

# Marx and Locke



Miriam D. Knox Dr. Soupios PoliticalScience304 April 6, 2010 Karl Marx's and John Locke's Ideologies The Communist Manifesto, written by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels and The Second Treatise of Government written by John Locke are two distinct written pieces that describes their ideas and their philosophical beliefs regarding how society would function at its best.

Moreover, both writers offer a detailed explanation about the many struggles that man has encountered regarding his existence in the world.

In addition, they suggested political concepts whereby they felt it would help man to bring about socialization that would allow man to live a fair and qualitative life. In The Communist Manifesto, Marx uses a large portion of the book to give a historical perspective of society. He emphasizes from the very beginning that most of mans history has been based on economic pursuits and economic gains. As a result, he says that " all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (50).

Throughout history, social change occurred when the productive forces in society clashed with the conditions of production, resulting in massive social upheaval. This was always to the benefit of one social class at the expense of another. Modern society was the result of a long series of revolutions in the modes of production, of which the bourgeois class was the main beneficiary. Marx wrote in the Communist Manifesto, " Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat "(51 ).

The bourgeoisie, or capitalist class, consists of the relatively small number of people who owned or controlled the means of creating wealth including land

and raw materials; mines, factories, and offices; machinery and technology and who could employ wage laborers to work for them.

Proletarians perform most of the work in capitalist economies, but they had little or no control over their work-lives or over the wealth that they produced.

The relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is an exploitative one because the latter is paid less than the value that its labor creates, with the surplus of economic profits being kept by the bourgeoisie. While wages may rise if workers are well organized and during periods of economic growth, competition between capitalists compels employers to reduce labor costs as much as possible, particularly during recurring periods of capitalist economic crisis. Historically, the bourgeoisie had played a quite revolutionary role.

Whenever it has gained power, it has put to an end all "feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations." (53). It has eliminated the relationships that bound people to their superiors, and now all remaining relations between men were characterized by self-interest alone (53). In addition, religious fervor, chivalry and sentimentalism had all been sacrificed. Personal worth is now measured by exchange value, and the only freedom is that of Free Trade. Thus, exploitation that used to be veiled by religious and political "illusions" is now direct, brutal and blatant (53).

The bourgeoisie has changed all occupations into wage-laboring professions, even those that were previously honored, such as that of the doctor.

Similarly, family relations have lost their veil of sentimentality and have been

reduced to pure money relations (53). Marx continues to describe that the bourgeoisie had only one thing in mind, and that was how to increase their economic status. Subsequently concerns and issues regarding man's overall well being was ignored and had no significance within society. The bourgeoisie made it clear that they were only concerned with increasing their political power.

Furthermore, human conditions or any means of making humanity better was never considered nor important. In fact, Marx emphatically reminds us that money and political power was the bourgeoisie's primary interest. The Manifesto then discusses the relationship of the Communists to the proletarians. Marx says that Communists have been "reproached" for desiring to abolish the "right" of acquiring private property through the fruits of one's labor (67). However, he points out, laborers do not acquire any property through their labor.

Rather, the "property" or capital they produce serves to exploit them. This property, controlled by the bourgeoisie, represents a social power and not a personal power. Changing it into common property does not abolish property as a right, but merely changes its social character, by eliminating its class character. Marx also points out that the "[The bourgeoisie] is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him.

Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society" (65). The bourgeoisie wanted

man to exist in a subservient state of mind and wanted man to accept the exploitative lifestyle they were providing for their daily existence. Moreover, " What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (65). Marx reminds us that it was impossible for man to continue to work and survive in such limited and harsh conditions successfully.

If man continued to live like this it would lead to severe suppression and eventually to mans own demise. Therefore, Marx stresses in order for the proletariat to survive, they must revolt against the bourgeoisie. Marx states, " The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletariat parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, the overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat" (66). Marx understood that the proletarians had to revolt in order to experience freedom from their enslaved environment and develop a communistic society.

