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## Karl Marx — The Father of Communism?

*From the print edition of The New American*

In 1853, a British official knocked on the door of a dwelling in a London slum to do a routine check on a political exile, a German socialist named Karl Marx. In his report, we get a glimpse of the man who is regarded as the “Father of Communism,” and whose 200th birthday anniversary fell on May 5.

Marx “lives in one of the worst, therefore one of the cheapest, neighborhoods in London. He occupies two rooms. The room looking out on the street is the parlor, and the bedroom is at the back. There is not one clean or decent piece of furniture in either room, but everything is broken, tattered or torn, with thick dust over everything and the greatest untidiness everywhere.”

He noted that there were “manuscripts, books and newspapers, as well as the children’s toys, odds and ends and his wife’s sewing basket, cups with broken rims, dirty spoons, knives and forks, lamps, an ink-pot, tumblers, some Dutch clay-pipes, tobacco ashes — all in a pile on the same table.”

It is hard to imagine that this was the home of a man who — ostensibly on his own — invented communism, a revolutionary belief that has led to totalitarian regimes and continues to inspire political turmoil in our own country. As we shall see, while Marx is certainly a central figure in the worldwide communist movement that still negatively impacts our world today, he was by no means the originator of “communism.”

And while Marx’s humble circumstances described here would seem to lend credence to the misconception that communism arose from a desperate working class suffering from “capitalist overlords” during the early supposedly dark days of the Industrial Revolution, the reality is far different. Karl Marx, like almost all socialist revolutionaries, sprang from academia and self-proclaimed intellectual secret societies, not from factories. Before getting into the ideological roots of the communist movement that Marx is falsely accredited with starting, let’s explore Karl Marx’s life and circumstances.

### Karl Marx, the Man

Marx was born in Trier, in the German Confederation, on May 5, 1818. His was not a “working-class” family. Both his mother and father were descended from scholars, professionals, and Jewish rabbis. His father, Heinrich, defected from the Jewish faith and joined the Lutherans. This appears to have been more of an economic expediency rather than a religious conversion, as Jews had recently been banned from the practice of law by the Prussian government that then ran the Rhineland region.





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His was a lucrative legal practice, which really began to grow in the 1820s. His income in 1831 placed him in the top five percent of the city. Heinrich Marx was an advocate of several Enlightenment thinkers, including Voltaire, from whose works he would often read aloud to young Karl. When Karl was placed in a university-preparatory school in 1830, it was a privilege only open to about a quarter of the population of the city. A number of the school's graduates later became leftists, perhaps inspired by school directors, some of whom were eventually imprisoned for radical activities.

Marx was sent off to the University of Bonn to follow in his father's profession of law, and while he attended lectures faithfully, he spent much of his time (as is the case with many college students away from their parents' direct supervision) at the Tavern Club, getting intoxicated and fighting. The next year, Marx's father sent him to the University of Berlin, where Marx became a much more serious student — switching his study from law to philosophy.

It was also where Marx was introduced to a host of left-wing radical ideas. He quickly became a devotee of the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Hegel, and his ideas on "dialectics." Put simply, this theory postulated that repeated interaction with a new framework of perception would lead to a new framework, and that the process would repeat itself over and over. As part of his role as a so-called scientist, Marx would borrow heavily from Hegel the concept of *dialectical materialism* and apply it to his belief that communism was the wave of the future. According to Marx, societies before his envisioned communist society were systemically unstable. Thus, the status quo, which he called the *thesis*, would run into a conflicting motion, which he termed the *antithesis*. This collision would result in a *synthesis*, which would become the new *thesis*, and the process would begin again.

An understanding of this belief is important in explaining how the Left continues to advance. They favor a change to the existing order, imposed by government or society upon individuals. The resistance usually leads to a compromise, or a synthesis. Soon, however, those on the left are not satisfied with the new thesis, and they ask for more. Then, after 10 or 20 years, "conservatives" wonder why the Left has achieved all that they had wanted only a few years before. Examples of this tried-and-true method of the Left should be obvious, if one follows any news at all.

Later, when Marx developed what he called "Scientific Socialism," or communism, he would make use of Hegel's philosophy.

His introduction to Hegel came largely from the Young Hegelians, so named more for their ideological views than their age. The term "young" had come into vogue in Europe following the 1830 French Revolution. It referred to a generational transition to a new political radicalism, based largely on nostalgia for the supposedly great days of the 1789 French Revolution. The Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini led a secret society known as Young Italy. There was even a corresponding "Young America" movement at the time.

