

# The concept of Marxism

Karl Heinrich Marx was born in Trier in the Kingdom of Prussia on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1818 and died on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 1883. He was a philosopher and economist who is most famous for the creation, together with Friedrich Engels, of the thought of Marxism and for the improvement of the idea of class struggle. In his *Communist Manifesto* he showed the historical materialism and the importance of means of production in the way the history was formed<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, he indicated the significant role of the economic basis of society in determining its social structure as a whole, as well as the psychology of the people within it. He wrote that constant class struggle leads inevitably to the proletarian revolution in which the proletarian class will win and a non-class society will spread. This process was one of the final steps in the historical transformation consisting of repeated stages. Jean Touchard in his book *Histoire des idées politiques* wrote quoting Marx that “on a certain level of (economical) development the forces of production enter a contradiction with the relations of production. The latter soon becomes an obstacle to the development of the forces of production what commences the social revolution”<sup>2</sup>. He is known for the development of modern socialism and communism along with creating Marxism.

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1 See K. Marx, F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html>.

2 J. Touchard, *Histoire des idées politiques*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1959.

## 1. Ideological sources of Marxism

Marx derived his ideas from Hegel's dialectical method and Feuerbachian materialism, changing and criticizing these ideas. These two philosophers were the most influential to his idea of dialectical materialism which was a unique combination of their concepts.

Dialectic as a philosophical idea dates back to the ancient times. Heraclitus of Ephesus who is considered as the father of this concept stated that everything is a constant process and this motion consists of transforming one individual thing into something else. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was the Hegel's idea of dialectic which gave basis to a modern understanding of this concept. He showed for the first time "the whole world of nature, history and spirit as process that is in a constant motion, changeability, dynamics and development".<sup>3</sup> Hegel considered development as going through the stages of low quality to the stages of high quality, as a motion happening not only in space but also in time and that process can be called improvement. In his idea the most important changes were caused by overcoming the inner contradictions which emerged naturally on the path of development because every term includes his own contradiction. According to Hegel the synthesis of a term and its contradiction was based on ideological dialectics. It stated that the idea is the essence of the world's improvement which can take place with the participation of human history. In his idealism Hegel claimed that the reality is based on an spiritual substance existing in the form of an objective thought consisting of connected logical terms. He conceived the idea of objective dialectic which was not a method explaining the reality neither any kind of reflection, but rather a mode of existing of the terms, their essence because "they exist in reality only in a dialectical way, as a motion, sort of continuity, as a process of development".<sup>4</sup> Marx used this concept but, as he had in habit, he analyzed and changed the original thought. Marx rejected the idea of objective spirit and in his concept it became a science of general rules of motion both in outside world and the sphere of human thought. By synthesizing it with Feuerbachian materialism he created the famous concept of dialectical materialism.

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3 J. Grudzień, *Filozofia marksistowska*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warsaw 1970, p. 117.

4 *Ibidem*, 119.

The second compound of Marx main theory has its roots in the philosophy of Feuerbachian materialism which at the time, according to Engels, was an inspiring novelty for both young philosophers.<sup>5</sup> Marx in his work *Theses on Feuerbach* stated that the materialist thinkers consider the Object as something connected with contemplation rather than human sensuous activity, practice. Perception itself is a part of human attitude to the outside world that is why he stated that Feuerbach focused only on the influence of the objects of nature on human beings, forgetting about the opposite process. He also criticizes Feuerbachian idea of religion as the concept created by men which could be annihilated just by the awareness of this fact. Marx stated that the spiritual basis is only one of the factors along with the real premises which should be abolished in order to free oneself of religion. He wrote that moulding the consciousness itself would not be the determining factor in changing the reality as long as the practice would not follow it. Moreover, Marx criticized Feuerbachian concept of the essence of man, saying that *the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.*<sup>6</sup> He also takes under considerations Feuerbachian concept, stating that “men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances (...) The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice”.<sup>7</sup> That means that the idea of a change can no longer derive from outside of the social masses but it should rather be an effect of realizing that their individual interests are identical with the common ones. In this process the working class would be the center of a historical initiative.

## 2. Dialectical materialism

Marx' dialectic is a theory of a constant motion in the surrounding world, a method of discovering and a guideline of development. It focuses on re-

5 F. Engels. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Progress Publishers edition, Moscow 1946.

6 K. Marx, *Theses of Feuerbach*, translated by Cyril Smith, 2002, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm>.

