

Genius of the modern world – 1. Marx

Bettany Hughes, BBC Channel Four, 16th June 2016

This is the 19th century... ..a pivotal, tumultuous age that witnessed revolutions in industry, technology and politics... ..but also, crucially, in ideas - big, bold, dangerous ideas that would bring the world as we know it kicking and screaming into being.

Three great thinkers led the way - Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud.

They lived in a time when old certainties were breaking down, regimes were overthrown by mass uprisings, science was undermining religious authority. Their challenge was to figure out what makes us human in a fast-evolving world.

Emigres, recluses, enemies of the state - **these outsiders challenged the existential crisis of their age head-on**. Little was out of bounds. They had an absolute commitment to identify the forces controlling our lives. **Their weapon - the power of their minds**.

Their search drove them to extremes, into poverty, into madness. Yet their penetrating, often contentious, ways of seeing the world **still shape how we make sense of our lives today**.

Arise, ye starvelings, from your slumbers
Arise, ye criminals, of want
For reason in revolt now thunders
And at last ends the age of cant...

Of all the great historical figures buried in Highgate Cemetery, there's one who continues to divide opinion like no other.

For those who come here year in, year out to mark the day of his death, Karl Marx is a keenly intelligent analyst of capitalism, a prophet of human emancipation. But for others, who've actually attacked this monument with paints, with hacksaws, even with explosives, he's a maligned progenitor of totalitarian regimes, a man responsible for the death of millions.

Love him or loathe him, what you cannot dispute is that Karl Marx dramatically transformed our world. Within 70 years of his death, one third of the world's population was ruled by governments claiming Marxism as their doctrine.

Marxist ideology claimed to be liberating but led to dreadful suffering and brought superpowers to the brink of Armageddon.

John Kennedy

It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States.

Communism was widely discredited, precipitating its fall in the 1980s and '90s. But economic crisis and social unrest have put Marx's ideas back in the spotlight.

I want to start at the beginning, not to study Marx with the hindsight of history, but to try to understand what motivated him in the context of his own times, to discover how a man, whose life was plagued with insecurities, with failure, with tragedy, would end up generating one of the most influential **ideologies** in the human experience.

We tend to think of Marx as a rather imposing, greybeard figure staring out sternly from Soviet propaganda, but this early image of the young Marx - dashing, dapper, privileged - offers a rather different story.

His birthplace, Trier, was an elegant Rhineland town, now part of modern Germany. Born in 1818 to upwardly mobile parents in this handsome building, Marx's childhood was, on the face of it, pretty idyllic and thoroughly bourgeois.

But one day, when Marx was just 15, his father, Heinrich, met with a group of respected public figures here at Trier's Casino Club. After too much to drink, some of them began pounding the tables raucously and singing songs that celebrated the virtues of the great revolution that swept through neighbouring France.

A Prussian army officer witnessed the scene and reported back. Two of Marx's schoolteachers, who were also in the room, were promptly sacked. Others were charged with subversion and Marx's father was tarnished with the disgrace. The casino was put under surveillance.

Because under the surface calm of the town there was tension. Not long before Karl's birth, Trier had been under Napoleonic control, which meant that people like Karl's father had got a taste of the French revolutionary principles of individual liberty and equality.

Under French law, Heinrich had been free to train as a lawyer, but he was Jewish and, once the more autocratic Prussians were in control, they imposed civil restrictions on all Jews. Now, in order to keep practising his profession, he had to convert to Christianity.

Marx was growing up in a period when questions of political authority and freedom of expression were highly contested, when ruling classes across Europe feared their people would rise up and overthrow them.

The struggle between the ideals of the French Revolution and the intractable conservatives of the Prussian State would inspire and motivate Marx. And from an early age, it was pretty clear where his allegiance lay.

When he was 17, Marx was packed off down the Moselle River to study law at Bonn University. There was clearly something of the hell-raiser about the teenage Marx. He quickly became co-president of the Trier Tavern Club - basically a bunch of middle-class bad boys. After one night of boozy brawling, Marx was banged up in the local cells for a day, but there was more to come.

