
Karl Marx the Man: An Appreciation

by Eugene V. Debs

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In his biographical memoirs of Marx the elder Liebknecht says:

Marx, the man of science, the editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, one of the founders of the *Deutsch-Franzoesischer Jarbuecher*, one of the authors of the Communist Manifesto, the creator of *Capital* — this Marx belongs to publicity, he stands before the whole world, the target of criticism, challenging critique, not hiding the smallest wrinkle to a searching eye — were I to attempt writing about this Marx, then I should be guilty of a reckless imprudence indeed, for that is not feasible in the short minutes I can filch and wrest from the unavoidable work of the day and hour.

Just so I feel when called upon in the press of these feverish and fitful days to write something befitting so majestic a theme as Marx the Man, in commemoration of the day, 100 years ago, that gave this titan to the world.

It seems prophetic of the birth of Karl Marx, on May 5, that the centenary of that portentous event should be celebrated by 100 million of his devotees in the midst of the crash and collapse of capitalism, and in the throes of a worldwide war that threatens the ruling powers with worldwide revolution.

The spirit, the genius, the very soul of Marx are all aflame and incarnate in this greatest upheaval in ancient or modern times.

But it is not of Marx the revolutionary inspirer and leader that I am to write, but of Marx the Man, and in the presence of such a task I may well falter, for what pen or tongue among us could do it justice?

Marx the Man is too great a theme.

As some tall cliff, that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leads the storm.
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

Marx is almost too big to write about, and this is said with the homage commanded by the majesty of the man, but not with the blind adulation with which unthinking idolators regard the so-called great men of history.

Karl Marx as a scientific and scholarly investigator, writer and author in the field of economic, political, and social research, stands preeminent before the world. As the triumphant awakener of the long asleep and the revolutionary leader of the long-enslaved masses of mankind he towers above us a titan and without a peer in history. But it is in his character as a man that he stands supreme and challenges the respect and love, the admiration and emulation of the modern world.

Had Marx the Man been weak, Marx the scientist and scholar [would have] never aroused, inspired, and set into motion the masses by his masterly genius and filled the world with the fame of his immortal achievement.

Marx the Man towered even above Marx the intellectual titan of his day.

Stern, inflexible, self-forgetting, and rigidly scrupulous and honest, he presents to us today the inspiring figure of a man.

Victor Hugo began his oration on Voltaire's centenary celebration with the simple yet sublime sentence: "One hundred years ago a man was born." And so we say of our beloved Marx today: "**One hundred years ago a MAN was born.**"

In the world of men there is nothing so rare as a man.

Karl Marx had every ingredient essential to that incomparable thing we know as character; he bore

upon his lofty brow the invisible crown of manhood.

There was not a soft spot in his armor and yet his was the tenderest of hearts and he overflowed with tears when he looked upon his own poverty-stricken, agonizing wife and starving babes and contemplated the misery of the numberless victims of the barbarous system his genius had stripped to the skeleton and was sworn to banish from the earth.

What Marx might not have commanded had the moral power of the man not supplemented the intellectual power of the genius?

Had he but consented to negotiate, to bargain, to compromise with the ruling powers he and his loved ones would never have been driven into the desert and compelled to eat in cold and hunger and tears the bitter bread of poverty and exile. But Karl Marx was immeasurably above and beyond temptation; his loft character disdained all dickering and temporizing, he stood at all times and in all situations inflexible as granite in his moral rectitude, and though he and his dear ones might be thrown into the street and perish of cold and starvation, he would not, could not pervert or prostitute his ideas and ideals, the children of his brain and soul.

Just as the unquenchable passion of Marx the revolutionist flamed out under persecution and exile, so the inherent nobility of his character as a man shown forth in the darkest hour of poverty that enshrouded his humble home and threatened his beloved wife and

darling brood with gaunt starvation.

Oh, the awful price that Marx the man paid to give Marx the genius to the world and consecrate Marx the revolutionist to the emancipation of the race.

He loved, aye, adored his beautiful and brilliant wife, the incomparable Jenny of Westphalen, and their brood of little ones, but more precious even than these and dearer far than his own life was the great cause, and for this the immortal Marx, the intellectual pathfinder, the moral leader and proletarian liberator, suffered crucifixion on a thousand crosses, sustained by the inexorable faith within him that the hated ideas and ideals he so devoutly cherished would one day flood the earth with light and rule the race throughout the world.

The moral grandeur and impregnability of the man shine forth in all their matchless luster today and in its splendor we behold not only Marx the Man, but Jenny Marx the Woman, who from first to last was his inspiration, his ministering angel, and his unfailing refuge and support. Her courage and fortitude never wavered; her loyalty to the cause was supreme; her devotion to her husband sublime.

Karl Marx and Jenny Marx, the adored wife, stand before us today, and with infinite pride and joy we hail them across the first century as the immortal leaders of the social revolution now shaking the earth and destined to destroy despotism in all its forms, and emancipate the race from the slavery of the ages.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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