It was not the only radical influence upon the impressionable young college student. His professor of legal history, Edward Gans, was an advocate of the Saint Simonians, early French socialists, with their ideas of collective rather than private ownership of industry, with economic planning taking the place of the free market. Much of Marx's future *Communist Manifesto* reveals the heavy influence of Gans' writings.

Also at Berlin, Marx was introduced to a militant atheism that sharply shaped his version of socialism the rest of his life. Hegel disciple David Friedrich Strauss, a professor at the liberal theological



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seminary in Tubingen, had written *The Life of Jesus Theologically Examined* in 1835, in which he claimed that the gospel stories were only mythical projections. The book was very much in discussion during Marx's time in Berlin.

Another lecturer at Berlin who greatly influenced Marx was Bruno Bauer, who wrote *Historical Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels* in 1841. In this book, Bauer argued that the gospel accounts of the life of Christ were nothing but pious forgeries, going so far as to claim that Jesus had never even existed. Bauer developed a close relationship with Marx, and they even planned to launch a magazine together devoted to the promotion of atheistic thought, but the project failed to attract a sufficient number of investors.

For Marx, religion was “the opiate of the people,” a phrase he borrowed from his mentor Bauer. By this, he meant that it kept the people sedated so that they would not rise up and change their condition. In his atheism, Marx hated not only Christianity, but the Jewish religion, as well. In fact, he believed the Jews had corrupted Christianity. “What is the worldly cult of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly god? Money,” he later wrote about Jews. Marx once attacked a fellow socialist who disagreed with him with a vicious anti-Semitic and racist tirade. “It is now perfectly clear to me,” he wrote to fellow socialist Friedrich Engels in reference to his opponent, “that, as the shape of his head and the growth of his hair indicates, he is descended from the Negroes who joined in Moses' flight from Egypt.... This union of Jew and German on a Negro base was bound to produce an extraordinary hybrid.”

When Bauer moved on to the University of Bonn, he recruited Marx to join him there as a fellow professor. Marx finished his thesis to obtain a doctorate in philosophy — a thesis in which he proudly proclaimed his hard-core atheistic position by writing, “I hate all the gods!” — but time had expired to present it in Berlin. Instead, he was able to get it accepted at the University of Jena, which did not require a formal defense of one's thesis.

Doctorate in hand by early 1841, Marx began preparing his lectures for Bonn, where a job apparently awaited him due to Bauer's influence, but then Bauer was abruptly dismissed from the university for his radical views. In addition to the attempt to create an atheist magazine, Bauer and Marx had collaborated on a parody mocking Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Evidently the two had decided to rent donkeys and gallop into the village of Godesberg on Easter Sunday. When word of these antics reached the university administration, they were not amused. The action was the principal cause for his firing.

With his hopes for an academic career dashed, Marx attempted to make money as a journalist, writing for the *Rhineland News*. According to Jonathan Sperber, in his *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life*, this brought Marx “into contact with communist ideas.” Moses Hess, an adherent of Henri de Saint-Simon's beliefs in collective ownership, provided some stock for the newspaper, where Marx was employed for a few months as the editor. Marx came into contact with communist ideas from both the contents of the publication itself and the views of its publishers and writers.

Enter Friedrich Engels, who is regarded as the only close friend Marx ever had. The son of a textile manufacturer who owned factories in both Germany and England, Engels came to reject his own father's devout Christianity and his stature as a factory owner. After reading Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, Engels became a follower of Hegel and atheism, and eventually, communism. Even before Engels had even met Marx, he admired the man, traveling to Paris in 1844 (where Marx was then living) for the



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chance to visit him.

Writing an introduction to an edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Stephen Tonsor, a professor at the University of Michigan, wrote of their relationship, “The secret of Friedrich Engels’ long friendship with Marx lay in Engels’ willingness to play a totally subservient role.”

But it was a critical role, as it was in the summer of 1845 that Marx and Engels traveled to England to do research on English political economists at the Manchester Public Library. On their way back to Brussels (Marx had to relocate frequently to keep one step ahead of the authorities, who often jailed those with such subversive ideas), they stopped in London, where Engels introduced Marx to some English and German radicals whom he had met the previous year — members of the League of the Just.

The League of the Just was a secret society comprised of a mixture of working-class and educated radicals, a group that followed the Jacobin radicalism of the French Revolution, adding socialist variants. One member, Karl Schapper, had gotten involved in radical politics while a student at the University of Giesseu in the 1830s, and eventually developed close ties with the Italian radical Mazzini, an organizer of various clandestine subversive groups, such as the Carbonari.