Student life was divided along class and political lines to the point of conflict. The liberal Trier Tavern boys attracted the attention of a gang of aristocratic cadets. Those cadets forced them to kneel down and swear their allegiance to the Prussian aristocracy, and the confrontations escalated.

At one point, Marx ended up in a dual with a sabre wound above his eye - a scar which this young scrapper wore as a badge of honour. Enough, it seems, was enough for Marx's father. Heinrich transferred Karl to the more studious environment of Berlin University. Yet even here, Marx found other distractions.

Marx met a group of Bohemian students and lecturers who loved to discuss the philosophies of the day late into the night. He grew a beard and joined the Young Hegelians, A group obsessed with the theories of a university professor who'd recently died. Georg Hegel.

Dr Hannah Dawson

Marx describes his first encounter with Hegel as one of a completely extraordinary moment. He says that when he read Hegel it was like the curtain had fallen from his eyes.

And what is it about Hegel? What's particularly exciting about his ideas?

Berlin is awash with Hegelian ideas but perhaps the most important idea of Hegel's that they are completely captivated by is the idea of history as this gradual unfolding of freedom and of reason. And this gradual dialectic, as he called it, was made manifest most magnificently in the French Revolution when, of course, you had a literal cracking open of freedom and of reason.

I suppose it is totally thrilling, this, isn't it? Because you're being told that you're part of a big historical story and that gives you a big historical -and philosophical canvas to paint on.

That's right. And I think that Marx does absolutely see himself as kind of standing, as it were, towards the end of history that had begun with the ancient philosophers, who had talked about the way in which one's soul could only find... ..perfection if it was properly embedded in the community.

And do they think that Hegel's got it absolutely right? Or is there a sense there's still work to do?

There is absolutely still work to do. So they think that while Hegel had got, in his vision, had got part of the way, that what they want to do is bring a total revolution rather than just reform.

They were operating in a world where the nobility, the privileged, the aristocracy were still very much in charge and they were pushing up against a great kind of wall of privilege and tradition.

Marx and the Young Hegelians believed that the single 'greatest obstacle to human progress was religion.' So they set out to critique and to attack it.

Now, you've got to think how subversive this is. Some said that the gospels of the New Testament were just folk tales, not divine historical truth. That's really shocking.

Others suggested that God was an illusion and that as humans we'd taken the best of our powers and

projected them onto a kind of fantastical fabricated being who embodied our finest qualities.

The Young Hegelians believed that this existential separation, brought about by religion, limited our human potential. Only by abandoning its delusions could we truly flourish.

Of course, the group's iconoclastic - many would say blasphemous - ideas had wider implications. The relationship between Church and state **was tight to the point of total union**. Criticism of religion was tantamount to criticism of Prussia.

Marx had aspired to an academic career but the Prussian authorities would not tolerate subversives in their universities. So he had to find another platform for his ideas. His outlet would be the hot, rapidly expanding business of journalism.

Marx thought that the written word had transformative power. And he became editor of the Rhineland News, based in Cologne. A mouthpiece for liberal entrepreneurs pushing for constitutional reform. He made an immediate impact. Nicknamed "the Moor" because of his dark complexion and thick mane of hair and beard, it seems he was impetuous, passionate, with a boundless energy and self-confidence.

Although some did say he was vindictive and an intellectual bully. But whatever his shortcomings, his drive and acuity got the job done. Under his tenure, circulation of the paper rose dramatically. Marx's journalism took up the cause of his nouveau riche paymasters and attacked the old political elite.

Here's a typical example of his lacerating style. It's polemic, laced with a kind of withering sarcasm.

"The aristocracy cannot be given the form of law because they are formations of lawlessness. No-one's action ceases to be wrongful because it's his custom, just as the bandit son of a robber is not exonerated because banditry is a family idiosyncrasy."

It's clever, cutting stuff.

Marx gained notoriety through his thinly veiled attacks on the Prussian ruling classes. Journalism also stimulated a new interest at the other end of the social scale.

In 1842, Marx reported on the conditions of lower class vine growers back in his home region. A dramatic drop in profits had plunged them into poverty. There's an unsettling poem written at the time that describes how, unable to feed their children, the vine growers were driven to suicide.

