

Marxism Ideology

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German philosophers George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx were responsible for advancing the idea that contradictions exist as an inherent characteristic of societal life. Both philosophers concluded that contradictions cause conflict, and conflict causes new social formations or syntheses to emerge where old contradictions are resolved and new, less severe ones are born. As this process continues, contradictions become smaller and less basic; nevertheless, they continue to instigate. Both Hegel and Marx saw the continuous search for syntheses as a process reflecting the spirit of history and charting its course. This process would, according to Hegel and Marx, lead eventually, but gradually to the resolution of all contradictions and the establishment of the ultimate conditions for a life without conflict. However, the contradictions that Hegel argued as being the driving forces of history are not the same contradictions seen by Marx.

Systems of thought as well as sociopolitical systems fall apart and disintegrate under the pressure of their own internal contradictions, argued Hegel. They are then replaced by new, more complex systems that contain less fundamental contradictions. This seemingly unending process of systemic change explains the notion of historical dialectics put forth by the Hegelian and Marxist philosophies of history. However, the basic contradictions in society, according to Hegel, are related to human freedom, and, therefore, the conflict they cause and the syntheses they produce are of a political nature. (See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 59-69)

Hegel sees progress in history as a result of the blind interplay of human passions that lead to conflict, revolution, and war. For him, “nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.” (George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* Dover Publications, 1936, 23) He maintained that “the history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom,” which itself is driven by passion. (Hegel, 23)

Before Marxism, the dominant view of history was based on the conception that idealism and morality were the causes of historical change, and that ideas, leaders and states were the primary agents of change. Marx, in contrast, saw the basic contradictions in society emanating not from social or political relations, but rather from society's economic structure. For him, "the mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual process of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. (Lewis S. Feuer, Ed. *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, Anchor Books Edition, 43)

The mode of production, according to Marxist thought, includes two components: the social forces of production and the relations of production, which together represent two sides of the same process. While the social forces of production represent man's relationship with nature, the relations of production represent man's relationship with other men in the market place. And while these two components are tightly connected to each other, the ownership of the means of production governs the nature of their interaction and influences the course of social change.

According to Marxism, people are the primary forces of production and the actors who invent and develop the material means of production and set them in motion. These human forces of production, however, do not include all people; they include only the working class, or the laborers who do the actual work. Relations of production are the social ties that develop among people during the production process, as they perform their tasks as workers and capitalists; and therefore they are a function of the ownership of the means of production at any given time. Property ownership, in other words, determines the nature of the relationships that ties the forces of production to the relations of production.

When property ownership is communal as it used to be in primitive societies and is supposed to be in communist ones, argued Marx, society is classless; no basic contradictions exist within its borders. But when property ownership is private, social classes appear and contradictions and antagonisms between social classes arise, causing conflict. To resolve the basic contradictions between the social forces of production and the relations of production

requires economic change that leads to a new synthesis, or to creating a new society. But since the new syntheses contain within themselves their own contradictions, economic change would have to continue to create new social formations until all basic contradictions are resolved and private ownership of the means of production is abolished and a classless society emerges.

The revolution to settle class conflict and resolve the basic contradiction in society will be carried out by the social class that represents the core of the social forces of production, the working class, or the proletariat. This class, according to Marx, is the most exploited class by capital or the owners of the means of production and therefore, its exploitation makes revolt against the existing relations of production inevitable. The proletariat, argued Marx, is not “naturally arising poor.” Rather, exploitation by capital renders members of this class “artificially impoverished.” (Feuer, 265) Notwithstanding his major emphasis on the role of economics and material relations in the making of history, Marx did not consider the economic structure to be the only active force in the historical process. Nor did he consider social, political and cultural superstructures to be passive forces. For Marx, other non-materialistic forces, such as the environment, circumstance and external forces also influence the economic structure and thus the historical process.

Progress in history, according to Hegelian thought, is made as people gain more freedom, which is supposed to be “embodied in the modern liberal state.” (Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 64) The end of history would therefore come when freedom is universal and the liberal democratic state has been established to represent its people and implement their desired principles of liberty and equality. Marx, in contrast, rejected the vision of a liberal democratic state as the embodiment of liberty and equality; he also rejected the notion that the establishment of such a state would end history. For Marx, the liberal state had failed to resolve the fundamental contradiction in society, and the freedom it brought was only freedom for the bourgeoisie, or the capitalist class. Democracy, Marx argued, is the tool used by the bourgeoisies to protect its own interests, which are at odds with those of the proletariat. Therefore, he envisioned the historical process coming to an end with the establishment of a classless society, where class struggle ends and the state withers away.

