

Western Political Thinkers (CIA – II Assignment)

Thinker: *Karl Marx*

Topic : *Karl Marx and His Island of Thought.*

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Introduction

Karl Marx was one of the greatest revolutionary thinkers of the 19th century. He is the one who introduced the historical dimension to an understanding of society, culture and economics. Marx borrowed certain concepts from G.W.F Hegel and at times he modified these concepts.

His thought of communism (which has been popularized as scientific socialism) shaped the course of history for years after he laid down his theory. Marxism is intriguing due to multiple factors. Firstly, the building of Marxism stands on firm reasoning, sound logic and rational analysis. Secondly, an in depth study of Marxism makes one believe that capitalism is a temporary arrangement and this arrangement would eventually pave way for an advanced arrangement of social and material life of people i.e. communism. Lastly, Marxism denounces all earlier ideologies as false consciousness and offers a solution to the riddle of history.

According to Marx, “The philosophers of the world have interpreted it in many ways, but the point, however is to change it.” Marx is the only thinker whose ideology has been implemented, though not in its pure form. Marxism is more than a philosophy. **It is an action oriented ideology.** However, the fact that humans have tried to practice Marx’s theorized way of life speaks volumes about Karl Marx and the clout he exercised on the minds of people.

(I) Karl Marx: Life and Times

Born in Trier, Germany in 1818 Karl Marx hailed from a prosperous Jewish family. His father, Heinrich Marx, practiced law and was a man of honour. It was Heinrich Marx who ensured that Karl, his son was a voracious reader of Locke, Diderot and Voltaire. Karl Marx, in his childhood, along with his family, embraced Christianity so that his father could continue practice of law.

Karl enrolled for the law course in University of Bonn. In his student days at the University of Bonn, Marx took to drinking at the local beer hall and involved himself in political discussions with other students. Moreover, Marx picked up a physical fight with one of the university students. Perplexed by their son’s shocking activities his parents made him shift to the more disciplined University of Berlin. Marx earned his doctorate in Philosophy from University of Jena in 1841. In his university days, Hegel had a profound impact on Marx. A group of intellectuals – Young Hegelians – appealed to the now-intellectually-inclined Marx. This group discussed, within the framework of Hegelian dialectics, revolutionary concepts such as atheism and communism in its pure form. These fruitful discussions and debates inspired Marx to become a philosopher. After completing his education Marx was hell-bent on teaching. His favourite professor, Bruno Bauer, was determined to secure an academic position for Marx at Bonn. Bauer was expelled for anti-religious ideas. Along with Bauer’s career, Dr. Marx’s academic career hopes were squashed too.

Marx now took to journalism first as a reporter and later by assuming the role of editor for Rheinische Zeitung, a liberal newspaper. Robert Heilbroner’s words capture Marx’s career at Zeitung – “His (Marx’s) career lasted exactly five months. Marx was then a radical, but his radicalism was philosophical rather than political. His editorials were too much for the authorities. He wrote a bitter denunciation of the law... for this he was censured. He wrote editorials deploring the housing situation; for this he was warned. And when he went on to say some uncomplimentary things about the Tsar of Russia, the Rheinische Zeitung was suppressed. (Heilbroner 1999)¹”

In 1842, Marx married his childhood love, **Jennet von Westphalen** and moved to Paris to edit the German-French year book. “Jenny was the belle of the town. Beautiful and with suitor’s galore she could have easily made a more suitable match than the young man next door. But she was in love with him and both the families smiled their approval. (Heilbroner 1999)²” It was in Paris, that Marx met Friedrich Engels. A symbiotic relationship between the two lasted for the next 40 years results of which were several philosophical and political works. However, the two transcended the intellectual strings that held them together and went on to establish a warm, life-long and friendly relationship. *The Holy Family* (1945) was the first result of their collaboration.

Marx’s dabbling in journalism made him recognize the chief role played by economics in social and political life. He assessed the gravity of the world in which market forces played a key role. It was during this time that Marx’s thinking sailed from the land of liberal philosophy to the newfound shore of political radicalism. However, his radical thoughts ousted Marx from Paris compelling him to seek shelter in Brussels. It was in Belgium that Marx (along with Engels) published “*The Communist Manifesto*” his masterpiece. In The Manifesto, Marx and Engels, laid down the basic tenets of a communist society and called for a revolution. It is a document which is universally accepted as cornerstone of modern communist thought.

Along with the publication of the Manifesto in 1848, the first Marxist political party i.e. the **Communist League** was formed. However, throughout its lifetime the Communist League remained a paper organization before its death in 1852. After being forced to move from Belgium and Germany Marx finally made London his home in 1849. In his brief stay in Germany, Marx took over the editorship of some newspaper. However, this newspaper too was shut by the Government. In London, Marx wrote several political articles for The New York Tribune. Marx was actively involved with German Workers’ Educational Society. In 1852 Marx published his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* which was a commentary on the French Revolution of 1848.

From here on, Marx transformed from a philosopher, idealistic young Hegelian interested in the upliftment of mankind to an economist, scientific minded, mature and a revolutionary person interested in eliminating exploitation of the mankind. “**Early**” Marx is Marx of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts; while the “**later**” Marx is Marx of the Communist Manifesto, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy and Das Kapital.

Marx was actively involved in the activities of International Workingmen’s Association founded in 1864. However, the association had a short life span. The composition of the association at its peak was eight million members but the quality of these members was disturbing. It consisted of “lukewarm socialists, rabid nationalists and trade unionists who were leery of any kind of revolutionary theory whatsoever. (Heilbroner 1999)³” The First International was followed by a Second which included socialists such as G.B. Shaw, Ramsay McDonald and Pilsudki.

Marx’s magnum opus was yet to come. **Das Kapital (Capital)** was its name. Published in four volumes over a period of forty five years the book (or the collection of four volumes) consists of twenty-five hundred pages. Its first volume was published in 1865. Das Kapital subjected capitalism to the toughest scrutiny it had ever faced. Marx highlights the “laws of motion” that define the processes which take place in a capitalist system

He predicts the collapse of capitalism. Marx as an emotional critic writes in his book “capital has a vampire thirst for the living blood of labour.” Despite its prose being fuelled by fury the book manages, and amazingly so, to analyze capitalism with cold logic in the light of then available facts and statistics. May be Das capital was the synergy of “early” and the “later” Marx. Its fourth and final edition was published in 1910, after Marx’s death.

Other works of Marx include: Theses on Feuerbach (1845), A Critique of German Ideology (1845), Wage-Labour and Capital (1849), Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859), The Capital: Volume I (1865), The Civil War in France (1871) and Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875). Marx is known for his concept of dialectical materialism, theory of surplus value, theory of labour value, theory of class war, theory of revolution, thoughts on consciousness, a classless society etc. Above all he is known for his social thought of “scientific socialism” popularly known as communism. Communism is widely identified with Marx alone.