"Now the wine's blessing won't run in your barrel

"You won't sing a song any more when all is covered with snow."

The workers blamed the authorities for opening up the market to greater competition. The authorities' response was that a protected market before had artificially inflated prices.

These were men and women who were really struggling. Officially they were no longer allowed to collect firewood for free because it was being consumed in such vast quantities by the new factories. They were caught in a pincer movement of progress.

Marx saw that the vine growers were losing what little power they had to determine their own futures. His journalism opened his eyes to the complex forces governing our everyday lives. He thought it should be possible, with scientific precision, to work out what these relations are.

Just listen to what he wrote.

"This can be determined with almost the same certainty as a chemist determines under which external conditions "given substances will form a compound."

A clinical deconstruction of the nature of society was just the sort of thing the Prussian authorities feared. Marx's provocations had ruffled the feathers of those in power once too often. His paper was shut down.

So we should picture Marx, aged just 25, angry, ambitious, criticised. Censured in Prussia, he resolved to travel to the fulcrum of game-changing, provocative ideas. The origin of those protest songs that his father once sang. The rallying point of revolution.

Marx's intellectual horizons expanded exponentially here. The rebellious fervour of the French Revolution had never really evaporated and the streets and bars were home to radical thinkers whose ideas threatened to turn society upside down. There were libertarian anarchists who declared that all property was theft, utopian socialists who sought common ownership of the means of production, and communists who advocated the creation of workers' co-operatives known as communes.

'In just over a year of frenetic discussion and writing, the shape of Marx's own agitating philosophy would 'start to form, and this was a new chapter in more ways than one.

He'd arrived with his childhood sweetheart and now wife, Jenny von Westphalen. The two had enjoyed the trappings of a well-to-do lifestyle back in Trier. She was the daughter of a baron and her father had introduced Marx to liberal thinkers and writers like Shakespeare. But here in Paris they had to turn their back on creature comforts and salon society. The newlyweds lodged here on Rue Vaneau with friends. And it was from here that Marx continued to agitate for change in Prussia.'

Marx helped launch an ambitious publication that encouraged collaboration between French and Prussian radicals. Actually, there was only ever one edition because of the difficulty partly of smuggling it into Prussia. But the early essays that Marx wrote for this failed publication are both historic gold and pivotal in the evolution of his ideas. In these essays, we can start to piece together Marx's quest to identify exactly what it is that limits humanity's freedom. He's starting to take a different course from the Young Hegelians.

Rather than seeing religion as the root cause of our problems, he describes it **simply as** "the opium of the people". **Just a painkiller** for something much more deep-seated. The true source of our woes, as he saw it, was the way that society was organised to supply our material needs. The capitalist economy.

Professor Jonathan Wolff

There have been decades of discussion of religion in Germany. Marx thinks that is relatively superficial, understanding that really the world we live in is the world of work, the world of productivity and it's this that affects us and the way that our lives go.

There's a phrase that he uses which is our species-essence, and I've never quite understood it. Can you explain that to me?

The species-essence for Marx primarily is about the way in which we human beings differ from other animals. And the key idea for Marx is that human beings are essentially productive beings. Other animals - bees, beavers - do produce, but not like us. Bees can only produce one thing, beavers produce one thing. We can produce anything.

Marx thinks that all human beings are creative in the way we produce but the tragedy of capitalism is workers in a factory, they're simply engaging in repetitive tasks. They're not doing the things human beings ought to be doing.

Now, Marx uses this notion of alienation from our species-essence to explain not only the way that the individual worker is sort of crushed and chained to the production line but also the way in which we human beings are together collectively dominated by the world. Even the capitalist, actually, is dominated. If a capitalist wanted to cut the working day, that probably wouldn't be possible because competitors would exploit workers just as much as before, they would lose profit and go out of business.

So, in this way, Marx said under capitalism we become playthings of alien forces. It's almost like a monster that we've created. It's not something we control.

Now that Marx saw the world in a different way, he set out to expose its workings. With his ferocious intellect and **arguably too the bold conviction of youth**, he resolved to end degrading injustice and to **reunite people with their true innate being**.

