

Module 2

Lecture 13

Topics

2.12 Karl Marx II

2.12.1 Socialism and Communism

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- Unlike some popular references where socialism and communism are used interchangeably, socialism and communism have specific meaning in the Marxian system.
- They are the two phases of history which would follow capitalism.
- One of the chief characteristics of capitalism is that the means of production is not owned by the proletariat class who produces surplus.
- In socialism proletariat now owns means of production. However, under socialism production will be organized following the same incentive system followed in the capitalist regime i.e. payment according to ability. Socialism in a way is very similar to the capitalist system in terms of production organization, the only difference being the ownership of means of production.
- The communist society that will emerge from the socialist system will be characteristically different from socialism and capitalism in terms of production organization.
- Classes that existed in capitalism and to a lesser extent in socialism will disappear under communism.
- Under communism each contributes according to his/her ability but consumes according to his/her needs.

- It becomes quite clear from this formulation that Marx believed that human beings are corrupted by the existing societal structure and can be made perfect by an ideal society. However, he did not outline the contradiction between forces of production and production relation that would trigger the transition from socialism to communism. This would initiate a methodological critique of the Marxian theory that we will discuss later.
- We can analyze the Marxian theory of post capitalist socio-economic transition from different angles. Let us first concentrate on the philosophical ones:
 1. Is it a correct reading of human nature to see the market as inherently alienating?
 2. Will a communistic society reveal that humans are basically good?
- A second level of analysis focuses on the practical issues
Can we think of a practical alternative to market?
- Related to this there is a criticism of Marx's dialectic that point out that the entire system is not truly an ongoing dialectic but is teleological. Because in this system the contradiction between forces of production and production relation ceases to exist whenever communism emerges.
- Some contemporary Marxist like Resnik-Wolff interpreted Marx's dialectic as over-determinism where there can be many possible paths.
- Such issues become especially important with the fall of socialist countries
- Two possible views explaining the fall of socialism in East Europe emerged :
 - (i) Marxism is wrong at its core
 - (ii) Those countries did not really try socialism
- These developments suggest that socialism or communism is too not a fated outcome (in the way capitalism developed from feudalism). There are different paths of development experienced in less developed countries which show different hybrid social formation (between feudalism and capitalism) emerging.
- Another important question regarding the treatment of class in the Marxian theory comes up with this criticism.

- Marx viewed a capitalist society divided in two classes: labor and capital.
- Some contemporary Marxists believe that this division is too narrow to fit in reality. For example, even in Marx's time there were farmers and middle class who could be classified neither as capitalists nor as laborers.
- Some scholars also raise the point of impossibility of class: class is one dimension of one's identity. There are many identity parameters individual posses: gender, race, religion etc.
- Hence it is not obvious that the class identity will be the fundamental parameter that will drive class struggle instead of any other form of conflict: racial or otherwise.
- Experience shows that classes did not disappear with the establishment of socialism in Russia. After the revolution, a new class nomenclature emerged which mainly consisted of the bureaucracy.
- Balkan war and deadly ethnic clashes in post-socialist regime East Europe shows that ethnic identities are difficult to erase even after a reasonably long socialist regime.
- One more example that runs contrary to the Marxian theory was World War I. Marx argued that this was a war with the imperialist agenda of capturing raw material and market for final goods. He appealed to the working class of Britain, France, Germany and other countries that they should not take weapons against workers of other countries and call a general strike to stop the conflict.
- This appeal did not have any effect resulting in a death toll of 10 million people in World War I.
- The fact that nationalistic sentiment was championed over the proletariat identity during WWI (and many other wars before and after that) does not directly disprove Marxian doctrine. But it shows that class is not the most obvious dimension of struggle in a society.
- The traditional interpretation of Marxian theory of transition also faces some serious challenge when that is applied in the context on Asia and other less developed part of the world.

- Unlike Western Europe, the transition of feudalism to capitalism was never complete in Asia. Hence, the traditional interpretation of Marxism, which is also described as Eurocentric for its overt emphasis on western European history, cannot account for this incomplete transition.
- Several contemporary Marxist scholars however, tried to explain the cases of less developed countries using Gramscian exposition of Marx.