The league told Marx and Engels that their goal was to unite the socialist movements across Europe. Inspired by the thought, Marx soon founded the Communist Committee on Correspondence, but this effort was largely unsuccessful. He continued his sporadic writing for publication, arguing in one article that a true communist society could only become possible following a period of industrialization and capitalism. His means of achieving his socialist utopia was beginning to take shape.

By 1847, Marx had become more deeply involved with the League of the Just in London. The group wanted to transform from a secret society advocating a revolutionary conspiracy to open propaganda. Their slogan of “All Men Are Brothers” was replaced by Schapper’s “Proletarians of all countries unite!” Most importantly for Marx and Engels, the two were commissioned to write *The Communist Manifesto*, as the group had changed its name to the Communist League.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, communist ideas did not originate with Karl Marx. Rather, they were *introduced to him*. So what are the ideological roots of communism, if they do not lie with Marx?

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### **Origins of the Communist Movement**

Early communists drew much of their inspiration from the radicalism of certain philosophers of the Enlightenment and the resulting French Revolution. As Dave Breese notes in his *Seven Men Who Rule the World From the Grave*, Mikhail Gorbachev said in 1989, “The glorious accomplishments of the socialist world revolution were based on two great events in history.” One was obviously the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, but the other cited by Gorbachev was the 1789 French Revolution.

Before the French Revolution, secret societies of all sorts preached radical doctrines that were implemented during the Reign of Terror. Marx’s own father admired French radicals Voltaire and Rousseau, and Marx lifted his famous proclamation “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains” from French radical Jean-Paul Marat, a prominent Jacobin and atheist.

Along with the Jacobins, another secret society that has long been accused of having played an important role in bringing on the French Revolution is the Illuminati. Founded by Adam Weishaupt in



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German Bavaria on May 1, 1776 (ironically an important date for devotees of international communism today), the secret society held to many of the views still held today by radicals of all stripes — establishment of a new world order, abolition of all national governments, abolition of inheritance, abolition of private property, abolition of the family, and abolition of all religions. The ideas are strikingly similar to those found in *The Communist Manifesto*.

The order was officially suppressed in 1785, but its members and their ideas continued to exist. Certainly their ideas were shared by other radical clubs, such as the Jacobins, and it was those ideas that brought on the French Revolution. Once in power, the radicals did their best to uproot society, particularly attacking the Christian religion, attempting to replace it with the worship of “reason.”

No less a personage than George Washington made it clear in a letter written in 1798 that he believed the spirit of Jacobinism and the Illuminati still existed — which would mean that he believed that they were in existence to bring on the French Revolution in 1789.

At the conclusion of the First World War in 1919, an openly communist group calling itself the Spartacist League, which drew its inspiration from the Bolshevik Revolution that had established a communist dictatorship in Russia, made a bold effort to impose a communist regime in Bavaria. The effort failed, but it is noteworthy that the name Spartacus, referencing the leader of a slave revolt during the time of the Roman Empire, was also the code name for Adam Weishaupt, the founder of the Bavarian Illuminati.

Clearly, the 1919 revolutionaries drew a connection between communism and the Illuminati. Perhaps this association inspired Winston Churchill to draw some conclusions of his own, in 1920: “From the days of Spartacus-Weishaupt ... to those of Karl Marx ... this world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence and impossible equality, has been steadily growing. It played a definitely recognizable role in the tragedy of the French Revolution. It has been the mainspring of every subversive movement during the nineteenth century.”

William McIlhany, who died in 2017, was a dogged researcher into these connections, and he contended that in the early 1800s, the Illuminati branched out into other secret societies, such as Filippo Michele Buonarroti’s Sublime Perfect Masters and Louis Auguste Blanqui’s Society of the Seasons. Members of these two organizations also were part of the League of the Just, which hired Marx and Engels to write *The Communist Manifesto*.

## **The Communist Manifesto**

Marx no doubt drew upon multiple sources to produce the tract for which he is most famous, *The Communist Manifesto*, including radical societies such as the Illuminati, but its contents can be seen in the platforms of politicians today, many of whom would protest hotly if called communists, or even just Marxists.

The following are often referred to as the “planks” of the *Manifesto*:

- Abolition of all property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes;
- A heavy progressive or graduated income tax;
- Abolition of all rights of inheritance;



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Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels;

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;

Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State, the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan;

Equal liability of all to labor. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture;

Combining of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equitable distribution of population over the country. [This plank, requiring the forced movement of human beings, was actually attempted in Communist Cambodia by Pol Pot, with genocidal results.]

Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labor in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, etc., etc.

