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Karl MarxThe most influential person pre-1900 If a fair list were given, , it would seem reasonable to say that he was bad tempered, caustic, fierce, vain, self-sacrificing, selfish, whining, capable of great love, a good father, a lover of mankind, fatherly to all, honest, scrupulous, tender, brilliant, eminently rational, racist in an off hand manner, irony as an art, a person obsessed with irony, obsessive in general, flexible, a brilliant politician, but a candid one as they go.(Olson 11)Hopefully we have all heard the name Karl Marx at some time or another, but what did he do thats so important? Marx was a great influence from before 1900, but his influences are also felt throughout this century. Marx was the most influential person in world history before 1900 because he developed a new form of government, Marxism influenced several world leaders, and Marxism can be linked to such important events as the Russian Revolution and the Cold War. The main reason Marx is so important is because of the political philosophy that he developed, appropriately dubbed Marxism and commonly called Communism. Marxs goal was to spiritually release mankind by freeing him of his economic chains and allowing him to find harmony with his fellow man and with nature (Fromm 3). Marxs interests in economics started when he wrote two extensive essays on the position of Eifel peasants and Moselle vinegrowers (Leonhard 4). His interests were also engaged by the labor movement, which the effects of were just becoming apparent (Leonhard 4). As talk about communist ideas first began to rise, Marx was reserved about his opinions (Leonhard 4).

In spite of his reservations, Marx heavily researched the contemporary French literature on socialism and Communism, and in 1843 moved to Paris,

the heart of the revolutionary movement (Leonhard 4). While in Paris, one of the most important events of his stay occurred, his meeting with Friedrich Engels. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship and collaboration of the founders of scientific socialism. (Leonhard 5) Marx and Engels emphasized the connection of socialist aims, economic reality, and the struggle of the working class (Leonhard 5-6). In 1847 Marx was invited to join the League of the Just which was later renamed the Communist League (Leonhard 6). Marx and Engels were instructed to work out a political program for the Communist League (Leonhard 6-7). Engels sketched a draft of questions and answers known as the Principles of Communism, after reworking by Marx this became the Communist manifesto (Leonhard 7).

The basic idea of the Communist Manifesto as stated by Engels was Economic production and the structure of society at every historical epoch necessarily arising therefrom, constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of the epoch; that consequently (ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land) all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social development; that this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie) without at the same time forever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression, and class struggles. (Leonhard 7) Not long after the Communist Manifesto was published in London, revolution spread throughout many European countries.

In an effort to support the revolution, Marx edited and published the Neue Rheinische Zeitung with Engels (Leonhard 7).

After the defeat of the 1848 revolution, Marx was exiled to London (Leonhard 7). While in London, Marx went into deep analysis and continued to study economics. Engels suggested to Marx that he write a 4 volumes dedicated to scientific socialism. However, this was never done due to other works and health problems. Marx continued to discuss a future classless society in documents such as Critique of the Gotha Program. Much of the later part of Marxs life was devoted to the second and third volumes of his Capital. Marx has written many essays on scientific socialism and is a co-founder if not the founder of Communism, which is a form of government adapted by several countries (although they do contradict a great deal of Marxist doctrine).

To quote the Marx himself: The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it. (Rossiter 61)The form of government that Marx shaped has influenced several world leaders. The three most prominent examples are Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung.

Vladimir Ulyanov, better know by his party name Lenin had been working since the beginning of this century to transform Marxism for the socialist movement in Czarist Russia (Leonhard 47). Lenins first writings reveal a conflict between the Marxist theoretician and the active revolutionary (Leonhard 47).

Marx believed that the classless society could be begotten only from an economically advanced society. However, in the case of the feudal Czarist Russia, that was too far in the future. Why should one have to wait that long

for liberation? Lenin being the practical revolutionary he was, had to rebel against the theory he committed himself to (Leonhard 48). World War I led Lenin to deeply analyze the social-democratic countries of Western Europe and War (Leonhard 48). This eventually led to his conclusion that the social revolution need not take place in every county at the same time, but can take place in one single country.

Lenin decided that instead of the Marxist idea of peaceful transition, the forcible overthrow of the government was necessary. Lenin, believing that his generation would not live to see the revolution, was surprised by the February Revolution of 1917(Leonhard 49). A few months later Lenin, at a Bolshevik convention, put together the April Theses which demanded that the democratic revolution should be further developed into a socialist revolution (Leonhard 49). Later, the October Revolution brought to power the First Marxist Government in history (Leonhard 49). After Lenins death, the power of the nation shifted to Stalins Secretariat.

One after another, Stalins opposition was diminished and expelled from the party (Leonhard 96). By his fiftieth birthday Stalin assumed the position of Vozhd or Leader(Leonhard 96). Stalins theses of intensified class struggle and capitalist encirclement were designed to give the population an impression of a beleaguered fortress, which, it was argued, required iron discipline and terror (Leonhard 97).

Stalin did not only have conceptual changes from Marxism, he was also nothing like Marx, Engels, or Lenin in personality (Leonhard 99). The Chinese Communists developed a Communist ideology of their own (Leonhard 210).

They follow the thoughts of Mao Tse-tung. Maoism had its origins in the attempt to transfer Marxist ideals to the conditions of China (Leonhard 210). There were, however, many problems from the start of Chinese Communism. In china the conditions did not exist for a Marxist revolution (economically advanced society), nor did it apply a revolution in the sense of Lenin (Leonhard 211). Marxism has been manipulated into many different forms of government, but has an influence on every Communist society, from Lenin to Mao. Marx not only influenced world leaders, but he also influenced some major historical events.

Two of these events were the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Cold War. In Czarist Russia, the feudal government was exploiting the proletariat. In order to free the workers, Lenin adapted a new form of Marxism. He decided that the transition couldnt be peaceful, if anything was going to change, force must be used. Eventually the government was overthrown and a Communist government put into place. A few decades later, after World War II, both the US and the USSR had established themselves as world powers. The US felt it had to intervene with Russias Communist government (Downing and Isaacs). One of the most apparent aspects of the cold war was the arms race.

Both nations had the power to completely destroy the other. Russia wanted to spread its influence while the US wanted to prevent more communist countries. Real war would have disastrous effects. The American hostility towards Communism and the Iron Fist of Stalin fueled the cold war, which did not completely end until the Berlin wall came down. Karl Marx has influenced

so much of the world today, his writings have influenced people and events. Whether one finds it positive influence or negative, it is definitely there.

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