Jenny Marx died in 1881. Marx was unwell. He didn’t attend his wife’s funeral. On this Engels lamented, “The Moor is dead, too.” **On a quite March afternoon, 1883 Marx too bid adieu to the world.** *Marx’s name, like those of Freud and Plato remains contemporary. Marx taught us not just to look at, but to look through, history, just as Freud taught us to look through the facade of personality to the psychic processes within us or as Plato taught us to look through the screen of unexamined ideas to the veiled questions of philosophy. Marx was a great explorer whose footprints have indelibly imprinted on the continent of social thought that he discovered. (Heilbroner - 1999)⁴.*

(II) Interplay between Hegelian Dialectic and Marx’s Dialectical Materialism

G.W.F. Hegel proposed that “**dialectic**” concerned itself with the process which went into knowing the “**whole**” of anything. **Hegel equated “whole” with “totality”**. According to him, only the whole is true. The whole is composed of moments that are partial wholes. The relationship that existed between these partial wholes is of prime importance. The whole contains within itself all the moments that it has overcome. Basically, overcoming these partial wholes/ moments to reach the whole defines Hegel’s dialectical process.

Evolution of ideas takes place through the dialectical process. Every idea, every thesis incubates its opposite – the anti-thesis. The conflict between the two sets the stage for the appearance of a new view, that is, the synthesis. It can be logically concluded that the truth quotient of the synthesis is much higher than the thesis and the anti-thesis. At the same time it should be understood that the synthesis preserves within itself – the thesis and the anti-thesis. The two concepts (the thesis and the anti-thesis) aren’t independent of one another but rather related to one another. The nature of this relation, as mentioned earlier, is contradictory. The synthesis forms the whole. This synthesis becomes the thesis (for a new dialectic) and it produces another anti-thesis which goes on to establish a relation (with the thesis) which is the base of a new synthesis. Thus, the dialectical process is similar to the trajectory of a spiral. **Upward movement of the spiral suggests progress and vice-versa.** Consider this, if heat is the thesis, its opposite would be cold. The synthesis of the two would allow us to understand the varying levels of temperature between the two extremes.

Basically, Hegelian dialectic relies on “unity of opposites”. “The grasping of opposites in their unity... is the most important aspect of dialectic...” (*Hegel’s Science of Logic – pg 56*)⁵. Additionally, human mind can best understand certain concepts by referring to their opposites.

For instance, “day” can be best comprehended by alluding to “night”; “black” can be best understood by referring to “white” and so on. Thus, Hegel’s dialectic theory envisaged change, constant and inherent. **And history, said Hegel, was nothing but the expression of this flux of conflicting and resolving ideas and forces.**

Marx’s view of history is called **dialectical materialism**; *dialectical* because it contains Hegel’s idea of change, and *materialism* because “it grounds itself not in the world of ideas, but on the terrain of social and physical environment. (Heilbroner 1999)⁶” “Men must be in a position to live in order to make history⁷” believed Marx. Marx’s interpretation of history was diametrically opposed to the Hegelian philosophy. To understand Marx’s dialectical materialism, which critiques idealist philosophy of Hegel, it is crucial to consider this famous statement **“life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.** (Nelson 2007)⁸” It expounds that whatever we contemplate and comprehend i.e. our mental processes are influenced by real material life.

According to the materialist interpretation of history, human beings exist as material entities. Marxian perspective of history bothers itself with the basic productive arrangement through which people provide for the necessities of survival. Central to this conception of history is the analysis of technique employed in carrying out productive activities. Marx highlights the importance of **substructure of economic activity**. Marx believes that each and every society is founded on an economic base.

Why does a society need to be founded on an economic base?

Human beings, regardless of which society they reside in, must satiate their basic urges of food, cloth and shelter. To satisfy these urges, human beings must organize themselves to undertake economic activity. Fruits of labour derived from undertaking that economic activity can be utilized by humans to fulfil their wants.

Material production requires material forces of production along with social relations of production. **Material forces of production** basically mean all those tools that are utilized to carry out the production function of a particular society. For instance, in an industrial society the forces of production would include sophisticated tools such as machinery (to extract raw materials), factories (to process these raw materials), freight transport (to transport the finished goods) and the like. Likewise, a primitive society will require varying tools to carry out its production function. Material production demands a degree of specialization that assists the material forces of production to achieve the feat of production function. Marx called this degree of specialization – **social relations of production**. According to him, “different kinds of societies or social relations have different kinds of social relations of production. (The Communist Manifesto)⁹” For instance, those who sow seeds, those who harvest the produce, those who winnow the produce, those who grind it in the mill and those who prepare the bread, all of these are included in the social relations of production governing the agricultural society. **Industrial society has its own social relations of production.**

According to Marx, **it is out of these social relations of production that different classes arise in a society.** As humans upgrade their technology they upgrade their whole mode of production too. It must be borne in mind that “whole mode of production” consists not only of technique of production but also the economic arrangement.

Thus, every economic arrangement in a society has corresponding social arrangement i.e. **social relations of production**. This social arrangement sheds light on ways in which productive activity in a society is carried out. Marx suggests that the productive activity is inherently social and a change in the “whole mode of production” entails alterations in the whole society. The society also requires a “**superstructure**” of **non-economic activity**. This superstructure of non-economic activity dictates how humans lead their lives. “The superstructure of non-economic activity will need to be bound together by laws, supervised by a Government, inspired by religion and philosophy. But this superstructure cannot be selected at random. **It must reflect the foundation on which it is raised**. No hunting community would evolve or could use the framework of an industrial society. The doctrine of materialism only maintains that thoughts and ideas are the product of environment, even though they aim to change the environment. (Heilbroner 1999)¹⁰”

As mentioned earlier “**life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.**” Marx believes that life is determined by substructure of economic activity (i.e. material production). This substructure of economic activity influences social relations of production. Plus, the substructure of economic activity and the social relations of production influence the superstructure of non-economic activity. It is the superstructure of non-economic activity that provides a framework for the society within which humans structure their thoughts i.e. their consciousness. Thus, real material life influences consciousness. It should be understood that any alterations in production function changes the social relations of production causing the society’s level of consciousness to change. “**Economic substructure of society determines superstructure of consciousness**. This is simply another way of saying that life determines consciousness (Nelson 2007)¹¹”

Working Hegel’s dialectics, step by step, Marx concludes that the material and the ideal constitute the “unity of opposites” in which the material is primary and the ideal is secondary. Thus, Marx approved of Hegelian dialectic. But **Marx felt that according to Hegel’s interpretation “dialectics is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up.”** Marx inverted Hegel’s dialectics. As opposed to dialectical idealism of Hegel, Marx believed that economic (material) factors form the crux of development of history. For Hegel, the inevitable end was the realization of the idea and for Marx; the end was a tangible reality in classless society.

(III) Relations of Production

An aforementioned line claims that social relations of production source different classes in a society. It is imperative to brood on this particular thought as it lays the foundation of Marx’s theory of communism.

