

The social theories of karl marx



Most influential socialist thinker of his time.

The philosopher, social scientist, historian and revolutionary, Karl Marx, is without a doubt the most influential socialist thinker to emerge in the 19th century. Although he was largely ignored by scholars in his own lifetime, his social, economic and political ideas gained rapid acceptance in the socialist movement after his death in 1883. Until quite recently almost half the population of the world lived under regimes that claim to be Marxist. This very success, however, has meant that the original ideas of Marx have often been modified and his meanings adapted to a great variety of political circumstances. In addition, the fact that Marx delayed publication of many of his writings meant that it is only recently that scholars had the opportunity to appreciate Marx's intellectual stature.

Karl Marx, the son of Hirschel and Henrietta Marx, was born in Trier, Germany, in 1818. Hirschel Marx was a lawyer and to escape anti-Semitism decided to abandon his Jewish faith when Karl was a child. Although the majority of people living in Trier were Catholics, Marx decided to become a Protestant. He also changed his name from Hirschel to Heinrich. His parents were Jewish, but converted to Lutheranism when he was only six.

It is difficult to know what effect this would have on his later philosophy, but we do know that Marx would be antithetical to religious belief, at one time pronouncing it, “ the opiate of the masses

After schooling in Trier (1830-35), Marx entered Bonn University to study law. At university he spent much of his time socialising and running up large debts. His father was horrified when he discovered that Karl had been

wounded in a duel. Heinrich Marx agreed to pay off his son's debts but insisted that he moved to the more sedate Berlin University.

Educated in the best universities in Germany at Bonn, Berlin and Jena, he was greatly influenced by the most prominent scholar of the previous generation, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. As youth turned to middle age, Karl Marx's views became more radical and finally hardened into the body of thought we know today. His journey to this point took him out of Germany where the newspaper he edited, the Rheinische Zeitung, was suppressed by the Government. He moved to Paris in 1843 and later to Brussels in 1845.

Marx himself considered his theory of surplus-value his most important contribution to the progress of economic analysis (Marx, letter to Engels of 24 August 1867). It is through this theory that the wide scope of his sociological and historical thought enables him simultaneously to place the capitalist mode of production in his historical context, and to find the root of its inner economic contradictions and its laws of motion in the specific relations of production on which it is based

Marx was partial to Hegel and his theories and was influenced by Hegel's views that history was a dialectical process. He did not adhere to Hegel's spirituality . He was also influenced by Fuerbach, Saint-Simon, Proudhon and Bakunin. While living in Paris, he began to associate with the working clasas for the first time. He began to formulate his thought that revolution was the key to achieving balance between the ' upper class' and the working class. He wrote and spoke on social change through revolution. He believed that there was great energy between proleterians and capitalists. Marx began to

appeal to more of the common people during the early depression days. American education became aware of soviet education reforms during the 1920's and through George S. Counts who visited Russia and brought their educational system of reform to light in America. But only a mere 10 years later, American educators did not think soviet education was good.

The theory associated with Marxism was developed in mid-19th century Europe

by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Although Marx and Engels did not write widely

about education, they developed theoretical perspectives on modern societies that have

been used to highlight the social functions of education and their concepts and methods

have served to both theorize and criticize education in the reproduction of capitalist

societies, and to support projects of alternative education. In this study, I will first briefly

sketch the classical perspectives of Marx and Engels, highlighting the place of education

in their work. Then, I lay out the way that Marxian perspectives on education were

developed in the Frankfurt School critical theory, British cultural studies, and other neo-

Marxian and post-Marxian approaches grouped under the label of critical pedagogy, that

emerged from the work of Paulo Freire and is now global in scope. I argue that Marxism

provides influential and robust perspectives on education, still of use, but that classical

Marxism has certain omissions and limitations that contemporary theories of society and

education need to overcome.

The young Marx and Engels thus perceived that without education the working

class was condemned to lives of drudgery and death, but that with education they had a

chance to create a better life. In their famous 1848 “ Communist Manifesto,” Marx and

Engels argued that growing economic crises would throw ever more segments of the

middle classes, and the older peasant and artisan classes, into the impoverished situation

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of the proletariat and would thus produce a unified working class, at least one with

interests in common. They declared that the bourgeois class is constantly battling against

the older feudal powers, among its own segments, and against the foreign bourgeoisie,

and thus enlists the proletariat as its ally. Consequently, the proletariat gains education

and experience which it can use to fight the ruling class.

The Marxist approach to education is broad constructivist and emphasises activity, collaboration and critique, rather than passive absorption of knowledge, emulation of elders and conformism; it is student-centred rather than teacher centred, but recognises that education cannot transcend the problems and capabilities of the society in which it is located.

The Soviet, Chinese, and other Communist states were at most only partly structured along Marxist “ classless” lines, and while such Communist leaders as Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong staunchly claimed Marxist orthodoxy for their pronouncements, they in fact greatly stretched the doctrine in attempting to mold it to their own uses. The evolution of varied forms of welfare capitalism, the improved condition of workers in industrial societies, and the recent demise of the Communist bloc in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have tended to discredit Marx’s dire and deterministic economic predictions. The Soviet and Chinese Communist

regimes did not result in the disappearance of the state, but in the erection of huge, monolithic, and largely inefficient state structures.

In recent years, many Western intellectuals have championed Marxism and repudiated Communism, objecting to the manner in which the two terms are often used interchangeably. A number have turned to Marx's other writings and explored the present-day value of such Marxist concepts as alienation. Among prominent Western Marxists were the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács and the Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci, both of whom viewed Marxism as a liberation from the rule of political economy and believed in its relationship to the social consciousness. Marxism's influence can be found in disciplines as diverse as economics, history, art, literary criticism, and sociology. German sociologist Max Weber, Frankfurt school theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, British economist Joan Robinson, German dramatist Bertolt Brecht, British literary critic Frederic Jameson, and the French historians of the Annales school have all produced work drawn from Marxist perspectives.