

# KARL MARX

by  
Frederick Engels

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Short bio based on Engels' version written at the end of July 1868 for the German literary newspaper *Die Gartenlaube* -- whose editors decided against using it.

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Translated by Joan and Trevor Walmsley  
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[...]

*Karl Marx* was born on May 5, 1818 in Trier, where he received a classical education. He studied jurisprudence at Bonn and later in Berlin, where, however, his preoccupation with philosophy soon turned him away from law. In 1841, after spending five years in the "metropolis of intellectuals", he returned to Bonn intending to habilitate. At that time the first "New Era" was in vogue in [Prussia](#). Frederick William IV had declared his love of a loyal opposition, and attempts were being made in various quarters to organise one. Thus the [Rheinische Zeitung](#) was founded at Cologne, with unprecedented daring Marx used it to criticise the deliberations of the Rhine Province Assembly, in articles which attracted great attention. At the end of 1842 he took over the editorship himself and was such a thorn in the side of the censors that they did him the honour of sending a censor [Wilhelm Saint-Paul] from Berlin especially to take care of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. When this proved of no avail either the paper was made to undergo dual censorship, since, in addition to the usual procedure, every issue was subjected to a second stage of censorship by the office of Cologne's Regierungspräsident [Karl Heinrich von Gerlach]. But nor was this measure of any avail against the "obdurate malevolence" of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, and at the beginning of 1843 the ministry issued a decree declaring that the *Rheinische Zeitung* must cease publication at the end of the first quarter. Marx immediately resigned as the shareholders wanted to attempt a settlement, but this also came to nothing and the newspaper ceased publication.

His criticism of the deliberations of the Rhine Province Assembly compelled Marx to study questions of material interest. In pursuing that he found himself confronted with

points of view which neither jurisprudence nor philosophy had taken account of. Proceeding from the Hegelian philosophy of law, Marx came to the conclusion that it was not the state, which Hegel had described as the "top of the edifice", but "civil society", which Hegel had regarded with disdain, that was the sphere in which a key to the understanding of the process of the historical development of mankind should be looked for. However, the science of civil society is political economy, and *this* science could not be studied in Germany, it could only be studied thoroughly in England or France.

Therefore, in the summer of 1843, after marrying the daughter of Privy Councillor von Westphalen in Trier (sister of the von Westphalen who later became Prussian Minister of the Interior) Marx moved to Paris, where he devoted himself primarily to studying political economy and the history of the great French Revolution. At the same time he collaborated with Ruge in publishing the [Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher](#), of which, however only one issue was to appear. Expelled from France by Guizot in 1845, he went to Brussels and stayed there, pursuing the same studies, until the outbreak of the February revolution. Just how little he agreed with the commonly accepted version of socialism there even in its most erudite-sounding form, was shown in his critique of Proudhon's major work *Philosophie de la misere*, which appeared in 1847 in Brussels and Paris under the title of [The Poverty of Philosophy](#). In that work can already be found many essential points of the theory which he has now presented in full detail. [The Manifesto of the Communist Party](#), London, 1848, written before the February revolution and adopted by a workers' congress in London, is also substantially his work.

Expelled once again, this time by the Belgian government under the influence of the panic caused by the February revolution Marx returned to Paris at the invitation of the French provisional government. The tidal wave of the revolution pushed all scientific pursuits into the background; what mattered now was to become involved in the movement. After having worked during those first turbulent days against the absurd notions of the agitators, who wanted to organise German workers from France as volunteers to fight for a republic in Germany, Marx went to Cologne with his friends and founded there the [Neue Rheinische Zeitung](#), which appeared until June 1849 and which people on the Rhine still remember well today. The freedom of the press of 1848 was probably nowhere so successfully exploited as it was at that time, in the midst of a Prussian fortress, by that newspaper. After the government had tried in vain to silence the newspaper by persecuting it through the courts -- Marx was twice brought before the assizes for an offence against the press laws and for inciting people to refuse to pay their taxes, and was acquitted on both occasions -- it had to close at the time of the May revolts of 1849 when Marx was expelled on the pretext that he was no longer a Prussian subject, similar pretexts being used to expel the other editors. Marx had therefore to return to Paris, from where he was once again expelled and from where, in the summer of 1849, [about August 26 1849] he went to his present domicile in London.

