



Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

Reel
45

Box
14

Folder
720

Books that Shape Our Destiny: Karl Marx, Das Kapital, 1960.

BOOKS THAT SHAPE OUR DESTINY

A Series

Karl Marx, "Das Kapital"

The Temple
January 17, 1960

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

History, my friends, recalls many gentle ironies. Not the least of these was the decision made by the board of censorship of Czar Alexander II, to permit the sale and distribution in Russia of a new economic treatise by one Dr. Karl Heinrich Marx, on the seemingly plausible grounds (and I quote) "that though this volume shows undeniable socialist tendencies, it is nevertheless not written in a popular vein and will not appeal to the general public." Well, the board of censorship was right to this extent - "Das Kapital" is fact-weighted, full of closely drawn logical analysis, of that type of volume which is usually read by twenty scholars besides the author who share with the author a particular field of competence. But history has its own form of logic, and fifty years, almost on the anniversary date of the permission by this board of censorship to distribute "Das Kapital" in Russia, the masses of Russia rose against their Czarist overlords, and, using "Das Kapital" as guide and as ~~god~~ and as gospel, established a socialist republic in the name of the author of this volume. No other book in recent history has had the immediacy of impact ^{of} ~~this~~ this particular economic treatise. Since its first publication in the year 1867, more copies of "Das Kapital" have been printed than any other book save our Bible. We have to go back some thirteen hundred years in history to find a book, the "Koran", and a man, Mohammed, whose impact upon world history was as decisive and as immediate as that of Karl Marx and of "Das Kapital". In his lifetime Mohammed preached to

tens and twenties of people in the small Arabian towns of Mecca and Medina. Yet within three-quarters of a century from the date of his death, Islam, his new religion, was the accepted faith of countries as separate as Spain and Indo-China, and it was the dominant religious belief of half the civilized world. Now, Karl Marx in his whole lifetime never spoke to an audience as large as this one here this morning. When "Das Kapital" was first published it sold less than a thousand copies. When Karl Marx died in the year 1883 in London, where he had lived for a quarter of a century, his passing was so little noted that no obituary notice appeared in any of the important daily London newspapers. And yet within three quarters of a century of his death two of the most populous and powerful states of our world and individuals numbering into the tens of millions accept his teachings as official doctrine, as scripture, gospel.

Now, Marx believed himself to be above all else a scientist and a scholar, an economic historian, an economic ~~historian~~ analyst and a philosopher. He disliked religion, He mistrusted inspiration. He respected only hard logic and cold fact. And yet I would submit that we can understand the impact of Karl Marx only if we conceive his teachings in religious terms and only if we conceive of his mission as that of a prophet - of a man who brought to the world a new gospel, a new message of salvation, of glad tidings. Now Marx himself would, of course, have bristled in indignation and have sat down and written one of his usual vitriolic diatribes if he had heard me make this comparison. And yet, though "Das Kapital" is a brilliant, scholarly book, and though nine-tenths of its pages are consumed with detailed research and analysis into the economic conditions of life in Marx' and into the facts which were available in his day as to the history of mankind, I submit to you that most people have never read these pages and ^{little} would have understood them/had they read them, and that what people understood of Karl Marx was largely this - that he had established as an iron law of history that destiny stood with the proletariat, with the lower, dispossessed, under-

privileged classes. For Marx believed that history was not a matter of chance, rather it followed certain inexorable laws, that there was always in history a series of wars between the "haves" and the "have nots". According to Marx, mankind had now come to that position where the one remaining great group of "have nots" were the laboring classes, and their misery was such that they would soon band together. Their misery was such that they would break the bonds and the chains which bound them to their misery, and they would rise against their capitalist overlords and revolt and establish a new form of government in which each man would be repaid according to his needs, not made to slave for the benefit of another. Lower classes found in Marx a prophet who preached the glad tidings of their destiny, of glorious destiny, the destiny for which they longed and prayed and hoped.

