

Karl Marx and Marxism

About Marx (1818 - 1883)

Karl Marx was born in what is now Germany, but what was then a small state known as Bavaria. His family were Jewish but had to convert to Christianity so that his father could work as a lawyer.

The young Karl Marx was something of a party animal but his father sent him to Berlin to study, and after that he was a very serious person indeed.

His best friend and colleague was Friedrich Engels who helped him with his writing and with gifts of money.

He died and was buried in London.

Marxism

Karl Marx said that:

All societies are divided into rich and poor.

The rich control everything in any society that exists.

Our society is known as capitalism.

Capitalists own all of the money and all of the property.

Poor people are called proletarians.

Proletarians may work for money, but basically, they are slaves because without work they die.

Proletarians put up with this state of affairs because they are conned into it by the rich who control ideas, law, the army, the church and the state.

Under capitalism, the poor will get poorer and the rich will get richer.

One day, poor people will realise their class position and overthrow the rich in a revolution.

After that time, people will live in a socialist society where everyone will be equal and will have the things that they want according to what they need.

Problems with Marxism

The revolution did not happen in the way that he said it would.

Poor people do not appear to be getting poorer and there are lots of middle class people.

Countries which had revolutions which said they were Marxist sometimes tended to be just as brutal and cruel as capitalism at its worst.

Neo- Marxism

Because Marxism was written in a different society from our own, some of the ideas have been developed and up-dated. These up-dates are neo-Marxism.

Be Careful

Do not confuse Marxism as a political system which does not seem to have been very successful with Marxism as an analysis of society, which is enormously influential.

Writers to name

Antonio Gramsci

Althusser

Steven Lukes

Pierre Bordieu

Key skill IT

Type 'Karl Marx' into any search engine and you will be taken to a number of sites. Note that some are very overtly political. You should make sure that you have a lot of notes on Marx and Marxism in your folder. Add your own personal commentary as you read.