But Marx's **philosophical mission** would be beset by personal battles. Marx suffered bad health, in particular a painful skin condition. New research suggests that what he referred to as "boils" was in fact something far more serious.

Professor Sam Shuster

When I read an account of his life, it was quite an interesting book, but it said he suffered really quite badly from a skin complaint. Naturally I pricked up my ears and they said that he couldn't find a place to rest, he couldn't lie down, he couldn't walk. For three weeks at one point he was totally unable to work, totally unable to think.

I thought, the skin complaint they said he was suffering from was just boils. Well, boils are a bit of a nuisance but they're not that bad. And I looked at Marx's letters over a period of about nine years. Bit tedious. But you could see from these letters he gets them in the groin, he gets them around the anus. And then, very diagnostically, under the arms.

Now, this distribution only occurs in one disease. It's a thing called hidradenitis suppurativa.

Right.

A rather terrible, unpronounceable name.

It sounds as though it's very debilitating physically.

Absolutely. Here's, for example, an armpit. It's scarred where there's been repeated episodes. It never really stands still.

Do we know when he developed this?

The first traces I found in the letters was in his early 40s. We know it starts in the early 20s, the average age is about 21 or 22.

So do we think this affected him psychologically?

When the skin is involved, our self-image changes. It produces a self-loathing. And Marx had this by the gallon. In a letter here, he writes, "I took a sharp razor and lanced the cur myself."

Yeah.

How can you do that? He regarded his disease as foreign to him.

Some have suggested that this condition would've added to Marx's sense of alienation. The new evidence certainly reminds us that towering thinkers also live a flesh-and-blood existence. In 1844, Marx became a father for the first time. Jenny took their newborn daughter to see her family in Trier and she was obviously genuinely worried about leaving her husband alone in a place renowned for its sexual licence. She wrote anxiously of the real menace of unfaithfulness. The seductions and attractions of a capital city.

Marx did arrange a rendezvous, but this was purely a meeting of minds. An appointment with a radical writer who'd contributed to Marx's failed journal - Friedrich Engels.

Engels was also from a bourgeois Prussian family. Just two years younger than Marx, tall and handsome.

Both of them had mixed with a young Hegelian crowd and had come to similar views on capitalism. It seems that the friendship was lubricated by an enthusiastic consumption of red wine. The two were inseparable for 10 days. Talking late into the night and railing against social, political, economic injustice. What Engels called the sheer misery and material squalor of industrial life.

Engels readily conceded that Marx was by far the cleverer of the two. But he had something that Marx lacked. Engels had been leading a kind of double life. Over the last two years, his day job had been working for his father's textile business in industrial Manchester. So he had first-hand experience of the engine room of capitalism.

Engels' lover was an Irish immigrant factory worker called Mary Burns. She'd shown him the slum districts of Manchester and so he'd witnessed the poverty of the urban classes in ways that **thesis-bound Marx** never had. As collaborators and friends, their joint mission was to open people's eyes to what they judged to be the devastating realities of capitalism.

But Paris turned out not to be a safe haven. All Marx's **fevered writing** and those **boozy conversations** with other agitators had attracted attention. There were Prussian spies in Paris and they alerted the French authorities to the potential danger that Marx's ideas posed. He was ordered out of the country.

In January 1845, Marx fled Paris in haste by postal coach... ..leaving Jenny behind with their baby daughter to frantically pack up all their belongings.

Neighbouring Brussels accepted political refugees and Marx applied for asylum. He was granted temporary residence, but on the strict understanding that he sign a written pledge assuring that he wouldn't stir up dissent with his writing.

In Brussels, Marx still feared the long arm of the Prussian authorities. And so to avoid potential extradition, he renounced his Prussian citizenship. Marx had been marginalised. He was stateless and virtually penniless, but he clearly had no intention of taking all this lying down. Despite the stringent conditions of his residency, he was about to ramp up his political activity.

Marx reunited with Engels and, together, they became part of the clandestine world of the communists. Outraged at being exploited by the ruling classes, they'd set up secret groups right across Europe.

