

Marxism Basic Tenants

Marxism generally refers to the ideas of the German philosopher, Karl Marx. But Marxism does not mean exclusively the ideas of Marx. It includes the ideas of Marx, Friedrich Engels and their supporters, who call themselves Marxists. Thus, Marxism refers to the body of ideas, which predominantly contains the ideas of Karl Marx. Marxism is a living philosophy. Marxist thinkers are continuously contributing to the philosophy of Marxism. Thus, it is said that Marx is dead, but Marxism is still alive. The Marxist philosophy existed even before the birth of Karl Marx. This is the reason David McLellan has written three volumes on Marxism, viz., Marxism before Marx; Thought of Karl Marx and Marxism after Marx. Similarly, the Polish thinker Leszek Kolakowski has authored three volumes on Marxism. The point once again is that Marxism does not mean only the ideas of Karl Marx.

26.2.1 Utopian and Scientific Socialism As said earlier, Marxism existed before Marx. These are known as the early socialist thinkers. Karl Marx calls them Utopian Socialists. They were utopian, because their diagnosis of the social ills was correct, but their remedy was wrong. It was impracticable, and therefore, they were called utopian. The word 'utopia' was derived from a novel of Thomas Moore titled, 'Utopia.' It refers to an imaginary island, called Utopia, where a perfect socio-economic-political system existed. There was no exploitation and people were happy. Some important utopian socialist thinkers are Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, Louis Blanc, Saint Simon, Sismondi and Proudhon. Marx calls his socialism as 'Scientific Socialism'. It is scientific, because it offers the economic interpretation of history by using the scientific methodology of dialectical materialism. It explains not only the true causes of exploitation, but also offers the scientific remedy of revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat to cure the social ills of exploitation. It not only offers scientific reasons for class division and also struggle in society, but also provides for a scientific mechanism to establish a classless and exploitation less society.

26.2.2 Evolutionary and Revolutionary Socialism Socialism is further divided into evolutionary and revolutionary socialism. Evolutionary socialism does not believe in revolution and wants to attain socialism through peaceful means. Evolutionary Socialists have faith in parliamentary democracy and want to bring social change through the ballot. They eschew violence and so, are opposed to a violent revolution. They also do not subscribe to the dictatorship of the proletariat and advocate a peaceful democratic transition from a class divided to a classless society. Fabian Socialism, Guild Socialism, Democratic Socialism are all various types of evolutionary socialism. Revolutionary socialism, on the other hand, believes in class struggle, revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. According to them, social change cannot be peaceful. It has to be

violent. A peaceful revolution is a contradiction in terms. Revolution is the midwife of social change, and this revolution must be violent. Revolutionary Marxism is generally identified with the scientific socialism of Karl Marx. Syndicalism is also a type of revolutionary socialism. Evolutionary socialism also traces its roots from the ideas of Karl Marx and Engels. They have talked about the withering away of the state. Exponents of evolutionary socialism have picked up the theory of withering away of the state, and argued that gradually through peaceful means, social change can be affected and an exploitation less and classless society can be established. However, the critics of evolutionary socialism do not accept this thesis, and argue that the idea of withering away of the state applies only to the socialist state or the dictatorship of the proletariat and not to the capitalist state. It will never wither away. It has to be smashed through a violent revolution. Therefore, the logic of evolutionary socialism is flawed.