



EXPLORING KARL MARX CONFLICT THEORY

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Abstract

Marx has been described as one of the most influential figures in human history, and in a 1999 BBC poll was voted the "thinker of the millennium" by people from around the world. The memorial at his grave is always covered by tokens of appreciation from his fans. His tombstone is inscribed with words that echo those from "The Communist Manifesto," which seemingly predicted the influence Marx would have on world politics and economics: "Workers of all lands unite."

Conflict theory originated in the work of Karl Marx, who focused on the causes and consequences of class conflict between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production and the capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class and the poor). Focusing on the economic, social, and political implications of the rise of capitalism in Europe, Marx theorized that this system, premised on the existence of a powerful minority class (the bourgeoisie) and an oppressed majority class (the proletariat), created class conflict because the interests of the two were at odds, and resources were unjustly distributed among them.

Within this system an unequal social order was maintained through ideological coercion which created consensus--and acceptance of the values, expectations, and conditions as determined by the bourgeoisie. Marx theorized that the work of producing consensus was done in the "superstructure" of society, which is composed of social institutions, political structures, and culture, and what it produced consensus for was the "base," the economic relations of production. Marx reasoned that as the socio-economic conditions worsened for the proletariat, they would develop a class consciousness that revealed their exploitation at the hands of the wealthy capitalist class of bourgeoisie, and then they would revolt, demanding changes to smooth the

conflict. According to Marx, if the changes made to appease conflict maintained a capitalist system, then the cycle of conflict would repeat. However, if the changes made created a new system, like socialism, then peace and stability would be achieved.

Evolution of Conflict Theory

Many social theorists have built on Marx's conflict theory to bolster it, grow it, and refine it over the years. Explaining why Marx's theory of revolution did not manifest in his lifetime, Italian scholar and activist Antonio Gramsci argued that the power of ideology was stronger than Marx had realized and that more work needed to be done to overcome cultural hegemony, or rule through common sense. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, critical theorists who were part of The Frankfurt School, focused their work on how the rise of mass culture--mass produced art, music, and media--contributed to the maintenance of cultural hegemony. More recently, C. Wright Mills drew on conflict theory to describe the rise of a tiny "power elite" composed of military, economic, and political figures who have ruled America from the mid-twentieth century.

Many others have drawn on conflict theory to develop other types of theory within the social sciences, including feminist theory, critical race theory, postmodern and postcolonial theory, queer theory, post-structural theory, and theories of globalization and world systems.

So, while initially conflict theory described class conflicts specifically, it has lent itself over the years to studies of how other kinds of conflicts, like those premised on race, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, and nationality, among others, are a part of contemporary social structures, and how they affect our lives.

Conflict theory is a theory propounded by Karl Marx that claims society is in a state of perpetual conflict due to competition for limited resources. It holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity. According to conflict theory, those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless. Marxist perspective and conceptualization of the way in which society is structured. This perspective depicts society as characteristically dominated by conflicts (Collins & Sanderson, 2008). Conflict is the determinant of how resources are allocated and who benefits the most from such allocations. Power is also acquired through conflict, and once such power is acquired, it is used to dominate the less-powerful and to benefit a few people. Collins and Sanderson (2008) cited that the basic form of interaction in the human society is not consensus

but competition, which culminates into persistent conflicts. Each party or individual competes against perceived rivals with the goal of gaining advantage and dominating the other.

The theory presented by Karl Marx underscores the fact that conflict, and not consensus, dominates designed mechanisms through different classes in the stratified society, interacts and relates to each other (Collins & Sanderson, 2008). The rich and the powerful use conflict to threaten their poor subjects and to maintain the status-quo. The poor on the other hand, organize and use conflicts to push for a revolution that will overthrow the powerful that are enjoying the privileges of capitalist structures. These tensions are thus sustained by the need of each group to have its interests dominate the structures and operations of the society.

Key Ideas of Karl Marx

The development process of the rule of class struggle theory of Karl Marx can be clarified from other some points which especially apply in capitalist society.

1. Capitalist society is divided into two classes: Marxism class structures The Bourgeoisie or the Capitalist class is the ones who own and control the wealth of a country. These control the productive forces in society (what Marx called the economic base), which basically consisted of land, factories and machines that could be used to produce goods that could then be sold for a profit. The majority, or the masses, or what Marx called The Proletariat can only gain a living by selling their labour power to the bourgeoisie for a price.

2. The bourgeoisie increase their wealth by exploiting the proletariat Marx argued that the bourgeoisie maintain and increase their wealth through exploiting the working class.

The relationship between these two classes is exploitative because the amount of money the Capitalist pays his workers (their wages) is always below the current selling, or market price of whatever they have produced. The difference between the two is called surplus value. Marx thus says that the capitalist extracts surplus value from the worker. Because of this extraction of surplus value, the capitalist class is only able to maintain and increase their wealth at the expense of the proletariat. To Marx, Profit is basically the accumulated exploitation of workers in capitalist society.

Marx thus argues that at root, capitalism is an unjust system because those that actually do the work are not fairly rewarded for the work that they do and the interests of the Capitalist class are in conflict with the interests of the working class.

3. Those who have economic power control all other institutions in society Marx argued that those who control the Economic Base also control the Superstructure – that is, those who have wealth or economic power also have political power and control over the rest of society.