7 *Ibidem*.

vealing general laws ruling both nature and human thinking. He considered world as a unity of phenomena and occurrences not in steadiness but in constant and uninterrupted motion, development and change. It is a law binding the organic world, human conscience as well as the society. The motion, being a feature of all things, is a result of one body having an effect on another, the relation between them. According to the Marx' materialism since everything in our world consists of matter, the dialectic talks about the motion of matter. It is a result of duality of the essence of all matter; its inner contradictions, opposing properties etc. (e.g., physical centripetal force and centrifugal force). Due to dualistic matter, the struggle of these contradictions is the cause of motion which is the only form of existence of matter.

The development in Marxism consists in going from a quantity change to a quality change from one quality to another. Although Marx and Engels did note that a new thing derives from an old thing they did not picture development as a loop, they did not consider it as a process of repeating the things which had happened or been before. In their point of view it was a growing line since the progress took place in steps (or "jumps") always leading to something of a new quality. *Motion and development consist in incessant solving of some contradictions and in its result in the emerging of others.* Negation of an old quality by a new quality is not the end of struggle, it does not stop it. The new quality is full of contradictions which appear in the course of time. They cause a next struggle in which a new quality emerges. The process of negation does not mean destroying and rejecting the values of the old quality; since new quality adopts accomplishments and good features of the old quality. That is why development can be divided into three stages: creation, pupation and dying.

As mentioned before, dialectic materialism states that the matter is an objective feature of all things, the only reality, the cause, the basis and the carrier of the world's diversity.<sup>8</sup> That does not reject different ways and structures of organizing the matter in the biological sphere and human conscience. Due to Marxism every process has its roots in matter which influences all things as it is the only objective and autonomous being. Engels stated that *the matter is nothing else but a sum of substance, a sum of all sensuously perceivable forms of motion*<sup>9</sup>. The matter is not only the basis of things existing in reality, it is also the environment of mental phenomena crea-

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<sup>8</sup> J. Grudziń, *op. cit.*, p. 176

<sup>9</sup> F. Engels, *Dialectics of nature*.

tion. Engels stated that time and space are forms of the matters existence. They are universal features of matter and neither they can exist without matter nor there is any matter without time and space. The unstoppable motion is a factor determining the eternity of the universe and matter.

The second main point of materialism says about the originality of matter and the derivativity of human conscience. The matter is previous because it is an objective reality and it exists independently from conscience. It is an outside sphere while the conscience is the ability of our mind to reflect the reality surrounding us, to comprehend the processes occurring in the world, understand our thoughts and actions as well as our attitude to the outside world and ourselves.<sup>10</sup> It creates the pictures of matter so it is derivative to it. It is of secondary importance because it is a product of our nervous system, work and human practice—the matter in motion.

### 3. Historical materialism

The historical materialism was an attempt of transmitting the idea of dialectical materialism into the path of history. Basing on his philosophy not only did Marx prove its accuracy in the past times, he also tried to predict future changes in society, politics and state. By deeply analyzing the history of humanity he noticed certain repeated regularities which lead him to the idea of historical materialism. Engels compared Marx concept of historical materialism to Darwin's theory of evolution, stating that just like the latter discovered the law of evolutionary progress in the organic world the former created similar laws concerning the history of mankind. Marx singled out certain features and phenomena causing the progress of humankind or being crucial factors in the change of history<sup>11</sup>.

#### The society, its classes and the struggle between them

In our world composed by matter the social relations are characterized by the matters reflection in society: the private property and different attitude

<sup>10</sup> J. Grudzień, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> See also: C.W. Mills, *The Marxists*, Dell Publishing, New York 1962; L. Kołakowski, *Główne nurty marksizmu. Powstanie – rozwój – rozkład*, tom I, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN S.A., Warszawa 2009.

to it. He stated that that was *the cause of forming of all social ideologies, law views political theories and institutions*.<sup>12</sup> Marx perceived the material conditions of human being as a determining factor of what he called superstructure. The state and the law are the exact reflection of the relations of production existing in the society. “The basis” is the main factor forming different views, feelings and social consciousness.

The historical materialism, connecting the progress of mankind with the material means of production, implies a question concerning the role of human beings in the historical development. Marx answers it quite clearly, stating that the history of societies, being a relation of consecutive changes in the ways of production, is, therefore, a history of the forces manufacturing the material goods. Although exploited and downtrodden they may be, the people has always been the evolutionary force, both in political and economical sense changing the ways of production and developing the means of production.

The proletarian masses have to be guided in their path of history. Marx neither negated nor decreased the importance of the individuals in this pursuit. The more people take part in the events changing history the more they need leaders, politicians and ideologist. Marx determined their role as crucial in increasing the class conscience of the excellent class. Although he underscored the importance of appearance of such unique persons in the crucial moments of history he rejected all symptoms of the cult of an individual as an idealistic concepts.

