

KARL HEINRICH MARX

BORN 1818, Trier (Treves)

DIED 1883, London

MAIN INTERESTS Politics, economics

INFLUENCES Hobbes, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, James Mill, Hegel, Engels

INFLUENCED Lenin, Trotsky, Adorno, Gramsci, Singer

MAJOR WORKS

Communist Manifesto, Capital, Grundrisse

Capitalism centers upon the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie (capitalists) own capital, and the proletariat own labor power. Marx contends that the dynamic is exploitative and contradictory; with the interests of the two directly opposed. This contradictory relationship has class conflict within it and class conflict will result in historical change.

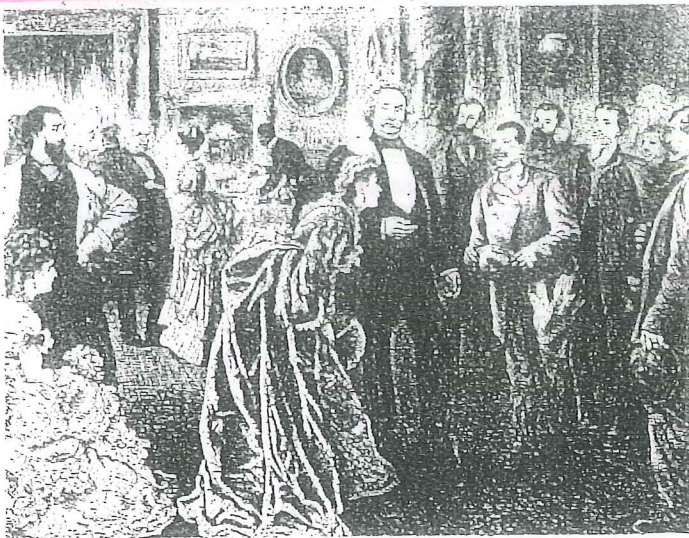
Born in the Prussian city of Trier to a middle-class Jewish family (his father, a lawyer, had converted to Christianity for professional reasons), Karl Marx was educated first at the University of Bonn (where he read law, but spent much of his time in beer halls), and then at the University of Berlin. It was at this point that he discovered an interest in philosophy, joining the Young Hegelians. This was a group of thinkers, including theologians and philosophers, who combined an acceptance of secularized versions of Hegel's theories with the belief that society (and especially Prussian society) was as yet imperfect. They criticized the church and the Prussian government, and in 1840 Marx found it wise to submit his doctoral thesis (on the ancient Greek atomists) not to the University of Berlin, but to the University of Jena.

In a nutshell:

We're not passively acted upon by the world, but are controllers of it—and we should do so in such a way as to free ourselves and our fellow human beings.

His radical political views made an academic career impossible, however, and Marx went into journalism, becoming the editor of the liberal newspaper the *Rheinische Zeitung*. When the Prussian government closed down the paper, Marx went to live in Paris, where he resumed his philosophical thinking and writing, as well as working as a freelance journalist. It was at this point that he met Friedrich Engels, who alerted Marx to the plight of the working classes, and who pointed him toward the study of economics. The two were to work and write together for the rest of Marx's life.

Political persecution and more dramatic upheavals saw Marx travel from France to Belgium, back to France, and finally to London, where he settled permanently, and where he became heavily involved in the International Working Men's Association (later known as the First International). This last period of his life saw the production of some of the most important of his writings, including *Das Kapital* (*Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*) in three volumes (and a





projected fourth), the first volume published in 1867, the second two volumes edited by Engels and published posthumously in 1885 and 1894, and the notes for the fourth volume edited by Karl Johann Kautsky and published as *Theories of Surplus Value*, itself in four volumes, from 1905 to 1910.

Marx's health declined badly during the last ten years of his life, and despite his travels to various spas around Europe (he even went to North Africa at one point), it continued to worsen. The deaths of his wife and eldest daughter served to weaken him further; he died in 1883 and was buried in Highgate Cemetery, North London.

Marx's writings are largely concerned with economics, history, and politics. His main philosophical importance lies in the way his theories were developed and used by later political philosophers (his most interesting philosophical work is to be found in the *Grundrisse*, published posthumously in 1941). At the heart of Marx's thought was an acceptance of Hegel's dialectical account

Marx was not a Marxist

The term "Marxist" is used to refer to those who made use of Marx's vocabulary and basic approach to history and society (and especially to capitalism), and should not be assumed always to accord with what Marx himself actually wrote. Indeed, Marx himself said that he wasn't a Marxist.

Marx and Engels enjoyed a close friendship for over forty years. Engels' industrial interests in the north of England even helped finance Marx and his family, who lived in poverty in London for several years.

of history, together with a rejection of his idealism in favor of materialism.

HUMAN NATURE

Human nature, apart from its fundamental ability and desire to transform the world (labor), depends upon social and economic conditions, and these change over time; human beings, however, have control of these conditions. One of the main elements that needs to be changed is private property, which serves to divide the classes and alienate human beings from their labor, their fundamental power to transform their environment, from their human essence. People become means rather than ends, and by getting rid of private property this is reversed, so that class divisions are dissolved and human beings gain their freedom.

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

The economic and social conditions are the result of productive forces, and these change through history as human beings gain understanding of and control of their environment. The various social forms, or production relations—such as feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism—replace each other in an inevitable pattern. This is the result of irresolvable tension and thus conflict between the productive forces and the production relations, which results in class warfare and revolution: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (*Communist Manifesto*, Marx Engels Werke 1:88).

The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it.

"Theses on Feuerbach,"
Marx Engels Werke 3:7

From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.

"Critique of the Gotha Programme,"
Marx Engels Werke 19:21