

# Marxism

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## NOTE:

*This is a document of my personal collected notes on the subject. It is very simplified, loosely written, and pieced from various sources. A crash-read of the basic Marxist framework as I have come to understand it.*

## STARTING POINT OF ANALYZING SOCIETY:

Marx studied society scientifically— looking at it as if it's a body, having different parts and functions but working together to form a “society”, or even more so, human history (like the sun of all the societies throughout history).

He goes off the basis of what's called “historical materialism” ... meaning that the first and foremost concern is the physical existence of an individual human being. So, this means the human first worries about what to eat, drink, shelter, and probably community too—since we humans are community-creatures also because it helps us survive. That is, it's a survival thing that drives us.

Going off this, he then says that every society that has been formed essentially has some sort of system in place that somehow attains this materialistic need—food, shelter, clothing etc.

With this I want to add that these resources require a way of producing them—so like land is required to produce crops. Land also allows for producing houses via lumber. These things are called “means of production”. (1)\* <-important (see below)

Land is one of the major central ones.

You also need a division of labor in order to have a society work together to be able to produce the necessary things like food.

In studying history (that's like the empirical “data” we have for social science), we can see that throughout history there were different (economic) systems by which people produced their necessities.

There are three main systems in human history that we can see:

Slavery was the earlier system... so humans naturally created this system in which the labor that nobody wants to do is forced upon a group of people that are considered lower class—slaves. They work the fields in order to produce but they don't own the land or anything. The “managers” who involve in more “intellectual” work—managing, organizing, and running the system are the ones who own all the resources and create the rules and regulations to run the system. These are your early day monarchs. And this was the hierarchy.

Around the medieval ages in Europe, we see a new system develop—feudalism. No longer were there “slaves” in the traditional sense as they were not property to any monarch. But these serfs were like slaves in the sense that they worked for some owner of the land—the lord— who essentially could do as he pleased as it was his land. If you don't like it, you can leave... but where are you, a lonely peasant, going to go? Every bit of land is owned by some lord. And you need to eat so you don't have much of a choice except to abide but the rules of the lord for who you work for.

In the 1750-1800's we come to the industrial revolution. Now it's essentially a new kind of slavery—dubbed “wage slavery”. Now the means of production has shifted into companies—where one wealthy man owns the resources that is necessary for a society. He doesn't own any person, but again, as a worker who needs to eat, you are required to work for some capitalist in order to feed yourself. This capitalist can again dictate the rules of his company... he sets the price that he will pay you, if you don't like it leave... but you'll just end up working for another capitalist.

(We're still in the 1800's so this doesn't relate exactly to 2022 just although there does exist many similarities ofc).

These capitalist— a small class of people—own the necessities to run a society—material for infrastructure, energy sources (oil, lumber, natural gas etc.), land, etc.

Because they have these necessary resources, they essentially run the town, which I'll explain in a sec.

## WHY/ HOW SYSTEMS CHANGE:

These systems evolve based on the idea that overtime, our productive forces evolve—that is our technology. So again, it is the material that guides how a society will be organized.

For example, the transition between the feudal system and capitalism is that with the growing interest in exploration that we see around 1400-1600's (Columbus, Vasco da Gama, that hernando fella in South America...) gave rise to a new class of people—merchants. People who can now acquire wealth based on material they get and sell. By the time we reach the 1750 (start of industrial revolution in England) we see merchants that acquire enough wealth that can now be used as Capital—the ability to purchase resources to produce a more of whatever they are producing.

In other words, revolution, and epoch change (war, social upheaval etc.) is understood as the consequence of an economic structure no longer being able to continue to develop the forces of production... and so it is eventually replaced with an economic structure better suited to preside over the continued development of the forces of production.

### Examples:

Also, for example, as dark as this seems, slavery wasn't abolished because people realized its immorality but rather because this system is no longer convenient—it doesn't produce as much as the new capitalist system... this is especially evident in the American Revolution... the defeat of the south is because their slave economy was weaker than the North's industrial economy. This is one example, I'll provide more, of how our conscious thought is based not on some enlightened idea of the immortals of slavery... but because of economics.)—this was 1850's (America was a little late in the game).

(We see this also in the French Revolution in 1790's—the monarchy being replaced for it was lacking the ability to satisfy even the minimum needs of their people.)

