

was committed to the cause of **emancipation**. He was not interested in developing an understanding of the dynamics of capitalist society simply for the sake of it. Rather, he expected such an understanding to make it easier to overthrow the prevailing order and replace it with a communist society—a society in which wage labour and private property are abolished and social relations transformed.

It is important to emphasize that the essential elements of Marxist thought, all too briefly discussed in this section, are also essentially contested. That is, they are subject to much discussion and disagreement even among contemporary writers who have been influenced by Marxist writings. There is disagreement as to how these ideas and concepts should be interpreted and how they should be put into operation. Analysts also differ over which elements of Marxist thought are most

relevant, which have been proven to be mistaken, and which should now be considered as outmoded or in need of radical overhaul. Moreover, there are substantial differences between them in terms of their attitudes to the legacy of Marx's ideas. The work of the new Marxists, for example, draws far more directly on Marx's original ideas than does the work of the critical theorists.

Key Points

- Marx himself provided little in terms of a theoretical analysis of international relations.
- His ideas have been interpreted and appropriated in a number of different and contradictory ways, resulting in a number of competing schools of Marxism.
- Underlying these different schools are several common elements that can be traced back to Marx's writings.

Marx internationalized: from imperialism to world-systems theory

Although Marx was clearly aware of the international and expansive character of capitalism, his key work, *Capital*, focuses on the development and characteristics of nineteenth-century British capitalism. At the start of the twentieth century a number of writers took on the task of developing analyses that incorporated the implications of capitalism's transborder characteristics, in particular **imperialism** (see Brewer 1990). The best known and most influential work to emerge from this debate, though, is the pamphlet written by Lenin, and published in 1917, called *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Lenin accepted much of Marx's basic thesis, but argued that the character of capitalism had changed since Marx published the first volume of *Capital* in 1867. Capitalism had entered a new stage—its highest and final stage—with the development of monopoly capitalism. Under monopoly capitalism, a two-tier structure had developed in the world economy, with a dominant core exploiting a less-developed periphery. With the development of a core and periphery, there was no longer an automatic **harmony of interests** between all workers as posited by Marx. The bourgeoisie in the core countries could use profits derived from exploiting the periphery to improve the lot of their own proletariat. In other words, the capitalists of the core could pacify their own working class through the further exploitation of the periphery.

Lenin's views were developed by the Latin American Dependency School, adherents of which developed the notion of core and periphery in greater depth. In particular, Raul Prebisch argued that countries in the periphery were suffering as a result of what he called 'the declining terms of trade'. He suggested that the price of manufactured goods increased more rapidly than that of raw materials. So, for example, year by year it requires more tons of coffee to pay for a refrigerator. As a result of their reliance on primary goods, countries of the periphery become poorer relative to the core. Other writers, in particular André Gunder Frank and Henrique Fernando Cardoso, developed this analysis further to show how the development of less industrialized countries was directly 'dependent' on the more advanced capitalist societies. It is from the framework developed by such writers that contemporary world-systems theory emerged.

World-systems theory is particularly associated with the work of Immanuel Wallerstein. For Wallerstein, global history has been marked by the rise and demise of a series of world systems. The modern world system emerged in Europe at around the turn of the sixteenth century. It subsequently expanded to encompass the entire globe. The driving force behind this seemingly relentless process of expansion and incorporation has been capitalism, defined by Wallerstein as 'a system of production for sale in a market for profit and

appropriation of this profit on the basis of individual or collective ownership' (1979: 66). In the context of this system, all the institutions of the social world are continually being created and recreated. Furthermore, and crucially, it is not only the elements within the system that change. The system itself is historically bounded. It had a beginning, has a middle, and will have an end.

