2.1.2: Brief Introduction to Marxism

November 2, 2015

Marxism is a theory based on the philosopher Karl Marx who was born in Germany in 1818 and died in London in 1883.

Marxism is what is known as a ______________________ theory because it states that society is in conflict with each other and Marxism claims that this conflict is between the ________ and the ____________.

According to sociologists, Marxism is a political and economic philosophy, a view of the way things are now and suggestions as to where society is headed. The danger is that we start to view it based on what we understand about its relationship to communism and the politics and oppression of the old Soviet Union (1917-1991). Marx never saw communism in this way. He saw it as ____________________, and as a leveller for creating a fairer society and how to get the best out of all people, not just those with money and power.

To really understand Marxism we need to start with its opposite, ________________, which represents the type of society that we live in today. In Marxist terms, it is an economic system based on ______________________ ownership of the means of ______________________. What this means is that our society today is based on a few people who own the factories, businesses, and other corporations. These corporations are not owned by the people who work for them or jointly by the employees and the owners, but by the owners only.

Marx was formulating his theories during the _________________ Revolution, a time when Britain and a few other countries were going through remarkable change. The old feudal system, when lords of the manor owned the land, meant that ordinary people had freedom and rights to all land. It was held in common. When the government passed a series of enclosure acts in the 1700s and 1800s, ordinary people no longer had the right to live on this land and many of them were forced to pack up and move to the towns and the cities which were beginning to grow due to the increase in factories and textile mills.

Whereas previously peoples were free to keep their own animals and grow their own crops on common lands, once they reached the cities they had to find work in the ________________ and the employment of the factory owners. The work was hard and often dangerous and the pay was very poor. Many factory owners did not want to pay high wages because this would mean less profit for the so children were often used a cheap labour.
2.1.2: Brief Introduction to Marxism

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The Industrial Revolution promoted a capitalists way of thinking, what we call a capitalist ideology. It also created two distinct groups of people

**Factory owners**

(Middle Class)

**Workers**

(Working Class)

Marx was on the side of the proletariat as he saw them as being treated unfairly and oppressed by the factory owners. In addition, Marx also saw the system as one that tried very hard to make sure that the poor stayed poor and the rich continued to get richer. So Marxists view capitalist society as being based on a system that encourages

__________________________ because the rich will always need someone to do the work they don’t want to do. It’s called a conflict theory because society is in a conflict, the proletariat vs. the bourgeoisie.

However, Marx also suggested that at some point that the working class would realize that they have the power to change things through ___________________ and personal development some members of the proletariat would begin to understand the system better and devise ways of changing it. Marx believed that such radical change could only come about through ___________________, when the workers rise up and overthrow those who are treating them unfairly.

Following the proletariats' defeat of capitalism, a new classless society would emerge based on the idea: 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'. In such a society, land, industry, labour and wealth would be shared between all people. In other words, they
2.1.2: Brief Introduction to Marxism

November 2, 2015

were communally owned. All people would have the right to an education, and class structures would disappear. Harmony would reign, and the state would simply 'wither away'.

Marx called this system COMMUNISM

Marx’s Main Ideas

Here are a summary of Marx’s ideas on the following:

1. The Relations between social classes

"Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." Marx & Engels, 1848

2. Work and economic value

"Labour is the source of all wealth, the political economists assert. And it really is the source, next to nature, which supplies it with the material that it converts into wealth. But it is even infinitely more than this. (Marx, 1876)

3. The bourgeoisie

Letter to Weydemeyer

"And now as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists, the economic anatomy of classes.

What I did that was new was to prove:

1. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat,
2. that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society." (Marx, 1852)

4. The Proletariat

What is the proletariat? The proletariat is that class in society which lives entirely from the sale of its labor and does not draw profit from any kind of capital; whose weal and woe, whose life and death, whose sole existence depends on the demand for labor.... " (Marx & Engels, 1848)
2.1.2: Brief Introduction to Marxism

November 2, 2015

Lenin: The Making of A Revolutionary

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov was born in 1870. As the son of a Russian bureaucrat, he had a good education and was to have become a lawyer. Things changed in 1887, however, following the death of his elder brother who was hanged for his role in the plot to kill Tsar Alexander III. The younger brother then became devoted to the cause of revolution and changed his name to Lenin.

Lenin believed strongly in the ideas of Karl Marx in particular the capitalist and the proletariat. Capitalist were the people who owned factories, business, and land. For Marx, however, it was the proletariat, the workforce in the factories, who really created the wealth. Yet workers earned meagre wages while the capitalist took the profits. One day, said Marx, the workers would rebel and take over the factories and the government,

Mark believed that this would lead to socialism, and eventually to Communism
According to Marx, a working-class revolution would occur first in a country like Britain or Germany, which had a lot of industry and a large proletariat or working class. Lenin had to adapt Marx’s ideas to Russian conditions. He knew that revolution was difficult in a country like Russia, where the government ruled autocratically and used the secret police to seek out and suppress revolutionary groups. Therefore Lenin believed that only a small, secretive, dedicated party could operate effectively and persuade the Russian working class to become revolutionary. These ideas are known as Marxism-Leninism.
2.1.2: Brief Introduction to Marxism

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To review the section, complete the following profile based on our class discussion, videos, and handout.

| What? | ____________________________ | An economic theory without social classes and private property. |
| Where? | | |
| When? | | |
| Who? | | |
| Why? | The history of the world is a history of _____________ struggle between the ___________ and have nots. |

**Associated Concepts**
- Proletariat

**How it Works:**

**Famous Quote**
Workers of the world unite! (Karl Marx, 1848)