

The complexities of class conflicts as depicted by erik olin wright's, karl marx'...

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The Complexities of Class Conflict in Class Structure

When Marx's and Engels' concept of class and class conflict in the Manifesto of the Communist Party is applied to Wright's ideas of class structure in Varieties of Marxist Conceptions of Class Structure, it becomes apparent that the ideals of Marx and Engels, while truthfully pointing out the inequalities of our societal system, failed to consider the complexities of the middle class and what this entails about how the conflict between complex class structures drives society.

Wright talks about three classes, and their various means of production. Means of production is a tool that functions as the basis of the economy for any given society. For example, in a capitalist society, the overall means of production is capital, whereas in a feudal society the means of production is land. Both Marx and Wright agree that the upper class is the bourgeoisie. Their means of production is "money capital," which is the overall accumulation of wealth through investing.

Another significant class that the two authors identify is the laborers, or the proletariat. The laborers, being the lowest class, only have their labor to sell or use as means of production. Their wages are only enough to keep them alive, whereas the bourgeoisie's rewards grow exponentially. This makes repetitive, constant labor the only option for this class, even though they are being alienated from the objects of their labor by being forced to sell them to stay alive. The proletariat's means of production enables the upper class to have "real economic ownership," and therefore dictate the lives of those below them in the class system.

Wright makes the argument that there is also a third major class, which is the middle class. They are the in-between for the capitalists and the laborers. Generally, as the middle class, their means of production is physical capital, or control over the laborers. Therefore, they are not doing work themselves, like the laborers, however, they are also not accumulating wealth like the capitalists.

However, the realities of this middle class are much more complicated. The whole middle class can be seen as a web, with the opposite ends leading towards bourgeoisie and proletariat, but the relation of each subgroup to the larger category is very messy. Additionally, there are other groups of people who do not fit into the immediate capitalist production system, such as housewives. This creates a blur of the classes, and a lack of clarity in the roles that these classes would play in the current system that Marx and Engels describe.

The system that Marx argues is one where there isn't a true middle class, but rather a capitalist society made up of two oppositional groups: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These classes are defined by those who accumulate capital, and those who exchange labor for cash in the form of wages. He argues that social tensions, or the unjust inequality of the classes, is what drives society. In a capitalist system, the means of production, or capital is not accessible to all who contribute to society, due to the dominant class exploiting the non-dominant class.

This creating social tensions. In order to alleviate social tensions and have equality for all, society would need to become a social system, where capital is distributed equally and necessary resources are available to all.

The issue with Marx's ideas of class conflict being a motivator, is that, in Wright's model, there are so many variations of class. Who is in conflict with whom? Class is not truly a black and white concept, to be defined as either proletariat or bourgeoisie, but a complicated system that involves a middle class on a spectrum between the two.