

The Marxist Critique of Industrial Capitalism



63 ▼ *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels,* *THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was born in Trier, a German city on the Rhine River that had been occupied by Napoleon in 1803 and assigned to the Kingdom of Prussia by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Marx's parents both came from long lines of Jewish rabbis, but in 1817 his father, Herschel Levi, converted the family to Christianity and changed its name to Marx to protect his career as a lawyer. Young Marx studied law at the University of Bonn before enrolling at the University of Berlin, where he was influenced by the thought of the famous philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), especially his theory that history unfolded toward a specific goal in an ongoing process driven by the clash and resolution of antagonistic ideas. After losing his job as a journalist for a Cologne newspaper because of his political views, in 1844 Marx moved to Paris, where he argued doctrine with other radicals and would-be revolutionaries and continued his studies of economics and history. He also made the acquaintance of another German, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), an ardent critic of capitalism despite the fortune he amassed from managing a textile mill in Manchester, England. In 1847, Marx and Engels joined the Communist League, a revolutionary society dominated by German political exiles in France and England. In 1848, a year of revolution in France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Italy, the two men wrote *The Communist Manifesto* to publicize the League's program. It soon became the most widely read socialist tract in history.

After 1848, Marx and Engels remained friends, with Engels giving the impoverished Marx enough money to continue his writing and political activities while living in London. Both men continued to write on behalf of socialism, but Marx's works, especially his masterpiece, *Das Kapital (Capitalism)*, assumed the far greater role in shaping modern socialist thought. Furthermore, Marx's views of history, human behavior, and social conflict have influenced not only politics but also philosophy, religion, literature, and all the social sciences.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. How do Marx and Engels define class, and what do they mean by the "class struggle"?
2. According to Marx and Engels, how does the class struggle in nineteenth-century Europe differ from class struggles in previous eras?
3. According to Marx and Engels, what are the characteristics of the bourgeoisie?
4. Marx and Engels believe that bourgeois society is doomed and that the bourgeoisie will be the cause of their own destruction. Why?
5. The authors dismiss the importance of ideas as a force in human affairs. On what grounds? Ultimately, what is the cause of historical change in their view?

