed to do so because they no longer possessed their own land. People sell their labor-power when they accept compensation in return for whatever work they do in a given period of time (in other words, they do not sell the product of their labor, but their capacity to work). In return for selling their labor-power they receive money, which allows them to survive. Those who must sell their labor-power are "proletarians". The person who buys the labor power, generally someone who does own the land and technology to produce, is a "capitalist" or "bourgeois". The proletarians inevitably outnumber the capitalists.

Capitalism can stimulate considerable growth because the capitalist can, and has an incentive to, reinvest profits in new technologies and capital equipment. Marx considered the capitalist class to be the most revolutionary in history, because it constantly improved the means of production. But Marx argued that capitalism was prone to periodic crises. He suggested that over time, capitalists would invest more and more in new technologies, and less and less in labor. Since Marx believed that surplus value appropriated from labor is the source of profits, he concluded that the rate of profit would fall even as the economy grew. When the rate of profit falls below a certain point, the result would be a recession or depression in which certain sectors of the economy would collapse. Marx thought that during such an economic crisis the price of labor would also fall, and eventually make possible the investment in new technologies and the growth of new sectors of the economy.

Marx believed that increasingly severe crises would punctuate this cycle of growth, collapse, and more growth. Moreover, he believed that in the long-term this process would necessarily enrich and empower the capitalist class and impoverish the proletariat. He believed that if the proletariat were to seize the means of production, they would encourage social relations that would benefit everyone equally, and a system of production less vulnerable to periodic crises. He theorized that between capitalism and the establishment of a socialist system, a dictatorship of the proletariat-a period where the working class holds political power and forcibly socializes the means of production-would exist. As he wrote in his "Critique of the Gotha Program", "between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which

the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." While he allowed for the possibility of peaceful transition in some countries with strong democratic institutional structures (such as Britain, the US and the Netherlands), he suggested that in other countries with strong centralized state-oriented traditions, like France and Germany, the "lever of our revolution must be force."



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- » [October 2009](#)
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- » [April 2010](#)
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- » [February 2010](#)
- » [May 2010](#)
- » [September 2009](#)
- » [December 2009](#)
- » [March 2010](#)