And we need only rehearse briefly the economic conditions of European life in the nineteenth century to realize why men needed to be dazzled by this hope and to believe in this gospel. England was the most advanced industrial state of Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century. England had a long and proud tradition of culture, learning, religion, and yet in England, this proud, modern England, children were sent into the mines and into the factories at six and seven years of age. They worked from twelve to fourteen hours a day seven days of the week. In Manchester, for which we have statistics, the average life span of the business man and of his family was thirty-eight years. The average life span of ^a ~~the~~ member of the laboring classes was less than seventeen years. The employer had every right to bargain with his employees, but the employees had no right to bargain collectively with their employer. There were no safety and health regulations, no sanitary housing, wages were minimal, child labor was not abolished. There was a degree of cupidity and ^v ~~penality~~ and exploitation which defy description to those of us who live in the twentieth century. And we can project from England to the Continent, where working conditions were compounded

in their misfortune. For on the Continent there was not only an exploited laboring class but there was a serf class bound by feudal ties to the land, forced by law to work land of a feudal overlord to his profit and not to their own. Serfs, who no education, no hope, no medical care, substandard housing, could look forward only to a life of misery and want and early death. Is it any wonder that millions took to this gospel, that they found that in this iron law of history which Marx had established for them, they found this to be heady wine, the hope which they needed to hang on to, the promise of a glorious future, and they took Marx as their prophet and with him they sought to march into this future.

Marx' doctrines are much more subtle and much more sophisticated and much more scholarly than I have outlined. Marx himself was preeminently a man of ideas and of books. From adolescence to old age, Marx spent from twelve to sixteen hours a day, every day of the week, at his desk reading and researching and writing. The vastness of his erudition is beyond question. And Marx was able very often to confound someone who sought to debate with him in a better cause, simply because he knew more of the law, more of economics, more of political theory, more of history, even more of literature than the man who was debating with him. And many of the young intellectuals of Europe, who were heartsick and soulsick at the misery which they saw about them, took to Marx' teaching because of its scholarship, because of its originality, because many of the ideas which he put forth were apt and were cogent, because he offered them the only key to a rectifying of the wrongs which they sensed and which they saw. And these intellectuals acted as his disciples, were the messengers of this gospel, reduced it, simplified it, brought it to the masses, and found for Marx that mass appeal which he might not otherwise have had. ^P But I insist upon this - that we can understand Marx' popularity only and largely in religious terms, that his popularity is in inverse proportion to the misery of the masses of Europe. Indeed, we can see this in retrospect by comparing the march of Communism in

Eastern Europe and in our own country. Here, where the people and the government came early to grips with the problems of exploited labor, here where we abolished child labor, where we established health and welfare standards, where we insisted upon opening the voting records so that all men, regardless of property qualifications, could cast their ballot, here where we established a free public school system, here Marxism made comparatively little inroads. For here men did not need to be dazzled by this hope. Here they could sit and they could read and they could debate, and they could see some of the omissions, some of the discrepancies, some of the vagaries of Marx' doctrine, and they could balance out in their minds the question whether or not Marx' promise of revolution, of force, naked, brutal force, was such a one as they wanted to take to take to themselves or rather if they did not enjoy here in reality the very promises which Marx held for them after this blood bath. And indeed, Marxism has retained largely the coloration of a religious institution, even to our day. It maintains its board of missionaries who seek to make converts about the world. Every political decision has to be justified by recourse to some scriptural verse, and the party is as ingenious as any historical church in quoting scripture to suit its own purposes. Those who oppose the particular policies of the party are not a loyal opposition as are the out-of-power parties in our country, but rather heretics, deviationists - to use the Marxian term. Deviationists from what, if not from some holy scripture, if not from "Das Kapital"? And finally, there are zealots in the Communist party, as there were zealots who preached holy war in Islam and zealots who preached Crusade and the Inquisition in Catholic Christianity, who have become impatient with the progress of Communism in its conversion to world mission, ^{and} who seek to impose by force this mission upon the rest of the world.