In London at that time was assembled the entire *fine fleur* [flower] of the refugees from

all the nations of the continent. Revolutionary committees of every kind were formed, combinations, provisional governments *in partibus infidelium*, [literally: in parts inhabited by infidels. The words are added to the title of Roman Catholic bishops appointed to purely nominal dioceses in non-Christian countries; here it means "in exile"] there were quarrels and wrangles of every kind, and the gentlemen concerned no doubt now look back on that period as the most unsuccessful of their lives. Marx remained aloof from all of those intrigues. For a while he continued to produce his *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in the form of a monthly review (Hamburg, 1850), later he withdrew into the British Museum and worked through the immense and as yet for the most part unexamined library there for all that it contained on political economy. At the same time he was a regular contributor to the *New-York Tribune*, acting, until the outbreak of the American Civil War, so to speak, as the editor for European politics of this, the leading Anglo-American newspaper.

The coup d'etat of December 2 induced him to write a pamphlet, [The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte](#), New York, 1852, which is just now being reprinted (Meissner, Hamburg), and will make no small contribution to an understanding of the untenable position into which that same Bonaparte has just got himself. The hero of the coup d'etat is presented here as he really is, stripped of the glory with which his momentary success surrounded him. The philistine who considers his Napoleon III to be the greatest man of the century and is unable himself how this miraculous genius suddenly comes to be making bloomer after bloomer and one political error after the other -- that same philistine can consult the aforementioned work of Marx for his edification.

Although during his whole stay in London Marx chose not to thrust himself to the fore, he was forced by Karl Vogt, after the Italian campaign of 1859, to enter into a polemic, which was brought to an end with Marx's *Herr Vogt* (London, 1860). At about the same time his study of political economy bore its first fruit: [A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy](#), Part One, Berlin, 1859. This instalment contains only the theory of money presented from completely new aspects. The continuation was some time in coming, since the author discovered so much new material in the meantime that he considered it necessary to undertake further studies.

At last, in 1867, there appeared in Hamburg: [Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I](#). This work contains the results of studies to which a whole life was devoted. It is the political economy of the working class, reduced to its scientific formulation. This work is concerned not with rabble-rousing phrasemongering, but with strictly scientific deductions. Whatever one's attitude to socialism, one will at any rate have to acknowledge that in this work it is presented for the first time in a scientific manner, and that it was precisely Germany that accomplished this. Anyone still wishing to do battle with socialism, will have to deal with Marx, and if he succeeds in that then he really does not need to mention the *dei minorum gentium*. ["Gods of a lesser stock;" meaning,

celebrities of lesser stature.]

But there is another point of view from which Marx's book is of interest. It is the first work in which the actual relations existing between capital and labour, in their classical form such as they have reached in England, are described in their entirety and in a clear and graphic fashion. The parliamentary inquiries provided ample material for this, spanning a period of almost forty years and practically unknown even in England, material dealing with the conditions of the workers in almost every branch of industry women's anti children's work, night work, etc.; all this is here made available for the first time. Then there is the history of factory legislation in England which, from its modest beginnings with the first acts of 1802, has now reached the point of limiting working hours in nearly all manufacturing or cottage industries to 60 hours per week for women and young people under the age of 18, and to 39 hours per week for children under 13. From this point of view the book is of the greatest interest for every industrialist.

For many years Marx has been the "best-maligned" of the German writers, and no one will deny that he was unflinching in his retaliation and that all the blows he aimed struck home with a vengeance. But polemics, which he "dealt in" so much, was basically only a means of self-defence for him. In the final analysis his real interest lay with his science, which he has studied and reflected on for twenty-five years with unrivalled conscientiousness, a conscientiousness which has prevented him from presenting his findings to the public in a systematic form until they satisfied him as to their form and content, until he was convinced that he had left no book unread, no objection unconsidered, and that he had examined every point from all its aspects. Original thinkers are very rare in this age of epigones; if, however, a man is not only an original thinker but also disposes over learning unequalled in his subject, then he deserves to be doubly acknowledged.

As one would expect, in addition to his studies Marx is busy with the workers' movement; he is one of the founders of the International Working Men's Association, which has been the centre of so much attention recently and has already shown in more than one place in Europe that it is a force to be reckoned with. We believe that we are not mistaken in saying that in this, at least as far as the workers' movement is concerned, epoch-making organisation the German element -- thanks precisely to Marx -- holds the influential position which is its due.

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