Marx, as he admitted himself, was not the founder of the concept of a society divided into classes neither he noticed the struggle between them. That observation dated back to the ancient times when it was mentioned by Aristotle then expanded by Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Marx himself stated that his contribution in the development of this idea consisted in showing the real basis of class division and consequences of this state.

Karl Marx denied the theory of natural harmony and indicated that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the social classes began to polarize and split into two groups: oppressors and oppressed, due to differences between propertied and non-propertied classes. The bourgeoisie was the class that appeared earlier as it was a product of another struggle—between the feudal rela-

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<sup>12</sup> H. Olszewski, M. Zmierczak, *Historia doktryn politycznych i prawnych*, Ars Boni et Aequi, Poznań 1994, p. 261.

tions and capitalistic forces. Then it dominated the society forming the superstructure subordinate to their goals and practice. The appearance of proletariat was caused by the changes in the sphere of relations of production in the capitalistic economy and society. This class took over the revolutionary role in the society. Marx believed that according to his theory the industrial society would undergo anticipated changes and would go through certain levels of evolution, finally causing a global proletarian revolution. According to these stages: firstly, the bourgeoisie or middle class will decrease in numbers, secondly, the workers will increase in numbers, thirdly, all the other intermediary classes will lose any significant political power and it will make the society polarized between two powers the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. That does not mean the annihilation of other social classes, for example feudal nobles, peasants, middle class or manufacturers. They simply have no significance in the relations of production, neither they have the class consciousness. They are not adapted to the modern world, they lack the awareness of their enemy. The society is then dominated by the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It happens in all spheres of social life: economical, cultural, political, and ideological. The struggle is a law of history and the factor, accelerating the development which works in every society consisting of antagonistic classes, fighting for a higher role in the area of production. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat both have opposite interests which are inherent in and cannot not be solved without modifying. That state of social antagonism was called by Marx "a contradiction". Different relations of each class to the means of production are, according to Marx, the main reason of that conflict. The capitalist organization of industry which happened to facilitate the development of the forces of production begin to fetter the latter and it causes a dis-soluble conflict between the possessors and non-possessors reflected by different needs and goals of both classes. The objective contradiction within the economical situation has its subjective counterpart within the social relations. These factors begin to differ into the point that no peaceful, evolutionary way could reconcile them.

The famous father of the proletarian revolution writes in his work *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism* that the state was created because of a need of fettering the classes contradictions and it is ruled by the most economically powerful class (that is bourgeoisie) which becomes also the most politically influential one. The state is than useful in

exploiting and oppressing workers. That indicates the reason for destroying superstructure (that is state) on the way of proletariat in changing the social structure.<sup>13</sup>

The philosopher noticed on the example of capitalists replacing nobles the indispensability of a class in the economic system and that observation led him to the idea that the proletariat would one day replace bourgeoisie and socialism would replace capitalism as a historical regularity. “They cannot help this. It is their destiny. And so they are doomed.” The Marxist theory of power assumed that the ruling classes lose their indispensability with the course of time. Economy would worsen due to severe crises inherent with the nature of the economic system. The growing consciousness of proletariat and their increasing in number, along with worsened life conditions, will lead to disturbances and finally to the revolution which will firstly emerge in the most industrialized countries.

## The superstructure

According to Marx the superstructure—political institutions like state, political organizations, law, customs etc.—which are determined by the capitalist relations of production, can only be changed in a revolutionary way when workers free the productive forces fettered by the capitalist, the forces dormant in the proletarian society. The state and the law are the result of the historical progress and their form depends on the stage of development of history. They are means of controlling one class by another, a system of enslavement and exploitation. The state creates the law as an additional system of norms, reflecting the relations of production and property, which are obligatory and punishable by the sanctions secured by state. Marx stated that the law is the will of the ruling class transformed onto the legal language of acts. He wanted to prove the adequacy of his idea historical changes, showing the successive types of states: slavish, feudal and capitalistic. He linked the types of state with the oppressing classes dominating the society in each of them: the owners of slaves, feudal lords and bourgeoisie. He underscored the importance of the economic system in forming the type of state. Marx criticized capitalistic state rationally and did not reject all its features. He considered it as *a school of political thinking of the working class as well as*

<sup>13</sup> See also: J. Ładosz, *Marksiowska teoria walki klas*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1969.

a good platform of increasing the level of revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat.<sup>14</sup> Engels treated parliamentary republic of a new socialistic kind as a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat leading to a socialistic state.