But to return to the concept of historical irony with which we began - this skeptic, this disbeliever becomes historically one of the great prophets of modern times, the patron saint of a new religion. And a more unlikely prophet

the world has never known. Karl Marx was a cold, intellectually arrogant, hate-ridden man who was convinced of the truth of his own mission. But I suspect that he had very little instinctive sympathy for the working classes who thronged in time to his banner. Karl Marx was born in Triere, Germany, in the year 1818. His father was a not too well-to-do lawyer who two years before Marx' birth had converted to the official Lutheran church. This conversion had been one of convenience, not of conviction. The elder Marx believed in the law, in science, and in the destiny of Germany, but certainly not in God. He was convinced and confirmed agnostic for whom Judaism had long ceased to have any meaning and whose Jewishness was a bar to advancement in his legal profession. As far as Judaism was concerned, young Marx in his home heard only a shame-faced silence, and on the street the jeers and taunts of his schoolmates and later of the disputants and debaters who knew full well the motives of his family's conversion. There is nothing in Karl Marx which reflects any understanding of Judaism or any pride in being Jewish. Quite the contrary. Marx is abysmally ignorant of our faith and is riddled with hate and frustration at his being numbered among our people. And I insist upon this because there are some among us who insist that simply because of Marx' fame he is one of us. And there are others, not so friendly to our people, who, following discredited racial doctrines, pawn Marx off upon us and thus say that we are the progenitors of the communist faith. Let me quote to you briefly some of the things which Marx himself feels about Judaism.

What was the essential foundation (he writes) of the Jewish religion? Practical needs, egotism.

Money is the zealous one God of Israel, beside which no other God may stand. Money degrades all the gods of mankind and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal and self-constituted value set upon all things. It has therefore robbed the whole world, of both nature and man, of its original value. Money is the essence of man's life and work, which have become alienated from him. This alien monster rules him and he worships it.

What is stated as theory in Jewish religion, namely, contempt for theory, art, history and man as an end in himself, is an actual and conscious point of view, held to be virtuous by the man of money. Even the relation between the sexes, between man and woman, becomes an object of commerce. The woman, in Jewish life, is auctioned off.

The law of the Jew, lacking all solid foundation, is only a religious caricature of morality and of law in general, but it provides the formal rites in which the world of property clothes its transactions.

Marx indited an essay, when he was in his twenties, entitled "A World Without Jews", and I am certain that such a world would have suited him. And if we sometimes wonder if the acts of anti-Semitism which we hear about in the Soviet Union, we must remember that not only is there in Russia a century-long tradition of Slavic hatred of the Jew, but there is also the wide publication and dissemination of these views of the prophet and founder of modern communism, and, combined together, they make for heady wine.

The young Marx' academic record was an excellent one. He was a voracious reader. He had a keen, logical, perceptive mind. He proposed originally to study law, as had his father, but at the University in Berlin he was influenced by the philosophy of one George Wilhelm Hegel, and ~~he~~ determined to become a philosopher by vocation and academician in life. Indeed, he did receive his Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of . But Germany, during Marx' youth, was riddled by censorship and ruled by reactionaries and ripe for revolution, and the University students were the seed-bed, the ferment of this discontent. And Marx, like so many of his confraternity, became a political radical, and his political radicalism closed the doors to him of an academic career. He soon found himself in Paris, which was then the center of much of the discontent and the disgruntlement of the "angry young men" of Europe. Here hundreds of Marx' contemporaries were bitterly inditing vitriolic pamphlets of denunciation against the cruelties and injustices of the Kaiser's rule and the Czar's rule and all the other rulees of Europe, and busily arguing in the cafes