4. Ideological Control Marx argued that the ruling classes used their control of social institutions to gain ideological dominance, or control over the way people think in society. Marx argued that the ideas of the ruling classes were presented as common sense and natural and thus unequal, exploitative relationships were accepted by the proletariat as the norm.

5. The result of the above is false class consciousness The end result of ideological control is false consciousness – where the masses, or proletariat are deluded into thinking that everything is fine and that the appalling in which they live and work are inevitable. This delusion is known as False Consciousness. In Marxist terms, the masses suffer from false class consciousness and fail to realize their common interest against their exploiters.

6. Important of Property in Society

Especially, the base of capitalist society has been placed/situated on the importance of economy. Because of the source of social dignity, popularity and status based on the importance of property, the strong group or class increases the access over limited resources. The access of them increases on the means of production. Through this process social development goes on. The division of class appeared in the society and conflict starts.

7. Economic Determinism

According to Karl Marx, the determining factor of each aspect of the society remains economic system. Production system or structure determines social values, norms, tradition, ritual, political and social organization etc. According to him, the main base of exploitation over the proletariat by capitalist is the monopoly of capitalist over the property. This monopoly nature affects to the other levels of society and they also use the economic structure. There remains hand of few capitalists in each level of production structure. This process bring the emergence of class in the society and antagonistic nature over them, this further brings the situation of conflict.

8. Polarization of Class

Because of the unequal power relation between capitalist class and proletariat class, these classes start to unite more for the benefit of class in the society. In the society, the structure of relation creates as the nature of these classes. Because of the over-exploitation by capitalist class over the proletariat the class polarization increases rapidly. The polarization further increases the level of

conflict and after certain period of time class conflict starts. The main cause of it is the protection of class benefit.

9. Theory of Surplus Value

Capitalists keep the greater portion of profit as for the involvement of them in production system. Labors cannot get the proper remuneration of their labor. While this situation or process of exploitation goes continue that create the situation of conflict.

10. Pauperization

While the capitalists keep surplus value with them that creates poverty, scarcity, insecurity etc. aspects to the labor class. The whole society influence by this process. There remains the crisis of human on the maximum labor classes. In this context Karl Marx says poverty emerges not because of the scarcity of resources but because of the exploitation. This further compels to unite classes and after a certain period of time the situation of class conflict emerges.

11. Alienation

Because of the over exploitation by capitalists in production system, the human relation changes as to the commodity of an object. The whole relation has been taken on the basis of economy. The process depends on the level of capitalism development. In this situation, there remains the monocentric decision of capitalists on production system. The labors feel them as the object of business. That has been served to the capitalists only. In this context, labor class prefer to choose next production system than capitalists production system, where they can get proper cost of their labor and end of exploitation.

12. Class Conflict and Antagonism

Because of the exploitation of laborers in capitalist production system there creates the situation of pauperization, the condition of frustration, poverty. Ultra poor situation and the loss of human value, this situation further emerges the class consciousness to human value, this situation further emerges the class consciousness to the working class people for the protection of their right. This situation of working class people for the protection of their right. This situation of unity and consciousness also remains there in capitalist class and their unity further increases as increased in labor class. They try to protect their supremacy and previously created. This situation compels to the condition of class conflict.

13. Revolution

In the situation of class unity, integration and conflict over the class divides the whole society into two classes. This situation stimulates to the struggle to end the capitalism. The leadership of

revolution has been done by working class people. Through this revolution socialist system established by ending the rule of few capitalists. Karl Marx says the capitalism itself is sufficient to end the system of capitalism and the assumes the victory of proletariat is compulsory.

14. Dictatorship of Proletariat

The revolution between capitalists and proletariat established the dictatorship of proletariat. At that time, there will be the end of capitalist class. The dictatorship of proletariat established through this process does the change in social structure. The ownership of means of production changes monopoly to group.

15. Inauguration of Communist Society

After the victory of proletariat in the class struggle, the society develops as the society of classless and stateless, where completely the ownership of personal property also finishes.

On The Basis Of Various Analyses, the Nature of Conflict Can Be Presented As Following

1. Social conflict is universal law.
2. Social conflict is a conscious action which contains specific objective.
3. In each levels of each society the forms of conflicts are remained more or less.
4. There remains lack of continuity and uniformity in the conflict.
5. It is both social phenomena and trend.
6. Social conflict is meaningful but complex.
7. Social conflict realizes the universal rule of social balance and change.
8. Struggle always tries to jump up to the new from the old.
9. In spite of several causes and nature of struggle, class struggle plays the leading role for the transformation of society.
10. In the context of social development, conflict is a regular process which can be seen by joining it with each period of time.
11. Conflict perspective emphasizes to the objective analysis of the society.
12. The consequence of conflict never remains uniform in each time, society and context.
13. Through conflict, alterness, development and progress can have in the society.
14. The term of present human society and development all are the consequences of internal or external and direct and indirect conflict.
15. Social conflict remains direct and indirect both types of nature. The direct conflict can have seen and realized and it remains manifesto. But indirect conflict cannot be seen and realized and it remains in latent type.

Criticisms of Traditional Marxism

Marx's concept of social class has been criticised as being too simplistic – today, there are clearly not just two social classes, but several; moreover, most people don't identify with other members of their social class, so it is questionable how relevant the concept of social class is today. Clearly Marx's predictions about capitalism ending and the 'inevitable success of communism' have been proved wrong with the collapse of communism. Capitalism has changed a lot since Marx's day, and it appears to work for more people – it is less exploitative, so maybe this explains why it still continues to this day?

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