Relations of production are characterized by division of labour. Each technological set up to carry out the production function demands a corresponding degree of specialization which can be achieved only through **division of labour**. In a society, based on substructure of economic activity, different roles are assigned to different persons on the basis of various qualities that a person possesses. These different roles should realize the society’s economic arrangement. Marx believes that it is the division of labour that forms the crux of social order. For instance, the division between mental and physical labour lays down a structure for the society. Those engaged in mental labour pursue intellectual aims of the society whereas those engaged in physical labour pursue the mundane and monotonous production aims of the society.

Once this division of labour emerges the intellectual class compels others (those engaged in physical labour) “to provide it with the leisure to engage in higher activities of the mind. (Nelson 2007).¹²”

“That structure, Marx argues, is a structure of class exploitation, for while the division of labour is at one level simply a division of activities, at another it is a division of property, that is, of social class. Those who perform certain productive tasks are rewarded more than others, both in terms of quality and quantity of goods produced by society (Nelson 2007)¹³.” **Thus for Marx, division of labour and private property are identical expressions.**

(IV) Theory of Class War

It is intriguing to trace the birth and growth of the two classes that according to Marx would redefine mankind’s way of existence. **Ownership of means of production** is the sole criterion that decides the class of a person in a society. Those who own the means of production belong to the bourgeoisie class whereas those who possess labour power belong to the proletarian class. **Marx, saw society as a whole splitting into two wide hostile camps i.e. the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.** “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles. (*The Communist Manifesto*)”

Over time society evolved. So did the rendezvous of exchange and transactions i.e. markets. Markets of the world kept sprawling on the account of ever growing ever expanding needs of human beings. This need, a multifaceted concept formed the crux of growing demand. Earlier demand could be met by manufacture only. But now, manufacture, alone, had lost the capacity to satiate the enormous demand. Enter steam and machinery. These two **technological inventions revolutionized industrial production.**

“The place of manufacture was taken by the giant Modern industry, the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeoisie. (*The Communist Manifesto*)” Modern industry’s progress was complemented by enhancement in communication facilities and better connectivity due to rail network. This progress, bought about the progress of the bourgeoisie.

Marx puts forward an engrossing thought – **economic progress of the bourgeoisie ensures increased political clout the class enjoys.** Exchange value and free trade are the by-products of the bourgeoisie era. Exploitation its main attribute. Relations of society acquire a market character. Emotional bonds are marked by money value. Constant revolutions that upgrade production become the norm. However, relations of the society are also constantly upgraded.

The bourgeoisie class makes its presence felt across the globe. “It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, and establish connexions everywhere (*The Communist Manifesto*).” The bourgeoisie capture markets in backward nations too. Cheap prices of bourgeoisie products complement the bourgeoisie vision of “creating a world after its image.” Sooner poorer nations adopt the mode of production followed by the bourgeoisie. In short, bourgeoisie succeeds in implementing its idea of civilization in backward lands. **The cities and urban populations are attributes of the bourgeoisie society.**

In the bourgeoisie society, the relations of production give birth to the owner of labour power i.e. the proletariat. The labourer is exposed “to the vicissitudes of competition.” He is forced to sell himself as a commodity. He is no longer excited at the prospect of work because his work is characterized by mundane routine and lack of creativity. The proletariat suffers alienation and is exploited at the hands of the bourgeoisie. Progress of industry doesn’t lead to progress of the labourer. The labourer lags behind in all aspects of life. The bourgeoisie dominated society fails to ensure the well being of the central cog in its scheme of things. Capital is the crucial ingredient for the recipe of a bourgeoisie society to work. The component that determines the life of this ingredient is wage labour. However, capital is “that kind of property which exploits wage labour (*The Communist Manifesto*)”

Bourgeoisie society is characterized by:

- (i) Capital is independent i.e. it possesses individuality whereas living labour possesses no individuality since it is the appendage of a machine.
- (ii) Existence of private property which springs due to division of labour in the society.
- (iii) Bourgeoisie private property symbolizes the exploitation of the many (proletariat) by the few (bourgeoisie).
- (iv) Capitalist orientation of substructure of economic activity consequently influences the superstructure of non-economic activity.

The same modern industry that causes isolation of a worker, due to competition, succeeds in organizing the proletariat in a revolutionary combination due to association. “The development of modern industry cuts from under its own feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces above all, is its own grave diggers. Its fall and victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable. (*The Communist Manifesto*)” Before delving deeper it is imperative to comprehend Marx’s views on capitalism and his predictions forecasting the impending catastrophe that was due to hit capitalism.

(V) Marx on Capitalism

Marx agrees that capitalism is a force to reckon with and bourgeoisie, the torchbearers of this force. He says, “The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.” Capitalism has established human supremacy in all realms of life. It has made man masters of the nature. “Capitalism has been the first economic system to show what man’s activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals, it has conducted expeditions that put in shade all former exoduses of nations and crusades. (*The Communist Manifesto*)” Capitalism has introduced efficiency and innovation in the process of production. It has made the existence of mankind easier. Yet Marx opines that capitalism has lost its glory. It has lost its old charm. Marx feels that capitalism plugged the loopholes of a feudal society. He saw capitalism as a better and upgraded version of the previously existing economic system. However, this didn’t mean that further improvement was impossible.

Capitalism, in Marx’s opinion, will pave the way for an advanced society – communist society. In Marx’s critique of capitalism, his “*theory of alienation*” is worth mentioning.

The **theory of alienation** believes that in a capitalist set up man fails to realize his true potential. Alienation manifests itself in the act which a labourer undertakes not voluntarily. Work is imposed on him. It is meant not to content his needs but other's. Work becomes monotonous and boring. Marx propounds that machines become masters of labourers i.e. there is hegemony of dead labour (machines, factory equipment etc) over living labour (human workers). It is in the womb of capitalism that the worker feels alienated. Firstly, he is alienated from the fruit (i.e. the product) of his labour since the worker isn't the owner of the means of production. Secondly, Marx argues that capitalism kills the creative spirit. Workers can't find satisfaction in their own work. This acts to alienate them from the activity of production itself. Work becomes for them a "means of existence" rather than "content of life." Lastly, the virtue of capitalism promotes competition among workers. Competition for wages alienates workers from one another. All these forms of alienation combine to produce the most diabolic form of alienation i.e. self alienation – workers fail to realize their true potential which prevents them from acting upon the world. Having been deprived of this power, the worker eventually alienates the power to comprehend that world. Thus, according to Marx, **capitalism is self-subverting**. "Life determines consciousness." Once life has been alienated so must consciousness. The worker works day in and day out without making much sense of the world prodding daily on the path that is detrimental to his mind, body and spirit. On the path that alienates him from his life.

Marx predicts that the **capitalist system will bring its own destruction**. It is just like a drama that unfolds before our eyes. A drama in which two classes - the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) and the proletariat (working class) lock horns to decide who will control the means of production. Marx in his theory doesn't have any place for corrupted or altered forms of capitalism. He has set his mind on critiquing the purest forms of capitalism.

