

Thus, history. marx  
linked this analysis to



Thus, Marx defined a class as all those people who share a common relationship to the means of economic production. Those who own and control the means of production – slave-owners, feudal landowners, or the owners of property such as factories and capital – are the dominant class. Those who work for them – slaves, peasants or industrial labourers – are the sub-ordinate class. The relationship between the two classes is not only one of dominance and subordination, but also of exploitation. The workers produce more wealth in the form of food, manufactured products, and services than is necessary to meet their basic needs.

In other words, they produce “surplus wealth”. But they do not enjoy the use of the surplus they have created. Instead those who own the means of production are able to take this surplus wealth as “profit” for their own use.

This, in Marx’s view, is the essence of exploitation and the main source of conflict between the classes that has occurred throughout history. Marx linked this analysis to the idea that “the economic base of society influences the general character of all other aspects of culture and social structure such as law, religion, education and government. The dominant class is able to control all of these institutions and to ensure that they protect its own interests. The laws, therefore, protect the rich, not the poor. The established religion supports the social order as it is, not as it might be.

Education teaches the virtues of the existing system, not its vices.

Government upholds the status quo rather than undermines it”

Five Variables That Determine the Marxian Concept of Class: Bendix and Lipset have identified five variables that determine a class in the marxian sense: 1.

Conflicts over the distribution of economic rewards between the classes', 2. Easy Communication between the individuals in the same class positions so that ideas and action programmes are readily disseminated; 3. Growth of class-consciousness in the sense that the members of a class have a feeling of solidarity and understanding of their historic role', 4. Profound dissatisfaction of the lower class over its inability to control the economic structure of which it feels itself to be the exploited victim', 5.

" Establishment of a political organisation resulting from the economic structure, the historical situation and maturation of class-consciousness" ?

Marx stressed that mere organisation of production is not a sufficient condition for the development of social classes; " there must also be a physical concentration of masses of people, easy communication among them, repeated conflicts over economic rewards and the growth of class consciousness." For the very same reason, small peasants who constitute a vast mass and live in more or less similar conditions, but scattered over a big area, do not form a class group in the Marxian sense. From the Marxian point of view, in all stratified societies there are two major social groups; a rich class and a poor class, or the ' Haves and Have-nots'; or a ruling class and subject class. The key to understanding a given society is to discover which is the dominant mode of production within it. All the other relations stem out of it. From a Marxian view, a class is a social group where members share the same relationships to the forces of production. Thus during the feudal stage, there are two main classes distinguished by their relationship to land, the major force of production.

They are the (i) feudal nobility who own the land and, (ii) the landless serfs who work the land. Similarly, in the capitalist stage, there are two main classes: (i) the bourgeoisie or Capitalist class which owns the forces of production and (ii) the proletariat or working class whose members own only their labour which they hire to the capitalists in return for wages. : Marx believed that human society evolves through different stages according to the means of production that is dominant at each stage: (i) the first is primitive communism, on which there is no private property (ii) The second is slavery in which one class owns and exploits the members of another; (iii) The third of feudalism in which a class of aristocratic landowners exploits the mass of peasants; (iv) The fourth is capitalism in which the owners of wealth exploit the mass of industrial workers. Each of these systems is more economically productive than its predecessor, but the tensions of class conflict lead to a revolution that results in the fifth stage, (v) the fifth stage, socialism, occurs when the industrial workers have finally revolted. In the three stages, excluding the first, the labour power required for production was supplied by the subject class, that is, by slaves, serfs, and wage labourers, respectively.

The subject class is made up of the majority of the population whereas the ruling or dominant class forms a minority. Marx mentions the case of the first stage, the stage of 'primitive communism' as the only example of a "classless society". : According to Marx, classes did not exist during the era of primitive communism when the societies were based on a sort of socialist mode of production. In a hunting and food gathering stage, classes did not exist, since all members of society shared the same relationship to the forces

of production. Every member here was both producer and owner. This stage represents a subsistence economy which means that production only meets basic survival needs.

“ Classes emerge only when the productive capacity of society expands beyond the level required for subsistence.....” This occurs in an agricultural economy where a few individuals are freed from food production to do other tasks. As agriculture developed, surplus wealth, that is, goods above the basic subsistence needs of the community, was produced. This led to an exchange of goods and trading developed within and between communities. This was accompanied by the development of a system of private property. “ Private property and the accumulation of surplus wealth form the basis for the development of class societies. In particular, they provide the pre-conditions for the emergence of a class of producers and a class of non-producers. Some are able to acquire the forces of production and others are therefore obliged to work for them.

The result is a class of non-producers which owns the forces of production and a class of producers which owns only its- labour power. From a Marxian perspective, the relationship between the major social classes is one of mutual dependence and conflict.