of Paris as to what particular philosophic and political scheme they would adopt once revolution brought them to power. But Marx came to this environment in the year 1843, five years before revolution broke out in France and in Germany. But Marx had a more scholarly bent of mind. He did not rush into the fray, rather he sat back and studied. And he sought to understand why political institutions had developed as they had, why economic conditions were as they were. For two years he spent his time and his energy busily reading - devouring - every text of political science, of economic theory, of social theory, of philosophy which was available to him. And gradually his philosophic and political and economic views began to take shape, and Marx began to feel that history is not a matter of chance - wars and of kings and of conquest - but rather history reveals a definite pattern of growth and ~~of~~ development, and this pattern is largely one which is dependent upon and catalysed by the economic means of production in the society. There is always a class war in any age between those in control and those out of power, between the "haves" and the "have nots". Those who are in power model the law, model the political institutions, model even the religious institutions to preserve their special privileges. Those out of power model a new philosophic set of principles, a new set of political outlooks and institutions, a new concept, new ideals, to force them into power. In the middle ages the political system was feudalism. Wealth depended upon ownership of the land. The Church consecrated the ties that bound the serf to the land and the knave to his master. But gradually life changed. The industrial revolution came about. Wealth was centered now not only on the land but in the factory, in commerce and in business, and the middle class began to feud with the aristocracy for power. And out of this dispute, Marx said, came the capitalistic system which Europe enjoyed in his day. And now the center of the class war shifts. Now the middle class and the aristocracy share the tradition of the "haves" and the lower of classes, the proletariat, the workers are the "have nots". But, according to

Marx' analysis, capitalism cannot long survive. For capitalism means, according to Marx, that wealth will flow more and more into the hands of fewer and fewer people, that more and more of even the middle class will be forced into penury and into misery, and gradually the pressures of misery will build up to such an extent that there will be an eruption, a break-through, a revolution, and once this revolution has taken place,^{the} laboring classes will be in control of the government, control of the economic means of production, and they will mold a new series of institutions - church, cultural, political - which will establish the rights of all men to a free share of the earth's bounty and prosperity and which will regulate life for the good of all.

Marx' first publication which attracted world-wide notice, in which he set down these principles, was put out in the year 1847-1848, just as the great revolutions in Germany and in France were about to break forth. A group of exiled German workers, labor organizers, rabble rousers, had banded together out from their exile to form what was known as the "League of the Just". They had been attracted by Marx' views as he had published them here and there in Paris, and they asked Marx, in collaboration with a younger disciple, Frederick Engels, to publish a manifesto for them, a statement of belief, a statement which would set forth the principles for which they were fighting, the purposes of life and of political action as they saw it, and which would give the broad sweep of destiny to the worker, his vision of the future. In 1847 the "League of the Just" changed its name to the "Communist League", and Marx and Engels in 1848 published for this Communist League their manifesto "The Communist Manifesto". This manifesto has been the key text for all communist movements since that day. In it Marx sets forth the immediate goals of the laboring classes and their ultimate goals. Their immediate goals are to destroy property, to establish a free public school education, to establish minimum wage and maximum hour laws, to abolish child labor, to establish a graduated income tax, to establish pro-

hibited death duties, to see to it that the kind of society evolves in which the laborer will get what is his due, and their ultimate goal - the overthrow of the capitalist class, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat which in its turn will wither away and a new democratic form of socialism will be established where every man will have his say and his vote and his share of the earth's bounty.

When the revolution of 1848 broke out Marx plunged into its activities, but he was soon disappointed, for this was a revolution, in Marx' terms, of "middle class, not of the worker" and within a year he was forced out again, forced into exile, now to London where, in penury and poverty, he lived out his days, little known, prolifically writing and working, researching and publishing. He devoted fifteen years of his life to the publication and the writing of "Das Kapital", the first volume of which appeared in his lifetime, the second and third volumes of which were published by his life-long cohort, Engels, after his death, and the fourth volume of which was left in the form of brief notes which have only recently been published. They are a mighty ^{INDICTMENT} inditement of the capitalist system. They are a mighty defense of Marx' economic philosophy and as an economic view of history.

Now, what shall we say of Marx' position in history? How shall we accept his contribution or lack of it to our world? First of all, we must say that as a social critic Marx did point to unexcusable crimes against humanity - child labor, inadequate housing, inadequate wages, inadequate health standards, the inability of the employee to collectively bargain with the employer. Marx lived in the days of unrestrained capitalism, of rugged individualists, and he was right in his denunciation of its evils and of its excesses. ~~And~~ The rightness of his views can be seen in the degree to which we in our own country have developed limitations and safeguards on this kind of unrestrained capitalism. For we have insisted that there is a primary social responsibility, and only when

the rights of all have been safeguarded has a man the permission to seek as much of income and of prosperity as he can find.

