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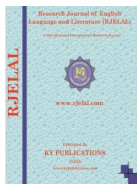
CONFLICT SOCIETY AND MARXISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Karl Marx was a great social and political thinker of the 20th century. He is one of the most important & controversial of the sociological thinkers and was primarily a great economic historian. Marx theory comes out because of political & social conflicts of 19th century. He believes that the class struggle was the driving force of social change. According to Marx: Men begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence. In producing their means of subsistence men indirectly produced their actual material life. This stage occurs within the framework of a progressive historical evolution. Marx has identified four stages of human history. Marx's theories have on the other hand inspired nations to change the course of their development. Even today, in spite of the great development; his thoughts & the communist ideology are still alive.

Key Words: Proletariat, Conflict, Bourgeoisie, Capitalist society, Hegemony

Introduction

Marx was born in Trier, Prussia (present-day Germany) on May 5, 1818, to Heinrich Marx and Henrietta Pressberg. Marx's parents were Jewish, and he came from a long line of rabbis on both sides of his family was a German philosopher, sociologist, economist, and revolutionary socialist. However, his father converted to Lutheranism to evade anti-Semitism prior to Marx's birth. He was educated at home by his father until high school, and in 1835 at the age of 17, enrolled at Bonn University in Germany, where he studied law at his father's request. Marx, however, was much more interested in philosophy and literature Marx worked in journalism and wrote for both German and English language publications. From 1852 to 1862, he was a

correspondent for the "New York Daily Tribune," writing a total of 355 articles. He also continued writing and formulating his theories about the nature of society and how he believed it could be improved, as well as actively campaigning for socialism. He spent the rest of his life working on a three-volume tome, "Das Capital," which saw its first volume published in 1867. In this work, Marx aimed to explain the economic impact of capitalist society, where a small group, which he called the bourgeoisie, owned the means of production and used their power to exploit the proletariat, the working class that actually produced the goods that enriched the capitalist tsars. While Marx remained a relatively unknown figure in his own lifetime, his ideas and the ideology of Marxism began to exert a

major influence on socialist movements shortly after his death. He succumbed to cancer on March 14, 1883, and was buried in High gate Cemetery in London. Marx offered a theory of capitalism based on his idea that human beings are basically productive - in order to survive, people have to work. He also believed that people have two relationships to the means of production: you either own the productive property or you work for someone who does. He has been described as one of the most influential figures in human history, and in a 1999 BBC poll was voted the "thinker of the millennium" by people from around the world. The memorial at his grave is always covered by tokens of appreciation from his fans. His tombstone is inscribed with words that echo those from "The Communist Manifesto," which seemingly predicted the influence Marx would have on world politics and economics: "Workers of all lands unite."

The Conflict Theory: Conflict theory originated in the work of Karl Marx, who focused on the causes and consequences of class conflict between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production and the capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class and the poor). Focusing on the economic, social, and political implications of the rise of capitalism in Europe, Marx theorized that this system, premised on the existence of a powerful minority class (the bourgeoisie) and an oppressed majority class (the proletariat), created class conflict because the interests of the two were at odds, and resources were unjustly distributed among them. Within this system an unequal social order was maintained through ideological coercion which created consensus--and acceptance of the values, expectations, and conditions as determined by the bourgeoisie. Marx theorized that the work of producing consensus was done in the "superstructure" of society, which is composed of social institutions, political structures, and culture, and what it produced consensus for was the "base," the economic relations of production.

Marx reasoned that as the socio-economic conditions worsened for the proletariat, they would develop a class consciousness that revealed their exploitation at the hands of the wealthy capitalist class of bourgeoisie, and then they would revolt,

demanding changes to smooth the conflict. According to Marx, if the changes made to appease conflict maintained a capitalist system, then the cycle of conflict would repeat. However, if the changes made created a new system, like socialism, then peace and stability would be achieved. Many social theorists have built on Marx's conflict theory to bolster it, grow it, and refine it over the years. Explaining why Marx's theory of revolution did not manifest in his lifetime, Italian scholar and activist Antonio Gramsci argued that the power of ideology was stronger than Marx had realized and that more work needed to be done to overcome cultural hegemony, or rule through common sense. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, critical theorists who were part of The Frankfurt School, focused their work on how the rise of mass culture--mass produced art, music, and media--contributed to the maintenance of cultural hegemony. More recently, C. Wright Mills drew on conflict theory to describe the rise of a tiny "power elite" composed of military, economic, and political figures who have ruled America from the mid-twentieth century.

