

Karl Marx

(1818-1883)

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 (1830-1835), Karl 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. Friedrich 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 equalizing 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 liberal 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.

In Cologne Karl Marx met Moses Hess, a radical who called himself a socialist. Marx began attending socialist meetings organized 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 Paris 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 Marx 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.

Marx had now become 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 concepts, Engels had the ability to write for a mass audience.

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. They spent most of the time consulting books in Manchester Library. 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 organization called the Communist League. Marx formed a branch in Brussels and in December 1847 attended a meeting of the Communist League's Central Committee in London. At the meeting it was decided that the aims of the organization 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 had concentrated on writing *The Communist Manifesto*. Based on a first draft produced by **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 Communist Manifesto* summarized the forthcoming revolution and the nature of the communist society that would be established by the proletariat.

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, *New Rhenish Gazette*. The men hoped to use the newspaper to encourage the revolutionary atmosphere that they had witnessed in Paris.

After examples of police brutality in Cologne, Marx helped establish a Committee of Public Safety to protect the people against the power of the authorities. The *New Rhenish Gazette* continued to publish reports of revolutionary activity all over Europe, including the Democrats seizure of power in Austria and the decision by the Emperor to flee the country.

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 Paris 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.

With only the money that Engels could raise, the Marx family lived in extreme poverty. In March 1850 they were ejected from their two-roomed flat in Chelsea for failing to pay the rent. They found cheaper accommodation at 28 Dean Street, Soho, where they stayed for six years. Their fifth child, Franziska, was born at their new flat but she only lived for a year. Eleanor was born in 1855 but later that year, Edgar became Jenny Marx's third child to die.

Marx spent most of the time in the Reading Room of the British Museum, where he read the back numbers of *The Economist* and other books and journals that would help him analyze capitalist society. In order to help supply Marx with an income, Friedrich Engels returned to work for his father in Germany. The two kept in constant contact and over the next twenty years they wrote to each other on average once every two days.

Friedrich Engels sent postal orders or £1 or £5 notes, cut in half and sent in separate envelopes. In this way the Marx family was able to survive. The poverty of the Marx's family was confirmed by a Prussian police agent who visited the Dean Street flat in 1852. In his report he pointed out that the family had sold most of their possessions and that they did not own one "solid piece of furniture".

Jenny helped her husband with his work and later wrote that "the memory of the days I spent in his little study copying his scrawled articles is among the happiest of my life." The only relief from the misery of poverty was on a Sunday when they went for family picnics on Hampstead Heath.

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.

In 1856 Jenny Marx, who was now aged 42, gave birth to a still-born child. Her health took a further blow when she contracted smallpox. Although she survived this serious illness, it left her deaf and badly scarred. Marx's health was also bad and he wrote to Engels claiming that 'such a lousy life is not worth living'. After a bad bout of boils in 1863 Marx told Engels that the only consolation was that 'it was a truly proletarian disease'.

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 labor); division of labor (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 labor movement. On one occasion Marx told his children that "Jenny (his eldest daughter) is most like me, but Tussy (Eleanor) is me."

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.

(1) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)

Communists openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!

(2) Karl Marx, New Rhenish Gazette (January, 1849)

The liberation of Europe is dependent on a successful uprising by the French working class. But every French social upheaval necessarily founders on the English bourgeoisie, on the industrial and commercial world-domination of Great Britain.

England will only be overthrown by a world war, which is the only thing that could provide the Chartists, the organized party of the English workers, with the conditions for a successful rising against their gigantic oppressors.

(3) In a letter written in March 1850, Jenny Marx described being evicted from their home in London.

The landlady demanded £5 that we still owed her. As we did not have the money at the time two bailiffs came and sequestered all my few possessions - linen, beds, clothes - everything, even my poor child's cradle and the best toys of my daughters, who stood there weeping bitterly.

(4) In January 1883, Eleanor Marx had the task of informing her father that his eldest daughter had died of cancer.

I have lived many a sad hour, but none so bad as that. I felt that I was bringing my father his death sentence. I racked my brain to find how I could break the news to him. But I did not need to, my face gave me away. My father said at once "our Jennychen is dead".

(5) Prussian police agent report on Karl Marx in 1852.