What of Marx, the scholar? Marx, the scholar, was right in that he insisted that almost all the institutions of man - our law, our culture, our school systems, our churches - reflect a great deal of the economic conditions of life at a particular moment. A few would agree with his wholly deterministic view of the development of these institutions, but no self-respecting scholar would today attempt a history of our world, a history of the growth even of the ideas of our world without explaining how technology and science and industry and economics have affecting the changing pattern of world history and of world ideas. And it was Marx who first developed in extenso this concept of history.

And as a prophet - as a prophet, Marx was a false prophet. Marx was wrong in many, many ways. He was wrong that if the proletariat came into power they would quickly divest themselves of this power. He was wrong when he held that the dictatorship of the proletariat would become a form of vague, free, democratic socialism. Power corrupts, and, as we have seen in the Russian state, far from loosening their holds upon the masses who revolted in the name of Marx the Communist party has intensified its control, intensified its censorship, intensified its dictatorship as time has gone on. Indeed, the Russian revolution itself is a disproof of Marx' theories. Marx believed that the revolution would come in the West, in England or in France or in Germany, where industrialization had had the chance to develop for a much longer time than in Russia. The Russian revolution, in a sense, is a movement from feudalism to communism without the intermediate step of capitalism which Marx conceived to be necessary. For Marx conceived that under the capitalistic system the condition of the worker must inevitably become worse and worse. He had no rights, he had no power, he had no privilege, he could be exploited for the benefit of those who controlled the tools of production. Now, we have only to look around ourselves to realize that

this is not necessarily the case, for certainly there has been no economy in the history of the world in which the privileges and the wages and the rights of the worker have been as high as in our own nation.

Why was Marx wrong? And here we come to the final irony of this story. Marx was wrong because he failed to understand, because he closed his mind to an aspect of life which this pulpit and our tradition teaches. Marx saw only one aspect of man - economic man; one instinct in man - the acquisitive instinct. Marx was determined that all that was spiritual, all that was moralistic, all that we would call good and saintly was simply a form of posing and of pretense, that religion was no more than a propaganda agency for the economic powers then at play. Had Marx' assessment of human psychology been correct, England and France and our own country would not have developed the restrained forms of capitalism, the high standard of living for all of our people, the high degree ^{social} of/legislation which we have effected. Indeed, we have put into practice in our own nation most of the very ideas which Marx set forth as necessities in his communist manifesto, and we have established these rights of the worker without losing our freedom by granting him freedom, without imposing upon ourselves a dictatorship, and without plunging our country into a blood bath and a revolution. Why so? Because man is, as our Jewish tradition tells us, composed of two elements. One is selfish, and one is saintly. One side of man is greedy, but one side of man is godly. One side of man has only the instinct to aggrandize, to take unto himself. The heart of man, the soul of man, the mind of man is capable of restraining himself, of planning for the future of all men, of seeing that ultimately his welfare is tied up with the welfare all and cannot be separated from that welfare.

So Marx, in essence, has driven us to recognize the truth of the very doctrines he contemned - the truth that if we do not "establish justice in the gates", if we do not work to relieve oppression, to establish the equality of

opportunity of all, if we do not work to establish what Amos was speaking about in the portion that was read to you this morning - then his theories, his revolution will come about. But if we work as our prophets bid us work there is the capacity in man to be divine, to establish a peaceful and just order of society, to gradually evolve a society which will redound to the wellbeing of all, and we will not need to be dazzled by vague promises, promises which are never fulfilled.

When Marx died Frederick Engels pronounced the eulogy over his bier. In this eulogy he compared the contribution of Marx to that of Charles Darwin. Both men, he said, had given to the world a radical new truth, a new idea. Now to the few, pitiful exiles and the family of Marx standing by the side of this grave, such comparison must have seemed grand indeed. But history has told us that the influence of this man was indeed as great, if not far greater than that of the eminent biologist whom we discussed two weeks ago. Marx brought to the laboring classes one essential truth - their right to a fair share of the earth's prosperity and bounty. They forced upon those in the middle and upper classes the realization that they were going to have to, one way or another, accede to these demands, either gradually, thoughtfully as we have in our own nation, or by force, with guns at their heads, as in Russia and China and elsewhere.