Marxism is a socioeconomic and sociopolitical philosophical worldview based upon a special interpretation of the history of development of human societies that considers economics the major force driving history and causing sociocultural transformation. Marxism employs the dialectical concept developed by Hegel to analyze social and economic change in society and provide critical analyses of capitalism and its consequences on class-relations and social conflict. Karl Marx, writing some eighty years after the birth of the Industrial Revolution, observed that man's consciousness changes as the conditions of his material existence change. Thus, societal development according to Marxism is provoked by economic change intended to meet human needs for food and survival, which in turn influence man's ideas and cultures and ways of living.

Marxism represents a comprehensive theory of history that includes an economic theory and a sociopolitical theory that refutes the non-materialistic interpretation of historical change and rejects capitalism as a system based on exploitation and degradation of man and falsifying his consciousness. And because of its revolutionary nature and sweeping analysis of historical change, Marxist ideas have influenced economic as well as social, cultural and political analysis. Though Marx and Engels are the founders of Marxism and its interpretation of history, many theorists and political figure like Vladimir Lenin have contributed to developing the ideas of Marxism and influenced their applications in socialist states in Europe and Asia, especially in the former Soviet Union and China.

In pre-capitalist economies, exploitation of the worker was achieved via physical coercion or slavery. In the capitalist system, in contrast, exploitation is achieved through a legal arrangement between the capitalist who owns the means of production and labor the needs to work to survive; in this relationship, labor, driven by need, enter into an exploitative relationship voluntarily in order to earn the necessities of life. Though this relationship leads to exploitation, the worker enters into such an arrangement voluntarily because he chooses which capitalist to work for. However, the worker in reality has no choice; he has to work or starve to death. Thus, exploitation is inevitable, regardless of the nature of the arrangement; and the

claim that workers choose to enter into the arrangement that suits them is a deceptive one. In fact when man is forced by the circumstances to sell his labor, he often loses his dignity and accepts exploitation, at times slavery to survive.

Due to the appalling life and work conditions of the industrial working class, the proletariat had become the focal point of the philosophical writings of Karl Marx and other socialist thinkers. Such thinkers devoted much of their research to analyzing the historical origins of this class, its life conditions and its rise and role in society. As compared to the much larger groups of farmers and servants, the industrial working class commanded unprecedented public attention. Marx predicted that the working class would revolt against its masters and eventually take ownership of the means of production.

But despite the miserable working and living conditions of this class, industrial work was an opportunity to farmers and servants who lost their homes and sources of livelihood on land taken away from them by landlords. In fact, industrial work was “the first opportunity that social history has given them to better themselves substantially without having to emigrate.” (Drucker, 59) Eventually, the increased size and power of organized labor, public sympathy, intellectual support, and rising business profits enabled labor to obtain higher wages and more social benefits and improved working and living conditions.

Marx argued correctly that under capitalism, the fruits of production belong to the capitalists who own the means of production, which enables them to expropriate the surplus created by labor. And because the working class is unable to change the production relations and the nature of its work arrangement under capitalism, it becomes alienated.

According to Marxism, the identity of each social class in society is determined by its relationship to the means of production, which create the conditions that enable the rich capitalists to control and exploit the poor and subjects the working class to exploitation. Marx identified the major social classes in capitalist society as follows;

1. The proletariat that represent the industrial workers who sell their labor to earn a living. Members of this class do not own the means of production or control the production process.

2. The Bourgeoisie that owns the means of production and control the production process and hire the proletariat to work for it. Members of this class exploit the proletariat by paying them less than what their work is worth and confiscate the surplus. Marx divides this class in the two subclasses; the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie.

3. The petit bourgeoisie or the middle class in industrial capitalist society represents the small employers who hire members of the proletariat to work for them but also work alongside their employees, such as merchants and small business owners. Marxism, however, predicts that as the means of production advance and become more productive, they cause the petit bourgeoisie or the middle class to lose its power and production base and eventually destroy it, forcing its members to join the ranks of the poor proletariat.