(Russia is another example, being even later than America—- overthrowing the monarchs with the Russian revolution in 1917– but they jumped straight to attempting to forcefully install Marxist ideas, skipping over capitalism—and hence they lived in tyranny and poverty and ultimately failed... now they're behind).

Thus, like every other system, if there comes a point when capitalism begins to fail to develop the productive forces it would disappear.

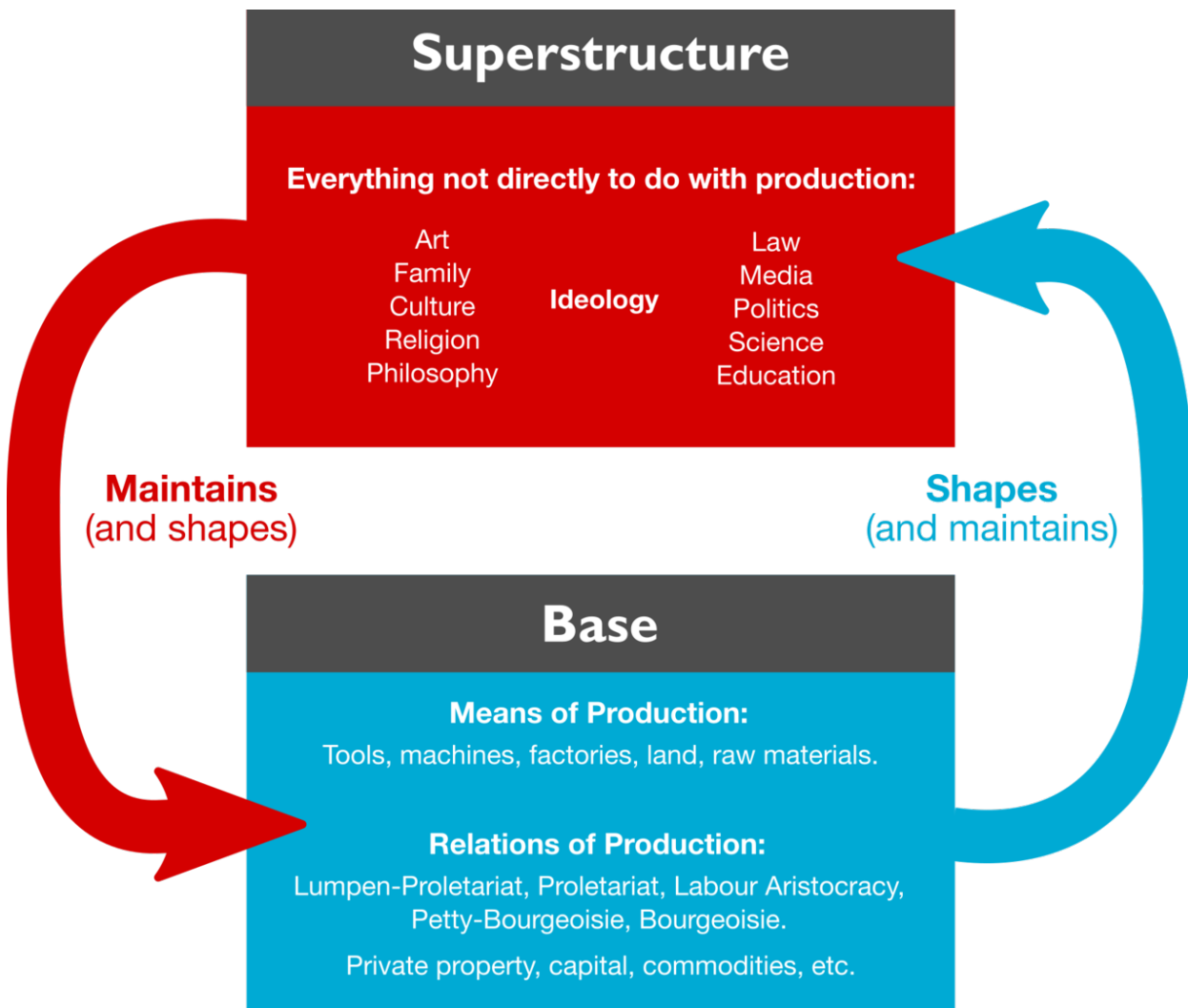
(Productive forces = technology)

### MODE OF PRODUCTION:

which includes the productive forces\_(machinery, tools and equipment, resources, labor) and relations of production (meant the sum total of social relationships that people *must* enter into in order to survive, to produce, and to reproduce their means of life).