Every product in Marx's interpretation of a capitalist system sells at its exact price. Exact price of a product is its value. **Value is basically the amount of labour that a product encapsulates within itself**. For instance, if the amount of labour that goes into making a cricket bat is thrice more than the amount of labour that goes into the making of a ball then the price of the bat will be thrice more than that of a ball. Labour is the common denominator. Everything produced can be expressed in the terms of amount of labour that was utilized to make it.

Everything sells at its exact price. Yet there are profits. Enter the **theory of surplus value**. Basically, a worker will demand a daily wage that is required for him to keep his body and soul together. In this system, wages are equivalent to amount of socially necessary labour that goes to ensure the well being of the labour. For instance, if it takes four hours of society's labour per day to ensure the well being of the labour, then the labour is worth four dollars a day (**assuming labour is priced at one dollar per hour**). Also, **Marx speaks about labour power**. The amount of labour that goes into making labour power is the value of the labour. Marx views labour power as a commodity having an exchange value as well as use value. It is with this labour power that the worker produces goods for the capitalist. Exchange value of labour power, as mentioned earlier, equals the amount of socially necessary labour that goes to ensure the well being of the labour. Use value of labour power encapsulates the additional new value created by the efforts of labour power and its own exchange value. Surplus value is nothing but the difference between use value and exchange value of labour power. Thus, **in Marxian analysis, there is a subtle difference between labour power and labour (value)**.

To quote Britannica “Karl Marx held that **human labour was the source of economic value**. The capitalist pays his workers less than the value their labour has added to the goods, usually only enough to maintain the worker at a subsistence level. Of the total worth of the worker’s labour, however, this compensation, in Marxian theory accounts only for a mere portion, equivalent to the worker’s means of subsistence. The remainder is “surplus labour,” and the value it produces is “surplus value.¹⁴”

But why does the worker/ prole work for the capitalist? Here is the catch – the capitalist owns jobs i.e. he owns machinery/ equipment/ factories without which labour cannot work. Thanks to the lawful existence of the institution of private property. Before deviating further let’s just clear how profits enter the system. Taking the above example – if labour is worth four dollars a day, it is quite likely that he will work for more hours a day – say eight to ten hours. He will earn only that sum (4\$) which is necessary to get him going. Whereas, the capitalist will extract from the labour, work which is worth a sum (8-10\$) that exceeds his wages. ***This is how profits enter the system.***

A labourer won’t work for only that much amount of time that is required to keep him going. The contract that he enters into with the capitalist ensures that he works for a substantial part of the day. During Marx’s time labourers used to work as long as 80 hours a week. Additionally, if a labourer demands more wage, the capitalist is likely to choose from vast pool of unemployed persons. Like everyone else in the system, a worker has no right and no power to ask more than his own worth as a commodity. Thus, the labourer receives that amount (or a little more) which gets him going. “The system is perfectly equitable and yet all workers are cheated, for they are forced to work a longer time than their own self-sustenance demands. (Heilbroner – 1999)¹⁵” Thus profits are ensured.

Once profits are secured, **the capitalist is in a race with his own kind**. It is a ‘**perform or perish**’ situation for him. The goal of the capitalist is to expand his scale of production. Expansion requires hiring more labourers. There is a competition among capitalists to hire labourers. Competition for labour pushes the basic wage level upwards. Soon, capitalists experience their profit being eaten away by higher wages. This is when **the capitalist introduces new technique of production – some innovation or introduction of labour saving machinery** to ensure that his profits haven’t eroded.

In the quest to save his profits the capitalist hires labour saving machinery. But in the due process he forgets that profits can only be realized from living labour. **The capitalist purchases the machinery in exchange for its true value**. For instance, if it can produce ‘n’ dollars worth of commodities during its lifetime our capitalist will have been charged the exact amount in the first place. That is, **the machinery has no surplus value**. “By the very process (introducing machinery) through which he hopes to free himself from one horn of the dilemma, he impales himself on the other. (Heilbroner – 1999)¹⁶”

So, **the rate of profit falls and falls**. Profits reduce to the threshold where production becomes unprofitable. Cataclysmic events follow. More and more workers are thrown out of jobs. Consumption takes a hit. The excess products are dumped in the market. Small firms suffer. ‘Big fish eat small fish’ situation occurs. **A capitalist crisis is at hand**. This is just the beginning of the game i.e. the beginning of trade cycles. As workers are fired they are compelled to take up jobs at low wages. Small firms are bulldozed – the equipment, machine, factories etc used by them for production are on sale.

Financially powerful capitalists purchase these production paraphernalia for less than their true value. Profits are back. **Each crisis gives birth to a trade cycle revitalizing the capacity of the business cycle to expand.** Business cycle is a combination of several trade cycles. “Depressions” in the trade cycle is the way the business cycle grooves forward. With each business slump (depression in the trade cycle) the bigger firms digest the smaller ones and keep the system working. However, the moment these industrial giants collapse the doom that follows is far greater than when the small firms are eaten away.

“The drama ends in the sequence that Marx had envisioned in the dialectic. **The system – the pure system – breaks down as it works upon itself to squeeze out its own source of energy, surplus value.** The breakdown is hastened by the constant instability that arises from the essentially plan less nature of the economy. Although there are forces at work that act to prolong its end, its final death struggle is inescapable (*Heilbroner 1999*).¹⁷”

It is lucid that “**the falling rate of profits**” is one of the key factors that cause the capitalist system to decay. Marx claims that this law of “falling rate of profits” is as objective as any law of physics. Additionally, by firing workers (living labour) the capitalist kills the hen that lays the golden egg. But nothing is in the hands of the capitalist himself. His responses to the razzmatazz of the entire business cycle are expected. As Marx notes, “what the capitalist class produces, above all, is its own gravediggers.” The demise of capitalism is inevitable. In the now famous words of Capital, “the knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated (*Das Kapital*)”

(VI) Theory of Revolution

The germ of the revolution can be found in the friction between relations of production and means of production. If the advances in mode of production are not accompanied by proportionate necessary adjustments in relations of production then a new mode of production arises from the ashes of an old one. Marx has placed his bet on communism (new mode of production) arising inevitably from the ashes of capitalism (old mode of production). However, Marx was confident that bourgeoisie relations of production would be the last antagonistic form of social processes of production. Marx opined that previously all historical revolutions were movements by minorities for the welfare of minorities. **Marx calls for a proletarian revolution.** This proletarian revolution would differ. It would herald a movement by the majority for the emancipation of humanity.

With the development of industry the proletariat is concentrated in great masses. Trade unions come into being. These unions expand slowly, thanks to improved means of communication. At first, the bourgeoisie locks horns with the aristocracy, later with those sections of the bourgeoisie itself whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry. In such struggles, bourgeoisie seeks the assistance of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie provides the proletariat with tools of political and general education. “It furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie (*The Communist Manifesto*).”

