

- 1.1 marxism primarily influenced by revolution, enlightenment
- 1.2 marx tried to do things scientifically
- 1.3 marxism was too radical and didn't catch on except in russia
- 1.4 socialism diff from communism
- 2.1 marxism: societies are based on conflict
- 2.2 marxism: there is a natural progression of societies while there are classes
- 2.3 marxism: communism abolishes classes and is the final form (inevitable)
- 2.4 marxism: human nature will change as society does

## Marx, Marxism, and Socialism

The year 1848 saw not only the tide of revolutionary ferment during the Peoples' Spring but also the appearance of *The Communist Manifesto*. Written by two German exiles, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the *Manifesto* called for a worldwide workers' revolution that would overthrow capitalism and establish a society in which all property would be publicly owned. As discussed in the previous chapter, the revolutions of 1848 soon failed, and socialist or communist ideology was barely a factor in the events of that year. Nevertheless, the *Manifesto* marked the emergence of socialism as a powerful new force for political and economic change in Europe. By the time of Marx's death in 1883, Marxist-based socialist parties were challenging governments all over the Continent. In 1917, communist revolutionaries seized power in Russia, establishing the world's first government based on Marxist ideology, the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)**, or the **Soviet Union**.

Source

The ideas of Marx and the communist ideology, however, were not creatures of 1848; they were tied to the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution. They reflected Enlightenment beliefs in science, historical progress, and the improvement of the human condition. They were inspired by the ideas, symbols, and events of the French Revolution, including the red flag and the slogan "liberty, equality, and fraternity." And the Industrial Revolution, in creating both great wealth and grinding poverty, established the preconditions for a revolution that aspired to create a new society based on material abundance and full equality.

## KARL MARX

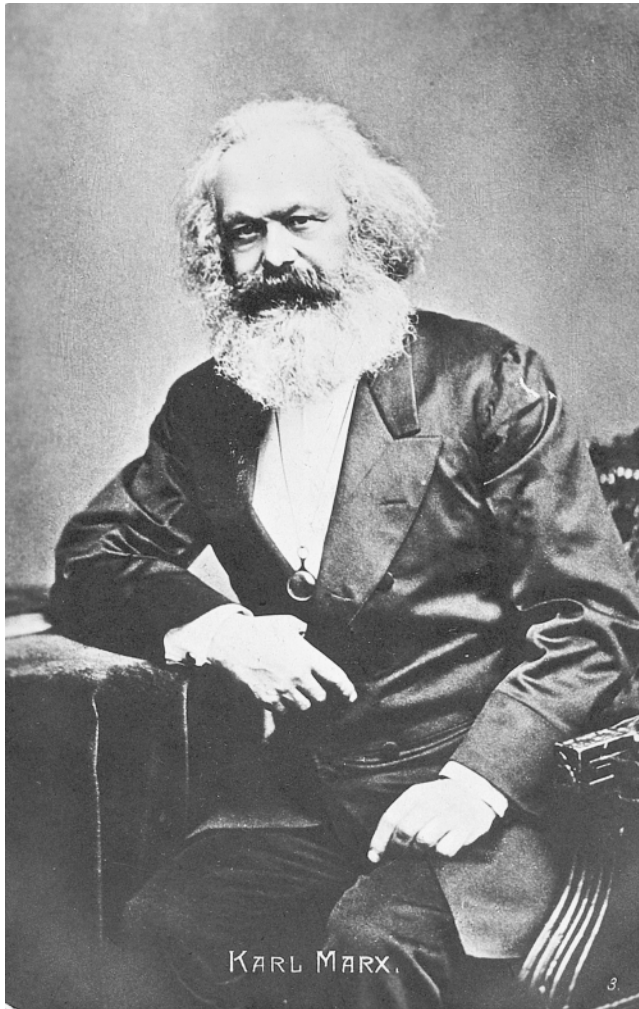
Young Karl Marx was born in 1818, to a middle-class family in Prussia (which is now part of Germany). Both parents were Jewish, although his father converted to Christianity just before Karl was born, and Karl himself was baptized when he was six. His father was a successful lawyer, a man of the Enlightenment, devoted to Kant and Voltaire, and an advocate for constitutionalism in Prussia. The young Marx was educated in Trier, Bonn, and Berlin and received a doctoral degree in philosophy at Jena in 1841. At the university, and especially in Berlin he was exposed to the ideas of the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel and to radical political thought, both of which influenced him greatly.