## The revolution

Studying the historical changes, Marx came to a conclusion that *at a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.*<sup>15</sup> The productive forces stand in an opposite position to the relations of production which no longer reflect them. The obstacle in changing of this *status quo* is the superstructure that is political and legal system. The new class and the new relations of production can triumph only when the old power will be abolished by force, because no social class would give up its privileged position voluntarily. The proletariat has nothing to lose in this fight since the bourgeoisie does not have any chance to win it. All means available will only strengthen the proletariat's class consciousness and radicalize its attitude.

In its fight the proletariat has to be guided by a political party equipped with an irreproachable scientific doctrine. Marx with the course of time supported different concepts of political parties. Firstly, he was for the Mazzini's strict and centralized view on a party, later he approached rather to Mikhail Bakunin's idea of a party divided into autonomous sections. He neither clearly stated whether an insurrection is a must and no peaceful way is possible. He limited himself to criticizing this question which he considered abstract.<sup>16</sup> Marx did not unambiguously reject the idea of democracy as a means to get into power, though especially

<sup>14</sup> H. Olszewski, M. Zmierzak, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>15</sup> K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, International Library Publishing Co. 1904.

<sup>16</sup> J. Touchard, *op. cit.*, p. 657.

after the revolutions of 1848 in France and Germany he stated that after “threatening” the bourgeoisie the proletariat should compromise with the ruling class in order to extend the democracy.<sup>17</sup>

The creator of Marxism also underscores the permanence and international character of the proletarian revolution: “it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far—not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world—that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers”.<sup>18</sup> He predicted that the revolution would take place in all or most of the capitalistic states at the same time. He considered the triumph of socialism in one country as improbable though he did not reject it in the context of the USA and the Netherlands. He stood for the internationalism of the revolution, saying that proletarians should create a nation not in a bourgeois meaning of the word. He preached the need for objection against the war of the bourgeoisie as a united striving of all proletarians. His famous sentence wrote in end of *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: “Proletarians of all countries, Unite!”, clearly shows his pursuit to combine the aspirations and goals of the working class.

He also stated that the proletarians should not support a conflict in which they are used as a weapon, a “cannon fodder”. Marx was obsessed with the “maturity” of the revolution. According to him all action which did not rely on the careful observation of facts, unity of revolutionary atmosphere and the development of the relations of production shall be declined.<sup>19</sup>

Karl Marx also named exploitation as another factor bringing the proletarians closer to the spectre of revolution. He underscored that only work can create value and that “workers produce a greater value than he is paid for by the capitalist for whom they work”. This additional value is called surplus value, a term Marx used as a measure of worker exploitation by the capitalism.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> K. Marx, *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm> [odczyt: 02.10.2012].

<sup>19</sup> J. Touchard, *op. cit.*, p. 661.

## The class consciousness

According to Marx' theory of materialism the class consciousness is a product of the economical life conditions in society . Political ideas, mentality, religion and morality are all formed by the material aspect of being. The dominant ideology is the one preached by the ruling class—bourgeoisie. He linked the ideological sphere with the forces of production, stating that whoever possesses the former also has the latter at his disposal. In the course of time the material misery of workers, as well as their alienation, will increase. That refers not only to the bad life conditions, but also to the mental and psychological deprivation. The workers forced to produce more than their maximum efficiency will be exhausted both mentally and psychically, thus they will not have energy for mental development. The fact that most of their production will be appropriated by the owners causes an alienation from private property. The awareness of their misery and the processes contributing to it will cause the transformation of a “class-in-itself” into a “class-for-itself”. That means that workers will transform from a group of exploited and oppressed into a fully aware class knowing its goals, role in society and political power. This fact will cause social dissatisfaction and frustration which will lead to disturbances. The class consciousness, growing constantly, will one day bring about the conviction of injustice and exploitation.

Karl Marx along with Friedrich Engels have fertilized many minds with their idea of Marxism. The new concept seemed to be an ideal solution for the problems of the working class, a way to reach its goals and aspirations. The practice showed its defects and vagueness in some aspects. Marx overestimated the class awareness of the proletarians. The Great October Revolution was a clear example of Marxism faults. It broke out in one of the least industrialized countries in Europe and did not spread on other states. The proletarians chose their national countries rather than international dictatorship of proletarians. According to Marx' notions the October revolution was premature and so it did not have a chance to succeed and last in other states. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the idea of Marxism was changed and used in practice many times. His greatest “successor”, Vladimir Lenin, developed Marx' concept towards a different direction adapting it to Russian conditions. His idea of Marxism distorted the original concept and mislead many people of the true intentions of its creators. His idea of historical materialism

turned out to be wrong. The concept of scientific socialism did not prove to be correct. Its main advantage in Marx' point, the ability to be used in practice in order to control and provide certain changes failed and showed its usefulness.