These working-class activists wanted to abolish private property and to create a revolutionary society.

We know that Marx and Engels hung out here with communists in what was once a smoky bar and has now, rather ironically, been transformed into an elegant bourgeois bistro.

The men that Marx met here, he believed to be the very foot soldiers of revolutionary change. Change which, and this is a critical shift, Marx now actively sought to effect himself. As he wrote, "Philosophers have only interpreted the world. "The point is to change it."

He and Engels matched their words with deeds and began to coordinate a network of communists across Europe from their base in Brussels. But they didn't stop theorising. As ever, Marx was determined to solve big problems with big ideas and with the power of the written word.

Marx and Engels are working furiously together here. What's the quantum shift in their thinking?

Professor Angie Hobbs

The quantum shift is they now see that it's economic organisations and the way they change throughout history, THAT'S what drives history forward. That's the motor. And they see the way society organises itself economically changing according to new technological developments. And they trace movements from a very early, cooperative - as they see it - a cooperative society in which people live in a communal fashion through slave-owning societies on into medieval feudalism with aristocratic landowners and their serfs, and then the Industrial Revolution and the birth of capitalism.

So, this is history as they see it.

Mm.

What's the issue here? I mean, what's the problem with this?

Well, the problem is that for most of human history, there have been haves and have-nots. And that most humans have lost out to the people who own the property and who own the means of production. And he thinks the problem is getting even worse under capitalism.

So, economics is important, class is also very important to them -both at this time, isn't it?

Hugely. They see capitalism necessarily leading to antagonisms between particularly the bourgeois capitalist property-owning class and the proletariat who sell their labour - because he says capitalism is intrinsically exploitative.

And more than this, he thinks that law, religion, politics, culture, the arts generally, they're all there to keep the ruling classes in power and in place. They are a superstructure, an ideology to maintain the status quo. And he thinks that part of his job is to strip the mask away so people can see that they've been had.

Marx believed that capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction. All that he had to do was to awaken what he called the proletariat - the working classes of industrial society - to their revolutionary role, to bring about **communism, the final stage of history**, when all class divisions would be eradicated.

By 1847, events in Europe were on his side. A revolutionary storm had been brewing. The failure of wheat and potato crops across Europe brought famine, food riots and political unrest. So when Marx and Engels were commissioned to write a *Profession of Faith* by the Communist League, they had everything to play for, and they didn't hold back.

In January 1848, Marx and Engels hurried to meet their tight deadline. Written with immense fluency in just over two weeks in a fug of cheap cigar smoke, they produced this little book.

This is the *Communist Manifesto*. It's just 30 pages long, but in those pages is some of the most **infamous** and influential political propaganda of all-time.

A lot of people think this is just going to be a kind of hatchet job on capitalism, but he's actually full of praise for the bourgeoisie. And he says that, "it has accomplished wonders far surpassing "Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals". That sounds like a great celebration of the bourgeoisie -and of capitalism, in a way.

Dr Peter Lamb

It is. He's actually saying that without the advances and the things that capitalism can bring, communist society cannot work. Because communist society needs an abundance of goods that

everybody can take advantage of. And he actually says at one point just before that quote, he says, "the bourgeoisie has got a revolutionary role in history".

And he's really gingering up the language. Because some of those phrases, "the spectre of communism is haunting Europe" and, "all that's solid melts into air" - they're incredibly memorable, aren't they?

Yeah.

The bourgeoisie creates its own grave-diggers." You know, he's a master of prose, really. He knew exactly what he was doing.

And one thing that troubles me is when ideas become ideologies. And that feels like that's what's happening here. There's a kind of calcification of ideas, -so it become quite a dangerous document.

Yeah. Just as he said that the bourgeoisie was like a sorcerer that's created something that he can't actually control any more, perhaps he's doing that. He's creating something that he...that he can't control any more, especially when he's gone.

Despite the radical fervour and sheer rhetorical power of the manifesto, it went almost unnoticed. The ink was still wet on the first German edition when revolts erupted across Europe. Here in Paris, workers barricaded the streets. After three days of frenzied fighting, they overthrew the monarchy and proclaimed a republic.