According to Marx, " the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property" (67). Marx felt in order for the proletarians to escape the bondage they were encountering and to establish a Communist society this theory had to be implemented. This theory was not an option, but in fact a necessity for the proletarians to develop a communistic society. Marx ends Communist Manifesto in stating " Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. Working men of all countries unite! (91). Marx strongly felt that man united throughout the universe and living in a Communist society would offer man the opportunity to live with the

prospect of both justice and a qualitative lifestyle while living in the world. He new this type of revolution would make the bourgeoisie fall and crumble. The Second Treatise of Government written by John Locke places sovereignty into the hands of the people. Locke's fundamental argument is that people are equal and invested with natural rights in a state of nature in which they live free from outside rule.

Locke addresses the state of nature in order to define political power. In Chapter 2, Locke explains the state of nature as a state of equality in which no one has power over another, and all are free to do as they please(4). He notes, however, that this liberty does not equal the license to abuse others, and that natural law exists even in the state of nature. Each individual in the state of nature has the power to execute natural laws, which are universal (5). Locke's theory includes a host of moral beliefs and moral practices.

Moreover, Locke points out and wants us to understand that the state of nature derives from a theory of justice and from a set of rights. No one would have any " rights" at all in the absence of a moral code applicable to human actions or any standard of " just" punishment. One topic that Marx and Locke had different views points on was whether private property was a natural right or not. John Locke believed that private property was a natural right, in fact he believed owning property was one of the most important possessions that mankind should seek and obtain.

Locke emphasized that all men have the right to " life, liberty and possessions "(5). One of man's best attributes as well as his down fall is having freewill, whereby man has the option in making a good or bad choice

regarding his actions. Keeping this in mind, Locke realizes the importance of establishing clear and precise rules for man to abide by. Locke emphasizes that, in any civil society, situations will arise that have to be dealt with before the legislative can be assembled to provide laws for them.

In these instances, the executive may exercise executive prerogative or simply "good judgment" (95). The executive is qualified to take actions that are outside the framework of the laws (not breaking them, just not provided for by them), if their actions advance the society's best interest. He defines this prerogative as "nothing but the power of doing public good without rule"(95). Overall Locke believed this rule of thumb avoided chaos and would provide peace and order. Ultimately this thought process was for man's overall good and for his general welfare.

Locke defines tyranny as "the exercise of power beyond right" (112). A just leader is bound by the laws of the legislative and works for the people, whereas a tyrant breaks the laws and acts on his own behalf. Locke notes that any executive body is not just a monarchy, but in fact ceases to function for the benefit of the people are a tyranny. Locke implies when the government is dissolved, the people are free to reform the legislative in order to recreate a civil state that works in their best interest before they fall under tyrannical rule.

In addition, He expressed the radical view that government is morally obliged to serve people, namely by protecting life, liberty, and property. He explained the principle of checks and balances to limit government power. He favored representative government and a rule of law. However he

denounced tyranny. He insisted that when government violates individual rights, people may legitimately rebel (126). Overall Locke believed that men were, by nature, born free and independent, meaning every person was a law unto themselves.

That meant that they couldn't be subjected to political power without their own consent. Since every individual had consented being part of the community, they had the power, and the will to act as a whole. By consenting to being in a community, man is obliged to be a part of it, and to support whatever the general will is, for his fellow citizens. Hence, Locke was asserting that government had to be fair and equitable towards all its citizens. In addition, Locke believed it was crucial for citizens had the right to revolt if government was not meeting their needs.

Marx and Locke were aligned along these terms although the ideas of Karl Marx did not have the same implicit trust in the inherent "good" of government that Locke had. According to Marx, government was not an entity through which change could be brought about. Rather, for change to happen and for the class struggles to be resolved it was necessary for the people to rise up and bring about the necessary adjustments to society.

Works Cited Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government*. 1997 Prentice Hall  
Engels, Friedrich & Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. 1998 Signet Classics