Marx in his theory of revolution calls for the “**ultimate revolution**” which would end all revolutions and establish a new social order. But the “ultimate revolution” hasn’t been translated into reality. **Proletariat is the real revolutionary class.** Intricate layers of proletarian revolution unfold. Soon war breaks out into an open revolution, where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletarian.

“The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority (The Communist Manifesto)”

Marx earlier held that the proletariat have been exploited more than enough to make them lose sight of reality i.e. to inspire a false consciousness in their minds. Yet he believes that the proletariat would be the torchbearers of the ultimate revolution. It seems odd. Even the utopian socialists dismissed the proletariats as “the most suffering class.” **Marx had unquestionable faith in the proletariat.** Marx saw it (the proletariat) as a class with worldwide historical significance. The propertylessness and the subsequent degradation made the real material life of the proletariat miserable. Marx felt that their condition became so pitiable that the proletariat alone had the fortitude to fathom the source of alienation. And once they succeeded in grasping the source of dehumanization the proletariat alone could weed out the prevailing exploitation. “No earlier productive class could possess such a radical insight, nor therefore initiate a radical revolution against existing conditions. (Nelson 2007)¹⁸”

Marx believes that **establishment of communism is inevitable.** He positions the establishment of a communist society on the foundation of an inevitable proletarian revolution. Inevitability of something means that that something occurs out of necessity i.e. it is ought to occur. If such is the predicament then **why does Marx constantly call for a revolution?** Enter the theory of surplus value. The theory of surplus value paints the vivacious picture expounding the exploitation of proletariats at the hands of the bourgeoisie. Labourers are exploited to a great extent. However, they do not even realize that they have been exploited because the process of exploitation (i.e. the process of rise bourgeoisie as an economic force) disconnects their consciousness from their life. Thus, they fail to comprehend their own plight. In such a scenario, Marx feels that the awareness about a need for revolution is imperative. Spreading awareness about the same would require spreading awareness about the theory of surplus value and the exploitation it entails. Once this awareness is spread i.e. **once the revolutionary consciousness is spread** among the proletariat then the revolution is bound to occur.

B. Nelson wonderfully drives the point home: “To assert that the workers will revolt is, at the same time to assert that they ought to revolt. **Marx combines the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’, the objective analysis of historical reality with a subjective call for revolutionary action.** This combining is known as the unity of theory and practice, or praxis, and may be said to be the defining characteristic of Marxism. Theory constitutes objective analysis of historical conditions, practice, revolutionary action aimed at transforming those conditions. For Marx, the overthrow of capitalism must involve both. (Nelson 2007)¹⁹”

Marx delineates the revolutionary movement. End of this revolutionary movement by the proletariat was the seizure of state power. The revolutionary movement would begin with strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, and riots. The revolutionary movement soon ossifies into an organized, militant and unified force for the overthrow of the ruling (i.e. the bourgeoisie) class.

Marx went on to describe the various possibilities that would lead to this boiling point in history:

(i) A nationwide “general strike (Ball 2011)²⁰” would ensure the collapse of the economy leading to the downfall of the capitalists.

(ii) A bloody civil war, in which, on one side are capitalist, soldiers and the police and on the other side are the armed proletarians.

(iii) Lastly, “an unlikely possibility (except in England and the U.S.) is that the bourgeoisie would be overthrown not by bullets but by ballots in a free and fair election. (*Ball 2011*)²¹”

Regardless the means, the proletarians work towards seizing the state power.

(VII) Role of the Communists

The revolution is inevitable. However, the revolutionary consciousness has to be spread. Marx entrusts this job to the Communists. According to Marx, “The Communists are the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others. Theoretically, they have, over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement. (*The Communist Manifesto*)”

However, it should be borne in mind that:

- 1) The Communists cannot direct the proletarian movement as per their whims and fancies.
- 2) Interests of Communists do not diverge from those of the proletariat as whole.
- 3) Communists do not formulate any sectarian principles governing the actions of the proletariat.

Marx saw the Communists as an adhesive that bound together several working class parties (irrespective of their region) to further the revolution. **Communists are the guardians rather than the leaders of the revolution.**

(VIII) Dictatorship of Proletariat

Dictatorship of the proletariat is the transitional phase as the society evolves from a capitalist one to a communist one. Moving along the trajectory of history, (which is conceptualized materialistically) from point A (capitalist society) to point B (communist society), lies in between an inflexion point C (point of revolutionary transformation). In the economic sphere, this point of revolutionary transformation is the socialist society. And in the political sphere, this point of revolutionary transformation adopts the form of dictatorship of the proletariat. However, the two spheres may or may not coincide. Dictatorship of the proletariat is the vehicle that takes one to a classless society.

Marx writings on this subject lack luminosity. But he was assured that class struggle paved the way for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In this phase, the proletariat take over the state machinery and rise to the position of ruling class. Unlike in the capitalist state, power will rest in hands of many (workers, majority in the population) as opposed to power in the hands of few (capitalists, minority in the population). The proletariat state machinery comprises of legislature, executive (centralized bureaucracy and police force) and judiciary. Marx believes that such a transitional phase, where the proletariat capture state power, is essential to decimate the structure/ framework of society founded by capitalist social and political order. Once the capitalist structure (both superstructure and substructure) of society is destroyed, conditions would be ideal for establishing and further entrenching a communist social order.

(IX) The withering away of the state

Eventually, the dictatorship of the proletariat own and operate the productive arrangement existing in the society. The proletariat aim at establishing a society based on a single class. Marx believed that the 'State' was the apparatus used by the bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat. This would be the universal class. State is a class institution. Once varying classes are abolished the very logic for the state to exist does not hold water. Once the bourgeoisie class is extinct, "the dictatorship of the proletariat" would have no sound basis to justify its existence leading to its eventual erosion. Marx sees the withering away of the state as the final stage of dictatorship and the first phase of communism.

According to him the state doesn't disappear overnight. It withdraws its claws back gradually. Marx is of the opinion that once the bourgeoisie class is overthrown the existence of the state is essential for abolishing the previously existing substructures and superstructures of the capitalist society. Moreover, this first phase of communism (by using wage incentives) inspires people to work hard. "In this first phase of communism", according to Marx, "the rule should be – each according to his ability, to each according to his labour (Ball 2011).²²" According to Engels, "There is no longer any class of society to be expressed, which would make a state necessary. The state is not abolished. **It withers away.** The government of persons is replaced by administration of things. (Bloom 1946)²³" Thus, as communism achieves its mature form the state withers away.

(X) Vision of a communist society

Marx provides a detailed analysis critiquing the capitalist system. However, Marx doesn't care to provide a similar penetrating analysis while describing the alternative to a capitalist society. Maybe this was due to his belief in the thought that communism should be reflective of the day and time it is established in rather than of the day and time when capitalism ruled the roost.

The peculiarity of a communist society is abolition of bourgeoisie property i.e. **abolition of private property.** As it had earlier been established – property is the manifestation of division of labour or the prevailing social relations of production which are founded on class antagonisms. Thus, abolition of private property would indicate abolition of division of labour which is abolition of class antagonisms which is abolition of exploitation of many by few.

