

Sociological Theory I

Week 4. Marx: Class and Politics

1. What reasons does Marx give for viewing the proletariat (as compared with other non-ruling classes) as a revolutionary class under capitalism (see especially the *Communist Manifesto*, pp. 479-483 in Tucker). What social forces does Marx point to as contributing to the growing class consciousness and political radicalization of the proletariat? With the benefit of hindsight, what do you see as the chief weakness of Marx's theory concerning the proletariat and its historical mission?

2. Compare the general theory of class struggle outlined in the *Communist Manifesto* with the more concrete analysis of class struggles found in Marx's historical writings, especially *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. What new elements or refinements are added in the later writings? Is the analysis of class struggles in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* consistent with the bold and categorical claims of the *Communist Manifesto* or does it depart from them in fundamental ways? Explain.

3. How does Marx theorize the political role of the petite bourgeoisie, the small peasantry, and other "middle classes" in the *Communist Manifesto* (especially pp. 479-480, 482), the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (especially pp. 607-617), and elsewhere? How applicable are Marx's ideas on middle-class politics to contemporary capitalism? What do you see as the chief weakness or limitation of Marx's analysis of classes other than the proletariat and the bourgeoisie?

4. What case, if any, can be made today for Marx's thesis of the "primacy" of class (over race, gender, and other bases of social identity and political mobilization) as the dominant contradiction and guiding principle of political struggles to radically transform capitalist society? Do you think Marx would react positively or negatively to the present-day tendency to subsume class within a more "inclusive" race-class-gender-etc framework of radical theory and practice? Explain.

5. Wright ("Class Analysis, History and Emancipation," p. 17) divides Marxism into three "conceptual nodes": (1) Marxism as class analysis; (2) Marxism as a theory of history; and (3) Marxism as an emancipatory normative theory. Which of these three theoretical components of Marxism do you see as most problematic in the present era and why? Critically evaluate Wright's proposals for reconstructing each of these theoretical components of Marxist theory.