Many others have drawn on conflict theory to develop other types of theory within the social sciences, including feminist theory, critical race theory, postmodern and postcolonial theory, queer theory, post-structural theory, and theories of globalization and world systems. So, while initially conflict theory described class conflicts specifically, it has lent itself over the years to studies of how other kinds of conflicts, like those premised on race, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, and nationality, among others, are a part of contemporary social structures, and how they affect our lives. Conflict theory is a theory propounded by Karl Marx that claims society is in a state of perpetual conflict due to competition for limited resources. It holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity. According to conflict theory, those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless. Marxist perspective and conceptualization of the way in which society is structured. This perspective depicts society as characteristically dominated by conflicts (Collins & Sanderson, 2008). Conflict is the

determinant of how resources are allocated and who benefits the most from such allocations. Power is also acquired through conflict, and once such power is acquired, it is used to dominate the less-powerful and to benefit a few people. Collins and Sanderson (2008) cited that the basic form of interaction in the human society is not consensus but competition, which culminates into persistent conflicts. Each party or individual competes against perceived rivals with the goal of gaining advantage and dominating the other.

The theory presented by Karl Marx underscores the fact that conflict, and not consensus, dominates designed mechanisms through different classes in the stratified society, interacts and relates to each other (Collins & Sanderson, 2008). The rich and the powerful use conflict to threaten their poor subjects and to maintain the status-quo. The poor on the other hand, organize and use conflicts to push for a revolution that will overthrow the powerful that are enjoying the privileges of capitalist structures. These tensions are thus sustained by the need of each group to have its interests dominate the structures and operations of the society.

The Theory of Class Struggle: Capitalist society is divided into two classes: According to Karl Marx, the society is divided into two classes; the Bourgeoisie or the Capitalist class is the ones who own and control the wealth of a country. These control the productive forces in society (what Marx called the economic base), which basically consisted of land, factories and machines that could be used to produce goods that could then be sold for a profit. The majority, or the masses, or what Marx called The Proletariat can only gain a living by selling their labour power to the bourgeoisie for a price; the bourgeoisie increase their wealth by exploiting the proletariat: Marx argued that the bourgeoisie maintain and increase their wealth through exploiting the working class. The relationship between these two classes is exploitative because the amount of money the Capitalist pays his workers (their wages) is always below the current selling, or market price of whatever they have produced. The difference between the two is called surplus value. Marx thus says that the capitalist extracts surplus

value from the worker. Because of this extraction of surplus value, the capitalist class is only able to maintain and increase their wealth at the expense of the proletariat. To Marx, Profit is basically the accumulated exploitation of workers in capitalist society. Marx thus argues that at root, capitalism is an unjust system because those that actually do the work are not fairly rewarded for the work that they do and the interests of the Capitalist class are in conflict with the interests of the working class; those who have economic power control all other institutions in society: Marx argued that those who control the Economic Base also control the Superstructure – that is, those who have wealth or economic power also have political power and control over the rest of society; ideological Control: Marx argued that the ruling classes used their control of social institutions to gain ideological dominance, or control over the way people think in society. Marx argued that the ideas of the ruling classes were presented as common sense and natural and thus unequal, exploitative relationships were accepted by the proletariat as the norm; the result of the above is false class consciousness: The end result of ideological control is false consciousness – where the masses or proletariat are deluded into thinking that everything is fine and that the appalling in which they live and work are inevitable. This delusion is known as False Consciousness. In Marxist terms, the masses suffer from false class consciousness and fail to realize their common interest against their exploiters; the important of Property in Society: Especially, the base of capitalist society has been placed/situated on the importance of economy. Because of the source of social dignity, popularity and status based on the importance of property, the strong group or class increases the access over limited resources. The access of them increases on the means of production. Through this process social development goes on. The division of class appeared in the society and conflict starts; the economic determinism: According to Karl Marx, the determining factor of each aspect of the society remains economic system. Production system or structure determines social values, norms, tradition, ritual, political and social organization etc. According