Why is private property abolished? Marx questions: "Does wage-labour create any property for the labourer? Not a bit. (*The Communist Manifesto*)" Wage-labour, Marx argues, creates capital. Capital is "that kind of property which exploits wage-labour." Capital enslaves and exploits wage labour. The antagonism between the two creates property. Capital is the result of collective effort of all members of society. It symbolizes not personal but social power.

Marx answers, "When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character (*The Communist Manifesto*)."

It should be borne in mind that personal property which provides for clothing, shelter and the like – property which isn't used to accrue profits – shall not be abolished.

Marx differentiates between the bourgeoisie society and the communist society in terms of capital and living labour. In the bourgeoisie society, living labour is **the blood diamond** that is utilized to increase capital (accumulated labour). It is appalling that capital and not living labour in the bourgeoisie society possesses individuality and complete independence. In the communist society, accumulated labour is not an end in itself. Rather it is tweaked for the welfare of living labour. It boosts the quality of life of living labour along with opening new vistas for the society as a whole. Above all, in the Communist society, living labour possesses individuality unlike the alienation he/she is subjected to in the bourgeoisie society. To sum it up in Marx's words "Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society, all it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation. (*The Communist Manifesto*)"

If capitalist private property is eliminated then the existing social relations of production (division of labour) would be abolished too. Social relations of production are accountable for class antagonism. Once these relations are discarded a **classless society emerges**.

Furthermore, in a communist society, with the abolition of division of labour, people will veer away from carrying out the similar activity day in and day out. They can indulge themselves in diverse productive endeavours. Marx propounds, "Communism makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, to fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize in the evening, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic. (*Nelson 2007*)²⁴" Thus, each one is able to hone his/her talent and contribute to the welfare of society. **Free development of one is a pre-requisite for free development of all.**

It can be seen that the **economic substructure undergoes change**. Economically speaking, the communist society will be a society of associated producers. Economic production will be planned. Society will own the means of production. The principle – from each according to his ability, to each according to his need – will guide the distribution of goods and services. The superstructure of non-economic activity i.e. **the political superstructure** which stands on the economic foundation changes too. The state and the administrative apparatus that surrounds it must disappear. State is the political outcome of economic superstructure of society. **A classless society, therefore, means a stateless society.**

A communist society improves the world around it. The society preceding the communist one leads to the propagation of an alienated consciousness among its people. The social framework that professes this alienation is an outcome of the economic milieu prevalent in the society. Life determines consciousness. Once, the real material life of people is transformed in a communist society it can be concluded that the aforementioned **alienated consciousness is eliminated**. The consciousness of an individual in the communist society can now comprehend the actual material reality of life. It can fathom the world as the world is no longer an alienated reality. In a communist society, **people will do away with religion, pure philosophy and culture** which for the "enormous majority was a mere training to act as a machine. (*The Communist Manifesto*)"

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx discusses certain attributes of a classless society. He creates a framework within which a classless society should operate. Moreover, Marx envisions two phases of a communist society. **First phase** involves socialization of means of production. The principle governing this phase is each according to his capacity to each according to his work. Wage labour is prevalent.

Second phase ensures that living labour is no longer subjugated by capital. As stated earlier, it is the elimination of – private property and human self alienation. And it is in this phase that state is slowly done away with. However, in the Communist society too material production will remain a necessity i.e. need of labour shall not come to an end. Work will continue to be an obligation even in a communist society.

(XI) Marxism after Marx

After “the Moor’s” death his theory lived on. His theory enlightened mankind on a possible alternate way of life. Marxism, as it is popularly known, has been scrutinized back and forth as tides of time left their imprint on the island of social thought on which it firmly stood. With the passage of time it has been modified, revised, adjusted and even restructured to suit contemporary circumstances. Let us consider some of the famous forms it acquired in theory or in practice.

1) Marx believed in a unified worker’s movement. He put aside the concept of nationalism and held that the worker class had no nationality. **Ferdinand Lassalle** (founder of United German Labour Party) opposed him. Lassalle was of the view that **nationalism affected worker’s consciousness**. Workers of each nation should embark on the journey of socialism within the framework of their own nationality. A unified international workers movement, according to Lassalle, would find itself in choppy waters. For instance, the political experience of German workers would differ from that of French workers. Lassalle even felt that the state should not wither away. The state is the crucial body politic that imposes socialism.

2) **Revisionism:** Eduard Bernstein, belonging to the German Democratic Party (SPD), strongly felt that the Marxist theory had to be constantly revised in the light of present times and newfound facts. Theorists believing in this school of thought came to be known as **revisionists**. **Morally speaking**, Bernstein felt that Marx had erred while emphasizing on a bloody revolution to overthrow the existing system. How could you establish a just society through unjust means? For Bernstein, it is the duty of those participating in a revolution to adopt morally sound means. If the means are not justified how would one distinguish between the capitalist and the communists? The former used workers as appendages of machines and the latter proposed using them as “cannon fodder in the coming revolution. (Ball 2011)²⁵” **Economically speaking**, Bernstein cited statistics that showed how certain facts had been left out of Marx’s Capital. For instance, Marx had suggested that wealth would be concentrated in the hands of few and workers would be exploited endlessly. Bernstein concluded that this trend had not established itself in the advanced economies as workers (instead of getting poor) were better off. Standard of living of these workers improved on account of better wages and decent working conditions. **Politically speaking**, Bernstein pointed out that the labour movement in Germany had gained momentum and trade unions had established ties with socialist parties which could recruit workers’ representatives and send them to the German parliament, where workers’ interests oriented legislations could be proposed and passed. Thus, Bernstein in his theory revised Marxism to make room for necessary changes.

3) The Russian Context

Russia in the late nineteenth century was under the autocratic rule of the Tsar. Russia, economically and politically primitive, was an agrarian society. Large chunk of its population were peasants who tilled lands. Owing to its insignificant industrial base only a small chunk of its population was

working in factories. How could the peasants (affected by “idiocy of rural life”, living under the influence of religion and ignorant of their economic plight) bring about the revolution? It seemed unlikely. Meanwhile, Russian intellectuals propagated Marx’s theory. “The task of intellectuals was to try to rouse that sleeping giant and to prepare it for its destiny. (Ball 2011)²⁶”

Marx’s theory, though not in its exact form, was put to practice. For the first time the world was spectator to the “unity of theory and practice.” Russia was the world’s stage where the communist play began. Marx was the playwright of this play and Lenin its protagonist. The play titled **Marxism-Leninism**. Lenin rewrote some of Marx’s play sequences. Marx dreamt of a broad based worker’s organization which inspired an all inclusive communist movement. Lenin observed that revolutionary consciousness, which Marx proposed to be the germ of revolution, could not come automatically or spontaneously. **Lenin felt that the Communist party ought to be small, tightly disciplined and highly organized working in secrecy.**

In Lenin’s view, “**The function of the proletarian vanguard** consists in training, educating, enlightening and drawing into the new life the most backward strata and masses of the working class and the peasantry. The party’s role is to agitate, organize and educate the workers.²⁷” Lenin vouched for such a party structure because of the prevailing social and political conditions in Russia which made it unsuitable for operation of a large democratic party. In the presence of a large working class, the role of a vanguard party would have been inconsequential as due to their constant exploitation the workers would promptly revolt without the aid of professional revolutionaries.