In 1842, Marx became the editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, which soon became the leading journal in Prussia. But, Prussian authorities soon closed down the publication for being too outspoken. The next year, Marx moved to Paris with his new wife, Jenny, to work for another liberal publication. At that time, Paris was the center of socialist thought and radicalism—and of the more extreme new sect that went by the name of communism. In Paris, Marx met Friedrich Engels, the German-born Manchester industrialist who was writing *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (see chapter 3), and began a collaboration with him that was to last for forty years. The Prussian government prevailed on the French (both conservative monarchies, remember), however, and after only a year and a half in the country, Marx was expelled from France and moved to Brussels.

## THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

In 1847 Marx and Engels joined a secret society called the Communist League, whose aim was “the abolition of the old bourgeois society based on class antagonisms, and the establishment of a new society without classes and without private property.” They agreed to write the program for this fledgling organization, which was published in January 1848 as *The Communist Manifesto*, a twenty-three-page pamphlet meant for a mass audience. Although Marx and Engels later wrote thousands of pages in books and articles, *The Communist Manifesto* remains the best short presentation of the ideas of Marx and the communist vision.

The *Manifesto* opens and closes with dramatic, even frightening, proclamations. The opening lines were particularly prescient, given the events that followed in the months after the document’s publication: “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise



*Karl Marx, London 1875. Courtesy of the David King Collection.*

the specter: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies." Here, Marx and Engels invoke the bastions of conservatism and the old order in Europe—the **Holy Alliance**, the pope, the Russian tsar, and the conservative prime ministers of Austria and France—as well as their noncommunist rivals on the Left, the French radicals. However, in 1848, it was revolution, rather than communism, that haunted Europe, and French statesman François Guizot and the Habsburg dynasty's Metternich were among the first to be swept out of office in that year.

The first section of the *Manifesto* opens with the assertion that “the history of all hitherto existing human society is the history of class struggle.” It goes on to develop in summary fashion the principal notions of **historical materialism**, class conflict, and proletarian revolution at the core of Marxist theory. Marx and Engels argued that history should not be understood as a story of great individuals or of conflict among states but of social classes and their struggles with each other. Each stage in a society’s development, according to Marxist theory, was characterized by conflict between the dominant class and the subordinate class. In capitalism, these classes were the bourgeoisie, consisting of the owners of factories and capital, and the proletariat, who worked in the factories. Over time, conflict between these classes would erupt in a revolution in which the proletariat would overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish a classless, egalitarian society. The *Manifesto* concludes with a call to action for the working classes: “Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Proletarians of all countries, unite!”

The *Communist Manifesto* was first published in London, in German, just a few weeks before the revolutions in Paris and Vienna forced the abdication of King Louis Philippe in France and Emperor Ferdinand in Austria. As the revolutionary movement gained momentum in Austria and Germany, Marx returned to Prussia and began writing again for a newly established liberal journal, advocating constitutional democracy. The June Days in Paris were seen by Marx and Engels as a confirmation of the imminence of revolution. But in Prussia, Marx took a more moderate line. He agreed with Engels to shelve the ideas of the *Manifesto* temporarily and to work instead on behalf of independent workers’ candidates to the Frankfurt assembly, which was to draw up a constitution for a liberal, unified, and democratic Germany. When the conservative reaction set in during the summer of 1848, and the king of Prussia moved against some of the new democratic assemblies, Marx returned to a more radical line, calling for armed resistance against the government. As the revolutionary tide ebbed, Marx was banished once again. He returned to Paris, was duly expelled, and then returned to London.

His involvement in the Peoples’ Spring was the only real revolutionary activism of his life; for the next fifteen years, Marx spent most of his days in research and writing at the British Library in London, where a desk in the reading room is still inscribed with his name. Marx lived in poverty for most of these years, crowded into two small rooms with his wife and four small children. They often subsisted only on bread and potatoes and were once thrown onto the street for nonpayment of rent. Two of his children died. His main source of income was a subsidy from his friend Engels. But he made steady progress on his *magnum opus*, which was

eventually published in German as *Das Kapital* (meaning “capital,” in the sense of money).