In terms of the geography of the modern world system, in addition to a core-periphery distinction, Wallerstein added an intermediate semi-periphery, which displays certain features characteristic of the core and others characteristic of the periphery. Although dominated by core economic interests, the semi-periphery has its own relatively vibrant indigenously owned industrial base (see Fig. 8.2). Because of this hybrid nature, the semi-periphery plays important economic and political roles in the modern world system. In particular, it provides a source of labour that counteracts any upward pressure on wages in the core and also provides a new home for those industries that can no longer function profitably in the core (for example, car assembly and textiles). The semi-periphery also plays a vital role in stabilizing the political structure of the world system.

According to world-systems theorists, the three zones of the world economy are linked together in an exploitative relationship in which wealth is drained away from the periphery to the core. As a consequence, the relative positions of the zones become ever more

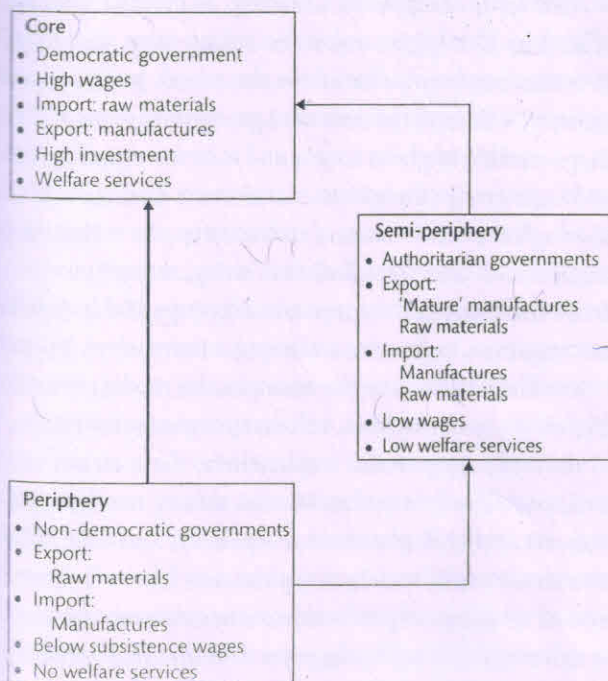


Figure 8.2 Interrelationships in the world economy

deeply entrenched: the rich get richer while the poor become poorer.

Together, the core, semi-periphery, and periphery make up the geographic dimension of the world economy. However, described in isolation they provide a rather static portrayal of the world system. A key component of Wallerstein's analysis has been to describe how world systems have a distinctive life cycle: a beginning, a middle, and an end. In this sense, the capitalist world system is no different from any other system that has preceded it. Controversially, Wallerstein argues that the end of the cold war, rather than marking a triumph for liberalism, indicates that the current system has entered its 'end' phase—a period of crisis that will end only when it is replaced by another system (Wallerstein 1995). On Wallerstein's reading, such a period of crisis is also a time of opportunity. In a time of crisis, actors have far greater agency to determine the character of the replacement structure. Much of Wallerstein's recent work has been an attempt to develop a political programme to promote a new world system that is more equitable and just than the current one (Wallerstein 1998, 1999, 2006). From this perspective, to focus on globalization is to ignore what is truly novel about the contemporary era. Indeed, for Wallerstein, current globalization discourse represents a 'gigantic misreading of current reality' (Wallerstein 2003: 45). The phenomena evoked by 'globalization' are manifestations of a world system that emerged in Europe during the sixteenth century to incorporate the entire globe: a world system now in terminal decline.

Various writers have built on or amended the framework established by Wallerstein (Denemark et al. 2000). Christopher Chase-Dunn, for example, lays much more emphasis on the role of the inter-state system than Wallerstein. He argues that the capitalist mode of production has a single logic, in which both politico-military and exploitative economic relations play key roles. In a sense, he attempts to bridge the gap between Wallerstein's work and that of the new Marxists (discussed below), by placing much more of an emphasis on production in the world economy and how this influences its development and future trajectory (see Chase-Dunn 1998).

Feminist Marxists have also played a significant role in theorizing the development of an international capitalist system. A particular concern of feminist writers (often drawing their inspiration from Engels's 1884 work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*) has been the role of women, both in the workplace and as the providers of domestic labour necessary