

Marxism

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German philosopher who spent the last years of his life in London. He wrote the *Communist Manifesto* setting out how workers should seize power by revolution. He also wrote *Das Kapital* which explained his view of history. His ideas influenced the thinking of the Socialists in Russia and other European countries. Marx's ideas became known as Marxism.

Marx's view of history

Marx saw the whole of history as a struggle between two classes of people: the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. The 'haves' owned the most important resources, e.g. land, used to produce food and goods. They formed the **RULING CLASS** and exploited the 'have-nots' by making them work hard for little reward. He believed that this struggle would end only when the 'have-nots' defeated the 'haves'. After this, people would co-operate and work for the good of each other and there would be no need for governments. He called this **COMMUNISM**.

Marx divided up history into a number of stages. He thought that most of Europe was in the stage called **CAPITALISM** which would soon be replaced by **SOCIALISM** (and later **COMMUNISM**). However, he considered that Russia was only in the very early stages of capitalism and was just moving out of the previous stage called **FEUDALISM** (see diagram).

During these stages, Marx said that different classes struggled for power to be the ruling class. At the end of each stage a new ruling class took over. For example, as capitalism developed, the bourgeoisie (or capitalists) would become the new ruling class, replacing the old landowning class.



The last stage

The last stage involved a struggle between two classes:

THE CAPITALISTS

The people who own the means of production in an industrial society, e.g. the factories, the machines, the banks, etc. Marx also called them the **BOURGEOISIE** or middle classes.

THE PROLETARIAT

The people who worked in the factories, mines, etc. They are called the working classes.

But this last struggle was different because no new ruling class would take over and the have-nots would finally triumph.

■ TASK

The diagram on the next page shows the four stages of Marx's view of history. A list of the key features of each stage appears on page 33 but they have been jumbled up. Your teacher may ask you to work in groups of two or three. Each group could sort the key features into piles according to whether they belong to feudalism, capitalism, etc. Your teacher will help you as you do this. You can then write down the correct features for each stage on the diagram. Use the information above, the clues on the diagram and your own ideas.

Marx's view of history

Feudalism

Key features:

- Most people live by farming. Owning land gives power.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Bourgeois Revolution

When the bourgeoisie or middle classes get powerful enough, they take away the power of the monarch and the big landowners. The revolution is not necessarily violent.

Capitalism

Key features:

- Most people live in towns and work in factories/industrial workplaces.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Socialist Revolution

As capitalism grows, so does the number of workers until eventually they form most of the population. The workers get angry about their oppression (poverty, terrible working conditions) and rise up to overthrow the capitalists.

Socialism

Key features:

- Everybody is equal – there are no ranks or titles.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



After some years, there would be no need for a 'state' or government to control people.

Communism

Key features:

- No classes.
- Everybody works according to their abilities – what they can do best.
- Everybody gets what they need to live a comfortable life.

Marx did not give a clear description of what life under communism would be like.



Key features:

Land and houses are owned by everybody, not individuals.

The ruling class are the bourgeoisie or 'capitalists' who own the factories, banks, etc.

There are elections to a parliament but government is controlled by the middle classes.

The most powerful person is the monarch (king, tsar) who has absolute power.

The oppressed class is the 'proletariat' or workers. They stay poor as the bourgeoisie gets richer.

The peasants are the oppressed class of 'have-nots'.

The state runs industry and agriculture on behalf of the workers.

Industry and trade are more important than agriculture.

A new class – the middle class or 'bourgeoisie' – starts to grow powerful as trade becomes more important and industry grows.

The ruling class is the aristocracy (nobles) who own large areas of land.

Wealth is shared out fairly among the workers.

The state protects workers from outside attack and the middle classes who are trying to get power back.