In 1864, Marx became politically active again with the London-based International Working Men’s Association, which is usually referred to as the First International (and an early antecedent of what would become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the next century). The International grew in prestige and membership, with about eight hundred thousand adherents by 1869. A number of factors, however, brought about its decline and dissolution. First, the International was split by yet another revolution in Paris, in 1870, that resulted in the establishment in that capital of a short-lived radical revolutionary government called the Paris Commune. Savage fighting between the Communards and troops of the Versailles government prompted the Communards to execute the archbishop of Paris, who was their hostage. With the defeat of the Commune, the government put to death some twenty-five thousand Parisians. Marx and Engels saw this as the first manifestation of a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” the preliminary step toward full communism, and they supported the Paris Commune. But many in the International did not see it that way, and the appalling violence of the experience led others to turn away from the idea of violent revolution.

Another factor that weakened the appeal of the International was increasing possibility of evolutionary reform. The English Reform Bill of 1867, for example, enfranchised part of the (male) urban working class and opened up broad new political opportunities for trade unions. At about the same time, in Germany, a new German Social Democratic Party was established, committed to socialist goals through cooperation with the state, not its overthrow. These evolutionary and reformist trends drew workers away from the more radical orientation of the International.

In the last decade of his life, Marx was beset by what he called “chronic mental depression.” He saw little hope for proletarian revolution in Western Europe. He increasingly looked to a European war to overthrow the Russian autocracy, the mainstay of conservatism and reaction, hoping that this would revive the political energies of the working class. (Something like this did occur long after his death, with World War I leading to the collapse of the Russian autocracy and the accession to power of the Russian communists.) Marx died in 1883 and was buried in Highgate Cemetery in London. At the graveside funeral, Friedrich Engels spoke of Marx’s theoretical contributions, but added that Marx was “before all else a revolutionist.” He was, Engels said, “the best-hated and most calumniated man of his time,” but also “beloved, revered, and mourned by millions of revolutionary fellow-workers.”<sup>1</sup> The inscription on his tomb reads, “Philosophers have so far explained the world in various ways: the point, however, is to change it.”

## MARXIST THEORY

It is difficult to summarize and synthesize the writings and theories of Karl Marx because these are so voluminous and because his ideas are rich, complex, and sometimes dense and even contradictory. But it is important to understand the basic principles of **Marxism** because they were so influential in the development of European socialism and remain important (albeit controversial) today.

The *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* number almost fifty fat volumes and occupy about six feet of library shelf space. The most important of these works for understanding Marxist theory are *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848, and *Das Kapital*, the first volume of which was published in 1867, and the second and third volumes of which Engels completed, edited, and published after Marx's death in 1883. In the early writings, many of them not published until many years later, Marx primarily set forth humanistic critiques of the excesses of capitalism in much the same way that Charles Dickens criticized urban capitalism in his novels. Marx's later work, however, was more historical and systematic, and attempted to create a "science" of history and economics. Marx wanted to create a sort of universal theory for human society, much like Charles Darwin had done for natural history (with his *Origin of Species*, published in 1859). Indeed, Marx considered dedicating the first volume of *Das Kapital* to Darwin.

Marx's "scientific" approach to the study of human society reflected mid-nineteenth-century trends in literature, the arts, and philosophy in which there was a breaking away from romanticism toward realism and materialism. After the failure of the 1848 revolutions, Marx offered a vision that was realistic and hardheaded, not idealistic and utopian. He branded other versions of socialism as utopian (and excoriated many of those in the *Manifesto*); his socialism, on the other hand, was "scientific."

A key component of this aspect of Marxist theory is historical materialism. Marx pointed to the material basis of all things, including historical development. He argued that one can understand history, and one's particular stage in history, by recognizing the means of production in that society: what it is that produces material things of value. So, in a feudal society, which is based mostly on agriculture, land is the means of production, the factor that produces agricultural goods. In a capitalist society, it is capital, which mostly takes the form of factories, that produces material goods. In every society, the owners of the means of production dominate virtually every aspect of society and form the basis of the class structure of that society. In a feudal society, the owners of the means of production are the landowners (usually the nobility); in capitalist society,

the bourgeoisie are the owners of the means of production, and the proletariat is the subordinate class of individuals who work in their factories.

These material and economic relationships constitute the foundation, or *substructure*, of society on which all else is built. The forms of economic production determine the dominant class, and the dominant class controls the economy, political system, social relationships, and culture of that society, all of which are part of the *superstructure* of society. As Marx wrote in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859),

The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and intellectual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence; it is on the contrary their social existence which determines their consciousness.

