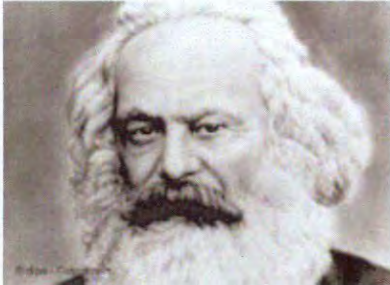


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Marx Continues to Influence 125 Years After His Death



Many of Karl Marx's theories on politics, society and economics still ring true today

Friday, March 14, marks the 125th anniversary of the death of German philosopher and political economist Karl Marx. Marx is still regarded as hugely influential to the development of 20th century thought.

Both a scholar and a political activist, Marx addressed a wide range of political as well as social issues, and is known for, among other things, his analysis of history. The interpretations of his theories, particularly those on political economy, have in the course of history generated decades of debate, inspired revolutions and cast him as both devil and deity in political and academic circles.

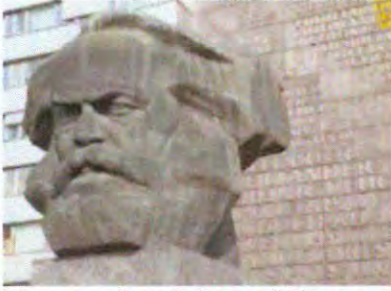
Maligned by some, misunderstood by others and celebrated as one of the world's great thinkers by many more, Marx continues to be a divisive and much discussed individual. While there has been a substantial revival of interest in his theories since the end of the Cold War, mainly those which deal with the volatility and shape of capitalism, the question remains as to whether a man who died 125 years ago still has any relevance today.

Ian Hunt, the director of the Center for Applied Philosophy at the Flinders University of Southern Australia, believes that Marx and his insights into the capitalist system in particular still have a place in contemporary society.

"Marx's thoughts on the exploitative nature of the relationship between capitalist employers and their employees ring true today," he said. "The proletariat, or those without property, continues to seek employment from those with property. Control over private investment continues to give the capitalist class decisive influence over government and sufficient control over the supply of labor to ensure that it is sold by employees on terms favorable to the increase of the wealth of employers."

Hunt said he believes that Marx's theories on the exploitative nature of the capitalist employment relationship -- which skews industrial development toward using up human and natural resources for short-term gain -- apply today in the form of climate and energy issues and "the problem of the despotic form of the employer-employee relationship under capitalism."

Marx foresaw impact of private dominance



Marx wrote about the factors which influenced climate change

"Marx's analysis of the foundations of a capitalist society raises questions of the justice of the distribution of wealth, and therefore also of income, in capitalist societies, which are even more acute in the modern world than in his own time," Hunt added. "It also raises questions about the environmental consequences of private dominance of investment that are even more acute today than in the time Marx wrote."

was ahead of his time.

Simon Tormey, the co-director of the Center for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ) at Nottingham University, also believes Marx

"The world is pretty much how Marx described it 150 years ago, which is quite impressive in itself," Tormey said. "This is to say that we now have a more or less integrated world capitalist system, with a global rich and global poor -- as Marx predicted. There is huge exploitation across all societies -- the proliferation of sweatshops and export processing zones are all very much in keeping with Marx's account."

"The peasantry is being systematically wiped out in a global process of dispossession, and of course social democracy, which started as a form of ultra moderate 'Marxism,' Marxism-lite if you like, is in retreat in all areas where it once enjoyed hegemony," he added.

Tormey also explained that Marx's theory of class struggle is hugely prevalent in today's current economic atmosphere.

Violent class struggle continues off media radar



Class struggle is evident in often violent industrial action

"There are workers there who have been denied trade union representation, who have been denied holiday pay, health care, and other benefits," he said. "Go into any business and you will see owners and workers -- the owners cannot do without the workers and they want to pay them as little as they can for the most amount of product/output; the workers want the most they can get. This is class struggle."

"The bosses have the laws on their side, the politicians, the state, and the media," he added. "They are able to contain struggle so that it doesn't disrupt society -- for the most part. However, beyond the wealthy countries, the picture is very different. Open and violent struggles are commonplace in much of the world; strikes, lockouts, and beatings of workers in places like China, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, and violent peasant conflicts in places like Nandigram, India. Look around: class struggle is everywhere and infects almost every human relation."

As well as economics and politics, Marx had a great influence on the way people thought about culture. While not considered to be a pure cultural theorist, Marx's writings on issues such as aesthetics,

communication and interpretation contributed in part to a growing cultural studies movement.

Modern cultural theorists following Marx's ideas

"Marx's influence on today's cultural theorizing derives more from his social theory, which forms a useful context to theorizing culture, and his philosophical ideas in general, including his method of investigation and reasoning," said Johan Fornas, director of the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (ACSIS). "He developed some German and Hegelian ideas in an exciting and inspiring direction that are still highly relevant for those of us who are engaged in developing cultural theory.

"Marx has inspired lots of recent thinkers to never cut theoretical concepts loose from experiences of everyday life and instead to understand the importance of situating knowledge in concrete material, embodied and socially organized practices, always interacting with institutionalized networks of power," he added.

Despite the continued relevance of a number of Marx's theories, experts are quick to point out that some have little significance in today's environment while others have been shown to be way off the mark in some cases.

Prediction of communist world proved wrong



Even China has diluted its communism in recent times

"Marx was convinced that communism would replace capitalism but we don't really see much of a communist movement emerging anywhere today," Tormey said. "So the irony might be that at the moment when Marx's ideas are even more relevant, so the attractiveness of Marxism (or more accurately communism) as a mobilizing ideology seems in decline. But this of course can change."

Marx's faith in the generation of informed political opposition from worsening material conditions failed to be realized, but that has not made his work irrelevant, Hunt said.

"His primary work, 'Das Kapital,' still stands out as a wonderfully structured and thought through piece of analysis, drawing on the philosophical and economic thought of his time," he said. "Its condemnation of the specific injustice of the capitalist system has few peers. So, as long as there are capitalists, Marx will remain relevant."

Nick Amies