

Karl Marx: Capitalism and Class Struggle

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

- Never had a comfortable life, lived in a rather poor economic state
- philosopher, political economist, political organizer
- reporter and editor with *Rheinische Zeitung* and *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*
- founded International Workingmen's Association (1864)
- famous publications include *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Capital* (v.1, 1867)

Materialist Theory of History

- idealist philosophies of history (e.g. Hegel)
- materialist theory of history - material production & class struggle
- every society is divided into classes defined by their relationship to the given system of production (freeman/slave, lord/serf, bourgeoisie / proletariat)
- historical change is driven by the struggle between these antagonistic class interests combined with transformations in the system of production
- Marx rejects an idealistic view for the most part
- Marx learned from GWF Hegel
- Marx looks towards people like Charles Darwin who explains that we derive from simple life forms
- Marx doesn't look towards biological courses and dynamics but instead political courses and dynamics
- Everything that's around us and we use is either put here by nature or it is our product, we build the world the way we want it, not God or anyone, we have collectively made everything but we do not collectively own it, the ownership is irrationally unequal.
- Always been a class of people who own things and a class of people who don't
- relationship to the different system of production
- The system we have today is Bourgeoisie/Proletariat (working class)
- These societies are NOT stable because it has an antagonist relationship between classes there will always be contradictions (struggle/conflict)

Critique of Capitalism

- capitalism is but a stage in human history
- capitalism as a progressive force
 - you need capitalism before communism because capitalism creates skyscrapers railways, and systems that connect the world. It enriches the world with its connections, gives us a hint on what humans are capable of
- capitalism as obstacle to human progress (alienation, poverty)
- ...hence, the *contradictions* of capitalism
- Marx "enemy" Robert Owen
- Owen says we need to build small villages to work the land to opt out of the industrial system but Marx wants to get away rural life and believes the future is the city

Power

1. Class – who controls society's wealth?
2. The state secures the interests of dominant class via courts, police, military, etc.
3. Ideology - systems of thought that mask unequal power relations (e.g., liberalism)
4. Alienation – estrangement from work, self, others etc.

5. Communism: the end of class struggle, alienation and domination

- Liberalism is universal we all for the most part have rights, sees the states as a neutral state, everyone is equal. Tells us we all have rights, we are not slaves
- Marx doesn't believe in Liberalism structurally and set up to advance or defend the capitalist class
- Marx says that this belief masks other inequalities and the real dynamics and interests at play
- Religion is a profoundly conservative force, tells the miserable to accept their luck. Leaders have used this to their advantage
- World full of wants (alienated by material things) we are a producer of this world

Revolution and Communism

economic crisis —> immiseration (poverty) of the workers —> division of society and goes extreme (polarization) —> radicalization & political organization —> seizure of state power —> “dictatorship of the proletariat” —> gradual withering of the state —> communism

Some problems in Marx

- The power of the “superstructure” (eg, religion, state policy, popular culture...)
- What about race, gender, sexuality, nationality...
- the belief that secondary elements are doomed can be proved wrong when you look around today and see religion and culture and know that it isn't true

We have to have revolution

Communism Revolutionary

Reformist

Social Democracy

we don't need to have a violent revolution but rather it can be a gradual transition to socialism

katherine.kenny@carleton.ca

Office Hours Monday 1pm to 2pm in Loeb A609