

Press Information  
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## Karl Marx and Capitalism

From 10 February 2022 at the Deutsches Historisches Museum

Since the global financial and economic crisis of 2007/2008 at the very latest, capitalism and its most important analyst and critic, Karl Marx, have found themselves back under the spotlight. As a point of reference for authoritarian ideologies and dictatorships in the 20th century, Marx remains controversial. At the same time, the questions he posed in his 19th-century critique of economy and society are still part of the conversation in light of ongoing transformations and crises.

In the exhibition “Karl Marx and Capitalism” (10 February to 21 August 2022), the Deutsches Historisches Museum presents and critically examines Marx’ thought and influence as an intellectual and political confrontation with the profound crises and conflicts of his time. The exhibition “Richard Wagner and the Nationalization of Feeling” is running in parallel at the DHM from 8 April to 11 September.

Industrialization catalyzed massive economical, social, and cultural upheavals across Germany and Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, changes that were perceived as threats to the social fabric. Beyond a political and economic revolution, the first modern wave of globalization also occurred at that time. One century later, what had transpired then would come to be known as the breakthrough of capitalism. Karl Marx' work played a crucial part in the emergence of that designation. He was among the sharpest critics of the volatility of modernity. Philosopher, journalist, economist, and political activist, he aimed to make the new dynamics comprehensible and malleable.

The exhibition shows what motivated Marx, to what he was reacting, how his theories evolved, and where he contradicted himself. It centers on seven topics that defined the present Marx inhabited and his critique of capitalism—none of which have lost any of their explosiveness since: religious and social critique controversies, antisemitism, revolution and violence, new technologies, the destruction of nature, global economic crises, as well as international protest and emancipation movements. The exhibition thus also connects the historicization of Marx to questions about his currency. At the same time, the content takes a critical look at the worldwide reception of his theories in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries,



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making clear how Marx' fundamentally ambivalent work also made a fundamentally ambivalent historical impact.

**Prof. Dr. Raphael Gross, President of the Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum:** "What is capitalism? We all have a certain idea of it—just not the same. The DHM approaches this question in two related exhibitions on Karl Marx and Richard Wagner. Both figures had far-reaching international significance for engagement with the concept of capitalism. Although it bears mentioning that the two understood it as something completely different. To this day, scant work has been done to flesh out those differences. So it's that much more important for us as a museum of history to consider the contemporaries Marx and Wagner in their time and to understand their influence firstly from the standpoint of their 19<sup>th</sup>-century context. In so doing, I hope we will also come to a better understanding of their historical impact in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries."

**Sabine Ritter, Exhibition Curator:** "By undertaking a historicization of Marx and his ideas, the exhibition aims to provoke the visitor to assess their timeliness. Because many of the topics Marx dealt with as a contemporary analyst of upheaval also tie in with the present."

In addition to paintings, drawings, Marx' personal belongings, handwritten manuscripts, photographs, and posters, curator Sabine Ritter has drawn on audio collages, graphic presentations, and animations to situate Marx' analyses within the context of his era. Original objects like a steam engine, a Humboldt penguin, and an eight-hour clock, plus interactive stations and an olfactory art installation by Sissel Tolaas all displayed across ca. 500 square meters demonstrate the raw power and ambivalent nature of technological and social transformation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The exhibition shows that Marx' diagnoses of the times and prognoses for the future changed and remained in part contradictory using exhibits including his handwritten notes in his personal copy of "Capital" (1867), a document now inscribed in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, and "The Communist Manifesto," written with his long-time companion Friedrich Engels in 1848 with a revised preface by the authors added to the 1872 edition. An imposing marble bust of Marx, official gifted to the GDR by the People's Republic of Romania for "Karl Marx Year" in 1953 and then displayed in the first exhibition of the GDR's recently founded *Museum für Deutsche Geschichte* (Museum for German History), symbolizes the ideological appropriation of Marx' ideas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This exhibition is inclusive, and every effort has been made to ensure accessibility for individuals with diverse needs: a tactile directional flooring system, sign

language videos, exhibition texts in Braille, large print and simple German, and wheelchair-friendly vitrines have been integrated into the exhibition design. Eight interactive and multi-sensory stations offer a participatory introduction into the thematic divisions. Verlag wbg. Theiss will put out a companion publication in German (304 pages with 80 color illustrations).

### **Karl Marx and Richard Wagner: Two 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Contemporaries**

In 2022, the Deutsches Historisches Museum is devoting itself to two German figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: **contemporaries Karl Marx (1818–83) and Richard Wagner (1813–83)**. Each made an enormous impact on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that endures into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And both would be elevated to the status of icons, though by opposing political camps: Marx by the left, Wagner by the right. With the exception of a few years, they experienced the same world, observed the same economic and social upheavals, but ultimately came to very different conclusions: Marx wanted to overtake modernity; Wagner wanted to overhaul it.

Running parallel to **“Karl Marx and Capitalism,”** the exhibition **“Richard Wagner and the Nationalization of Feeling”** is on view at the Deutsches Historisches Museum from 8 April to 11 September 2022. This latter shows Wagner not only as a witness to and critic of the political and social upheavals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also as a controversial artist and entrepreneur adept at strategically incorporating societal and emotional sensibilities in his work and staging them as *Deutschtum* (Germanness)—a man whose success would have been unthinkable without a modern capitalist art market. At the same time, Wagner’s pronounced antisemitism was inextricably linked to his nationalism.