

Karl Marx

Many bourgeois thinkers employed their highly rich intellectual resources to glorify the capitalist order by putting up a grand theoretical defence in its favour. But western capitalism could not too long hide the agonies it generated. As facts are always much stronger than theories the protagonists of capitalism could not keep its critics at bay. On the one hand, when J.S. Mill and T.H. Green were trying to add fragrance to the capitalist society there had already started an intellectual tradition of criticising this society, notably in England and France. These critics were diverse in their finding solutions to address the problems in capitalist society. But they neither had the guts nor a potent theoretical offensive to put up a challenge against the capitalist system which could explode the myth created by the bourgeois thinkers that the capitalist system was good, rational and ever-lasting. It was Karl Marx who filled this void and western capitalism met a fierce encounter in his ideas for the first time.

Marx broke away from the contemporary tradition and rejected capitalism by pointing it out as a social system prone to die and by indicating the inevitability of the emergence of socialism out of its ruins.

It is important to note here that Marx's ideas should not be studied in abstraction from the contemporary facts of life. The ideas were, of course, the product of an extraordinary mind, but the mind was not distanced from any social context, rather very much connected to it. Marx's ideas were, indeed, characterised

by the emergence of working class as an organised force. Having reached a mature level western capitalism was enmeshed in its own internal contradiction that threatened its very survival. Marx just gave a faithful account of how capitalism was thus nearing its end. Marx's ideas did not create conditions for change. Rather, the conditions of change were lying inherent in the society he was living in. The extraordinary genius of his mind lay in the fact that he correctly identified these conditions in the contemporary capitalist society and made these conditions applicable to every developed capitalist society of the world by means of a comprehensive theory. Marx constructed a universal theory but it was far from being an abstraction from the realities of life. Although he made a good many generalisations they only represented an inductive formulation resulting from a massive detail of historical facts. And this is what makes Marx a unique specimen among his predecessors and contemporaries. It is in Marx that one comes across for the first time a scientific theory of society and politics.

It needs to be explained more clearly what exactly makes Marx's theory a scientific theory. This can be done by looking into the ways Marx developed his doctrine. Marx never believed in giving an empty call for overthrowing the capitalist society and installing a new one free from the maladies of the former. He never tried to offer a ready made alternative model of society. Marx's focus, instead, was on more

to establish the logic and validity of the need to replace the existing order. He detected a fundamental contradiction within the capitalist order by making a thorough scientific study of capitalism. Marx dived into the past in order to know how exactly the capitalist society had come into being. He made a detailed enquiry into the different phases of man's social development since the earliest times. Such an enquiry ultimately resulted in showing the operation of universal laws of the development of human society. Hence instead of making a prophecy about the end of the capitalist order Marx showed that the end of capitalism was the inevitable phase the laws of man's social development were leading to. These laws were detected by him by probing the historical facts of the past and the present. Thus they were not the product of any imagination or intuition.

Like a true scientist Marx only observed and tested all his observations on the touch-stone of facts. And then he pointed out → the most natural and logical result of his findings. Thus, neither did he prescribe nor recommend. Taking history as his permanent guide Marx constructed the entire edifice of his social and political theory on the basis of materials provided by history. It must be emphasized here that while collecting materials from history he viewed history with a unique approach. Marx located in history a law, a purpose which, he showed, was amply manifest in its course, establishing history as a continuum and not as a sum total of disjointed events and activities. He did not study the historical conditions of a particular age as a separate and an

independent category: Rather, he would view them as related to the conditions of the past and also having enough bearing on things of the future. Marx established the validity of this view on the basis of a penetrating analysis of man's life and its basic needs and also of the social environment in which he lives and works. Although Marx derived certain elements from the bourgeois philosophical tradition in developing his philosophy his philosophy appeared unique as it was a philosophy that was free from all abstract intuitionism and transcendentalism. It was a philosophy, which was also free from all mechanical materialism and upheld a kind of materialism that exactly corresponded to the hard facts of life as evident in the life and society of man.

There is absolutely no doubt that Marx considered the collapse of the capitalist order as inevitable. But he never left it to be brought about by any chance or fate or by the will of any supernatural force. He clearly referred to the visible hands of those suffering under the capitalist system which would sound the death-knell of capitalism. The suffering class was, of course, the working class which would bring the change by way of organised efforts. But this could be possible only if the working class were made fully aware of the real nature and extent of their sufferings under the capitalist system. In this job of making the working class fully aware of their sufferings Marx had a unique contribution. After surveying the different types of social systems in different historical epochs he came up to a study of the capitalist society of his

time Marx, with the aid of his theory of surplus value made a naked exposure of how the very capitalist mode of production thrived on an exploitation of labours.

The ongoing analysis points very clearly to a fact that Marx's theory of society and politics represents a part of a comprehensive and integrated theoretical structure comprising mainly his philosophy of life called dialectical materialism, his view of history known as historical materialism and his economic theory culminating in his theory of surplus value. A sufficient awareness of these three basic components of the Marxian system is of utmost importance and a compulsive necessity to fully comprehend Marx's political ideas. Marx never believed in the autonomy of politics which, according to him, was a product of social relationships. These social relationships, in turn, were alone explicable in the context of their clearly materialist foundation.

N.B. The materials provided to you here could be fruitfully used to answer a question of general nature on Marxian thought. For example, there could be a question to analyse the unique contribution of Marx to western political thought and show how Marx studied capitalism in a scientific way to reach the conclusion that he did. There could also be a question regarding Marx's approach to politics and history. The basic components of Marxian thought which have been listed above would be taken up next one by one.