Marxism-Leninism As A Political Theory Essay, Research Paper

Marxism-Leninism as a Political Theory Although the economic theory s of Marxism-Leninism and capitalism differ intensely and are in fact quite contrary to one another, both have their positive and negative characteristics. The Marxist-Leninist theory is based on their idea that socialism should and will overcome capitalism because it is a wiser and more just economic system. Marxist-Leninists argue that the system of capitalism creates a very unjust class distinction where the upper class, or the bourgeois, are living a life of luxury while the working class, or the proletariat, are hardly making enough money to meet with basic survival needs. On the other hand, capitalists tend to see Marxism-Leninism as much less democratic, or not democratic at all, because despite the social or economic inequalities within their capitalist society, Marxism-Leninism takes away many of the common freedoms capitalism includes. Marx believes that capitalism came about through class conflict, one of the central ideas in his political ideology (Marx, GI 82). Marx using his notion of historical inevitability, sees capitalism as really a stepping stone to his egalitarian political economy, socialism. According to Marx s theory of historical inevitability, the capitalist society was created by the bourgeois because they were being exploited in the feudal system. The bourgeois in turn gathered together to over throw it, creating capitalism a society which favored individualism rather than dependence on feudal lords and system (Marx, CM 11). Marx believes that men within this system are for the first time totally dominated by self-interest and there is no longer any binds holding them together.However, capitalism is still a class society in which the bourgeois became the ruling class and did the same thing to the proletariat that they fought against. The proletariat being the lowest in society, now found themselves being completely exploited and oppressed. They found themselves at the point of immiseration where they could only live as long as they found work (Marx, CM 15) and became known as paid wage slaves (Marx, CM 15). The working conditions for them worsened and wages were lowered in order to make a profit for the bourgeois. All of these conditions created a severe alienation between the workers and what they produced. The proletariat were no longer invested in their work and were living unhappy and destitute lives. Marx argues that, like the bourgeois before them, the proletariat will soon become fed up with the exploitation they are suffering through and rise up against the present ruling class. He believes that this will occur naturally, bringing an end to capitalism. In order for the proletariat to rebel against the bourgeois, Marx states there must be increased communication amongst the workers and therefore unions are formed that organize and bring them together and they finally exist as a class. With these ideas Marx opens the notion of class consciousness. Class consciousness is when the working class as a whole comes to realize their universal exploitation and revolts against it (Marx, CM 15). This class consciousness in Marxism is what he continually stresses as pivotal in order for the proletariat to succeed in their revolution to a classless society (Marx, GI 46). Through the flow of all of these ideas Marx proves his conviction that the bourgeois were their “own grave diggers” (Marx, CM 21). It was through their our selfishness and avarice and their incessant oppression of the working class that they will be overturned. He argues that the victory of the proletariat is inevitable and therefor so is the fall of the bourgeois (Marx, CM 21). Marx claims that the bourgeois created their own destruction, one which will lead to a society which is in the interests of all people (Marx, CM 20). His idea of socialism is then an economy which is highly democratic and very just. It reunites the workers with their work and allows them to choose what it is they want to be doing. There is no room for systematic exploitation because the society has, in his point of view, evolved into one which is classless. And because the society is classless, it is socially and economically equal, so immiseration does not exist. Therefore, in the end of Marx s political theory, he concludes that he has found a solution to the evils of capitalism and will eventually be found world wide (Marx, CM 28). Although Marxism is very logical as a political theory, there are a few aspects and strengths of capitalism that Marx overlooked. Capitalism turned out to be a lot more creative than he had expected it to be. It figured out ways to adjust and better itself for the proletariat. Two of the major changes that took place in the capitalist system which allowed it to continue rather then be replaced with socialism, were the formation of labor units and Roosevelt s New Deal programs. The labor units pushed for immediate change for immediate and tangible benefits for the workers. They pushed for moderate change in order to comply with the proletariats present needs. President Roosevelt s New Deal programs also had the same intentions. He created social programs such as a welfare system, social security, and setting up a minimum wage. Various laws and regulations were also passed to secure an improved standard of living. All of which were crucial in limiting proletariat immiseration. Marx was in a sense a victim of his own time because had capitalism not gone through these changes, it could very well have gone under. These programs are what Lenin opposes in his work What is to be done? Lenin agreed with most of Marx s works, but expanded and adapted it to produce Marxism-Leninism. Although Marxism is very similar to Lenin s new political theory, it has a few major differences. One of such is why Lenin strongly objects to the previously mentioned programs. Lenin views these improvements as spontaneous uprisings that in the long run don t accomplish much of anything for the proletariat. He strongly denounces these because the workers only receive short term improvements and are not looking to better the society for future generations (Lenin, 37). Despite the obvious immiseration, Lenin argued that he saw no class consciousness forming because these “spontaneous” outbursts were in a sense clouding the proletariat s minds (Lenin, 38). These isolated, and according to Lenin s view insignificant revolts, were the workers attempts to make their situation better from within their society (Lenin, 39). Lenin argued that it was simply not possible to do such and in fact these outbursts from within were, in his eyes, detrimental to class consciousness and the revolution. Marxism-Leninism disputes that to try and work within a class will only result in the strengthening of the ruling class or bourgeois (Marx, GI 47; Lenin, 39). This was being condemned by Lenin because it was opposite to his goal of a socialist egalitarian society. In other words, the bourgeois were finding themselves in a better position because the workers were settling for short term objectives, and minute compensations but being drawn deeper and deeper into capitalism (Lenin, 37-39).This brings about Lenin s second major contradiction to Marx s theory. They both believe that the only antidote to spontaneity is class consciousness, however, Lenin s views on how to obtain that are very different from Marx s. Where Marx believes that consciousness will come about naturally through immiseration, Lenin believes that there needs to be the creation of professional revolutionaries or the vanguard, in order to lead the proletariat to a revolution(Lenin, 79). These vanguard must have political wisdom and training in order to teach the proletariat and act as propagandists (Lenin, 78). His notion then is that class consciousness can only be brought about from “without” (Lenin 78). He also includes propaganda as another way to spread the ideas of a socialist economy in his notion of consciousness coming from “without” (Lenin, 54-56). “Propaganda and agitation” become his “principle thing” in working to enlightening the proletariat towards revolution and a classless, socialist economy (Lenin, 82). Lenin s goal therefore is to have the professional revolutionaries lead the working class toward class consciousness and finally into taking action against the capitalist system which has been exploiting them. I personally feel that of the three economic policies discussed, Marxism is definitely the most democratic but Marxism-Leninism is by far the most unjust. Lenin argues that the capitalist theory is wrong because it oppresses the working class, but in my interpretation, he wanted to do the same thing only on a larger scale. He believed, like Marx, that capitalism was evil because it divided up classes and gave more to one class than to another, but in the political system he wanted to create he left the control of everyone s lives in the hands of still a small few. He also took almost all freedom of choice and expression away from the working class. Lenin, in a sense makes himself into a hypocrite because he is taking away the freedom of thought but if that was to be taken away, how would he have come up with his conclusions on capitalism in the first place? He has taken away all ideas of individualism and wants to indoctrinate everyone into his way of thinking. Capitalism, on the other hand, although it is not a flawless system, gives everyone the right to choose for themselves and create their own ways of life. It gives people, like Marxism, the ability to choose what they want to do as a profession and to go in and out of that choice as they please. In a capitalist economy, people have to work hard for what they want and we create goals for ourselves to strive for. In my opinion, although capitalism is not a evenhanded society, the freedoms it entails for all people are far more important overall.

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