4. The landlord represents the remnants of the old land aristocracy that still have a good deal of wealth and power.

5. The peasants and farmers who represent the small landholders; however, Marx considers this class to be in transition, making it unable to form a distinct social class. As a consequence, some of its members will eventually join the landlord class; and others would lose their land and join the ranks of the proletariat.

In fact, with the exception of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, no group of people in society is able to develop class consciousness and become aware of itself and its interests and role in societal life; and without such an awareness, no group of people could be called a social class and gain enough power to exert influence on the rest of society and cause change in its favor. On the other hand, the social class that owns the means of production usually rules society; and whoever rules society makes his ideas the dominant ideas that direct policy and shape social change to serve his interests at the expense of everyone else. As it was explained in Chapter Two, the major forces of the societal process that dominates society claim most of the talent is society and employ them to serve its interests.

Marxism is an economic and social system based upon the political and economic theories articulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It is, according to the Encarta Reference Library,

“a theory in which class struggle is a central element in the analysis of social change in Western societies.” As for capitalism, the Encarta defines it as *“an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods, characterized by a free competitive market and motivation by profit.”* In contrast, socialism based on Marxism considers public ownership of the means of production and distribution, and trade a must to end economic exploitation and achieve social justice.

Marx views religion as something the worker under the capitalism needs to comfort him. For the miserable and alienated worker, claimed Marx, was a necessity that caused religious beliefs to be sustained. Religion, according to Marx was the response to the pain of being alive. Marx wrote in *Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1844) that *“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances.”*

The materialistic interpretation of history developed by Marx is a theory that to indentify the causes of development and change in societal life as people seek ways and means to survive and advance toward higher levels of security and satisfaction.

Class conflict, which dominated life throughout history, has manifested itself in different stages with distinct characteristics: Marx considered that these socio-economic conflicts have historically manifested themselves as distinct stages (one transitional) of development in Western Europe.^[14]

1. *Primitive Communism*: as in co-operative tribal societies.
2. *Slave Society*: a development of tribal progression to city-state; aristocracy is born.
3. *Feudalism*: aristocrats are the ruling class; merchants evolve into capitalists.
4. *Capitalism*: capitalists are the ruling class, who create and employ the proletariat.
5. *Socialism*: workers gain class consciousness, and via proletarian revolution depose the capitalist dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, replacing it in turn with dictatorship of the proletariat through which the socialization of the means of production can be realized.

6. *Communism*: a classless and stateless society.

Exploitation of workers is realized when the amount of labor one performs is larger than what one receives in compensation. Since all societies, starting with the age of agriculture have produced surplus, exploitation has been a socioeconomic feature of every society. The power of one social class to control the means of production enables it to exploit the other classes.

In capitalism, the labor theory of value considers the value of any good equals to the labor time required to produce it. The difference between the value of labor the good needs and value of labor the worker is forced to invest represents surplus value. While capitalism calls this profit, Marxism considers it exploitation.

Marxists believe that the transition from capitalism to socialism is an inevitable part of the development of human society. Marxists believe that a socialist society will be better for the majority of the people than its capitalist counterpart. Lenin wrote that prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917 that "The socialization of production is bound to lead to the conversion of the means of production into the property of society... This conversion will directly result in an immense increase in productivity of labor, a reduction of working hours, and the replacement of the small-scale, primitive, disunited production by collective and improved labor."^[24]

In 1991 the Soviet Union was dismantled and the new Russian state, alongside the other emerging republics, ceased to identify themselves with Marxism. Other nations around the world followed suit. Since then, radical Marxism or Communism has generally ceased to be a prominent political force in global politics, and has largely been replaced by more moderate versions of democratic socialism.

Since many of the self-proclaimed Marxist nations eventually became authoritarian states, with stagnating economies, questions were raised concerning the causes of the failure of Marxism. The resulting debate asked whether Marxism was doomed in practice or the nations that failed were not led by "true Marxists". Critics of Marxism speculated that perhaps Marxist ideology itself was to blame for the nations' various problems. Followers of the currents within Marxism which opposed Stalin, principally cohered around Leon Trotsky, and tended to locate

the failure at the level of the failure of world revolution: for communism to have succeeded, they argue, it needed to encompass all the international trading relationships that capitalism had previously developed.

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