

Marxist and Neo-Marxist Writers: Research Project

To complete this research exercise, you will need to use most of the books in the Learning Resource Centre.

Each of these writers is associated with Marxism or neo-Marxism, or their ideas draw on and develop the themes of Marxism.

Find out something of what they have written and summarise their ideas in a short paragraph.

writer	main research area
Stephen Lukes	<i>power</i>
Paul Willis	<i>education</i>
Westergaard and Resler	<i>class</i>
Bowles and Gintis	<i>education</i>
Pierre Bordieu	<i>education (cultural capital)</i>
Althusser	<i>control</i>
Antonio Gramsci	<i>control and ideology</i>
Freidrich Engels	<i>family</i>
Michael Young	<i>knowledge and control</i>
Stuart Hall et al	<i>media reporting of crime and deviance, also writing on class</i>
Anne Oakley	<i>feminism and family</i>
Frank	<i>development of poor nations</i>
Castles and Kosack	<i>class and race</i>
Rex and Tomlinson	<i>ethnicity</i>
Ludwig Feuerbach	<i>religion</i>
Ivan Illich	<i>health care and medicine</i>

Make simple notes, or photocopy and learn Stephen Harris, ***Longman Research Guides to A level Sociology*** (1991:17) which summarises modern Marxist thought related to stratification.

Comprehension Exercise: Marx

source: Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (1968) Cambridge University Press.

For Marx the question of the inevitability of the revolution is a tautology. Since the revolution needs a conscious urge and motor in the form of revolutionary *praxis* (a self change in the proletariat *pari passu* with his striving for the revolutionary goal) the dilemma of determinism versus voluntarism is transcended by the dialectical nature of this revolutionary consciousness. Never does Marx guarantee the success of the revolution in advance or take it for granted. He only indicates its possibilities historically. If a revolutionary consciousness exists, then the revolution is bound to happen. The activist and practical elements of this consciousness imply that circumstances will change with the self change of the proletariat. In other words, under these conditions, the revolution is already taking place. If, on the other hand, such a consciousness is lacking, then the revolution lacks its main impulse and is stillborn. If the proletariat has self-consciousness, it will sustain the revolution. Its self-consciousness is already a main component of the revolutionary situation. If however, the proletariat is still unaware of its own historical position, if it does not possess an adequate world view, then the objective conditions by themselves will not create the revolution until and unless the proletariat grasps that by shaping its own view of the world it also changes it.

That objective conditions alone are not enough is evident from one of Marx's remarks in his polemic against the Bakuninists. It is also Marx's justification for the existence of the International. The International, he says, should seek to organise the workers in order to change them and bring out their own class consciousness through their own activities.

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That the economic struggles i.e. trade union activities, strikes. etc., create out of their own dialectics the political emergence of the proletariat is also at the centre of the resolution accepted in September 1871 by the London Conference of the International. The resolution, drafted by Marx, says under Title 9:

The proletariat cannot act against the collective force of the property-holding classes unless it constitutes itself as a distinct political party, opposed to all political parties formed by the propertied classes.

This constitution of the proletariat as a political party is indispensable for ensuring the victory of the social revolution and its final aim: *the abolition of all classes*.

The association of labour forces already achieved through economic struggle should also serve to help this class in its fight against the political power of the exploiters.

The conference reminds members of the International that in the militant stage of the working class, its economic movement and its political actions are indispensably united.

Use the above passage to summarise:

- the significance of the development of class consciousness to the proletariat and the revolution.
- how the development of class consciousness is to be achieved.

Critical appreciation of Marx

He is scientifically doubtful. He made predictions and yet cannot be proved to be right or wrong in any meaningful sense.

His ideas have been polluted by later political events.

He was a political as well as a sociological writer so much of his work was polemic.

His ideas tend to shift and vary according to context or his age when he wrote. His theory developed but sometimes he did not develop individual areas with the whole theory so they are subject to interpretation.

Marx rejects idealism (the idea that men are guided by ideas) and puts forward an opposite philosophy and yet, his ideas have been the guide for many great and infamous historical events and figures.

Marx tends to consider broad social issues and so cannot be criticised with precision because he did not postulate testable hypotheses.

Marx considers the 'sociology of knowledge'. He is the first to point to this area of understanding and this is a valuable contribution to sociology.

Can we be sure that societies evolve? It seems unlikely. There is no evidence to support the Marxist view.

Marx's morality and value judgements are clear in his social theory and yet he claims to be scientific.

The working class do not seem to have developed a united social or political philosophy, and parties which claim to represent the working class are in fact led by intellectuals.

Few people would accept Marx's definition of science, (except the Frankfurt School).

There has been a major development of the middle classes in modern society, this was not foreseen by Marx.