You can just imagine the atmosphere of expectation. Something equivalent perhaps to the experience of the Arab Spring. The world changing in front of your eyes. People power overturning the status quo. A domino line of radicalism.

The Belgian authorities, fearing an uprising, gave Marx just 24 hours to clear out. He needed a little encouragement to leave and to take up a lead role with the revolutionaries. But the insurrections quickly collapsed in chaos. In France, an attempt by the new Republican government to quell a workers' protest spiralled out of control. Over 10,000 died or were injured. And across Europe, the old ruling classes quickly re-established control.

Marx ended up in Prussia, hoping to ferment revolution. But he was arrested, put on trial for inciting rebellion and narrowly escaped prison.

There was just one haven left. A relatively stable kingdom that was still prepared to take on refugees with radical views. In August 1849, Marx set sail for England.

Arriving here aged 32, Marx consoled himself that the uprisings of 1848 had failed because the historical conditions weren't yet right for change. The ultimate revolution that his philosophical theories predicted was yet to come. But life in London would offer little else in the way of solace. With over two million inhabitants, this challenging, unforgiving, dystopian metropolis was the biggest city in the world. Even back then, the cost of living in London was crushingly expensive.

Marx, Jenny and his four children could only afford to live in what were then the slums of Soho, alongside other immigrants in cramped, debasing conditions. Jenny actually wrote that it cost more to rent one room here for a week than the biggest house in Germany for a month.

In London, Marx set out to write a definitive account of the driving forces of capitalism. But his plans were complicated by the turmoil of his personal life, which was still subject to Prussian surveillance. A spy who'd managed to gain access to Marx's home described the household as squalid and chaotic.

"Washing, grooming, and changing his linen are things he does rarely and he often gets drunk. Though often idle for days on end, he will work day and night with tireless endurance. He has no fixed time for going to sleep and waking and he often stays up all night and then lies fully clothed on the sofa at midday."

Marx's all-consuming theorising and political agitating dragged his family down. Unemployed and destitute, they pawned everything and ran up tabs with local businesses while Jenny went to beg her parents for a hand-out. And then we're told Marx made things worse. Living with the family was a feisty woman called Helene - she helped around the house, she was a fellow radical and a friend. But Marx slept with her and fathered an illegitimate son at the same time that Jenny was pregnant again. This was not Marx's finest hour.

Rachel Holmes (Marx Family Biographer)

Jenny was furious. They'd all known each other for a long time, so clearly, there is some drama and

upset that goes on. And it is really, really heavy going. Marx is sending notes to Engels, saying, "I can't go home, because it's an absolute storm "and everybody is really upset and Jenny is furious. "Please come and have a drink with me in the pub on Great Russell Street."

You know, he has slept with somebody who is not his wife. She's pregnant. This is a terrible stigma at the time. It's tough now, it was really, really tough in the middle of the 19th century.

Well, is it? Because they are quite conventionally unconventional and at that time, illegitimacy - particularly in the circles that they were moving in politically and socially - isn't such a stigma, but at the same time, quite a lot of the evidence points towards the fact that Jenny wanted it covered up.

So who takes responsibility for all this?

Who makes it OK is Engels. He even lets it be understood that he is the father. And Engels take the rap for his best friend.

What do you think this incident tells us about Marx?

Marx is a man! And ultimately, also a Victorian patriarch - a man like any other that needs to be understood in context. And all heroes have their flaws. Throughout his troubles, Marx was always propped up by Engels.

He compromised his revolutionary ambitions and returned to his father's factory - somewhat paradoxically, to bankroll Marx's theorising.

But despite this, Marx's family life was mired in tragedy. Three of his children died in infancy. The nadir was the death of Marx's eight-year-old son, Edgar, the apple of his eye, who died in his father's arms on Good Friday, 1855.

When Edgar's body was lowered into his grave, other mourners thought that Marx was so distraught, he was actually on the brink of throwing himself in. But after the heartbreak came a modest reprieve. Jenny received two inheritances, allowing them to move to the relative prosperity of the suburbs.

