

Marx, Karl

Karl Marx (1818-1883) applied historical and scientific analysis to economic history and concluded that class struggle would lead to a dictatorship of the proletariat as a transition to the development of a classless society governed by the principles of communism. Marx responded to the suffering and injustices he observed and experienced during adulthood by participating in subversive political activities aimed at overthrowing existing political and economic power structures.

### **The Formation of a Radical**

Karl Marx grew up the second son of nine children in Trier, Prussia, a city now in the western part of Germany. His paternal and maternal grandfathers were both Jewish rabbis. His father converted the entire family to Lutheranism, the state's dominant religion, when Marx was six years old, to continue practicing law in the civil service. Marx studied law at the University of Bonn and philosophy at the University of Berlin, where he became attracted to the writings of Kant and Hegel. He obtained his doctorate from the University of Jena in 1841.

Although a brilliant philosophy student, Marx was denied a teaching position because of his Jewish heritage and atheistic religious beliefs. He became a journalist for a liberal newspaper in Cologne and attended socialist meetings. His articles criticized the Prussian monarchy, proposed the abolishment of private property, and encouraged a working class revolution. Marx and his wife, the daughter of Prussian nobility, moved to Paris after the Prussian government threatened to arrest him for treason. There Marx helped to create a political journal-in-exile.

## Marx and Engels

In 1844, Marx declared himself a communist and formed a lifetime friendship with Friedrich Engels, another Prussian writer living in Paris. Engels, an heir to a business fortune, published *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1845, a seething critique of the negative impacts of the Industrial Revolution on individuals and society. That same year, Marx and Engels published *The Holy Family*, a critique of the Young Hegelians. Marx began writing *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, about the communist solution to capitalist alienation, and *The German Ideology*, about his materialist conception of history, though neither would be published until after his death.

Marx was expelled from France in 1845 for his revolutionary writings. Jobless, he relocated his family to Belgium, where they lived in poverty. Marx joined the revolutionary Communist League whose goals included violently overthrowing capitalism. In February 1848, he and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* as the political organization's statement of faith. In their call to arms, Marx and Engels argued that capitalism inevitably would be replaced by socialism and then communism.

Marx was arrested and expelled from Belgium in 1848 for supplying revolutionaries with money to purchase weapons. He and Engels reentered Germany as it experimented with democratic reform. They were arrested for inciting a revolt, acquitted, but then deported. Marx went back to Paris to participate in revolutionary activities but was expelled from France again. In 1849, Marx settled in London, England. He lived in slum conditions with his wife and children. Only three of his seven children survived to adulthood.

Engels accepted a job with his father's Manchester, England textile firm and subsidized Marx's living expenses and revolutionary writings. Marx earned minimal income as the

international reporter for an American newspaper and spent most of his days reading and writing in the British Museum's Reading Room. With Marx and his wife in continual ill-health, his mother-in-law sent a servant to assist them. The maid gave birth to his illegitimate son, whom he abandoned. In 1859 Marx published *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* which outlined how economic forces influenced the law, politics, religion, art and philosophy. After nearly two decades of living in poverty, Marx inherited money and moved his family into a mansion.

In 1867, Marx published the first volume of *Das Kapital*, his economic magnum opus that integrated his economic, philosophic, historical, and scientific thoughts. Three years later Engels sold his portion of the family business and paid Marx a generous annual pension. Marx continued to study, argue with intellectuals, write, and struggle with his many illnesses until his death in 1883 at the age of 65. Engels published the long awaited second volume of *Das Kapital* two years later and the third and final volume in 1894, a year before his own death. The three volumes served as the intellectual foundation for Marxist thought over the next century.

Denis Collins

See also Communism; Economic Liberalism; Industrial Revolution; Marxism; and Socialism.

#### Further Readings and References

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