In the whole apartment there is not one clean and solid piece of furniture. Everything is broken. There is a chair with only three legs. In private life he is an extremely disorderly cynical human being, and a bad host. He leads a real gypsy existence. Washing, grooming and changing his linen are things he does rarely. He has no fixed times for going to sleep and waking up. He often stays up all night, and then lies down fully clothed on the sofa at midday and sleeps till evening.

(6) Frederick Lessner, first met Karl Marx at a meeting of the Communist League in December 1847.

Marx greatly impressed as all. He was of medium height, broad-shouldered, powerful in build, and vigorous in his movements. His forehead was high and finely shaped, his hair thick and pitch-black, his gaze piercing. Marx was a born leader of the people. His speech was brief, convincing and compelling in its logic. He never said a superfluous word; every sentence contained an idea and every idea was an essential link in the chain of his argument.

(7) Karl Marx, The Eastern Question (1885)

The redeeming feature of war is that it puts a nation to the test. As exposure to the atmosphere reduces all mummies to instant dissolution, so war passes supreme judgment upon social systems that have outlived their vitality.

Major Works of Karl Marx

- Writings of Young Marx (selections before 1837)
- The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature, 1841 (first published 1902)
- On Freedom of the Press, 1842, Rheinische Zeitung
- On the Law on the Theft of Wood, 1842, Rheinische Zeitung
- Communism and the Augsburg Allgemeine Zeitung, 1842, Rheinische Zeitung
- Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction, 1843, Anekdoten zur neuesten deutschen Philosophie und Publicistik
- Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1843
- Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1844, Deutsch-Französischer Jahrbücher
- On The Jewish Question, 1844, Deutsch-Französischer Jahrbücher
- Critical Notes on the 'The King of Prussia', 1844, Vorwärts!
- Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, 1844
- Comments on James Mill's Elements of Political Economy, (written 1844, published 1932)
- The Holy Family - or a Critique of Critical Critique, 1844
- Theses on Feuerbach, 1845, publ. 1886 in Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy
- A Critique of the German Ideology, with F. Engels 1846
- The Poverty of Philosophy, 1847
- Manifesto of the Communist Party with F. Engels, 1848
- On the Question of Free Trade, 1848, speech in Brussels
- Communism, Revolution and a Free Poland, 1848, speech in Brussels
- The Demands of the Communist Party in Germany, with F. Engels, 1848
- Addresses to the Central Committee of the Communist League, with F. Engels, 1850
- Articles in Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung, 1848-1849
- Reviews in Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung Revue, with F. Engels, 1850
- Wage Labor and Capital, 1849, Neue Rheinische Zeitung
- England's 17th Century Revolution, with F. Engels, 1850, Politische-Ökonomische Revue
- Articles on the Class Struggle in France, 1848 to 1850, 1850, Neue Rheinische Zeitung
- Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany, 1851 (first publ. 1896)
- The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 1852, Die Revolution
- Heroes of the Exile with F. Engels, 1852 (first publ. 1930)
- Articles from the New York Daily Tribune, 1852-1861
- Articles on China War from New York Daily Tribune, 1853-1860
- The Duchess of Sutherland and Slavery, 1853, People's Paper
- Anti-Church Movement: Demonstration in Hyde Park, 1855, Neue Oder-Zeitung

- Speech at anniversary of the People's Paper, 1856, People's Paper
- Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, 1857 (publ. 1939)
- Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, 1859
- Outlines for a Critique of Political Economy (Grundrisse), 1859
- Theories of Surplus Value Volume 1, Volume 2, Volume 3
- Articles on the American Civil War in Die Presse, 1861
- Speeches and Communications re. International Workingmen's Association, with F. Engels, 1864-1874
- Value, Prices and Profit - Address to the IWMA, 1865
- Capital: Critique of political economy
- Volume One: The Process of Production of Capital , 1867
- Volume Two: The Process of Circulation of Capital, 1885
- Volume Three: The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole, 1894
- The Abolition of Private Property, 1869
- The Civil War in France, 1871
- Fictitious Splits in the (First) International, with F. Engels 1872
- Documents, etc. on the Hague Congress of the IWMA, with F. Engels, 1872
- Political Indifferentism, 1874, Almanacco Repubblicano
- Conspectus on Bakunin, 1875, unpubl. notes
- For Poland, with F. Engels, 1875
- Critique of the Gotha Program, 1875
- Strategy and Tactics of the Class Struggle, with F. Engels, 1879
- A Worker's Inquiry, 1880, Revue socialiste
- The Programme of the Parti Ouvrier, with Jules Guesde, 1880

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