In 1917 Russian revolution overthrew the Tsar. Bolshevik party founded by Lenin came to power. Centralized planning came into being. New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced. Major manufacturing concerns of Russia were nationalized. Farmers were allowed to till their own land and avail of benefits by selling the produce.

Critics pointed out that in Russia a large working class was absent. Instead a large peasant class existed which had to be awakened to revolt against the existing conditions. Thus, prompt revolution was not on the cards making Lenin distinguish between spontaneity of revolution and revolutionary consciousness. The latter had to be inculcated in the workers and the peasants for the revolution to be a success. Critics claimed that this distinction violated the true relation between life and consciousness. Furthermore, it was pointed out that if the capitalist ethos had not completely enveloped Russia, how could a complete communist revolution stem from such conditions? Lenin brushed aside these criticisms. Lenin considered “**Russia to be an imperialist extension of capitalist powers.** (Ball 2011)²⁸” Russia was at the periphery of the capitalist world, a perfect place for socialism to grow and eventually spread to the centre of the capitalist world.

Lenin’s analysis of imperialism is worth mentioning. Lenin concluded that working class in developed countries is affected by “**trade union consciousness.**” Forming trade unions allowed the workers to secure higher wages and better working conditions. In a way, the bourgeoisie, through the mechanism of trade unions, succeeded in bribing the workers. This “bribe” was the source of higher wages and improved quality of life of workers that the revisionists talked about.

Lenin observed that the role of the Communist party as vanguard party was important as ever. Lastly, he mentioned that revolution would initially spring in those regions where the proletariat is most exploited and his consciousness awakened by a vanguard party. The corollary of the previous

observations is that the revolution would first occur in backward pockets of the world (such as Russia, China etc) rather than in advanced nations.

Marxism-Leninism was followed by another variant i.e. **Stalinism**. Stalin employed DiaMat (Dialectical Materialism) to justify every policy of his era. Stalin said “We stand for the withering away of the state. At the same time we stand for the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is the mightiest and the strongest state power that has ever existed... Is this “contradictory”? Yes, it is contradictory. But this contradiction is bound up with life and fully reflects Marx’s dialectics.²⁹” This statement would have made Marx turn in his grave. Stalin intended to accept these contradictions. Marx on the other hand believed in overcoming such contradictions. Stalin introduced collectivization of agriculture. Peasants were forced to cultivate in collective farms. Planned economy was the main attribute of Stalin’s era. What will be produced? How will it be produced? How much will be produced? Everything would be pre-decided.

(XII) Evaluation of Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism

The litmus test of any theory is whether it plays out fine when practiced in the real world. Marxist movement (led by Lenin) in Russia produced results that didn’t confirm to theory. In Lenin’s era and under Stalin’s rule one thing was common – the state grew all powerful and bureaucracy became the hub of power – something which Marx never professed. The Communist Party which was ought to guide the revolution became the leader of the revolution. Within the party there was democratic centralism and workers were expected to tread the party line. Under Stalin events took turn for the worst. Production figures dipped. Welfare of the people became a pipe dream. The economy went into a tailspin. Collectivization of agriculture produced one of the worst famines in Russia’s history killing four million people in 1930. Marx was assured that the establishment of a communist society would emancipate the worker. In Russia, poor working conditions ensured status quo in worker’s plight. Workers led tough lives. Consider this – “In living quarters, in the wintertime, at 40 degrees below, workers had to climb down from the fourth floor and dash across the street in order to go to the toilet. (NCERT 2006)³⁰” Above all, power, as earlier, continued to be concentrated in the hands of few. George Orwell’s remark holds water in this regard – “Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power.³¹”

(XIII) Critical Evaluation of Marxist Theory

Earlier economists such as David Ricardo and Adam Smith spoke of “labour” as a common denominator to be used in exchange ratios while carrying out transactions. But how can labour of different people be similar? To make it clear, Ricardo set hours of labour it took to catch a fish and to kill a deer as the benchmark to decide their exchange ratio i.e. to price the two commodities. Ricardo failed to fathom that never a fish was caught by a hunter and never was a deer killed by a fishing rod. Marx uses “labour” as the common denominator in deciding the exchange ratios. He is simply of the view that the prevalent social system creates abstract labour – labour that can be bought and sold as any other commodity. **The true objective of labour theory of value** isn’t determination of prices (as Smith and Ricardo thought) but understanding the social conditions that exist in the capitalist framework. This social system creates a worker class devoid of private

property, leaving the workers with no option but to sell the only thing they possess i.e. labour power which is the ability of the labour to work as a commodity.

Marxian analysis predicting the collapse of capitalism is built on the theory of labour value and surplus value. The real material world which we inhabit runs on tangible prices. While equating the abstract values of his utopian world with tangible prices of the real world **Marx makes a mathematical error.**

Marx's model predicting the "**laws of motion**" of the capitalist system has proved to be true on so many accounts. It is already established that profits do fall in business. But profits rise on account of innovation and new techniques of production. Empirical evidence can be provided to prove Marx's theory that small firms are digested by larger ones. Major corporate acquisitions happening are reflective of this trend.

For instance, Tata Motors acquisition of European steel maker Corus or Coco-Cola's acquisition of Indian brand Thums Up etc to name a few. **The concept of business cycles** bought by Marx is unimaginable. In the past, hundred years the world has already seen quite some economic depressions – such as The Great Depression (1929), East-Asian Financial Crisis (1997), Global Financial Crisis (2008) and the like. Marx's forecast has always hit the bull's eye.

However, his mother of all predictions that capitalism would collapse one day hasn't come true, though capitalism was/ has been temporarily displaced by socialism in some pockets of the world. Marx saw the state as the agent of one single class i.e. the ruling class. However, in several modern countries the state doesn't serve the interests of a single class alone. The offshoot of capitalism such as high unemployment rate or poor working conditions do exist in modern societies. But the state takes care of the unemployed through unemployment benefits or pensions. **Labour laws** in several nations ensure that workers work in healthy atmosphere, they are paid more than subsistence wages and prevent exploitation at the hands of capitalists. **Social security benefits** including universal health coverage, provision of free education etc keeps the proletariat from revolting against the authority of the state. Marx claimed that the workers would be alienated or rather frustrated to the extent that they would revolt. But the current trends display that the above mentioned **social safety measures more than compensate the frustration of the working class.** As Lenin observed, the bourgeoisie "bribe" the working class. Now the state bribes them or actually intends to look after their welfare is something that can't be easily proved. Whatever may be the intention of the state, it has managed to keep "the ultimate revolution" at bay. Brian Nelson opines "The most fundamental problem for the Marxist theory has been the failure of the industrial proletariat to act as a revolutionary force. This may be attributed mainly to improved economic conditions that have eliminated the extreme economic exploitation that existed in Marx's time. (Nelson 2007)³²"

It can be said that **Marx's vision of a communist society is utopian.** Industrialization is so deeply entrenched that doing away with division of labour (on which complex processes of modern industry depend to accomplish highly specialized tasks) would seem illogical. Abolition of private property seems to be irrational. If means of production (factories, equipment etc) are owned by the society collectively welfare becomes the main motive. If means of production are owned by an individual profit becomes the main motive. Most of the times it is the production processes inspired by profit motive that succeed in efficient and timely delivery of goods and services as well as in ensuring better quality of goods and services. But Marx has an outstanding reply to this assessment.

