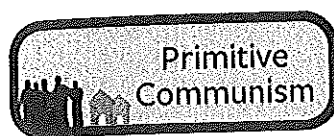
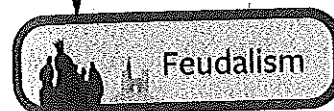


## MARXISM: STAGES OF HISTORY



In ancient times people lived in tribes and shared most of their basic resources. Society lived under a primitive form of communal egalitarianism. As humankind progressed powerful chieftains and their tribes developed into kingdoms. A class structure headed by privileged nobility emerged.

evolves into



Feudalism saw monarchies and noble aristocracies rule over largely peasant societies. Farming provided the backbone of the economy and ownership of land was the key to wealth. As villages developed into towns with merchants and workers, discontent with absolute monarchism grew. An emerging bourgeoisie, the educated middle classes who owned factories and businesses, demanded greater political rights. Monarchies were overthrown and parliamentary democracies came about.

bourgeois  
revolution



In modern times, the means of production or capital (the opportunities to acquire wealth through industry) were owned by the bourgeoisie. They accumulated their wealth by exploiting the labour of their workforce – the proletariat. Marx argued that as the proletariat became aware of its exploitation in the industrial era it would develop a 'revolutionary consciousness'. The workers of the world would eventually unite and overthrow the bourgeoisie in a socialist revolution.

socialist  
revolution



The socialist phase in history was not clearly outlined by Marx. He spoke of a workers' state that would take over the means of production in a dictatorship of the proletariat and distribute wealth equitably: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. Eventually society would lose its sense of class difference and would evolve into a higher form of development where the state would 'wither away'.

gradual  
transition



A system in which all people would live in peace and equality as there would no longer be social conflict. Modern machinery would reduce the need for hard physical labour and resources would be plentiful. Marx vaguely theorised that under communism an 'administration of things' would take the place of 'government'. The tasks of government would be uncomplicated and easily managed by all peoples.

## Marxism

**Karl Marx:** 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. **WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**'

Marxism is the revolutionary philosophy of German thinkers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In 1848 Marx and Engels authored one of the most influential texts of modern times: *The Communist Manifesto*. Making use of a detailed study of the lives of industrial workers in Britain, Marx and Engels proposed a framework for understanding the modern world. For Marx, economic forces and class struggle were the primary forces shaping society and history. He famously declared that all history is the history of class struggle. The ongoing struggle between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' was seen as the driving force behind development and change in human societies.

Marx's theory of *historical materialism* was an attempt to demonstrate that history is made by men, not by 'the hand of God' or 'destiny'. Past history and the predicted future progress of human development could be seen in definable stages which reflected differing *modes of production*.

The force that brought about each stage in social development (except the step from socialism to communism) was revolution. Revolution, for Marx, was inevitable. The scientific manner proposed for understanding the conflict which brought revolutionary change about was called *dialectical materialism*. Materialism considers that there is nothing in the world other than material things; it denies divine or supernatural forces. The observable and measureable material conditions of the world, particularly economic systems, were the prime factors that shaped society. Dialectic means an argument, a concept that Marx extended from the philosopher Hegel. Marx believed the world was inherently full of clashing and opposing forces, such as the conflict between workers and industrialists; labour and capital. Dialectical materialism refers to a *thesis*, or given state of things, and an opposing force, the *antithesis*. Inevitably the clash of opposing forces becomes so great that a resolution or *synthesis* will come about. This idea could be applied to social development, Marx argued. In feudal times the thesis was the situation where land was owned by the nobility and farmed by peasant labour. The antithesis was the emergence of new urban classes, made wealthy by commerce and trade and opposing the feudal order. The synthesis was the bourgeois revolution that brought about parliamentarianism.

Marxism also holds that a society's economic *base*, meaning those who own the means of production and the ways in which work is done (the mode of production), ultimately determines its *superstructure* such as politics, values, morality and culture. Change therefore cannot be achieved through a reform of laws or the election of a new government. The economic base must be changed, which comes through revolution, so that new social relationships and values can emerge.

Vladimir Lenin, the Russian revolutionary leader, drew on Marx's ideas to form what became known as Marxism-Leninism. One of Lenin's many theories was that revolution in a 'backward' nation with poor industrial infrastructure (such as Russia or China) could inspire urban workers and peasants in other countries. A revolutionary movement in the colonial world would undermine capitalist nations and hasten their demise. Many members of the May Fourth Movement embraced this idea.



Karl Marx.



Vladimir Lenin.