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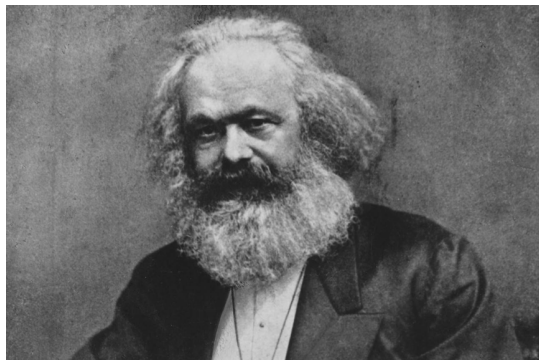
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OPINION | COMMENTARY

# Marx's Apologists Should Be Red in the Face

The bicentennial of the man whose ideas killed untold millions.



Karl Marx in the 1880s. PHOTO: HENRY GUTTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

By *Paul Kengor*

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May 5 marks the bicentennial of Karl Marx, who set the stage with his philosophy for the greatest ideological massacres in history. Or did he?

He did, but deniers still remain. “Only a fool could hold Marx responsible for the Gulag,” writes Francis Wheen in “Karl Marx: A Life” (1999). Stalin, Mao and Kim Il Sung, Mr. Wheen insists, created “bastard creeds,” “wrenched out of context” from Marx’s writings.

Marx has been accused of ambiguity in his writings. That critique is often justified, but not always. In “The Communist Manifesto,” he and Friedrich Engels were quite clear that “the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: abolition of private property.”

“You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property,” they wrote. “But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population.” And this: “In one word, you reproach us with intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend.”

Marx and Engels acknowledged that their views stood undeniably contrary to the “social and political order of things.” Communism seeks to “abolish the present state of things” and represents “the most radical rupture in traditional relations.”

Toward that end, the manifesto offers a 10-point program, including “abolition of property in land,” “a heavy progressive or graduated income tax,” “abolition of all right of inheritance,” “centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly,” “centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state” and the “gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equitable distribution of the population over the country.”

In a preface to their 10 points, Marx and Engels acknowledged their coercive nature: “Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads.” In the close of the Manifesto, Marx said, “The Communists . . . openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.”

They were right about that. Human beings would not give up fundamental liberties without resistance. Seizing property would require a terrible fight, including the use of guns and gulags. Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and a long line of revolutionaries and dictators candidly admitted that force and violence would be necessary.

We're told the philosophy was never the problem—that Stalin was an aberration, as were, presumably, Lenin, Trotsky, Ceausescu, Mao, Pol Pot, Ho Chi Minh, the Kims and the Castros, not to mention the countless thousands of liquidators in the NKVD, the GRU, the KGB, the Red Guard, the Stasi, the Securitate, the Khmer Rouge, and on and on.

Couldn't any of them read? Yes, they could read. They read Marx. The rest is history—ugly, deadly history.

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