

Karl Marx: Tyrant? Hippie Bum?

In 1957 J. Edgar Hoover wrote a book called *Masters of Deceit* telling "what the communist bosses are doing now to bring America to its knees." Of course, it has since become clear that Hoover himself had few masters when it came to deceit, but that is another story. His book has become a textbook of anti-communism. It's ideas both mould and reflect popular

attitudes toward communism and communists.

The Organizer wants to debate these ideas with the arch anti-communist Hoover. While J. Edgar has passed on, his ideas have not. And while he no longer is able to speak, his book continues to speak for him.

by JIM GRIFFIN

As everybody knows, the basic ideas of communism are associated with Karl Marx, the founder of scientific socialism. Who was this man and what were his ideas? This is where J. Edgar Hoover starts his story. . . with Karl Marx as the first "master of deceit".

Hoover wastes no time in letting us know that Karl Marx was the kind of guy you'd want to keep away from your kids. ". . . An egotistical, crabby, stubborn man who from student days showed no interest in productive labor to support his family. . . a highly disorderly, cynical person. . . washing himself, combing his hair, changing his underwear and shirts are a rarity with him. . . he is often lazy for days. . . he kept plugging away, writing, reading, denouncing "capitalist" poverty and letting his family starve. . . instead of writing about capital it would have been better if Karl Marx had made some."

Marx emerges from this treatment as a kind of early hippie. . . a dirty, lazy bum who wouldn't get a job and support his family. We can almost hear Marx's father in the background — "Karl, go out and get a job, cut your hair, clean up your act. . . Settle down in business and forget these crazy radical ideas."

MARX — HARDWORKING REVOLUTIONARY
History has not recorded how often Karl Marx changed his underwear, but never the less we know enough about his life to refute Hoover's slanders. Marx was born in Trier, Germany, in 1818, the son of a well-to-do lawyer. He was a brilliant student and after graduation undoubtedly could have had a prosperous career as a lawyer or college professor.

Instead, Marx became a revolutionary. When he was 26 years old, Marx wrote: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world; the point, however, is to *change* it." (From *Theses on Feuerbach*, italics in the original.) This was not just youthful idealism on Marx' part. It was to be his life work.

All Marx' study and writing was done with the aim of developing a body of analysis that would provide the working class with the knowledge to transform society. Nor was Marx some ivory tower intellectual far removed from the fields of battle. He was an active leader in the revolutionary democratic and working class movements of two continents.

LIVED IN POVERTY

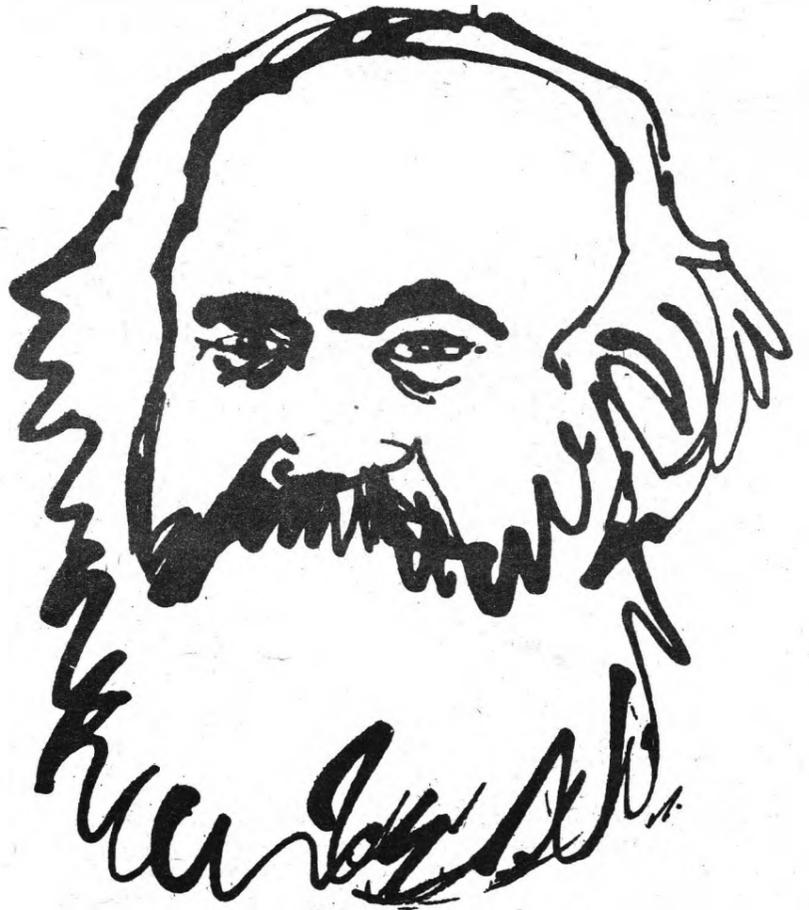
Like most revolutionaries, Marx suffered for his convictions. He was expelled from his native land and spent his whole life in exile. He lived in the worst poverty for most of his days and was barely able to support his family. But this was hardly because Marx was lazy and wouldn't work. Marx made very little money from his theoretical writings. Not surprisingly,

the capitalist publishing houses were not anxious to promote works like *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*.