Marx says that the need for private property emerges from the consciousness that the economic superstructure of a capitalist world creates. Communism will eliminate this consciousness by eliminating the superstructure itself. “The desire for material incentives will no longer exist in any case. (Nelson 2007)³³”

Marx viewed history from an economic perspective. However, dumping the non-economic factors would be unfair. Non-economic factors such as religion, polity, culture, psychology etc too influence human history. Lastly, Marx felt that scientific knowledge was open to criticism and change. He himself revised his theories in the light of newfound facts. Maybe due to this, Marx’s theory is able to cushion several (not all) modern changes (not saying that it is completely insulated from shocks due to changes in the world) and continues to loom large in the ideological world.

(XIV) Karl Marx: The Person

Who is Karl Marx? A nebulous idea that floats in the universe of history or an ideology that tends to redefine human existence on this planet. Let us dig in a bit deeper. Scientific socialism, theory of surplus value, dialectical materialism and the like define only the tip of the iceberg that was Karl Marx. Marx, whenever these four letters appear in our conscious we think on the lines of the abovementioned concepts. Why is our thinking conditioned in such a manner? I can think of two reasons that answer this question. One, **we are ignorant about Marx, the person**, whose social thought we otherwise love to boast. Two, the ideas he has put forward and the voluminous texts that he has penned overshadow Marx, the person, completely.

Who is Karl Marx? This time think about a person, in flesh and bone. Think about a person whose dealings with the world around him, unlike his ideas, were not always brilliant. Think about a reckless son but a loving husband. Think about a warm father. Think about an arrogant but rational person. Think about a caring friend. Think about an atheist. Think about a dark-skinned, stocky and powerfully build person. Think about a bearded man. Think about a face with glowering expression and flashing eyes. **Above all, think about a person like you and me.**

The author of the book *Love and Capital* writes, “Marx was fiercely argumentative, intellectually arrogant, and notoriously impatient with anyone who disagreed with him. His frequent drinking episodes often devolved into verbal if not physical fights. He had little time for niceties; for someone so conceptually fascinated by the alienation of man, Marx routinely alienated those who encountered him.” In the same breath the writer notes “In private Marx was warm, loving, kind, and generally described as excellent company when he was not plagued by sleepless nights or stricken by disease, both due to anxiety over his work.³⁴” Just like us, Marx too, was a multi-faceted being.

Marx was a meticulous person, a pedant and a perfectionist. In his written works he meticulously dotted the “I”s and crossed the “T”s. **He failed to meet deadlines.** He failed to submit assignments on time. He failed to adhere to a pre set document length. Not because he was inefficient or unintelligent but inquisitive. **The unknown enthralled him.** And once in the territory of the unknown he forgot everything. He returned only after fully knowing the gradient, topography and the feel of the unknown territory of thoughts, ideas or theories he had set to explore.

Marx, if need arose, **labelled his opponents “rascals” and even “bedbugs.”** If any person did not tread his line of reasoning the person was likely to be showered with his wrath. In this context, Marx’s meeting with a German tailor, Weitling is worth mentioning.

Weitling had full faith in the revolution Marx called for. However, when he came to Marx to discuss the idea of justice or brotherhood, Marx subjected him to a relentless interrogation. The purpose of interrogation was to ensure that Weitling was well versed with the tenets of “scientific socialism.” Marx found out Weitling had no clue whatsoever about “scientific socialism.” Marx scolded him – “Ignorance has never helped anybody yet (*Heilbroner 1999*)³⁵”

Karl Marx was an intelligent and a practical giant in the field of study he undertook. It is quite amusing that **pragmatism eluded him while he conducted his day to day affairs.** Marx faced a life-long financial crisis. His financial priorities were skewed. He put money in ensuring that his five children received music lessons, amusingly, at the same time he didn’t have enough money to afford a square meal for his family. Marxes were assisted by the never ending flow of loans from Engels. Marx even tried to secure a job as a clerk with the railway but **he was rejected for his illegible handwriting.** “He pawned what was left to his name, all the family silver and valuables having been sold long ago. He lacked money to buy postage stamps to send his works to the publisher. And to compound his difficulties, he suffered from the most painful boils.”³⁶”

Marx’s relation with Engels is worth mentioning. **The two completed each other.** Marx and Engels’ symbiotic relation began in 1844. One day in Paris, Engels visited Marx, just to see how Marx was doing. The two had so much to say to one another, so many issues to talk about and so many things to share that their conversation lasted for ten days. Marx and Engels shared a warm relation. There is hardly a product of the one that was not edited or rewritten or at least debated with the other, and their correspondence filled volumes.

Conclusion: “Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in organic nature, so **Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history.**”³⁷”

Marx made a significant contribution to modern political thought. However, if the **Russian adaption of communism** is to be reviewed it is clear that there is disunity between theory and practice. The revolution in Russia misses the Marxist theory by miles. Marxists might argue that the historical drama is yet to unfold. They opine that the progress of capitalism is deceptive and it would soon be jolted. Opponents of Marxism hold that the collapse of Soviet communism vindicates capitalism. Communist states such as China do exist. But over the years China too has developed a free market economy. Moreover, he emphasized on the inevitability of socialism. Though socialism was established in Russia in 1917, the disintegration of USSR post 1990 brought to the fore the flaws in communist thought. **It is crucial to point out** that Marx’s whole theory is built on the premise that “life determines consciousness.” That is, the actual real material life of an individual determines his psyche. For Marx, material is primary and mind is secondary. Hegel’s theory proposes a challenging thought – “consciousness determines life.” Hegel’s theory sees consciousness as the sole determining factor which assists humans in comprehending the social, material, political and spiritual aspects of his/ her life. For Hegel, mind is primary and material is secondary. ***Without the spiritual understanding (which takes place in the psyche) of the world, how can one comprehend the material processes and problems of his/ her time?***

Interestingly, years before his death, Marx learned about the works of a group of French working men. This group called themselves “Marxists.” The thought that a group of working men could summarize his complex scientific theory as simple “ism” bewildered him. **Flabbergasted, Marx said, “What is certain is that I am not a Marxist.”**³⁸”

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