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Marx Final Draft

When Karl Marx wrote about the evils of capitalism in his economics and philosophical manuscripts*,*he was surely describing capitalism as he knew it – capitalism during the 19th century, along with the economic and social realities of Northwestern Europe during that time. Without doubt, there are similarities between the capitalism that Marx knew and loathed throughout his life and the capitalism that exists throughout the free world today. And with so many people still reading Karl Marx’s economic and philosophical manuscripts today, it must have some relevance.

In economic and philosophical manuscripts, Marx describes capitalism as an exploitation of labor - a system in which the owner of the means of production unfairly owns and collects the value workers produce. Further, Marx described the victimized workers as depressed, and the capitalist as greedy (Marx). While this doesn’t seem to be the current majority opinion of capitalism, many of the ideas in Economic and philosophical manuscripts continue to hold true of the capitalism that exists in the United States today.

Ownership of the means of production concentrated to a few, or one, individuals played a large role in the evil that Marx saw capitalism as. Marx argued that for this distribution of ownership to exist, expropriation must have happened. That is, the owner of the means of production must have stolen the rights from the laborers - presumably in a violent manner but could have also occurred in more complex ways. Marx further argued that these laborers, likely small craftsman, could have done their work just as well had they organized it themselves (Marx). It is hard to imagine one worker, or even a group of workers, organizing their work and competing efficiently with a corporation today. Marx’s argument may have held more weight in 1867 when businesses were much smaller and less complex, but the technology and innovation of today’s corporations render this argument irrelevant. Further, if a person is a plumber by trade and they decide to work for a small plumbing company, it is hard to argue their boss somehow forced them to work there instead of operating independently. The plumber likely weighed their options and found employment at the plumbing shop to be their best option.

Today, if someone works for a corporation, he, indeed, does not have full ownership of the value he creates each day. However, he has ownership of his check, compensation for his work. Perhaps employees’ expectations have changed since Marx’s time. Today, it is not common for an employee to demand ownership over the entire value he or she creates. For example, a roofer would not expect to receive the full value of what he creates because there are often many levels of upper management that also create value and must be paid a share of the profit as well.

It is also likely that employees today better understand the way a company operates and the role of profits. If a company paid its employees so much that they broke even every year, they would not operate well or for very long. In the long run, it is in the employees’ best interest and for their company to make a profit, so their wages can be secured and grow over time. Thus, most of the scholars would argue that Marx’s central argument that the owners of production are unfairly stealing the profits resulting from the value created by their employees has become irrelevant.

The important thing to learn from Karl Marx is how someone can be completely wrong about everything, be shown to be wrong in the years after his death, for his ideas to be responsible for deaths of 10s of millions and still be revered. It is a good object lesson on how foolish outwardly intelligent human beings can be. As for the contents of his works, they are a waste of time. The Labor Theory of Value was discounted in his lifetime, his highly artificial, Legalistic ideas about the contradictions of capitalism has been disproved by events. His ideas of how to achieve a society without government have always been seen as ridiculous. In the U.S., the basic idea behind Capitalism is what Marxism warned about.  But the tension between classes has always been mediated here by the idea of political equality.  One vote for one person, and that every citizen, regardless of social standing, wealth or education, can participate in and possibly affect the political process. However, this factor is quickly eroding, with attempts at voter suppression, corporate lobbying, corporations as political entities and big money PAC's crowding out the common citizen and creating multiple vast divisions between various interests and ideologies.

# **Works Cited**

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