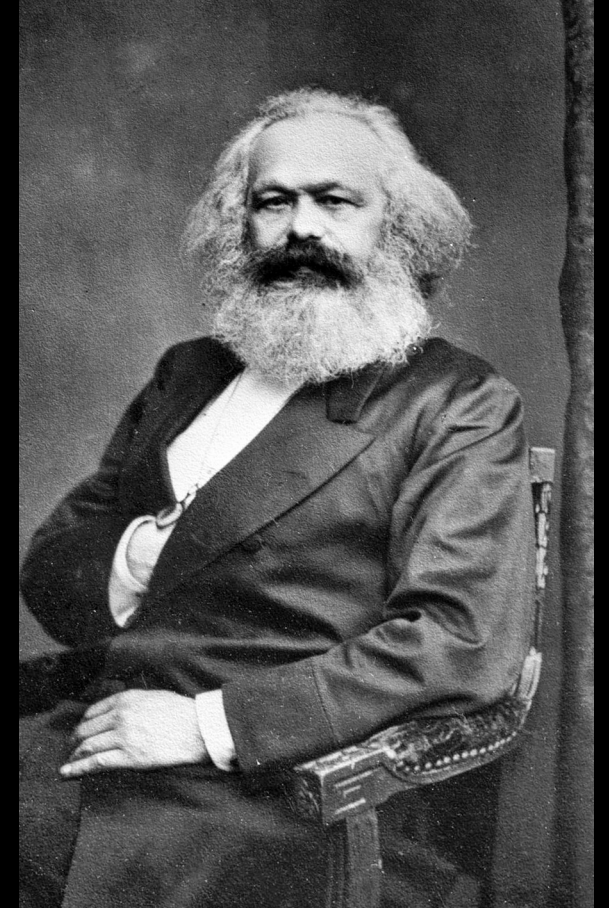


# Ways of looking at the past

IHS History: Lecture 4

# Who is Karl Marx and why is he so important?

- German born (1818-1883)
- Philosopher, economist, historian, political theorist, journalist, sociologist
- Occupied with understanding and explaining the contemporary capitalist mode of production
- Became its most foundational critics



# Historical Materialism

- Aims to understand society as a product of particular material conditions
- A materialist conception of history
- Production and the exchange of things produced: the basis of all social structure
- Determines the nature of social relations in all societies
- The difference between different stages in history?
- Production and exchange

# How is historical change explained?

- Each stage of historical development is defined by a particular mode of production
- How does one transition into the other?
- Can be explained through 'dialectical materialism'

# Discounting the 'great men' theory of history

*"The final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight on eternal truth and justice but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought not in the philosophy, but in the economy of each particular epoch"*

- Friedrich Engels



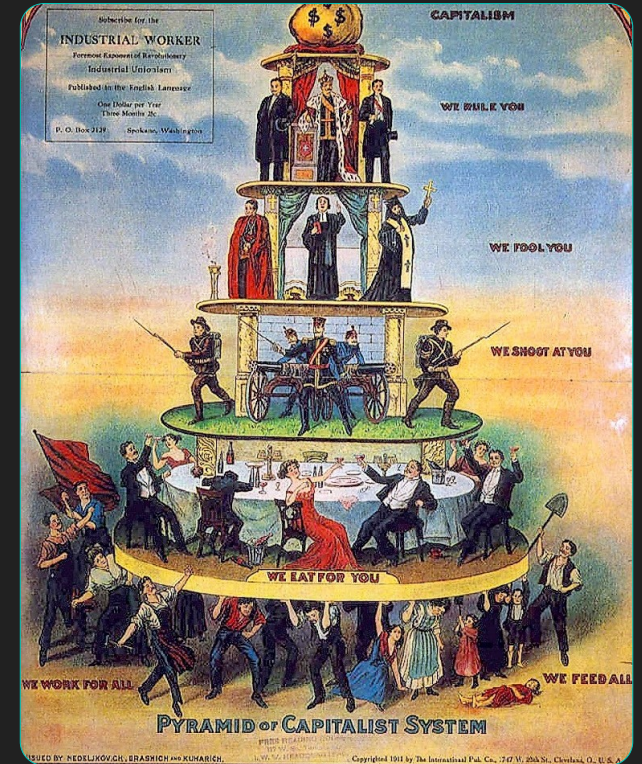
# The realization of historical progression