So, even consciousness and human nature are parts of that superstructure and are, therefore, changeable; when the substructure changes, so too will all aspects of the superstructure, including human consciousness and our notions of human nature. Religion is also part of this superstructure, of course, and is simply a tool of the dominant class to keep the lower classes in their place in this world, with the expectation of a better existence in the hereafter. Religion, in the words of Engels, is the “opiate of the masses.”

Marx saw all history of every society as proceeding on a predetermined path, moving from one stage to another after a clash between dominant and subordinate classes. “The history of all hitherto existing human society is the history of class struggles,” he contended. All societies begin in the primitive-communal stage, move through a system of slavery (the dominant class being the slave owners), then feudalism, then capitalism, and eventually communism, at which point classes would no longer exist. A good deal of Marx’s writing, then, was focused on the capitalist stage and the way capitalism would be overthrown by a proletarian revolution and replaced with communism. Marx believed that this process would occur naturally and inevitably in every society.

Marx believed that the decline of capitalism was already under way in advanced capitalist states like England, France, and Germany. He explained that capitalism, like every previous stage of history, both paved the way for the next stage and sowed the seeds of its own destruction in a process that Marx referred to as the *dialectic*.<sup>2</sup> The capitalist system, through factories and mass production, generates enormous amounts of material goods, enough to provide the basics for everyone, actually, if it weren’t for the inequitable distribution of those goods. The underpaid workers often cannot even afford to purchase the very products that they



assemble. The workers receive in wages only a fraction of the value of the products they produce. The factory owners (the bourgeoisie) keep the rest as “surplus value.” This leads to the accumulation of goods that people cannot afford to buy and to periodic crises of overproduction in capitalist societies that force entrepreneurs to scale back production and lay off workers. This has two consequences: periodic and increasingly severe economic crises and the increasing “immiseration” of the working class as wages decline and more and more workers are unemployed. Economic crises and increasing immiseration foster growing **class consciousness** by the proletariat and the realization that they have nothing to gain from the system. Finally, during one of these economic depressions, workers will simply seize control of factories in a revolution that will displace the bourgeoisie and initiate a new stage in history.

#### BOX 5.1

##### Robert Owen, Karl Marx, and Indiana

In Part III of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels criticize alternative theories of socialism, including “reactionary socialism,” “bourgeois socialism,” and “critical-utopian socialism.” In this last category, they mention Robert Owen (1771–1858), one of the first socialists and also one of the first cotton barons of Manchester and Scotland. Owen was appalled by the condition of workers in the mills, and especially of children. When he purchased four textile factories in New Lanark, Scotland, he tried to create a model community for his employees by prohibiting the employment of very young children, reducing working hours, establishing schools, and providing subsidized housing and factory stores. Owen argued (much as Marx did later) that a person’s environment shapes his or her character, so the way to produce better people, and thus a better society, is to create the right environment.

Owen’s increasingly radical ideas, including his negative views on religion, alienated him from many in Britain, so in 1825 he purchased land in southern Indiana and established a community there, which he called New Harmony. He believed that his utopia could more easily be achieved in the New World than in the Old and that New Harmony would be the seed for other such communities. The community was to be based on cooperative labor, communal upbringing of children, and free education and medical care. The experiment was soon overcome, however, by internal divisions, financial difficulties, and a plethora of opportunists and hangers-on. Within five years, Owen gave up on New Harmony and returned to Britain to work on social reforms and the development of trade unions.

Marx and Engels criticized the work of Owen and other socialists as utopian and as failing to recognize historical dynamics and class struggle sufficiently. They not-so-subtly criticized Owen’s experiments in New Lanark and New Harmony as “pocket editions of the New Jerusalem.”



## THE IDEA OF COMMUNISM

According to Marxist theory, when the workers own the means of production, the entire economic substructure will collapse and re-form, as will the superstructure of society. Social classes will disappear. In the words of the *Manifesto*, “in the place of the old bourgeois society with its classes and class antagonisms, there will be an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” Without the bourgeoisie to skim off surplus value, workers and peasants will benefit from the full fruits of their labor. Capitalism, with its mass production, had provided enough material goods to satisfy the needs of everyone, and with a more equitable distribution of goods under communism, everyone’s basic needs will be satisfied. The governing principle of the new society will be “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs”: Each person will contribute to society what he or she does best and will get whatever he or she needs.