Marx tried to make a living as a journalist, supplying articles on the issues of the day for newspapers like the N. Y. *Herald Tribune* for a few measly dollars. For Hoover, of course, Marx' theoretical work and practical revolutionary activity were not "productive work". Only if Marx had hung out a shingle and spent his life collecting legal fees or opened a business and 'made his living exploiting labor, would he have measured up to J. Edgar's notion of productive labor.

This "lazy" man worked so hard under such poor conditions that he ruined his health. During Marx' most productive period he suffered from boils, migraine headaches, rheumatism, liver ailments and lung problems. In writing to his life-long friend and collaborator, Friedrich Engels, in 1866, Marx says, "Yesterday I was on my back again with a malignant boil which formed in my left groin. If I had money enough for my family and my book were finished I shouldn't care in the least whether I went to the knacker's yard today or tomorrow. . ."

A concerned Engels advised a week later: "Stop your night work for a time and lead a more regular life." Marx replied soon after, "This time it was touch and go. My family didn't know how serious the matter really was. If the thing breaks out again three or four times in the same fashion, I am a dead man. I have fallen away terribly and still feel damned weak, not so much in my head as in my loins



and legs. The doctors are right of course when they say that excessive night work was the cause of the relapse, but I can't tell them why I commit such extravagances, and it would be no use if I could"

MARX' FAMILY

It is true that Marx' family suffered along with him for his devotion to the working class cause. But Hoover's attempt to paint Marx as a cold, unfeeling fanatic who readily sacrificed his wife and children for the revolution is contradicted by the facts. Karl and Jenny Marx had seven children, four of whom died at birth or when very young. Marx was a devoted family man. His children, who became activists in the working class movement themselves, called him the "Moor" and were as devoted to him as he was to them.

Marx' concern for his family's welfare runs like a thread through all his correspondence. After pawning most of his belongings Marx wrote Engels, asking him for money. "I assure you I would sooner cut off my finger than write this letter. It is truly crushing to have to live half one's life in dependence.

"The only consolation which sustains me is that you and I are in partnership and that my job is to give my time to theoretical and party business. I am afraid that this house is rather above my means and this year we have lived a little better than usual, but it was the only way to give the children an opportunity of establishing connections which might offer them some security for their future, not to mention the fact that it was little recompense for all that they have gone through."

MARX — A HUMAN BEING

Karl Marx was not a saint. One of his favorite expressions was "nothing human is alien to me". Like all of us he had his share of shortcomings. He was sometimes moody and had a fiery temper which he did not always keep under control. He could be impatient with people and coldly aloof. But he was also known for his sense of humor, his warmth and his charm. Like most of us he was contradictory. But what stands out in Marx is his strength — his drive and ambition in the face of great adversity, an ambition not for himself but for the working class and the interest of all humanity.

Undoubtedly J. Edgar is unhappy that Marx did not choose to spend his life as a quiet but prosperous shopkeeper. But the international working class has no reason to be embarrassed by the character and life of Karl Marx and every reason to take pride in his example of life-long devotion to the common cause.

But even more important than Marx' character as a man were his ideas. J. Edgar Hoover and the capitalist class hate Marx' ideas with even more passion than they hate Marx the man. And as we shall see, the working class stands in great debt to Karl Marx for these very same ideas.

Two Views of Marx

If the mind of Marx was perverted and biased, it was at the same time sharp and keen. In his arrogant pride he thought he could recast the world on his own terms. Through his writings and his revolutionary organizations he undertook to do so. . . This man who attacked the domination of the capitalists showed his own dominating nature again and again. In theory, he was "for the common man. . ." In practice, his fanatical intolerance and overbearing ego made him a tyrant, an autocrat, a dictator. Marx's character helped shape the whole philosophy of communism and, as we shall see, forged a hideous instrument of power for those who were to follow him.

—J. Edgar Hoover
Masters of Deceit

. . . Marx was above all a revolutionary, and his great aim in life was to cooperate. . . in the overthrow of capitalist society. . . to cooperate in the emancipation of the modern proletariat, to whom he was the first to give a consciousness of its class position and its class needs, a knowledge of the conditions necessary for its emancipation. In this struggle he was in his element, and he fought with a passion and tenacity and success granted to few. . .

And therefore Marx was the best hated and most slandered man of his age. Governments . . . expelled him from their territories, while the bourgeoisie . . . vied with each other in a campaign of vilification against him. He brushed it all to one side like cobwebs, ignored them and answered them only when compelled to do so. And he died honoured, loved, and mourned by millions of revolutionary workers from the Siberian mines over Europe and America to the coasts of California, and I make bold to say that although he had many opponents, he hardly had a personal enemy — His name will live through the centuries and so will his work.

— Friedrich Engels
Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx