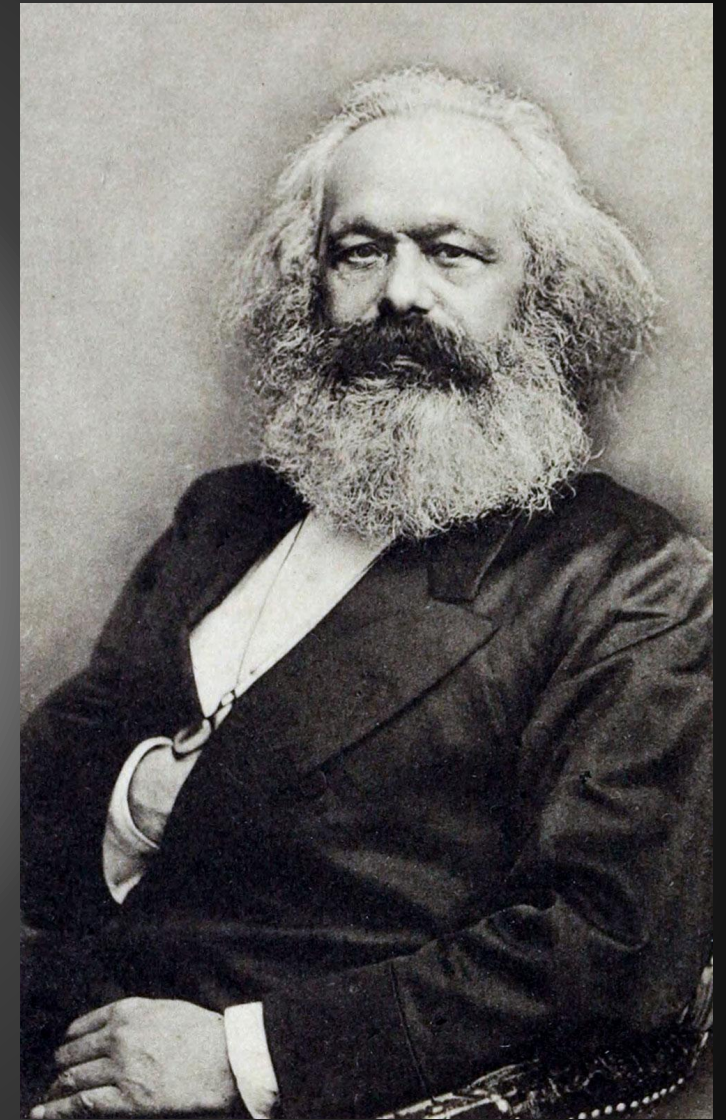


Karl Marx

Karl Heinrich Marx was born on 5 May 1818 in Trier in western German, the son of a successful Jewish lawyer. Marx studied law in Bonn and Berlin, but was also introduced to the ideas of Hegel and Feuerbach. In 1841, he received a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Jena.

