

# Karl marx essay sample

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Karl Marx – Possibly the most important thinker of our times. Through his theories of Marxism this philosopher, social scientist, historian and revolutionist predicted our historical evolution. Marx born in Germany in 1818 attended the University of Berlin. After much study he became editor of the liberal newspaper Rheinische Zeitung and with many of his debatable conflicting articles about economics was forced by the Prussian government to close down the paper. Marx then moved to France which led him to first meet German socialist Friedrich Engels which would begin the start of a lifelong friendship. After some time in France Marx became a strong supporter of communism and was later expelled from Paris for his writings on alienation under the capitalist society at the time.

His return to Germany forced him back into his study where he and Engels published their most famous book The Communist Manifesto (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, 1848) which was backed by the Communist League based in London. After the breakout of the revolutions across Europe Marx moved to London where he sought refuge and began his greatest work based on his theories of the economy. He wrote three volumes of a book he named Capital which discusses the Theories of Surplus Value and his understanding of the labour theory of value which were later published by Engels after his death.

### Marx's Key Points and Theories

The three volumes by Marx discuss in great detail his synopsis about the exploitation of workers and surplus value under capitalism, and they elaborate on other theorists ideas such as Adam Smith, with his principal of

The Invisible Hand and David Ricardo's labour theory of value. Although Marx sees capitalism as a class struggle between Capital (the employers and owners of wealth) and Labour (the people who do the hard graft), he further emphasizes on alienation and what the workers experience from the capitalist environment. Firstly the whole system of capitalism is based on the idea of the ordinary worker versus the business man, factory owner or perhaps today, the entrepreneurs of society. Capitalism centres around the idea of an employer owning his employees creations and ultimately the fact that workers in general don't receive the full benefit entitled to them for their hard work. For instance the worker goes to work each day and works hard to produce a commodity. That commodity now belongs to the employer who pays that worker a fixed wage and ultimately sells on the commodity for their own profit – Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity (Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 1, 1867)

This outlines the idea of surplus value – the profit difference between what the product sold for and what it actually cost to produce. Marx questioned this process and announced how it exploited the workers. Marx not only questioned this exploitation but broke it down into four main types of alienation. The worker creates the product, be it a hand crafted chair or a work of art, and immediately has their creation taken away from them. Other people experience the enjoyment from the employees hard work. The worker has no choice but to allow this to happen and let the employer reap all the rewards in terms of making the profit. The only person who loses out here is the worker by not receiving the full value for their hard work. Because of this workers feel and view going to work as a torment and to an extent feel as

though employers are stealing their skills and knowledge of their various trades away from them. Marx also states that this process leaves the worker alone, confused and separate from their fellow workers, and this can strip away the workers identity and their mutual need of other people. Marx describes this process as the employee becoming estranged from himself, from his own work and other people around him inside and outside of work.

Work is an essential part of a persons well being and provides a sense of self satisfaction in providing stimulating and interesting things to do. With current exploitation and depriving workers of their needs the worker simply looks at his job merely as a means to survive - he works that he may keep alive. He does not count the labor itself as a part of his life; it is rather a sacrifice of his life (Karl Marx, Wage Labour and Capital, 1847), Capitalists aim to produce goods for the lowest possible cost which involves paying the worker less and less while having no concern for the worker - Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the laborer (Karl Marx, Capital, 1863-1883). Workers also understand this and Marx predicted that this situation will lead to a revolution by the working class and the eventual overthrow of capitalism. Marx sees the flaws in the capitalist regime but also recognises that there will always be an inequality between rich and poor, but perhaps in a way capitalism only aids and strengthens this indifference unnecessarily.

The Communist Manifesto influenced Marx's three volumes on capitalism and why it will without a doubt result in its own downfall. Although Marx was relatively ignored by the people of his own era his ideas and predictions are

widely known and used today. In 1999 Marx was voted the greatest thinker of the millennium. Marx viewed capitalism as a cyclical process, as per say a system which would eventually come back around after its demise and evolution would mean it will always be a part of society. Marx describes evolution as a class struggle throughout history. The relations of production refer to those who own the means of production in an economy – the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus-labour (Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 10, 1867). for example – in a feudal society lords and land owners owned the means of production by having the wealth to sway the poorer class whereas in a capitalist society the upper class and the wealthy own the productive forces by means of owning the machinery and technology.

