



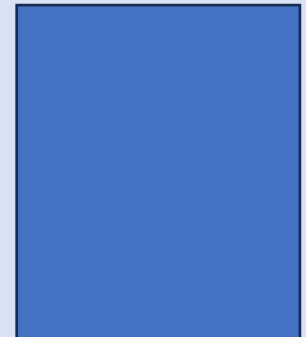
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Transforming Education, Transforming Lives



ECAY6006 The Politics of Activism

Theme 3: Ideology and Activism

Part 4: Ideological Challenges to the 'Mainstream' – Marxism, Anarchism & the Far Right

Marxism

Origins of Marxism

- Based on the works of Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels
- Key works are;
- *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx & Engels, 1848)
- *Das Kapital* (Marx, 1867-1894)
- *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels 1845)
- It should be noted that, whilst Marx and Engels were writing in the 19th century their ideology still influences individuals and groups today
- Their original theories can be seen to have influenced political activists (e.g. communists) and industrial activists (e.g. Trade Unionists)

'Classic' Marxist Themes

- **Historical Materialism:** This theory posits that material conditions and economic factors are the primary influences on society's structure and development. History is, therefore, seen as a series of struggles driven by lack of access to society's material wealth (money, food, luxury goods etc.)
- **Class Struggle:** Marxism emphasises the conflict between different social classes, particularly the capitalist class (the owners of wealth etc.) and the proletariat (working class). This struggle is seen as the driving force behind social and political change.
- **Labor Theory of Value:** According to this theory, the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour (e.g. time and human energy) required to produce it.
- Marx argued that capitalists exploit workers by paying them less than the value of their labour, extracting surplus value as profit.

‘Classic’ Marxist Themes

- **Alienation:** Marx believed that under capitalism, workers become alienated from their labour, the products they produce, and their own human potential. This alienation results from the commodification of labour and the worker's lack of control over the production process.
- **Revolution and Communism:** Marx predicted that the contradictions within capitalism would eventually lead to its downfall through a proletarian revolution. This revolution would overthrow the capitalist system and establish a classless, stateless society based on common ownership of the means of production.
- **Dialectical Materialism:** This philosophical approach combines dialectics, the idea that change occurs through the conflict of opposites, with materialism, the focus on material conditions. It provides a framework for understanding the dynamic and contradictory nature of social and economic development.

Neo-Marxism

- Hobson (2018) states that this phrase covers large corpus of work which identifies with Marxism but seeks to build and improve upon the classical works of Karl Marx and Joseph Engels.
- Neo-Marxist thought includes the following strands which each has an influence on activism:
 - Anti-Globalisation
 - Political Marxism
 - Open Marxism

Anti-Globalisation

- The anti-globalization movement, also known as the global justice movement, emerged as a response to the perceived negative impacts of economic, capitalist globalisation. It includes:
- Critique of Neoliberal Policies: The movement opposes neoliberal globalization, which promotes free markets, deregulation, and privatization. Activists argue that these policies benefit multinational corporations at the expense of workers, the environment, and local communities.
- Advocacy for Social Justice: A central theme is the demand for social justice, including fair trade, labour rights, and equitable economic policies. The movement seeks to address inequalities and ensure that globalization benefits all, not just the wealthy.

Based on [Eschle, C. & Maiguashca, B.](#) (2004)

Anti-Globalisation

- **Environmental Concerns:** Environmental sustainability is a significant focus. Activists highlight the ecological damage caused by unchecked industrialization and advocate for sustainable development practices.
- **Democratic Decision-Making:** The movement calls for more democratic and transparent global governance. It criticizes the influence of multinational corporations and international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on national policies.
- **Cultural Preservation:** There is a strong emphasis on protecting local cultures and identities from the homogenizing effects of globalization. Activists argue that cultural diversity should be preserved and respected.

Based on [Eschle, C. & Maiguashca, B.](#) (2004)

Anti-Globalisation

- Grassroots Mobilization: The movement is characterized by grassroots activism, including protests, demonstrations, and direct action. Notable events include the [1999 Seattle World Trade Organisation protests](#), which brought global attention to the movement.
- Coalition Building: It is a diverse and decentralized movement, comprising various groups and organizations with different focuses, such as trade unions, environmental groups, and indigenous rights organizations. (Based on [Eschle, C. & Maiguashca, B.](#) (2004))
- Prominent figures in the movement include Naomi Klein, known for her critiques of corporate globalization, and Vandana Shiva, an environmental activist advocating for sustainable development

Political Marxism

- **Political Marxism** is a strand of Marxist theory that emphasizes the importance of historical specificity and social agency in understanding the development of capitalism and social change.
- It emerged as a critique of more structuralist and deterministic interpretations of Marxism, focusing instead on the role of class struggle and political processes.
- Key features include:
- **Historical & Geographical Specificity:** Political Marxism stresses the importance of understanding historical contexts and specific social relations rather than applying universal economic laws.
- It argues that the development of capitalism and other social systems must be analysed within their unique historical and geographical settings.