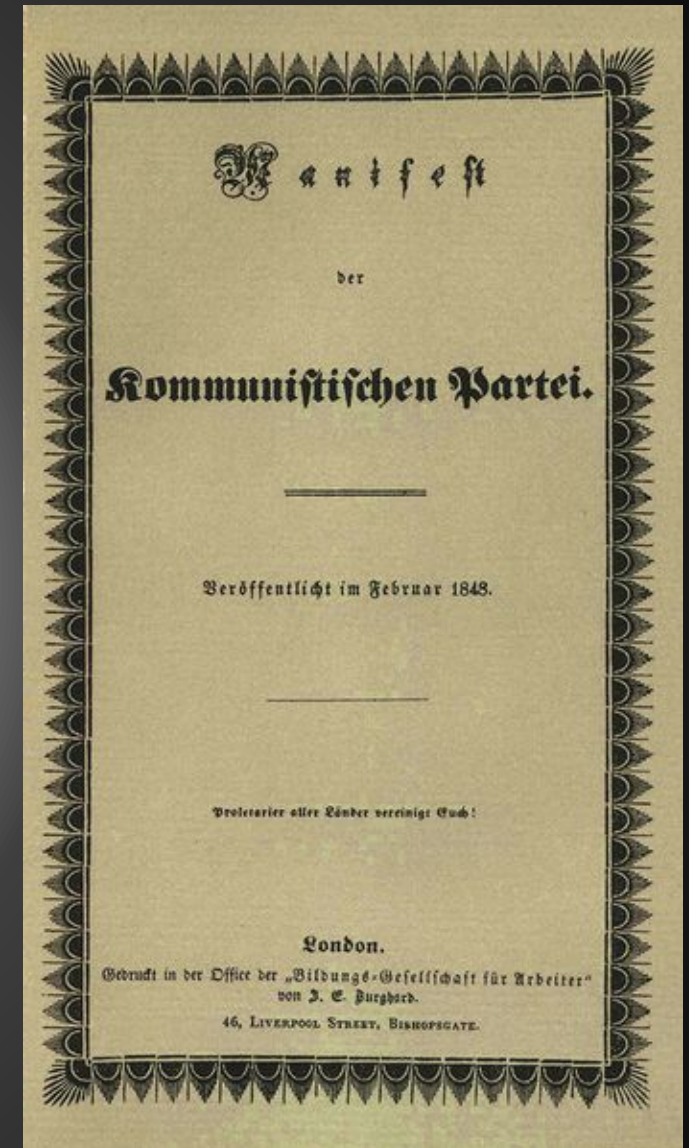


In 1843, after a short spell as editor of a liberal newspaper in Cologne, Marx and his wife Jenny moved to Paris, a hotbed of radical thought. There he became a revolutionary communist and befriended his life long collaborator, Friedrich Engels. Expelled from France, Marx spent two years in Brussels, where his partnership with Engels intensified.



Friedrich Engels

They co-authored the pamphlet 'The Communist Manifesto' which was published in 1848 and asserted that all human history had been based on class struggles, but that these would ultimately disappear with the victory of the proletariat.



In 1849, Marx moved to London, where he was to spend the remainder of his life. For a number of years, his family lived in poverty but the wealthier Engels was able to support them to an increasing extent. Gradually, Marx emerged from his political and spiritual isolation and produced his most important body of work, 'Das Kapital'. The first volume of this 'bible of the working class' was published in his lifetime, while the remaining volumes were edited by Engels after his friend's death.

Das Kapital.

Kritik der politischen Oekonomie.

Von

Karl Marx.

Erster Band.

Buch I: Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals.

Das Recht der Uebersetzung wird vorbehalten.