### BIG POINT:

Marxism assumes that the form of economic organization, or mode of production, influences all other social phenomena, including broader social relations, political institutions, legal systems, cultural systems, aesthetics and ideologies. These social relations and the economic system form a base and superstructure.



**This moves in a spiral pattern.  
The base is generally dominant.**

In other words: —materialistic principles (so the economic system) form the society we experience (political system, laws, ideologies, forms of entertainment, attitudes in culture etc.)

The economic system creates these naturally and they are created in such a way as to support the current system thereby bringing some “stability” to a society.!

## ON THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM:

Note 1:

### EXPLOITATION:

All the systems presented- slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, are forms of “slavery” because they all partake in exploitation.

Regarding capitalism, an example of this is:

Suppose I work eight hours to earn my wages. With this perhaps the best thing I can buy is a coat. But imagine that the coat took only a total of four hours to make. Therefore, I have exchanged my eight hours work for only four hours of other people’s work, and thereby, on this view, I am exploited.

(Based on theory of labor)

In fact, the essence of Capitalism is that it involves not merely the exchange of commodities, but the advancement of capital, in the form of money, with the purpose of generating profit through the purchase of commodities and their transformation into other commodities which can command a higher price, and thus yield a profit. Marx claims that no previous theorist has been able adequately to explain how capitalism as a whole can make a profit. Marx’s own solution relies on the idea of exploitation of the worker.

(Surplus value theory of profit):

Labor power is the only commodity which can produce more value than it is worth, and for this reason it is known as variable capital.

Note 2:

### ON CLASS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT:

This is an important point in the theory. It’s a description of the fact that there exists a division in class, that there is always tensions between them.

Ways that this conflict is expressed can be through direct or indirect ways.

For example, trade unions and labor protests are an expression of the workers (working class) unhappiness to their conditions—unsafe working conditions, low wages, high working hours, unfair-layoffs etc. (\*these are such things that lead to “Alienation” described below this section).

We see a rise in these labor movements and protests in the early 1900’s in America and worldwide. We see many changes as a result. Firstly, a major chunk of the world’s poor countries took up Marxist ideas and became revolutionary communists... starting with Russia (as Marx himself predicted!).

But socialist ideas were being pushed in the United States as well.

New ideas began turning into laws that care for the well-being of the worker—things like:

- a minimum age requirement that allows children to work
- the max number of hours a worker is required to work until overtime becomes voluntary
- minimum wage that's required
- healthcare being covered by employers
- if a worker is injured at the job, he can't be fired because he is not useless...there requires some legality
- safety in the workplace

All these things are not in favor to the capitalist. He doesn't want to have to pay any money to cover your healthcare, or if you broke your arm and can't work hence, you're not useful to him. But because of protests, and a call for change in laws and conditions... now the law requires it.

These things emerged as “wins” for the lower class.

Furthermore, new associations began forming... for example the FDA, which checks that meat companies don't mix garbage with the meat.

Regarding the base and superstructure that was mentioned earlier, a great example of this is feminism. Feminism emerged around the 1920's—around the same time the labor movement was heated— it emerged because of the capitalist system... because the capitalist in retaliation to the men who no longer wanted to work under poor conditions, figured that they could exploit women as you can pay them less. Women agreed with this as this was a step towards their liberation—a step in being allowed to work and receive pay, thereby being independent on their man. So, ideas of a women being equal to the man socially and legally as we all agree today is a good example of how the economic system shapes ideologies of a society in order to reinforce itself.

Even more so however, the idea of globalization also emerged alongside capitalism. When we see how everything is made in China—this is because it's no longer convenient for the capitalist to exploit Americans (because higher minimum wages and better conditions) but the Chinese—being a poor country—are ready to work for pennies, as this will help with their poverty.