Although this would not lead us to believe the forces of production would be owned by a different class in a socialist or communist society (Marxist Theory, Ted Trainer, [www. socialsciences. arts. com](http://www.socialsciences.arts.com)) Society had evolved from system of slavery to a feudalist system and then onto to capitalism, so Marx predicted evolution will inevitably bring about another shift to a better socialist or communist classless society. In older times workers produced goods for there own use or for family and friends needs. Whatever the worker produced was for self benefit and went towards their interests to bargain or trade with as they saw fit.

He claimed that capitalism had no concern of workers rights, interests, needs or thoughts and were they were merely there to perform their necessary tasks to make a profit for the capitalist. In comparison he felt that workers

were only paid just enough to keep them alive to perform their work duties – like a horse, he must receive enough to enable him to work. It does not consider him, during the time he is not working, as a human being (Marx, Wages of Labour, 1844). The working class creates and the capitalists take all the profit. The capitalists in fact make so much profit that they then re-invest some of this profit back into the industry with the view to producing even more profit – Capital is money: Capital is commodities. ... Because it is value, it has acquired the occult quality of being able to add value to itself (Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 4, 1867).

The problem here is the re-investment will most likely come in the form of technology or machinery which will inevitably result in less workers, less jobs and more profit – The production of too many useful things results in too many useless people (Karl Marx) This scenario will eventually lead to an over-production of goods involving too many products on the market for people to consume or be able to afford. Marx questions here the typical market system used of supply and demand and suggests that capitalism will result in crisis from the over production of commodities. Although Marx recognised the flaws of a capitalist world he recognised it as a necessary step in the ladder to a more desired communist or socialist society. He viewed capitalism only as something which created huge wealth alongside better knowledge and discoveries in science which would lead to an upgraded system such as socialism.

### Main Arguments

Capitalism is merely a production for profit scenario according to Marx and the whole crisis of capital versus labour is based on the private ownership of the costs of production – Under private property ... Each tries to establish over the other an alien power, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need (Marx, Division of Labour, 1844) Marx examined the idea of culture and what distinguishes individuals as being belonging to a certain classes. He asks does private ownership of property put you into a higher class bracket, This focuses on the inequality that comes with capitalism – to claim that the capitalist system is inefficient means that there is some alternative system that is better for all (Free to Lose – John Roemer 1988, Pg. 3). This questions whether a system based on the ownership of land can be fair system. Marx examines individuals and if people born with a silver spoon in their mouth should have the same entitlements as someone who has worked hard all their life and accumulated money to purchase what they own.

At the same time should a company owner who has worked hard to get where he is be distinguished against a person who has inherited his company from a rich family member. A class is a group or a partnership of people who share common interests. Employees are a class and employers are another class of people. Marx contemplates what separates the classes and which ones are better and more important. Do people who have different amounts of money form a class of their own or does having certain knowledge, skills or experiences entitle you or give you membership to enter a higher class. Can you enter certain classes by being good looking or is it simply down to the people you know or the contacts you have. Marx

questions if capitalists are simply people who have paid to be in a higher class and maybe made different choices or decisions in life along the way.

You can buy Artwork or expensive bottles of wine to become more cultured or you can live in a large house and drive an expensive car to appear to have more money. Marx defines class as a status in society. Those who rely on their earnings to live make up the largest class in society known as the working class. Recent middle class workers such as teachers and civil servants who are now overworked and underpaid have relegated into and now see themselves as working class people. Should knowing certain people give you an advantage in life and more importantly does this mean you are in a higher class which gives you the ability to exploit others. According to Marx this class struggle along with exploitation of the workers will result a working class revolution and the downfall of the capitalist era – The Proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains, (Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto, 1848).