It should be obvious, from even a cursory reading of the planks, that "Marxism" is not just an abstract philosophy of a 19th-century philosopher, but is very much alive and well. The United States adopted a progressive and graduated income tax with the 16th Amendment in 1913, the same year we adopted the fifth plank, a national bank, via creation of the Federal Reserve System. After all, the president at the time, Woodrow Wilson, had as his most trusted advisor a man (Colonel Edward House) who had advocated "Socialism as dreamed of by Karl Marx."

Over the next several years after writing *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels made speeches, organized, and wrote prolifically in an effort to bring about the world socialist revolution. In 1867, Marx and Engels produced *Das Kapital* (or at least the first volume of what was envisioned to be a three-volume work, arguing the "scientific" case for communism), asserting that the communist revolution would occur in the more industrialized nations first.

As Engels wrote in the preface to the 1888 edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, remarking on the similarities and differences between socialism and communism, as the two were seen at the time,

Thus the history of the Manifesto reflects the history of the modern working-class movement....

Yet, when it was written, we could not have called it a socialist manifesto. By Socialists, in 1847, were understood, on the one hand the adherents of the various Utopian systems: Owenites in England, Fourierists in France, both of them already reduced to the position of mere sects, and gradually dying out; on the other hand, the most multifarious social quacks who, by all manner of tinkering, professed to redress, without any danger to capital and profit, all sorts of social grievances, in both cases men outside the working-class movement, and looking rather to the "educated" classes for support. Whatever portion of the working class had become convinced of the insufficiency of mere political revolutions, and had proclaimed the necessity of total social change, called itself Communist. It was a crude, rough-hewn, purely instinctive sort of communism; still, it touched the cardinal point and was powerful enough amongst the working class to produce the Utopian communism of Cabet in France, and of Weitling in Germany. Thus, in 1847, socialism was a middle-class movement, communism a working-class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at



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least, “respectable”; communism was the very opposite. And as our notion, from the very beginning, was that “the emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself,” there could be no doubt as to which of the two names we must take.

There had always been a ruling class, lording it over the unfortunate ruled class, Marx argued. Eventually, however, he believed, there would be an uprising of the workers, or *proletariat*, against the ruling class, which Marx called the *bourgeoisie*, leading to a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Because Marx recognized that human beings were not inclined to share their property with others on the basis of “from each according to his ability to each according to his needs,” he believed there would be an indefinite time period of re-education required.

At some time in the future, the state would then “wither away,” to be replaced by true communism, with no government, in which those who had more would voluntarily share with those who had less.

Marx put it this way: “If the *proletariat* during its contest with the *bourgeoisie* is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class; if, by means of revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and of classes generally, and will thereby have established its own supremacy as a class.”

Any honest, thinking person can quickly spot the fallacy inherent in such an ideology. Would anyone actually expect the immensely powerful “total state” of a communist system to eventually “wither away” and bring forth a classless utopia?

At the 1864 International Workingmen’s Association (often called The First International), Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin listened to Marx’s assertions of the need for a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” and asked, “If the proletariat is ruling, over whom will it rule? ... If there exists a State, there is inevitable domination.... Can it really be that the entire proletariat will stand at the head of the administration? ... There are about 40 million Germans. Will all 40 million really be members of the government?”

As though he were peering into the future and seeing the gulags of the Soviet Union or the Cultural Revolution of Mao, Bakunin presciently said, “They say that such a yoke — dictatorship is a transitional step towards achieving full freedom for the people. And so, in order to free the masses of people, they first have to be enslaved!”

## **The Last Days of Karl Marx**

“The closing years for Karl Marx were sterile, lonely ones,” wrote W. Cleon Skousen in *The Naked Communist*. Two of his daughters committed suicide. His own health declined rapidly, particularly after his longsuffering wife, Jenny, died of cancer in 1881. That was followed by the unexpected death of another daughter. Two months later, he died, on March 18, 1883, while sitting alone in his chair. He was only 64 years old.

He was buried at Highgate Cemetery in London, where his longtime friend Friedrich Engels read a funeral oration to the half-dozen mourners. His remarks were, as expected, quite complimentary of his friend and communist ally.

At the time of his death, it appeared that the socialist tide had ebbed. Yet, to the east, in Russia, there were those who took up his cause and eventually established the first communist state. Others — in



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China, Vietnam, Cuba, and elsewhere — would move to implement his fallacious theories in the next century, and the next.

It is uncertain how the world would be different today had Karl Marx never been born, or if his life had taken a different path, but we can safely say that the world is different today because of him, and not for the better.





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