Yet even here, Marx was still plagued by debt - much of it self-inflicted, **as he lavished money trying to maintain a respectable middle-class lifestyle with private education and dancing lessons for his girls.** You do wonder just how much he was trying to replicate the bourgeois, comfortable world that he'd been born into.

By the time Marx turned 40, he was a regular at the new Reading Room of the British Museum. Here, he spent 12 hours a day gathering evidence for his definitive critique of capitalism, *Das Kapital*.

By the 1860s, Britain was the world's industrial powerhouse. The UK population had doubled since the turn of the century, with terrible social impact. Sifting through public records, Marx would find what he was looking for - traces of the destructive consequences of rampant capitalism.

Paul Mason

*This is a Children's Commission report, 1863, so exactly at the right time for Marx to be writing *Kapital*. And there's a nine-year-old kid, working a 15-hour day. Marx looks at that and he understands that in that story lies the whole secret of how this system works. The secret of capitalism is this idea of surplus value.*

Where does profit come from? Marx says it comes from work. When this little boy turns up to work, everything that's gone into getting him there - the food, the clothing, maybe the education, certainly the housing - cost some money and his labour is worth all of that.

But the amount of work he does during that working day, that 15-hour working day, is way above what he needs to and the difference between what it should take, what his work is really worth, and what he's actually working, is a surplus. That's where profit comes from and we know, actually, that he is trawling through this stuff for these acute examples of exploitation, because he wants to shove the concept of exploitation right down the throats of mainstream economics.

Mainstream economics - then and today - doesn't even accept that exploitation exists. When a factory falls on the head of a bunch of Bangladeshi garment workers, that's an accident. To Marx, it's one of the most fundamental laws of capitalism, that the capitalist will extract the maximum amount of surplus value that they can.

Where's this system heading? What does he think the future of capitalism is?

Marx isn't predicting the imminent doom of capitalism. He understands that it is a fully functioning system. But he identifies the fragility that in this system based on profit, where all the profit is extracted from the work of people, then you hit limits. The first limit you hit is the working day, because you can't extend the working day forever. You must innovate. You must create machines and the machines squeeze the worker more and more out of the production process, then the very source of all the profit is squeezed into a tiny area, so you get repeated crises of profitability.

People in Marx's time were asking whose fault was it that X, Y, Z company went bust? Marx says it's not anybody's fault. It's the fault of the profit system, which is based on the exploitation of workers and the exploitation of workers cannot go on producing the profit at the rate it is required to expand the system forever.

Marx believed there were too many contradictions within the capitalist system for it to survive. The cycle of boom and bust and expansion and recession meant that it was inherently unstable.

After 16 years, Das Kapital Volume I was finally finished in 1867. But it didn't have the impact that Marx had hoped for. Engels actually ghost-wrote some reviews, to try to drum up interest on the Continent.

Now Marx suspected that the indifferent response was a conspiracy of silence orchestrated by his enemies, but I think it's probably much more straightforward than that. Kapital is really long and although some of the writing is very vivid, much of it is dense and demanding and reading this cover-to-cover is a serious commitment.

Also, Europe was experiencing economic growth, thanks largely to expanding global markets. While the British government was passing laws to improve working conditions, the crisis of capitalism - the touchpaper of revolution - showed no sign of arriving.

This seems to me to be **one of the great ironies of Marx's life. Marx had identified the need for change but then things did change at such an exponentially rapid rate that by the time he'd worked out a coherent solution to society's problems, the world had already moved on - leaving him behind.**

With the help of a generous pension from Engels, Marx gradually settled into comfortable, middle-class respectability. He spent his time with his beloved grandchildren and enjoyed family walks here on Hampstead Heath.

Marx even admits to speculation on the stock market, **which of course, you could argue is wildly hypocritical and at the very least is probably a sign that he thought capitalism was here to stay.** In his 60s, he became crippled by worsening health and heartbroken by the death of his wife Jenny. Knowing he was nearing his end, he had this photograph taken as a lasting memory for his daughters, before symbolically shaving off his trademark beard and hair.

When Marx finally died in March 1883, a photograph of his father, who had strived to give his son a good start in life, was found in the breast pocket of his jacket and it was buried together with Marx in a simple grave here in a remote corner of Highgate Cemetery.