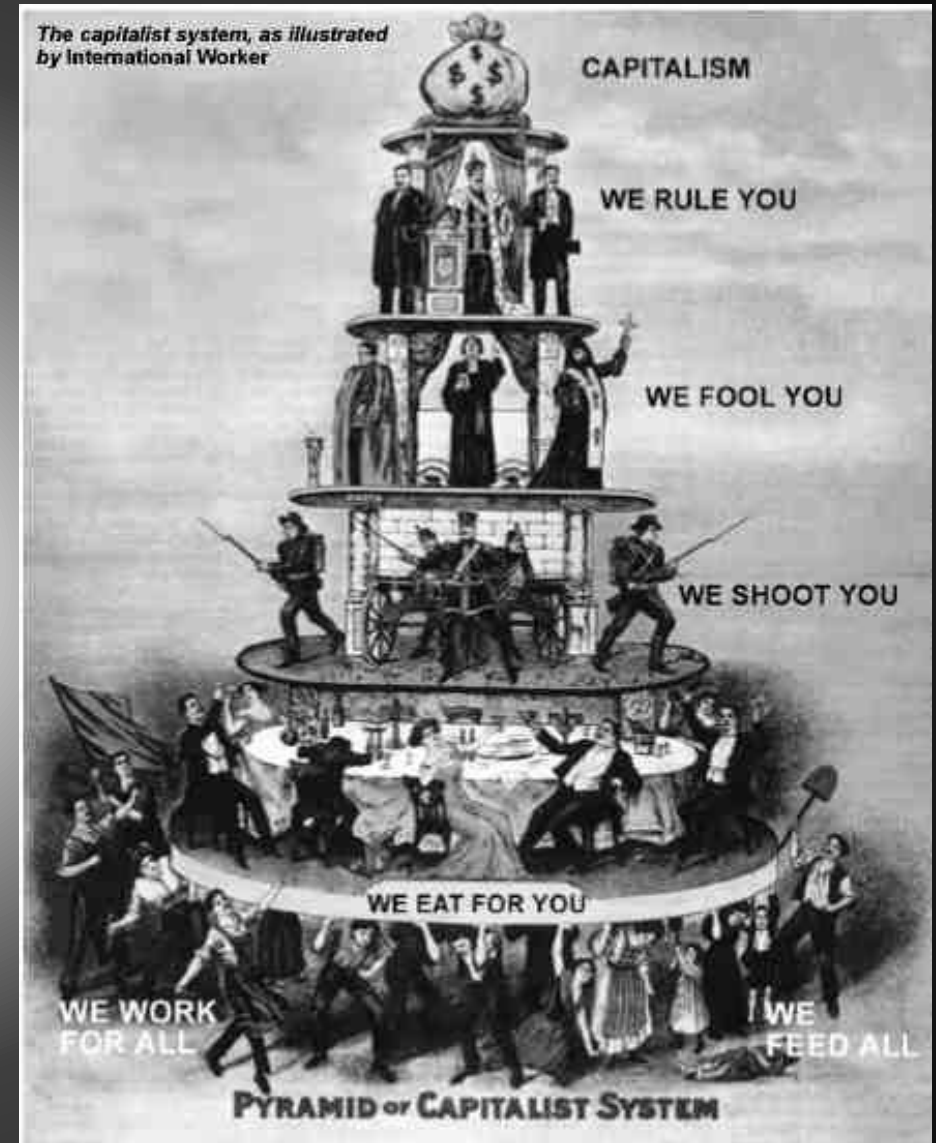
Hamburg

Verlag von Otto Meissner.

1867.

New-York: L. W. Schmidt, 24 Barclay-Street.

Marx's most popular theory was 'historical materialism', arguing that history is the result of material conditions, rather than ideas. He believed that religion, morality, social structures and other things are all rooted in economics. In his later life he was more tolerant of religion.



Marx abandoned the six-volume scheme, and decided instead to call the whole work Capital, which would be divided into four volumes:

- Production
- Circulation
- The system as a whole
- Theories of surplus value

Marx had originally intended the Contribution to be only the introduction to the 'Economics', which would be separated into six volumes:

- Capital
- Landed Property
- Wage Labor
- The State
- International Trade
- The World Market

Key Ideas of Karl Marx

- Capitalist society is divided into two classes
- The bourgeoisie increase their wealth by exploiting the proletariat
- Those who have economic power control all other institutions in society
- Ideological control
- The result of the above is false class consciousness
- Revolution and communism

Capitalist society is divided into two classes:

The Bourgeoisie or the Capitalist class are the ones who own and control the wealth of a country. These control the productive forces in society (what Marx called the economic base), which basically consisted of land, factories and machines that could be used to produce goods that could then be sold for a profit.

The majority, or the masses, or what Marx called The Proletariat can only gain a living by selling their labour power to the bourgeoisie for a price.

The bourgeoisie increase their wealth by exploiting the proletariat

Marx argued that the bourgeoisie maintain and increase their wealth through exploiting the working class.

The relationship between these two classes is exploitative because the amount of money the Capitalist pays his workers is always below the current selling, or market price of whatever they have produced. The difference between the two is called surplus value. Marx thus says that the capitalist extracts surplus value from the worker. Because of this extraction of surplus value, the capitalist class is only able to maintain and increase their wealth at the expense of the proletariat. To Marx, Profit is basically the accumulated exploitation of workers in capitalist society.

Marx thus argues that at root, capitalism is an unjust system because those that actually do the work are not fairly rewarded for the work that they do and the interests of the Capitalist class are in conflict with the interests of the working class.

Those who have economic power control all other institutions in society

Marx argued that those who control the Economic Base also control the Superstructure – that is, those who have wealth or economic power also have political power and control over the rest of society.

Ideological control

Marx argued that the ruling classes used their control of social institutions to gain ideological dominance, or control over the way people think in society. Marx argued that the ideas of the ruling classes were presented as common sense and natural and thus unequal, exploitative relationships were accepted by the proletariat as the norm.

The result of the above is false class consciousness

The end result of ideological control is false consciousness – where the masses, or proletariat are deluded into thinking that everything is fine and that the appalling in which they live and work are inevitable. This delusion is known as False Consciousness. In Marxist terms, the masses suffer from false class consciousness and fail to realize their common interest against their exploiters.

Revolution and communism

As far as Marx was concerned, he had realised the truth – Capitalism was unjust but people just hadn't realised it! He believed that political action was necessary to 'wake up' the proletariat and bring them to revolutionary class consciousness. Eventually, following a revolution, private property would be abolished and with it the profit motive and the desire to exploit. In the communist society, people would be more equal, have greater freedom and be happier.

Criticisms of Traditional Marxism

- Marx's concept of social class has been criticised as being too simplistic – today, there are clearly not just two social classes, but several; moreover, most people don't identify with other members of their social class, so it is questionable how relevant the concept of social class is today.
- Clearly Marx's predictions about capitalism ending and the 'inevitable success of communism' have been proved wrong with the collapse of communism.
- Capitalism has changed a lot since Marx's day, and it appears to work for more people – it is less exploitative, so maybe this explains why it still continues to this day?

In his final years, Karl Marx was in creative and physical decline. He spent time at health spas and was deeply distressed by the death of his wife, in 1881, and one of his daughters. He died on 14 March 1883 and was buried at Highgate Cemetery in London.