One might object that some greedy people will claim that they need more than they really do (i.e., what if someone needs a fifty-foot luxury yacht?), but the Marxist response to this is that human nature (part of the superstructure) will also have changed. Although capitalism requires human nature to be competitive, aggressive, and greedy (remember Adam Smith’s notion that private vice creates public virtue), communism will foster human values of cooperation and solidarity. Without exploitation of labor and with adequate reward for one’s work, workers will not feel the need to compete in the workplace. According to Marx and Engels, a “new man” will build a new society.

When social classes disappear, so too will poverty, exploitation, resentment, greed, and crime, so that there will be no need for a police force. Indeed, because government simply perpetuates the supremacy of the dominant class, without social classes there will be no need for government at all. The state, according to Engels, will simply “wither away.” As states disappear, so will national boundaries, national conflicts, and wars, and the planet will evolve into a global community of workers joined in solidarity.

Marxist theory, then, was both relentlessly logical and, in the end, broadly appealing. Its rigor and science appealed to many students and intellectuals, and fit with the nineteenth-century ethos of progress, realism, materialism, and science. For workers of all kinds, it offered both an explanation for their plight and an attractive resolution to it. Nevertheless, communism remained a small and isolated piece of political thought throughout the remainder of the century and might have remained a footnote in history were it not for the Russian revolutionaries who revived and adapted it at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## THE LEGACY OF MARXISM

Marxism, as we have seen, was a reaction to and product of the Enlightenment, capitalism, and industrialization. It contributed to our understanding of history and human society, and to the way in which we study those topics. Marx was one of the first social scientists, in terms of his efforts, to apply scientific and systematic methods to the study of society. And, even though modern social scientists have rejected many of his ideas, his notion of **economic determinism** (that the economy determines much else in society) has broad applications in contemporary sociology, political science, economics, and other disciplines.

But Marx's biggest impact, of course, was in the political realm rather than the academic. The writings of Marx and Engels were instrumental in the development of socialism and socialist parties in Europe, especially in the 1870s and 1880s. Although socialism never became much of a force in North America, it was a powerful political movement in Europe and remains so today, in the form of the socialist, democratic socialist, and social democratic political parties that play a major role in virtually all of the European countries.

From the nineteenth century forward, most of these socialist parties were parliamentary parties in the sense that they worked for socialist outcomes and programs within the legal constraints of their political systems. They favored broad-based equality, social welfare, and public ownership of the means of production, while rejecting the proletarian revolution that was intrinsic to Marx's theory. Communism, as such, was not a major political factor, or even much used in political vocabularies, until Russian radicals and revolutionaries resurrected it near the end of the century.

It was in Russia, of course, that Marxism eventually gained a foothold and a platform for expansion. Before 1905, tsarist Russia essentially had no parliament or democratic politics, so there was no room for legal political parties of any kind. The politics that did exist took the form of underground, illegal, or exile political organizations. This was how the first Russian Marxist party was formed, by Russian exiles in Switzerland, in 1883. *Das Kapital* had been translated into Russian just a decade before and attracted the attention of Russian radicals intent on transforming the stultified Russian autocratic state. Marxism seemed to provide both an explanation for Russia's backwardness and a solution to its problems.

Vladimir Lenin participated in the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (the Russian Marxist party) in Brussels and London in 1903, and he soon became the leader of the **Bolshevik** (majority) faction of the group. Russia's involvement in World War I (1914–1918) gradually weakened the Russian autocracy and the Russian

socialism  
vs  
communism

state, and the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917. They proceeded to establish a government based on Marx's ideas, as revised for Russian circumstances by Lenin. The official ideology of the new state was Marxism-**Leninism**. The Bolsheviks became the Communist Party, and the Russian Empire became the Soviet Union. The last words of *The Communist Manifesto*, "Working men of all countries, unite!" were emblazoned on the masthead of every newspaper published in the country (and on Communist Party newspapers all over the world). Communists ruled the country until its collapse in 1991. (All of this will be treated more thoroughly in chapter 10).

After World War II, communism spread into Eastern Europe, China, North Korea, Southeast Asia, and Cuba, and the communist ideology and model became hugely influential throughout the **Third World**. Only eleven people attended Karl Marx's funeral in 1883. By the 1960s, half the world's people lived under governments that ruled in his name.