Engels paid for Marx's original burial plot. Just 11 mourners attended the funeral. Engels' words by Marx's graveside - "His name and work will endure through the ages" - must have seemed more optimistic than prophetic, but as it turned out, he was absolutely right.

Marx's ideas were codified and clarified by Engels, promoting Marx as a great thinker. Socialist movements across the world started to translate Marx's persuasive works. His ideas began to gain momentum. Finally, in one country, a Communist revolution succeeded.

Recorded voice.

'A human sea, joyous and wrathful, overflowed out of the city streets 'in mighty demonstrations. The revolutionary fire of the masses 'was finally unleashed.'

But it defied all Marxist logic, because the conditions for change - a highly developed capitalist economy - had barely emerged. Russian communism had been kick-started by the Bolshevik Revolution in Moscow in 1917 and seven decades later, it became crashing down here with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Revolution wasn't just powered by the proletariat as Karl Marx had predicted, but by a whole range of radicals and agitators. Top-down revolutionaries, notably Stalin, claimed to be disciples of Marx and his theories.

But their authoritarian ideologies crushed the liberty that Marx cherished. Paradoxically, he would have been

condemned by their regimes. Their distorted appropriation of Marx is demonstrated by recent analysis of one famous text - *The German Ideology*.

Professor Terrell Carver

Well, we've got Engels' handwriting here and he had quite good handwriting. Marx's handwriting was absolutely terrible. And so, we can tell from this page that Marx is making insertions into Engels' draft.

And what's it actually aiming to do? What are they working on here?

Well, from the draft by Engels, we get this story about communist society - will it allow people to do what they want? Because they would not be constrained by the economically imposed division of labour. So, he's developing a vision which includes livestock herding, hunting and fishing, but I think he gets a very sharp message from Marx, saying, "Let's get back on track here." And he does it in a kind of indirect way. He doesn't just write, "Well, you're wrong." He writes something quite sarcastic, so he inserts the words, "and criticise after dinner".

This work-in-progress draft was rejected by Marx and Engels. But in the 1920s, it was resurrected, **taken at face value as a blueprint for communism** and printed in smooth text, obscuring its knock-about origins. So this is very much a draft and yet, this will become the kind of foundations for a big political ideology.

*Yes, and a lot of people have an investment in making him simple and making him dogmatic and you can get political mileage out of that, but we don't have to do that. He was a man with questions and went looking for answers. **He wasn't a man who had a big idea, one answer, and then that's what he found everywhere.** He actually went on the record saying he didn't want to be a kind of guru or prophet or great teacher.*

So when we look at evidence like this, should we remember Marx - should we think about him differently?

Yes, I hope so and I think we need to be prepared for a much more exploratory, much less dogmatic Marx.

Paul Mason

I think Marx's genius lies in his determination to think abstractly about capitalism - to look beneath the surface reality, to ask about its destiny.

Dr Hannah Dawson

The idea that I find most compelling is his idea about the alienation of labour. If you're cut off from the fruits of your labour, if you're cut off from your creativity, then you lose your sense of self.

Professor Angie Hobbs

The challenge he leaves us with is - can we live under a capitalist system and retain healthy, functional, non-exploitative human relationships?

Marx stated that communism is the riddle of history solved. I'd argue that that is demonstrably untrue. His prediction that a communist utopia would emerge to emancipate humanity is yet to be realised and as a historian, **I just can't accept that one single idea can solve the complex riddle of the human experience.**

There's a dreadful paradox **that the man who said that he hated ideology inspired one of the most rigid ideologies in history.** It seems to me that **Marx's life-story trumpets a warning that ideas can acquire their own inherent power and that charismatic, explosive thoughts - particularly if set down on the page as writing - can be twisted from their original intention and manipulated for malign ends.**

But Marx's desire to find the root cause of human distress, of suffering and inequality, is surely a laudable goal. So whether you choose to read Marx as a hero or a villain, his philosophical journey must be interrogated and never forgotten.

If the mind of Marx has made you think, then explore further with the Open University to discover how other great minds have influenced our world today.

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