

COMMANDING HEIGHTS

Karl Marx

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(1818-1883)

Karl Marx was a philosopher and revolutionary who, with Friedrich Engels, wrote The Communist Manifesto, a pamphlet that provided a platform for the European socialist and communist parties during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

From "Marx, Karl." Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2001.

Karl Marx was a German political philosopher and revolutionist who, with Friedrich Engels, cofounded scientific socialism (modern communism), and, became one of the most influential thinkers of all time.

Marx was born in Trier and educated at the universities of Bonn, Berlin, and Jena. In 1842, shortly after contributing his first article to the Cologne newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx became editor of the paper. His writings in the *Rheinische Zeitung* criticizing contemporary political and social conditions embroiled him in controversy with the authorities, and in 1843 Marx was compelled to resign his editorial post, and soon afterward the *Rheinische Zeitung* was forced to discontinue publication. Marx then went to Paris. There, as a result of his further studies in philosophy, history, and political science, he adopted communist beliefs. In 1844, when Engels visited him in Paris, the two men found that they had independently arrived at identical views on the nature of revolutionary problems. They began a collaboration to elucidate systematically the theoretical principles of communism and to organize an international working-class movement dedicated to those principles.

In 1845 Marx was ordered to leave Paris because of his revolutionary activities. He settled in Brussels and began organizing and directing a network of revolutionary groups, called Communist Correspondence Committees, in a number of European cities. In 1847 these committees were consolidated to form the Communist League, and Marx and Engels were commissioned to formulate a statement of principles. The program they submitted, known throughout the world as *The Communist Manifesto*, was the first systematic statement of modern socialist doctrine and was written by Marx, partly on the basis of a draft prepared by Engels. Marx contributed the central propositions of the *Manifesto*, which embody the

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materialist conception of history, or historical materialism. This theory was later explicitly formulated in *Marx's Critique of Political Economy* (1859).

The *Manifesto's* propositions are that in every historical epoch the prevailing economic system by which the necessities of life are produced determines the form of societal organization and the political and intellectual history of the epoch; and that the history of society is a history of struggles between exploiting and exploited, that is, between ruling and oppressed, social classes. From these premises, Marx drew the conclusion in the *Manifesto* that the capitalist class would be overthrown and that it would be eliminated by a worldwide working-class revolution and replaced by a classless society. The *Manifesto* influenced all subsequent communist literature and revolutionary thought generally; it has been translated into many languages and published in hundreds of millions of copies.

In 1848 revolutions occurred in France and Germany, and the Belgian government, fearful that the revolutionary tide would engulf Belgium, banished Marx. He went first to Paris and then to the Rhineland. In Cologne he established and edited a communist periodical, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, and engaged in organizing activities. In 1849 Marx was arrested and tried in Cologne on a charge of incitement to armed insurrection; he was acquitted but was expelled from Germany, and the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was suppressed. Later in the same year he was again banished from France; he spent the remainder of his life in London, [where he] devoted himself to study and writing and to efforts to build an international communist movement....

Marx's influence during his life was not great. After his death it increased with the growth of the labor movement. Marx's ideas and theories came to be known as Marxism, or scientific socialism, which constitutes one of the principal currents of contemporary political thought. His analysis of capitalist economy and his theories of historical materialism, the class struggle, and surplus value have become the basis of modern socialist doctrine. Of decisive importance with respect to revolutionary action are his theories on the nature of the capitalist state, the road to power, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. These doctrines, revised by most socialists after his death, were revived in the 20th century by Vladimir Ilich Lenin, who developed and applied them. They became the core of the theory and practice of Bolshevism and the Third International. Marx's ideas, as interpreted by Lenin, continued to have influence

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throughout most of the 20th century. In much of the world, including Africa and South America, emerging nations were formed by leaders who claimed to represent the proletariat.

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