to him, the main base of exploitation over the proletariat by capitalist is the monopoly of capitalist over the property. This monopoly nature affects to the other levels of society and they also use the economic structure. There remains hand of few capitalists in each level of production structure. This process bring the emergence of class in the society and antagonistic nature over them, this further brings the situation of conflict.; the polarization of class: Because of the unequal power relation between capitalist class and proletariat class, these classes start to unite more for the benefit of class in the society. In the society, the structure of relation creates as the nature of these classes. Because of the over-exploitation by capitalist class over the proletariat the class polarization increases rapidly. The polarization further increases the level of conflict and after certain period of time class conflict starts. The main cause of it is the protection of class benefit; the theory of Surplus Value: Capitalists keep the greater portion of profit as for the involvement of them in production system. Labors cannot get the proper remuneration of their labor. While this situation or process of exploitation goes continue that create the situation of conflict; the pauperization: While the capitalists keep surplus value with them, that creates poverty, scarcity, insecurity etc. aspects to the labor class. The whole society influence by this process. There remains the crisis of human on the maximum labor classes. In this context Karl Marx says poverty emerges not because of the scarcity of resources but because of the exploitation. This further compels to unite classes and after a certain period of time the situation of class conflict emerges; the alienation: Because of the over exploitation by capitalists in production system, the human relation changes as to the commodity of an object. The whole relation has been taken on the basis of economy. The process depends on the level of capitalism development. In this situation, there remains the monocentric decision of capitalists on production system. The labors feel them as the object of business. That has been served to the capitalists only. In this context, labor class prefer to choose next production system than capitalists production system, where they can get proper cost of their labor and end of exploitation; the Class

Conflict and Antagonism: Because of the exploitation of laborers in capitalist production system there creates the situation of pauperization, the condition of frustration, poverty. Ultra poor situation and the loss of human value, this situation further emerges the class consciousness to human value, this situation further emerges the class consciousness to the working class people for the protection of their right. This situation of working class people for the protection of their right. This situation of unity and consciousness also remains there in capitalist class and their unity further increases as increased in labor class. They try to protect their supremacy and previously created. This situation compels to the condition of class conflict; the revolution: In the situation of class unity, integration and conflict over the class divides the whole society into two classes. This situation stimulates to the struggle to end the capitalism. The leadership of revolution has been done by working class people. Through this revolution socialist system established by ending the rule of few capitalists. Karl Marx says the capitalism itself is sufficient to end the system of capitalism and the assumes the victory of proletariat is compulsory; the Dictatorship of Proletariat: The revolution between capitalists and proletariat established the dictatorship of proletariat. At that time, there will be the end of capitalist class. The dictatorship of proletariat established through this process does the change in social structure. The ownership of means of production changes monopoly to group; the inauguration of Communist Society: After the victory of proletariat in the class struggle, the society develops as the society of classless and stateless, where completely the ownership of personal property also finishes.

Main elements of the Conflict Theory by Karl Marx:

Karl Marx contends that the society is stratified into two main social groups. These are the proletariat and the bourgeoisies. The conflict between these two large social groups results in what Marx considered as revolutionary change. The probable source of conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisies are the desire of the proletariat to have ownership of means of production, such as factories, power, land and other valuable resources (Collins &

Sanderson, 2008). The bourgeoisies, on the other hand, are not willing to relinquish these resources and give up their privileged positions of power and overwhelming riches and investments.

According to Karl Marx, society is stratified into classes. The classes comprise the bourgeoisies, land-owners and the proletariat. The propertied-upper-class is the minority, while the proletariats are the majority. Wood (2004) notes Marx's dissection of the dominant features of each of these classes in most of his works. For example, the bourgeoisies own the means of production. This is due to the huge investments they have made into factories and machines in the industries. The land owners have rent as their primary source of income. The proletariats are owners of cheap labor which they offer in exchange for wages that they use for their basic subsistence (Collins & Sanderson, 2008).

Investment gives the bourgeoisies a lot of profit. Marx conceptualized the structure of the society in relation to the two major classes. He is focused on the inherent struggles between the proletariat and bourgeoisies which is the engine that pushes the occurrence of social change through revolutionary movements. In the understanding of Marxists, class is defined by the level of wealth and power that one possesses (Wood, 2004). This power is used to sideline other classes from property and positions of power. Bourgeoisies use their power to serve their personal interests and amass more wealth at the expense of the proletariat. These three different classes, in the understanding of Karl Marx, have different interests which pit them against each other (Wood, 2004). For example, the bourgeoisie are interested in safeguarding their investment in the industries, maximizing profits and minimizing costs. This makes them engage the proletariats as laborers in the farms to achieve this objective at relatively minimal wages.

The proletariats on the other hand, organize and mobilize themselves to collectively push for better wages, conditions of work and strive to overcome the repressive and exploitative forces of their masters in the industries and factories. Thus, they struggle to join hands and, through revolutionary movements, overthrow the

bourgeoisies and control the industries and factories (Wood, 2004). These conflicting interests are what pit the social classes against each other. Conflicts, and not consensus, therefore, characterize the society as noted by Marx who had envisaged such a society founded on constant conflicts.

The clash between the owners and the workers is at the heart of Marx's thinking. In an industrial, wealthy, society, how can so many people be poor? At the heart of Marx's thinking is social conflict, which is the struggle between groups in society over scarce resources. Marx's primary concern, however, was class conflict, which arises from the way society produces material goods.

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