

Marx and weber's ideas of class, power, and

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Marx and Weber's Ideas of Class, Power, and Capitalism Conflict is a natural trait that characterizes interpersonal interactions. Various factors promote the development and maintenance of this phenomenon. In capitalist populations, this struggle is often attributed to the existence of social classes with varying levels of access to economic and political resources.

Consequently, various scholars have attempted to examine the interaction between socioeconomic classes with the aim of understanding the core elements that underpin the operations of capitalist societies. Concepts posited by Karl Marx and Max Weber's provide the most significant insights into this economic form. Due to this emphasis on both political and economic elements, Weber's stratification theory presents a more comprehensive analysis of capitalism. There is a marked difference in the definitions of the class systems proposed by both scholars.

According to Karl Marx, the class system is maintained by disparities in access to and ownership of means of production and labor. These discrepancies result in the establishment of three distinct societal civilizations: slave societies, feudal societies, and capitalism (Holt 2014, p. 92).

The first two civilizations are characterized by ownership of the labor of other humans. For instance, in feudal societies, lords owned the work of their serfs, and in slave societies, slave owners directed the activities of their slave. Due to the enactment of various policies that recognize fundamental human rights, feudal and slave civilizations are almost non-existent today.

Interestingly, Marx's view about the ownership of forces of production offers a continuum that facilitates increased quality of access to resources.

Consequently, the third element in the continuum, capitalism, outlines significant levels of equality when compared to the first two civilizations described above.

According to Marx, this transitory mode of production contains internal contradiction that threatens its efficacy and sustainability (Callinicos 2012, p. 122). Similar to its predecessors, the class system in this form of society is tied to wages and control. According to Marx, this phase is characterized by increased competition that fosters conflict between the two primary society classes, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat. Due to the conflict in disparities in political and economic power, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat exist in a constant state of struggle. This struggle is a result of the antagonism in objectives and discrepant levels of control of states.

While the proletariat class seeks increased access to forces of production, the bourgeoisie is intent on maintaining its established socioeconomic status primarily via economic means. Max Weber, on the other hand, provides a more complex view of social stratification. In his works, he outlines four distinct groups created by varying levels of mobility. The broader classification offered in his work presents a more comprehensive view of society and stratification compared to the view shown by Karl Marx. Notably, Weber's definition of social classes allows for a less polarized light of society. According to Karl, capitalist mechanisms only allow for the establishment of the rich and the poor socioeconomic classes.

To some extent, this view is reflected by the widening wage gap demonstrated by the worsening economic condition of the underprivileged

and the improving financial situation of the rich. Recent statistics indicate that there is a marked disparity in access to factors of production.

This discrepancy is evident in the current income gap, which indicates that individuals from affluent backgrounds, on average, earn approximately 88% more than those from low socioeconomic backgrounds do (Chu 2017). While this difference in earnings illustrates the view posited by Karl, it also reflects tenets of Weber's arguments. Notably, Weber's social stratification model provides a means of understanding this wage gap. However, unlike Karl's theory, this framework accounts for differences in wealth fostered by family wealth. By doing so, it implies that observed differences in society are inherent elements of capitalism that are maintained by primarily political factors. Moreover, Weber accounts for the emergence of the middle class.

Karl's framework as mentioned above emphasizes the development of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, creating the perception that these are the only classes that exist in capitalist nations. Arguably, the broader definition provided by Weber allows for the exploration of an in-between class, the global middle-income population. According to Kharas, the global middle-income population is growing, primarily due to improved economic growth in developing and emerging countries (2017). While this population's access to forces of production fails to rival that of the rich, it is still significant.

Arguably, the economic and political autonomy fostered by this access is demonstrated by the fact that by 2030, the global middle-income population is anticipated to spend approximately a third of the expected GDP growth (2017). Besides, Weber's definition transcends economic stratification.