- From slavery to feudalism to capitalism
- Result of the contradictions between each historical epoch being resolved
- Through:
  - 1) The development of the society's productive forces
  - 2) Transformation of the relations of production through **CLASS STRUGGLE**

*"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle"*

Marx

- Karl



# The nature of all modes of production

- The fraught co-existence of exploiter and exploited
- The struggle between them drives social historical change

# Accounting for roadblocks

- History is not linear as this makes it appear
- There exist setbacks and regressions
- Evident in the historical record of the 20th century
- The defeat of communism and the perseverance of capitalism
- The contradictions still exist and will continue to propel society towards the next stage of historical development



# The Annales School: The French historiographical revolution/rebellion

- Founded by Marc Bloc and Lucien Febvre
- Journal founded in 1929
- What was it a rebellion against?
  - 1) Rankian history
  - 2) Marxist historiography

# The main historiographical interventions

- Incorporating methods of all the social sciences
- Elevates the discipline of history above all the others
- Unfolding the layers of a society or region over a long span of time: The Longue Duree
- The writing of a 'total history'

# Social history

## **The influences**

- he Annales School
- Anthropology and sociology
- Focus on social groups which lacked wealth and power
- A 'history from below'

# The point of departure

- More interested in groups than in individuals
- Focus on 'ordinaryness' and 'everydayness' of life
- Through the lens of 'gender' , 'race' , 'ethnic groups' , 'age'
- An effort to understand agency
- Emphasis on understanding some aspects of human and social behavior
- Borrowed heavily from the other social sciences

# Postcolonialism

- An actual historical period and a way particular way of thinking about the world
- Decolonisation did not end the hegemony and dominance of the former colonial powers
- This is made apparent in the world around us both directly and indirectly



# What is postcolonial theory?

- To understand and highlight the continuity of the impact of the colonial encounter
- Emphasis on 'reading from the margins'
- A postcolonial reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* by Edward Said
- Synchronising domestic authority with international authority
- A normalisation of colonial rule
- The critique is not of the novel but of colonialism itself
- The novel is best appreciated when read through a postcolonial lens

# A world divided into "us" and "them"

- Understanding 'Orientalism' (1978)
- An institutionalisation of the study of 'other/ed' cultures
- Edward Said: Orientalism both a field of knowledge and a field of power
- The establishment of Western hegemony over 'Oriental' knowledge
- The creation of stereotypes and their subsequent transformation into historical "facts"
- The idea was to "*emplot* Oriental history, character and destiny" into a Western storyline
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QYrAqrpshw>

# Subaltern Studies

## **The historical Backdrop**

- In the wake of a growing crisis of the indian state in the 1970s
- A precarious nation state flailing to hold on to its dominance
- Sharpening of social and political inequalities and conflicts
- State challenged by different social and political movements
- Responded with repression: But not only repression
- coupled with patronage, money and populist rhetoric and slogans
- These measures secured the state's dominance but corroded the authority of its institutions

# Subaltern Studies: The Historiographical Backdrop

- An embattled nationalist historiography
- Faced a relentless attack by the "cambridge school"
- Marxist historiography posed a challenge to both but was riddled issues of its own
- Their claim to represent the history of the masses remained debatable

# Enter Subaltern Studies . . .

- Accused the colonialist, nationalist and marxist interpretations of robbing common people of their agency
- A new approach to restore history of the subordinated
- Started by an editorial collective of six scholars (later joined by more)
- Inspired from social and cultural history



# WHAT IS SUBALTERN STUDIES?

- A key movement within postcolonial studies in the 1980s
- Who is the 'subaltern' in 'subaltern studies'
- Comes from Antonio Gramsci's use of the term in his prison diaries
- Referred only to peasants in Gramsci's writings
- Analyses the binary relationship of the subaltern and the ruling classes
- Studies the interplay of dominance and subordination in colonial systems