And our job is not over, my friends. Marx' challenge to us has not been completely dissipated. There are still in our own country segments of people ~~in~~ whom this prophecy might dazzle. And there are certainly abroad in the world, especially in the ~~underdeveloped~~ underdeveloped parts of the world, millions upon millions of people who have not the most elemental rights. And if we wish to contain and to restrict this gospel of revolution, you and I must see to it that in every way that it is possible for us to do we extend opportunity, we extend promise, we extend rights, we extend protective legislation to the oppressed and to the underprivileged, lest they be infected with the incubus of this prophecy

and, marching with Marx, take a road which will not lead them to the end that they desire but will lead them into the hands of the few in control of the organs of government who will exploit them as mercilessly as did any Czar of old.

So Marx, paradoxically, has led us back to an affirmation of the truths of our own faith, a realization of the meaningfulness of the Hebrew psychology, a realization of the imperative of Biblical prophecy.



free, many in the world would like to help in achieving it
but the world press is usually a bit behind. It makes
its gradual steps in not always pressing concerns of the world
force of example from inefficiency.

Like it or not many have been the founder of a new faith & the people
of new salvation and a new world of people have been. But,
intellectually aroused, with little self love, with a handful of people, many
learned with a sense of the world of his teaching, but 2 or 3 years later he had
very little real sympathy for the millions who were in the synagogue,
then he had left at the death of his life. Many were born in Trier, Germany,
in 1815, the son of a ^{rich} family of lawyers. Ten years before his death,
he had been converted to the Judaism of his father. The conversion was not one
of ^{conviction} but of ^{convenience}. The ^{old} money was a confirmed agnostic. ~~He was~~
conversion of Judaism was long and came to him as a heavy price &
his father was unwilling to pay his professional man. The old money
followed in him no more, in his own family but not in his
and his son found at home a & a transformed man and in the street
only the joys & tears of a world which did not misjudge the nature
of conversion.

Karl Marx was also a life to be a confirmed non-believer - but beyond
his ancient religious money always believed a particular hatred
for Judaism & Jews, the one made in an old article "A World Without
Jews" & said a world would stand here without him. A religious
his ignorance of Judaism & psychological predictions to himself
and now he wanted to show that was simply because of his own
and of an "old" old followers which described - a world without
credit money & have Communism to be, making in Marx's words
was Jewish, the neither Jews nor anti-Jews which Judaism was all
about - to make sure his ignorance & lack of interest and personal
dislike led him just to give some of his views on the Jews.

Why were we in London?

He was coming because he was the only one who knew the man - I was only one of the many. A common man.

First to see other dimensions of personality - man under stress, social action group action.

reconstruction

many not very powerful. social product - product of people had a mind
in power itself - had a mind that people - + people have a right to be
just & power handed - real reformation, reconstruction

Power power power - power - power - power power power
construction man reconstruction - power power power - power power power
power power power power power power power power power power

reconstruction

many power power power power power power power power power power

WRHS



(he writes)

What was the essential foundation of the Jewish religion? Practical needs, egotism.

Money is the zealous one God of Israel, beside which no other God may stand. Money degrades all the gods of mankind and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal and self-constituted value set upon all things. It has therefore robbed the whole world, of both nature and man, of its original value. Money is the essence of man's life and work, which have become alienated from him. This alien monster rules him and he worships it.

What is stated as theory in Jewish religion, namely, contempt for theory, art, history and man as an end in himself, is an actual and conscious point of view, held to be virtuous by the man of money. Even the relations between the sexes, between man and woman, becomes an object of commerce. The woman ^{in Jewish life} is auctioned off.

The law of the Jew, lacking all solid foundation, is only a religious caricature of morality and of law in general, but it provides the formal rites in which the world of property clothes its transactions.