To some extent, his society stratification theory takes into consideration the fact that individuals in capitalist countries share different cultural aspects. The appreciation of cultural differences promotes examination of capitalism from different perspectives. The recognition of this diversity provides a feasible platform for understanding and resolving economic challenges fostered by increased immigration due to globalization and other factors. Additionally, the perspectives adopted by both scholars in their examination of capitalism differ. As illustrated above, Karl Marx adopts a historical context in his analysis of the phenomena. Notably, in this continuum, which includes slavery and feudal societies, he explores the increasing access to elements of production and labor. This view leads him to conclude that capitalism is a transitional civilization phase and that communism is the end stage of this evolution as it facilitates equal access to means of production and distribution of wealth. Weber, in turn, views capitalism as a persisting form of civilization.

Arguably, his perception is more attuned with society today. Most states and organizations are working towards creating more equity within capitalist mechanisms rather than establishing an entirely different form of production. Furthermore, the 20th century efforts aimed at promoting communism rather than illustrate its merits, – as indicated by the limited growth of Cuba and the eventual collapse of East Germany, – demonstrated its shortcomings and consequently, undermined its adoption. However, the disparities in accounts aimed at tracing the origins of capitalism indicate that Weber's explanation is more attuned to modern capitalism. While Karl emphasizes the impact of economic inequality in fostering the emergence of capitalism, Weber examines the role of American Protestant cultural values in bolstering the

development of modern capitalism. By referencing the works of religious leaders such as Martin Luther, Weber argues that the Church's preoccupation with money rather than spiritual matters precipitated the establishment of the fundamental tenets of capitalism (Weber 2012).

Arguably, Weber's explanation reflects the political processes that create and maintain economic inequality. This political orientation facilitates understanding of gender and racial disparities in the workplace. The disparity in the theories posited by both theorists is also evident in their perception of the phenomenon. Karl's view of capitalism also encompasses the commodification that defines the production type. According to him, rather than create value and facilitate the satisfaction of human needs, the system is primarily oriented towards the realization of monetary values via the exchange of commodities (Ingham 2013, p. 15).

Today, corporations in various sectors have to contend with competitive pressures from existing companies and new entrants. Due to this significant level of competition, the focus across all industries is on commodifying all aspects of life in a bid to maintain a competitive advantage. However, Weber's assertion that capitalism provides an avenue that facilitates the realization of human needs and wants (2013, 25) is not wholly without merit. To some extent as indicated by the success of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, capitalism promotes both economic viability and meets fundamental needs. Interestingly, both theorists acquiesce that exploitation is inherent to this form of production. Karl argues that employees in this type of production have the freedom to determine where to work.

However, they are often compelled to sell their labor to a segment of the population that encompasses the traits of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, they are likely to experience exploitation. Undoubtedly, this exploitation is illustrated by labor and tax policies that merit the corporate rich at the expense of the workers. Weber, on the other hand, asserts that disparity in power and control are essential in ensuring the sustainability of capitalism (Ingham 2013, p. 28). According to him, accurate cost calculations are crucial to ensuring the achievement of the overall objectives of meeting basic needs and guaranteeing favorable profit margins.

Arguably, this cost calculation is exemplified by the significant number of layoffs during economic downturns. Moreover, both Marx and Weber, to varying extents, use their models to expound on financial crises.

Various nations in the world including the US and Greece have experienced economic crises in recent times.

Marx ties the occurrence of these crises to the existence of social classes. He posits that inequality in income, fostered by varying access to resources, promotes the creation of conditions where there is an imbalance between production and consumption due to surpluses (Ingham 2013, p. 28). Today, these situations due to the advent of banking may undermine the currency value resulting in inflation. Though Weber does not go into details about this phenomenon, he does refer to debt deflation in his works. Arguably, Weber's theory accounts for the co-existence between the classes.

While Karl asserts that social classes are in constant disharmony, Weber suggests a more harmonious view. He argues that the state and economic

elite accommodate each other to facilitate the accomplishment of specific objectives (Ingham 2013, p. 32).

Undoubtedly, this accommodation is demonstrated by the involvement of philanthropists such as Bill Gates in government efforts aimed at alleviating the condition of citizens across the world. In conclusion, both Karl and Weber present useful insights into the working of capitalism. The theorists via their respective models of social classes examine the characteristics, and primarily, the limitations of the mode of the production.

However, Weber's perspective is more comprehensive. This is because apart from focusing on both the economic and political elements of the system, it also provides a more extensive definition of social stratification that accounts for the emergence of the global middle-income population.

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