

Karl Marx: An Examination of Theory and its role in Current Society

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Since the industrial revolution there has been a significant amount of social change in society. Working environments have become more regulated to ensure safety, minimum wages have increased and access to employment has become more feasible. This is a step towards what philosopher Karl Marx predicted back in 1848 when he and Friedrich Engels published their hypothesis regarding capitalism in the pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*. This publication introduced the Marxism theory otherwise known as the capitalism theory. This short essay is going to explain who Karl Marx was, his theoretical contribution to society and how they are still relevant in today's time period.

Karl Marx was born in the year of 1818 in Trier, Prussia which at the time was being run by France (Library of Economics and Liberty, 2014). He was one of nine children and both of his parents were jewish and came from a long line of rabbis; however, when Marx was very young his father converted to the protestant church due to the laws prohibiting jews from having higher paying jobs. But in later years Marx explained that he was an atheist. At the age 16 he went to study philosophy and law at Bonn University located in Germany. Afterwards, he continued his education at the University of Berlin and then later received his doctorate degree at the University of Jena in 1841. He married his high school sweetheart Jenny von Westphalen, where they had seven children together. Unfortunately, only three children made it past their youth due to illness and starvation. Marx always had interest in the conflict between the rich and the working class and in 1848 he and philosopher Friedrich Engels publicly published in the *The Communist Manifesto* pamphlet the Marxism Theory. Marx then died in the year of 1883 at a young age of sixty four, suffering from the illness bronchitis.

At the time Marx published his theory, the industrial revolution was in full swing; In other words, capitalism was at an all time high (Guys-Evan, 2024). Factories were producing an

extreme amount of product in a rapid period and money was accumulating faster than ever before. The social issue presented was the imbalance in the population's wealth. The factory owners were making an extreme amount of wealth and were in control of multiple social factors due to the economic power they held. On the other hand, the factory workers were working in unsafe environments for longer hours and less pay. This resulted in many individuals suffering not only from the work conditions but also being unable to pay for medical assistance. Even worse, when one was unable to work, there was no assistance in helping one provide for themselves and their family. At that point in time, the next generation of the working class had to step up and provide, even if it was at a young age. This struggle was due to the economic growth that the industrial revolution brought to society.

Overtime, this “way of life” started becoming a norm and the people started to accept that there were only two kinds of classes in the world (Wolf & Leopold, 2020). First, was the working class who made up the majority of the population but only made a small percent of the wealth being made. Second, were the rich people who owned the factories and were in power with the majority of the money being made. This population was much smaller but held almost all power and authority in decision making due to their economic status and control of wealth. This hard divide between the two was a significant amount. Furthermore, there was no such thing as middle class. During this time period, one was either born rich or poor. There was no opportunity or reason one would be able to move to the opposing class and it was quite impossible if one ever wanted to do so.

This social struggle was the key point to Marx’s theory of marxism (Wolf & Leopold, 2020). Marxism theorizes that class struggle is through social, economical and political power. This struggle is between the working class and the rich also known as the bourgeoisie. This

theory favors communism and socialism over capitalism due to the extreme economic imbalance capitalism causes. Marx hypothesized that there would one day be a revolution against the bourgeoisie; However, until then, society will continue to be brainwashed in this divided “way of life” not only through work but through our education, religion, social leaders and government. A key point that should also be noted in this theory is that Marx explains why there was not a revolution occurring previously. He mentions that capitalism goes much further than just wealth. Since all members of the bourgeoisie were also leaders of politics, religion and other social factors; it was not just about revolutionizing against the workforce, but the entire economic, social and political government of the state. This shows that capitalism had full control of everything in society and not just the jobs that people worked in. Children were educated that this was the norm, religion was preaching that this was correct, and social culture was influencing everyone that what was happening was good for society as a whole. Even if there was a large amount of suffering among many, capitalism was taught to be the most beneficial way of life. Overall, the Marxism theory exposes the bourgeoisie and their tactics of gaining social control as well as hypothesizes that one day society will revolutionize against it.

The theories founded by Marx, although centuries old, still influence and play a crucial role in today’s society. Although there was no huge revolution like Marx hypothesized, there are individuals who go against capitalism. These individuals in support of Marx’s theory are known as “Marxists.” An example that is relevant to today's times are entrepreneurs. These individuals do not want the average nine to five we are taught; moreover, they are stepping outside of the norm and starting their own business where they get out of the working class and become one of the bourgeoisie. Another, more prominent, example of Marx’s theories on capitalism and

economics in general and its role and impact in society today, can be found in the ever constant debates on political levels.

The United States is widely considered as one of the leading countries in the world as far as production and is used as a role model for many other nations. However, as a developed country, the United States has one of the highest rates of homelessness compared to that of other developed nations (Wolff & Leopold, 2020). Furthermore, it was found that as of 2023 around 66% of the nation's wealth is owned by the top 10% of earners. It was also found that the United States is ranked second in the world for having the most billionaires. These statistics do not go unknown to the citizens of society. In many political elections, the topics of capitalism and its impact on society are brought up. Many elected officials and previous candidates for the presidential election, such as Bernie Sanders, consistently advocate and propose policies that would help eliminate the large wealth gaps within the United States. Many U.S. citizens are opposed to capitalism and would much rather prefer the economy to switch to a more socialist economy. For example, many advocate for higher minimum wages, free higher education, and free healthcare. However, those in political power and economic power, the bourgeoisie, consistently fight to ensure that these policies and bills are not put into place as it would possibly diminish their power and control.

Karl Marx and his theories on economics led to the creation of one of the most prominent and impactful theories to sociologists today. Marxism is the general belief that power and economics, more specifically that of capitalism, creates large disparities and creates social issues between different socioeconomic classes. It is important to understand such theories as they allow one insight into the current social world. By understanding his theories, one can be more able to recognize the wealth disparities within society and strive to combat these issues.

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