Marx emphasises the idea that Social life is based upon these conflicts of interests and whoever is dominant in this class struggle changes with the historical evolution of society . Challenges

Marx proceeds with exposing the weaknesses in the capitalist system while advertising the need for a communist like society. Marxism offers up public ownership of land but struggles to explain how wealth could fall upon the hands of the poorer class people. Ownership of private property is not the best way of running an economy today, and questions like – Why does labour



not hire capital instead of capital hiring labour (Free to Lose – John Roemer 1988, Pg. 11) have been presented to Marxist followers.

Capitalist owners of established factories, shops, banks and offices will simply leave all of the wealth within the small minority of the population whilst the huge majority of the working class people struggle to deal with the continuing problem of increasing exploitation. The worlds largest 100 companies now own 70% of global trade (www. socialistalternative.org(02/10/2013) while workers continue to lose benefits in the workplace with cuts in wages, bonuses and pensions. As work hours increase and pay decreases workers face cuts in education, medical and healthcare costs and a realisation that things are not going to improve.

In the past the workers made it, sold it and received the profit and would want things to remain so, but in this modern world are H. R teams for large companies seeking to please the so called greatest assets of the company(the workers) or maximise performance and profit for the capitalist. Marx argued that the working class will never be paid properly for their labour and even if they wanted to capitalists can not afford to pay more money for fear of competitors undercutting them and putting them out of business. Obviously the consequences of exploitation needs to be weighed up. People unable to find work will inevitably lead to robbery, raised unemployment levels and severe social welfare cuts.

Marx's Relevance in Today's Society

Today we see evidence of low wages and long hours with employers finding new ways around having to pay out sufficient money for labour. Minimum wage seems to be laughed upon by employers and workers need to work various jobs just to survive and feed their families. Many workers fear for their jobs and family and as a result accept the harsh conditions of the new working world. Employers don't want employees on their books anymore or the unreliability of humans - companies pursuit for profits and productivity would naturally lead them to fewer and fewer workers (Karl Marx - Das Kapital, 1867). The cost of having to pay wages, keep workers happy and motivated in the workplace have become too expensive for the capitalist. The new generation of worker is the one who supervises the work carried by the real engineers known as computers and machines - machinery has greatly increased the number of well-to-do idlers. (Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 15, 1867) Unskilled multi-task workers are now being sought by employers and organisations who can easily be replaced when they don't fall into line or refuse to accept pay cuts - different sorts of labour are reduced to unskilled labour as their standard, are established by a social process (Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 1, 1867).

Specialist workers are now a thing of the past with computers and machines now storing the required knowledge of the specialist with the added ability of doing most work in a much faster time. Globalisation adds to the already stressed capitalists who need to slash the costs of their product to keep up with the competition. The working people are the ones who will bear the cost of this and as such will lead to further hardship. Is re-skilling and re-training now enough to survive this this new era or will Marx finally get the revolution

he predicted. The theories and ideas of Marx are more relevant today than ever with the global crisis. Marxism ideas created over a century ago are forcing his critics to accept he was correct in stating: that capitalism contains within itself the seeds for its own destruction. (The Ideas of Karl Marx, Alan Woods- 21/06/2013). People who have long ignored Marxist ideas are now opening their eyes to what he had been saying. People who witnessed the fall of communist Russia are now unsure about the future of capitalism.

Sceptics of Marxism are now amazed how a book written over 150 years ago can so accurately predict the times in which we live in today. New age Neo-Marxist scholars and theorists share in Marx's theories but are more concerned with culture and ideology as opposed to economics (Slideshare, Marxist Theory, Christine P. Lee, Hassan Khannenje). Marx has left us with a theory of how society works, has made us aware of the flaws of capitalism and gives us an insight into the problems of society today. However Karl Marx's goals cannot be viewed by everyone in the same favour. I'm quite sure business owners and fellow capitalists will not be supporting a revolution by the working class with a lead up to a communist society.

“ The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working Men of All Countries, Unite!” (The Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1848).

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