Although, not all aspects of Marx ideology turned out to be wrong and unreal. The concept of basis and superstructure in an objective point of view has some true features. The modern world clearly indicates that whoever possesses the means of production also governs both political and ideological power. Moreover, the idea of a state as a mean of exploitation and oppressing other classes also showed its probability. The 20<sup>th</sup> century verified Marx' concepts and showed their practical features.

## STRESZCZENIE

TOMASZ HELEMEJKO

### Koncepcja marksizmu

Teorię marksistowską można podzielić na dwa główne nurty rozważań – materializm dialektyczny oraz materializm historyczny. Pierwszy to filozofia łącząca Hegłowską dialektykę z Feuerbachowskim materializmem – w interpretacji Marksa poddane krytyce i przez niego zmodyfikowane. Drugi to materializm historyczny, swoisty pogląd na przyczyny i ewolucję ludzkości, będący próbą wdrożenia koncepcji materializmu dialektycznego w życie.

Materializm dialektyczny to przede wszystkim stwierdzenie, że materia jest cechą obiektywną wszystkich rzeczy, przyczyną ich ruchu i ciągłych zmian. Materia także stoi za powstawaniem zjawisk psychicznych, jako że ich ośrodkiem jest mózg z tej materii zbudowany. Dlatego Marx doszedł do wniosku, że jest ona zjawiskiem pierwotnym względem ludzkiej świadomości. To sfera zewnętrzna, niezależna od świadomości, podczas gdy nasz układ nerwowy jest zdolny wyłącznie do odtworczego pojmowania otaczającego nas świata, rozumienia zachodzących w nim przemian. Świat ten ulega ciągłym modyfikacjom powodowanym przez nieustający ruch wszechobecnej materii wynikający z jej dwoistej natury. Ona to właśnie sprawia, że wewnętrzne sprzeczności materii, jej przeciwstawne cechy, poprzez ciągłą walkę ze sobą, wywołują jej ruch będący jedyną formą jej bytu.

Marksowska teoria materializmu historycznego pokazuje, że przyczyną wszelkich zmian historycznych jest warstwa ekonomiczna życia społecznego, którą Marx nazywał „bazą” – stosunki produkcji i środki produkcji. Jednak historia determinowana

jest nie tyle przez sam sposób produkcji dóbr, ile przez masy ludowe, które te dobra wytwarzają, a które są siłą sprawczą przemian. Dzięki obserwacjom czasów minionych wyprowadził on pewne prawidłowości dziejowe, uznając historię za ciąg możliwych do przewidzenia przemian. Struktura własności sprawia, że środki produkcji, będące w posiadaniu klasy panującej, powodują zmianę w stosunkach produkcji, które ulegają w ten sposób zaostrzeniu. Wywołana tym walka klasowa i rodząca się wskutek niej świadomość klasowa proletariatu powodują, że uzmysławia on sobie, iż wartość dodatkowa z jego pracy trafia w ręce burżuazji. Marx twierdził, że tzw. nadbudowa, czyli m.in. państwo i prawo, jest określana i kontrolowana przez klasę panującą, służy realizacji jej celów i dążeń, utrzymaniu istniejącego systemu społecznego. Jednak żadna klasa nie rezygnuje ze swoich przywilejów dobrowolnie, stąd jedynym środkiem zmiany tego stanu rzeczy jest rewolucja. Niezadowoleni z niewolniczego traktowania i bycia wykorzystywanymi robotnicy buntują się przeciwko swoim wyzyskiwaczom. Społeczeństwo podlega polaryzacji, gdyż tylko dwie klasy dzięki swojej świadomości klasowej i znaczeniu w stosunkach produkcji są politycznie istotne. W wyniku tych wszystkich czynników, jak właściciele niewolników zastąpili feudałowie, tych z kolei burżuazja, tak proletariat w wyniku następstw dziejowych wejdzie w rolę burżuazji, stając się klasą panującą. Jedyną drogą do osiągnięcia tego celu jest permanentna, międzynarodowa rewolucja zjednoczonej klasy robotniczej. Według Marksa zwycięstwo w niej sprawi, że gdy tylko proletariat upora się z wrogami społecznymi, stworzone zostanie państwo pozbawione klas społecznych, a historia się skończy.