The forms of class conflict include direct violence such as wars for resources and cheap labor, assassinations, or revolution; indirect violence such as deaths from poverty and starvation, illness, and unsafe working conditions; and economic coercion such as the threat of unemployment or the withdrawal of investment capital; or ideologically, by way of political literature. Additionally, political forms of class warfare include legal and illegal lobbying, and bribery of legislators.

Note: a truly pure capitalist system is that of the illegal drug markets... where the market is truly and fully free. What we see in there is violence, a monopoly, and corruption. This is pure capitalism.

Our society despite standing on capitalist principles of “free markets” have some number of regulations (which I personally, for simplicity, classify as socialist “wins”).

The number of regulations however fluctuates, and this can be analyzed further\* (see Modern day).

## PROBLEMS WITH CAPITALISM:

There's no doubt that regarding production, capitalism has been extremely successful in its materialistic accomplishments.

Marx describes the problems with capitalism.

One main problem is called: Alienation.

Alienation:

Alienation means when two objects that are meant to be together are separated.

In Marxist theory, we are talking about how the worker becomes alienated from his labor and his community.

Four dimensions of alienated labor in contemporary capitalist society:

1. immediate producers are separated from the product of their labor; they create a product that they neither own nor control, indeed, which comes to dominate them.
2. immediate producers are separated from their productive activity; in particular, they are forced to work in ways which are mentally and/or physically debilitating.
3. immediate producers are separated from other individuals; contemporary economic relations socialize individuals to view others as merely means to their own particular ends.
4. immediate producers are separated from their own human nature; for instance, the human capacities for community and for free, conscious, and creative, work, are both frustrated by contemporary capitalist relations.

Marx's condemnation of contemporary economic arrangements and their transformation of workers into deformed and "dehumanized" beings— who's primary purpose of existence is to be a slave— specializing in a detailed task to keep the corporation and the economics going.

Productive activity, on Marx's account, is a central element in what it is to be a human being, and self-realization through work is a vital component of human flourishing.

So, a central criticism of capitalism that aside from material needs, there are also the social needs. And while capitalism has been excellent in producing the former, the latter is still a problem.

Human Flourishing:

To provide for 'human flourishing', a society must satisfy not only basic needs (for sustenance, warmth and shelter, certain climatic conditions, physical exercise, basic hygiene, procreation and sexual activity), but also less basic needs, both those that are not always appreciated to be part of his account

(for recreation, culture, intellectual stimulation, artistic expression, emotional satisfaction, and aesthetic pleasure), and those that Marx is more often associated with (for fulfilling work and meaningful community)

## MORALITY:

Marx claims that the role of both the superstructure and ideology is to stabilize the economic structure. Consequently, to state that something is just under capitalism is simply a judgement that it will tend to have the effect of advancing capitalism. According to Marx, in any society the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class, the core of the theory of ideology.

The theory of ideology appears to play a role in explaining a feature of class-divided societies which might otherwise appear puzzling, namely what might be called their “stability”; that is, the absence of overt and serious conflict between social classes. This stability is not permanent, but it can last for extended historical periods. This stability appears puzzling to Marx because class-divided societies are flawed in ways which not only frustrate human flourishing, but also work to the material advantage of the ruling minority. Why do the subordinate classes, who form a majority, tolerate these flaws, when resistance and rebellion of various kinds might be in their objective interests?

Very roughly, Marx’s account of ideology claims that the dominant social ideas in such societies are typically false or misleading in a fashion that works to the advantage of the economically dominant class.

Other factors might include: dull economic pressure, including the daily grind of having to earn a living; doubts—justified or otherwise—about the feasibility of alternatives; sensitivity to the possible costs of radical social change; and collective action problems of various kinds which face those who do want to rebel and resist.

For Marx ideological beliefs are social in that they are widely shared, indeed so widely shared that for long periods they constitute the “ruling” or “dominant” ideas in any given class-divided society (MECW 5: 59). And they are social in that they directly concern, or indirectly impact upon, the action-guiding understandings of self and society that individuals have. These action-guiding understandings include the dominant legal, political, religious, and philosophical views within particular class-divided societies in periods of stability

ideology often portrays institutions, policies, and decisions which are in the interests of the economically dominant class, as being in the interests of the society as a whole (MECW 5: 60); and ideology often portrays social and political arrangements which are contingent, or historical, or artificial, as being necessary, or universal, or natural (MECW 35: 605)

