

Karl Marx Was a Pretty Bad Person

When Karl Marx died in March 1883, only about a dozen people attended his funeral at a cemetery in London, England, including family members. Yet, for more than a century after his death – and even until today – there have been few thinkers whose ideas have been as influential on various aspects of modern world history. Indeed, as some have said, no other faith or belief-system has had such a worldwide impact as Marxism, since the birth of Christianity and the rise of Islam.

Marx's critique of capitalism and capitalist society has shaped much of the social thinking in Western countries that led to the welfare state and extensive government intervention into economic affairs. And it served as the ideological banner that inspired the socialist and communist revolutions of the twentieth century – beginning in Russia in 1917 and still retaining political power today in such countries as Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, and China.

In the name of the Marxian vision of a “new society” and a “new man,” socialist and communist revolutions led to the mass murders, enslavement, torture, and starvation of tens of millions of people around the world. Historians have estimated that in the attempt to make that “new” and “better” socialist world, communist regimes have killed as many as, maybe, 200 million people in the twentieth century.

Marx's Private Life

Karl Marx was born on May 5, 1818, in the Rhineland town of Trier. His parents were Jewish, with a long line of respected rabbis on both sides of the family. But to follow a legal career in the Kingdom of Prussia at the time, Karl Marx's

father converted to Protestantism. Karl's own religious training was limited; at an early age he rejected all belief in a Supreme Being.

After studying for a time in Bonn, he transferred to the University of Berlin to work on a doctoral degree in philosophy. But he was generally a lazy and good-for-nothing student. The money that his father sent to him for tuition at the University was spent on food and drink, with many of his nights spent at coffee houses and taverns getting drunk and arguing about Hegelian philosophy with other students. He finally acquired his doctoral degree by submitting his dissertation to the University of Jena in eastern Germany.

Marx's only real jobs during his lifetime were as occasional reporters for or editors of newspapers and journals most of which usually closed in a short period of time, either because of small readership and limited financial support or political censorship by the governments under which he was living.

His political activities as a writer and activist resulted in his having to move several times, including to Paris and Brussels, finally ending up in London in 1849, where he lived for the rest of his life, with occasional trips back to the European continent.

Though Marx was "middle class" and even "Victorian" in many of his everyday cultural attitudes, this did not stop him from breaking his marriage vows and committing adultery. He had sex enough times with the family maid that she bore him an illegitimate son – and this under the same roof with his wife and his legitimate children (of which he had seven, with only three living to full adulthood).

But he would not allow his illegitimate child to visit their mother in his London house whenever he was at home, and the boy could only enter the house through the kitchen door in the back of the house. In addition, he had his friend, longtime

financial benefactor, and intellectual collaborator, Fredrick Engels, claim parentage of the child so to avoid any social embarrassment falling upon himself due to his infidelity.

As historian Paul Johnson explained in his book, [*Intellectuals*](#) (1988):

In all his researches into the iniquities of British capitalism, he came across many instances of low-paid workers but he never succeeded in unearthing one who was paid literally no wages at all. Yet such a worker did exist, in his own household ... This was Helen Demuth [the life-long family maid]. She got her keep but was paid nothing ... She was a ferociously hard worker, not only cleaning and scrubbing, but managing the family budget ... Marx never paid her a penny ...

In 1849-50 ... [Helen] became Marx's mistress and conceived a child ... Marx refused to acknowledge his responsibility, then or ever, and flatly denied the rumors that he was the father... [The son] was put out to be fostered by a working-class family called Lewis but allowed to visit the Marx household [to see his mother]. He was, however, forbidden to use the front door and obliged to see his mother only in the kitchen.

Marx was terrified that [the boy's] paternity would be discovered and that this would do him fatal damage as a revolutionary leader and seer ... [Marx] persuaded Engels to acknowledge [the boy] privately, as a cover story for family consumption. But Engels ... was not willing to take the secret to the grave. Engels died, of cancer of the throat, on 5 August 1895; unable to speak but unwilling that Eleanor [one of Marx's daughters] should continue to think her father unsullied, he wrote on a slate: 'Freddy [the boy's name] is Marx's son ...

Marx's Mean and Mendacious Manner

In temperament, Marx could be cruel and authoritarian. He treated people with whom he disagreed in a crude and mean way, often ridiculing them in public gatherings. Marx had no hesitation about being a hypocrite; when he wanted something from someone he would flatter them in letters or conversation, but then attack them in nasty language behind their backs to others. He often used racial slurs and insulting words to describe the mannerisms or appearance of his opponents in the socialist movement.

For instance, in an 1862 letter to Frederick Engels, Marx described leading nineteenth-century German socialist, Ferdinand Lassalle, in the following way:

The Jewish Nigger Lassalle ... fortunately departs at the end of this week ... It is now absolutely clear to me that, as both the shape of his head and his hair texture shows – he descends from the Negroes who joined Moses' flight from Egypt (unless his mother or grandmother on the paternal side hybridized with a nigger). Now this combination of Germanness and Jewishness with a primarily Negro substance creates a strange product. The pushiness of the fellow is also nigger-like.

In Marx's mind, the Jew in bourgeois society encapsulated the essence of everything he considered despicable in the capitalist system, and only with the end of the capitalist system would there be an end to most of those unattractive qualities. Here is Marx's conception of the Jewish mind in nineteenth century Europe, from his essay "On the Jewish Question" (1844):

What is the secular basis of Judaism? Practical need, self-interest. What is the worldly cult of the Jew? Hagglng. What is his worldly god? Money! ... Money is the jealous god of

Israel before whom no other god may exist.

