

Socialist: Karl Marx (1818-1883)

My name is Karl Marx. I was born in Germany to a middle class family. After I finished my university studies, I began writing articles and soon became editor of a newspaper in Cologne, Germany. My writings condemned contemporary politics and social conditions, and soon I was asked to resign. I moved to Paris where I met Fredrick Engels who shared my beliefs about society. Together we wrote about the unjust treatment of the working class. Soon I was asked to leave Paris. Over the next several years, I devoted myself to an intensive study of the history of the production of goods, particularly of the present system of production: industrial capitalism.

1. Why do you think Karl was asked to resign from his job and move away from Paris?

I have seen the profound effects of industrial capitalism on the European civilization. Industrial capitalism is the result of a historical process characterized by a continual conflict between classes. Capitalism has made much of the old aristocracy irrelevant, boosted the bourgeoisie factory owners to economic and political power, and drafted much of the old peasant class into its factories as little more than wage slaves. The new industrial modes of production have fundamentally changed people's work lives and created immense new wealth.

2. How did the Industrial Revolution change Europe?

The present capitalist system is unfair, though superior to the socioeconomic system that preceded it. Even though under capitalism the workers freely sell their labor and receive wages in return, this system disguises a profound inequality. The capitalists cheat the workers by taking for themselves far more than they paid out in wages and other production costs. The profit that is left after all of the costs of producing a product have been paid is surplus value. Because the worker's labor contributed to the value of the goods produced, he should receive a share of that profit. However the industrialists view themselves as the sole creators of this new wealth and see no reason why they should share their good fortune with their workers. Their accumulated profits give them great power over the economic development of society and great influence over those who make the laws that govern that society.

3. Why does Marx author feel capitalism is unfair? What does he mean by surplus value?

Under capitalism, the workers become all the poorer. The goal is always to get the most labor from the worker at the cheapest possible price. Vicious competition is the only rule. There is not enough work for everyone. Competition for jobs causes workers to take lower and lower salaries. To produce products for lower prices than his competitors, the owner forces the worker to work 14 hour days with the threat that he will be fired and replaced with a cheaper worker. And so a man's wages continue to go down while his hours go up. Women and small children, who will work for even cheaper wages, are forced into the factories in order to supplement the father's wages and help their families survive. Any owner who tried to treat his employees more fairly would be driven out of business by his more ruthless competitors.

Capitalism exploits workers, it degrades them, and it transforms them into beasts or machines. The workers are broken in body and spirit As British journalist William Cobbett observed: "men

are rendered old and past labor at forty years of age, and children are rendered decrepit and deformed, and thousands upon thousands of them slaughtered by consumptions [tuberculosis], before they arrive at the age of sixteen.”

4. How does competition affect the way the new economy operates? What does this mean for the lives of workers and their chances for improving their lives?

Caught up in this great societal change, workers have banded together to form labor unions. By joining together they hope to convince the owners to grant them respect for their skills and their work, a decent standard of living, and the right to leisure and recreation time with their families. But owners have refused to negotiate, claiming that the workers had no right to join together or to make demands about the conditions of work and wages. When workers have attempted organized strikes against factories, employers have locked them out of the factory, fired whole groups of strikers, and attacked strikers with armed policemen. The government is controlled by the wealthy and helps the factory owners continue to hold down the workers.

5. Why did workers form unions? Why were they unsuccessful in meeting their goals?

I believe that only a fundamental social and economic change will allow the new industrial society to work for all classes. Competition must be eliminated and replaced with a cooperative society where people work for the good of all. We must organize into political parties and trade unions that will represent the interests of the working class and reject any attempt to divide us on the basis of religion, ethnicity, nationality, and gender. A divided working class is the surest way to ensure the continuation of capitalist rule.

Capitalists will never surrender their power voluntarily. I believe the only way that real change can occur is for the proletariat (workers) to forcibly overthrow the bourgeoisie (the employers). We can see the change coming. In 1848, the poor rose up in revolutions all over Europe. In 1871, the workers took over Paris and for two months we had a government run by the working class. Each of these revolutions was put down violently by the wealthy, but there is strength in numbers, and workers far outnumber the owner class. The time is coming when the people will seize power from the wealthy and keep it. As I have said in my writings: “Workers unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!”

6. Why does Marx believe that only revolution can solve the problems of industrial society?

7. How would his new society be different from the one it replaced? Why would he argue that the new society is fairer and more just?