

Marxism: A Theoretical Revolution

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine how the theories presented by Karl Marx presented an example of a theoretical revolution. First, we must examine what is a theoretical revolution and then determine if Karl Marx theories did qualify for this classification. Karl Marx did revolutionize traditional concepts of his time (such as classical liberalism and classical conservatism) about policy, power and property. While the theories have gained much criticism over the years, the theory proposed sweeping differences in political power, use of property and collective group motivations. This theory has affected public policy and discourse since the publishing of Marx's work in various ways from whole institutions of governing to labor laws. Some countries have totally embraced Marxist theorists, some embraced parts of the theories, and yet, others have viewed the theory with considerable disdain.

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For social sciences, especially political science and public policy, Marx theory presents dramatically different concept of where power is derived and how that power is maintained. With arguments based upon the capitalist and feudal structures around Europe, Marx sought to change the perception of how land and property affects the power that people hold. His work even suggested that the theories could only be realized if the people completely revolutionized the social and political structures and that is due to the entrenched interests within the current maintained structures.

This theory challenges classical liberal and traditional conservative theories of government in the following ways. First, we will look at some viewpoints by classical liberalism and traditional conservatism.

Classical liberalism, similar to modern American libertarianism, believed in laissez faire markets and capitalism as the means to building wealth throughout the country following many of the ideas of Adam Smith. Classical liberalism asserted that owned property is entitled to family. As well, to avoid the tyranny of the majority, rights must be guaranteed of the minority. Traditional conservatives rely more about traditional social units like churches and the family,

and they would argue that raw capitalist societies encourages profit-only motives by individuals rather than social-oriented actions. They assert “social cooperation” against excessive individualism (Schumaker, Kiel & Heilke, 1996, p87) and that justice does not mean equality but more about the “commensurate rights and obligations” based upon the traditions within the society. While classical liberals would suggest humans are simply motivated by pursuit of pleasure, traditional conservatives would suggest that people are tied together spiritually.

Marx believed that “humans are naturally laboring beings, and all human activity is ultimately economic activity” (Schumaker, Kiel & Heilke, 1996), and that societies are based principally upon classes and subjected to the rules made by ruling classes. He was completely different from classical liberals in that the means of production should be held with the “proletariat” working class rather than a few capitalists. This also is a differing view from traditional conservatives that were willing to believe an authoritarian ruler might be better for a particular society. As well, Marx theory dramatically challenges traditional conservatism with respect to rights in his idea of a utopian and egalitarian society.

Marx went further and suggested that capitalism was “doomed” and that the working class would eventually revolutionize the society into a classless society where private property would be abolished and the political state would eventually go away. Marx theory suggests an eventual utopian state rather than a chaotic anarchy.

2. Factors that caused the acceptance

This theory gained some acceptance in places that were not meant to have Marxism since Russia and China had neither developed capitalism nor industrial base. Again, Marxist theories have been adopted in some form by some industrialized countries like worker rights and unions. Communist revolutions have taken place in Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea, French

Indochina/Vietnam and others. The factors that led to these revolutions varied but most primary factors were uprisings against dictatorships, colonialism, and failing authoritarian regimes.

Marxist theory is a response to growing capitalist issues in western democratic societies. Many of the ideas about working conditions, rights and distribution of wealth were used in modern liberalism and modern conservatism in order to maintain a healthy and vibrant democracy. His idea that labor contained power not solely held by ruling class helped to bolster support for labor unions and worker rights to assemble. The idea that labor has power challenges those who own the means of production or those that believe they are entitled to the power over people. As well, Marxist theory about abolition of private property as a central pillar of his utopian society challenges all capitalist motivations to accumulate wealth and property.

While not completely embraced and limited in scope, unions and worker strikes used Marx principles of proletariat fighting the bourgeoisie for power over working conditions and better pay (wealth distribution). As well, some populist policies implemented progressive income taxes, passed equal rights legislation and government regulations to check the potential “abuses” of the capitalist over the workers.

3. Professional and scholar reaction

One might suggest the ruling class of many of the industrialized world outright rejected the Marxist theory due to concept about abolition of private property. Anyone with wealth would lose their property and their reason for accumulating property. This has also been a contention that suggests people will not be properly motivated to achieve for the better of the society instead of strictly for oneself. Anyone with an interest in maintaining current power structures or policy processes would also reject these policies.

As well, his idea that people will naturally revolt after continuous recessions and unemployment in industrialized nations has not happened. The cycles of market economics always happens and the Great Depression did not initiate the revolution that Marx predicted.

Marx and his associate Friedrich Engels wrote *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in order to attempt to unite workers across Europe to build a coordinated revolution. Even before his death, many were altering the viewpoints held by Marxist theory. Even eventual communist theory from Lenin and Zedong deviates considerably from Marx theory. Thus, Marxist theory receives poor consideration due to the inferences to communist efforts in Russia and China.

4. Conclusion

Karl Marx wrote a broad theory about people, government, society and motivation. His theory was so revolutionary that he called for actual revolution of societies. Yet his theory has been implemented in various forms across the world including the United States and Western democracies. Some countries completely embraced Marxist theory by implementing the communist ideologies. The fact that some socialist ideas that he presented became reality suggests that some of his ideas have merit.

Yet, his theories have serious flaws and his theories challenge the personal motivations that guide people every day. Since Russia and China had to embrace some Western capitalism to revitalize their weak economies or that North Korea is literally starving suggests that communist theory has serious problems. The conditions were not right for a communist society to exist in those countries perhaps, but the theory was accepted through the implementation by the leaders of those countries. The conditions may not be right for current Western democracies to fully embrace the Marxist theories. Marx, in any case, changed the way we thought about labor, rights and wealth distribution.

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