Money degrades all the gods of mankind and converts them into commodities ... What is contained abstractly in the Jewish religion – contempt for theory, for art, for history, for man as an end in himself ... The social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Jewishness.

(Marx's caricaturing description of the asserted "Jewish mindset" rings amazingly similar to those that were later written by the Nazi "race-scientists" of the 1930s, who also condemned Jews for the same self-interested pursuit of money and the resulting degenerative influence that they believed Jews had upon the German people.)

Marx was also what some might label as a plagiarist. From 1852 to 1862, Marx worked as a European correspondent for the New York Daily Tribune. Marx found it too burdensome to grind out the expected two articles per week, for which he was relatively well paid. Instead, he spent his time participating in revolutionary intrigues and researching, reading, and writing for what became his famous work, *Das Kapital*.

During Marx's decade of employment with the newspaper, Friedrich Engels wrote about one-third of his articles. Marx's name still appeared on the by-lines.

A Filthy Home and a Personality to Match

Many found Marx's personal appearance and manner off-putting or even revolting. In 1850, a spy for the Prussian police visited Marx's home in London under the pretense of a German revolutionary. The report the spy wrote was shared with the British Ambassador in Berlin. The report said, in part:

[Marx] leads the existence of a Bohemian intellectual.

Washing, grooming and changing his linen are things he does rarely, and he is often drunk. Though he is frequently idle for days on end, he will work day and night with tireless endurance when he has much work to do.

He has no fixed time for going to sleep or waking up. He often stays up all night and then lies down fully clothed on the sofa at midday, and sleeps till evening, untroubled by the whole world coming or going through [his room] ...

There is not one clean and solid piece of furniture. Everything is broken, tattered and torn, with half an inch of dust over everything and the greatest disorder everywhere ...

When you enter Marx's room smoke and tobacco fumes make your eyes water ... Everything is dirty and covered with dust, so that to sit down becomes a hazardous business. Here is a chair with three legs. On another chair the children are playing cooking. This chair happens to have four legs. This is the one that is offered to the visitor, but the children's cooking has not been wiped away and if you sit down you risk a pair of trousers.

Another report on meeting Marx was given by Gustav Techow, a Prussian military officer who had joined the Berlin insurrectionists during the failed revolution of 1848. Techow had to escape to Switzerland after being sentenced and imprisoned for treason. The revolutionary group with whom Techow associated in Switzerland sent him to London and he spent time with Marx.

In a letter to his revolutionary associates, Techow described his impression of Marx, the man and his mind. The picture was of a power-lusting personality who had contempt for both friends and foes:

He gave me the impression of both outstanding intellectual superiority and a most impressive personality. If he had had

as much heart as brain, as much love as hate, I would have gone through fire with him despite the fact that he not only did not hide his contempt for me, but as the end was quite explicit about it ...

I regret, because of our cause, that this man does not have, together with his outstanding intelligence, a noble heart to place at our disposal. I am convinced that everything good in him has been devoured by the most dangerous personal ambitions. He laughs at the fools who repeat after him his proletarian catechism, just as he laughs at [other] communists ... and also at the bourgeoisie ...

Despite all of his assurances to the contrary, perhaps precisely because of them, I left with the impression that personal domination is the end-all of his every activity ... And [Marx considers that] all of his old associates are, despite their considerable talents, well beneath and behind him and should they ever dare to forget that, he will put them back in their places with the impudence worth of a Napoleon.

Playbook for Revolution and Mass Murder

Marx's desire to destroy the institutions of society and his blood-thirst towards enemies in the coming communist revolution was captured in his plan of action, written with Engels, for the Central Committee of the Communist League in March 1850. It reads like the literal playbook for what Vladimir Lenin did in undertaking the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

He stated that the goal of the organization was "the overthrow of the privileged classes," initially in cooperation with the petty and liberal "bourgeois" political parties. Marx warned

that these democratic parties only want to establish a liberal agenda of reduced government spending, more secure private property rights and some welfare programs for the poor. Instead, Marx said,

Its our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far – not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world ...

Our concern cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one.

In the process of overthrowing the liberal democratic order that assumes power following the end of the monarchical rulers, Marx said that the revolutionary proletariat needed to form armed “councils” outside of the democratic government’s authority and control. This is the very method Lenin insisted upon in Russia in the form of “Soviets” after the abdication of the Russian czar in March 1917 and in opposition to the newly established provisional democratic government that replaced the Russian monarchy.

Marx insisted that the feudal lands were not to be turned into peasant-owned private farms. No, instead, they were to be taken over by the state and transformed into collective farms upon which all among rural population will be made to live and work. And all industries had to be nationalized under an increasingly centralized and all-powerful proletarian government, to assure the end of capitalism and “bourgeois” democracy.

In addition, Marx said, the communist leaders must work to

ensure that the immediate revolutionary excitement is not suddenly suppressed after the victory. On the contrary,

... it must be sustained as long as possible. Far from opposing the so-called excesses – instances of popular vengeance against hated individuals or against public buildings with which hateful memories are associated – the workers' party must not only tolerate these actions but must even give them direction.

In other words, Marx was insisting upon fostering a frenzy of “vengeance against hated individuals” that clearly meant terror and mass murder. And this, too, was the signpost that Lenin followed in assuring the triumph of his revolution in Russia.

The Foundation for Real Tragedy

How did Marx become an advocate of mass murder and dictatorship in place of liberal democracy and social peace? What intellectual influences worked on him that lead to his becoming the visionary advocate of what he came to call “scientific socialism” and the belief that the “laws of history” dictated the inevitable doom of capitalism and the inescapable triumph of communism?

And how did his conception of mankind's destiny create the foundation for the human tragedy of “socialism-in-practice” in the twentieth century?

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