All sorts of ideas might get generated for all sorts of reasons, but the ones that tend to “stick” (become widely accepted) in class-divided societies do so, not because of their truth, but because they conceal or misrepresent or justify flaws in that society in ways which redound to the benefit of the economically dominant class

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## MODERN DAY

My own impression is that there's many similarities between the late 1800s-early 1900s with the major trusts, developments of major cities through new available resources (ex: steel), emerging financial markets (stock market which eventually grew too high leading to the crash in '29)

In the last 50 years, emergence of new technology—internet and computers, allowed for new billionaire to emerge with immense wealth — if you analyze corporations, you'll see a trend towards monopolizing worldwide; this include transnational banks, media <examples from manufacturing consent, Chomsky>

- problem with drugs
- problem with identity
- rising inequality
- longer hours less pay
- higher insurance premiums

These are all sub-problems emerging in our current system.

Moreover, problems of over-producing and climate change are a result of excessive capitalist production.

\*(2): When I said earlier how “the number of regulations on big business fluctuates” — I was referring to the fact that if you analyze certain aspects in the past 60 years, you will see some trends towards corporations taking more power.

This is clear when you see modern day when major corporations merge essentially forming monopolies—for example Facebook which owns Instagram, WhatsApp, Oculus (and they have a whole slew of other companies). We see these occurring with financial companies —transnational banks, insurance companies, and media corporations too.

(See: <https://youtu.be/34LGPIXvU5M>  
<https://youtu.be/tTBWfkE7BXU>)

So, the conflict between classes is continuing to this day.

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While there were bad things about capitalism, there is, from a world historical point of view, much good about it too. For without capitalism, communism would not be possible. Capitalism is to be transcended, not abolished.

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## HOW COMMUNISM WOULD LOOK LIKE:

### Justice:

Marx's attitude to communism and justice there are really only two viable possibilities: either he thought that communism would be a just society or he thought that the concept of justice would not apply: that communism would transcend justice.

The philosopher Hume argued that if there was enormous material abundance—if everyone could have whatever they wanted without invading another's share—we would never have devised rules of justice. And, of course, there are suggestions in Marx's writings that communism would be a society of such abundance. But Hume also suggested that justice would not be needed in other circumstances; if there were complete fellow-feeling between all human beings, there would be no conflict and no need for justice. In any case, the idea that living well, goes hand-in-hand with ethics, is a reasonable argument to make, and hence is favorable given a society with 1) enough material abundance and 2) concerns itself with the individual's social wellbeing (i.e. human flourishing).

Imagine that a democratic communist polity introduces a new law prohibiting smoking in public places, and that a representative smoker (call her Anne) obeys that law despite being among the minority who wanted this practice permitted. Anne's motivation for obedience, we can stipulate, is grounded, not in fear of the likely response of bodies of armed persons enforcing the law, but rather in respect for the democratic majority of the community of which she is a part.

### Government:

His preferred future political arrangements involve a high degree of participation, and the radical "de-professionalization" of certain public offices. First, Marx is enthusiastic about regular elections, universal suffrage, mandat impératif, recall, open executive proceedings, decentralization, and so on. Second, he objects to public offices (in the legislature, executive, and judiciary) being the spoils of a political caste, and sought to make them working positions, remunerated at the average worker's wage, and regularly circulating (through election). This combination of arrangements has been characterized as "democracy without professionals" (Hunt 1974: 365). Marx saw it as reflecting his view that:

Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it. (MECW 24: 94)

### Global Order: (my notes)

The results of more globalized world and eventually countries should disappear—we already see a tiny bit of this with the European Union, where borders matter less than ever before.

Moreover, an international body (like the United Nations) would be important in maintaining an order and peace worldwide.

## FINAL NOTE:

Given that the basic structure of the future socialist society develops automatically (without design assistance) within capitalist society; and that the role of human agency in this unfolding historical process is to deliver (not design) that basic structure.

Marx doesn't view capitalism as separate to communism. It is a necessary step in human history. But he predicts, with the reasoning described in his works, that slowly more social ideas will begin to work in a society, eventually leading to socialism and then finally communism—an era that transcends capitalist modes of production. And he views it not as an idealist theory but based on economic principles.

“Socialism is not an inevitability but an economic necessity”.

END.