Based on Blackledge, P. (2008)

Political Marxism

- **Social Agency and Class Conflict:** This approach places a strong emphasis on the actions and struggles of social classes.
- It highlights how class conflicts and political struggles shape historical developments, rather than seeing these changes as inevitable outcomes of economic structures.
- **Critique of Economic Determinism:** Political Marxists critique the idea that economic factors alone determine social and political outcomes.
- They argue that political and social factors, including state actions and class struggles, play a crucial role in shaping economic developments.

Based on Blackledge, P. (2008)

Political Marxism

- **Rehistoricising Marxism:** Political Marxism seeks to reintroduce historical and political analysis into Marxist theory, moving away from abstract and timeless models.
- It aims to understand how specific historical processes and social relations contribute to the development of capitalism and other social systems.
- Prominent figures associated with Political Marxism include Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood.

Based on Blackledge, P. (2008)

Open Marxism

- Open Marxism is a collection of critical and heterodox (taking many viewpoints) Marxist schools of thought that critique state socialism and traditional party politics.
- It emphasizes the need for openness to praxis (practice informed by knowledge) and history through an anti-positivist method
- That is to say that they argue that the study of society is not an empirical, economic and quantitative science but is instead a subjective, sociological and qualitative process
- They argue for a contextual understanding of society which focuses on the context and complexity of social phenomena rather than seeking universal laws.

See for example: John Holloway, Matamoros, & Tischler (2008)

Open Marxism

- Key features of Open Marxism include:
- Non-deterministic view of history: It foregrounds the unpredictability of class struggle, arguing that each example of class struggle is different
- Anti-structuralist: It opposes 'structuralist' forms of Marxism such as those seen in communist Russia and China
- Open Marxism aims to reconceptualise Marxism as a theory of struggle in general, rather than an objective, economic analysis of capitalist domination.

See for example: John Holloway (2010)

Anarchism

Principles of Anarchism

- Anarchist ideology is a political philosophy that advocates for a society without hierarchical structures and coercive institutions. (Slevin, 2018)
- ‘While supporters of the state see it as necessary to solve problems of security and order (and in many cases, to provide other services), anarchists reverse the argument, and see such problems as a direct consequence of its existence whatever form it may take’ (Slevin, 2018)
- It is ‘grounded in moral claims about the importance of individual liberty, often conceived as freedom from domination’. (Zalta & Nodelman, 2021)

Principles of Anarchism

- ‘Anarchists also offer a positive theory of human flourishing, based upon an ideal of equality, community, and non-coercive consensus building’. (Zalta & Nodelman, 2021)
- ‘Anarchism has inspired practical efforts at establishing utopian communities, radical and revolutionary political agendas, and various forms of direct action’. (Zalta & Nodelman, 2021)
- Prominent figures in anarchist thought include Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, and more recently, Noam Chomsky.

Principles of Anarchism

- Key features of anarchist thought include:
- Anti-Authoritarianism: Anarchists oppose all forms of hierarchical authority, including the state, capitalism, and other forms of domination. They believe that power should be decentralized and that individuals should have autonomy over their own lives.
- Direct Action: Anarchists often emphasize direct action as a means of achieving social change. This can include protests, strikes, and other forms of grassroots activism that bypass traditional political channels.
- Mutual Aid: The principle of mutual aid is central to anarchist thought. Anarchists advocate for cooperative and voluntary forms of social organization where people help each other based on solidarity and reciprocity.

Principles of Anarchism

- **Self-Management:** Anarchists support self-management and direct democracy, where decisions are made collectively by those affected by them. This can be seen in practices like workers' councils and community assemblies.
- **Anti-Capitalism:** Anarchists critique capitalism as a system of exploitation and inequality. They advocate for the abolition of private property (in the sense of means of production) and the establishment of communal ownership and control over resources.
- **Liberty and Equality:** Anarchists strive for a society where individuals are free to pursue their own goals without coercion, and where social and economic equality is promoted. They believe that true freedom can only be achieved in a society without oppression.

Principles of Anarchism

- Environmentalism: Many anarchists are also environmentalists, advocating for sustainable living and the protection of natural ecosystems. They often see the exploitation of nature as linked to the exploitation of people.
- Diverse Strains: Anarchism is not a monolithic ideology; it includes various strains such as anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, individualist anarchism, and eco-anarchism.
- ‘Almost by definition, there are as many forms of anarchism as there are supporters of it, each with its own emphasis and approach’. (Slevin, 2018)

Far Right Ideologies

Far Right Ideologies

- Modern far-right ideology encompasses a range of beliefs and movements characterized by radical conservatism, authoritarianism, and ultra-nationalism. Key features include:
- Nationalism and Nativism: Far-right ideologies often emphasize a strong sense of national identity and pride, coupled with a belief in the superiority of the native population over immigrants and minorities.
- Authoritarianism: Many far-right movements advocate for strong, centralized authority and often support authoritarian leaders who promise to restore order and traditional values.

Based on Mudde, C. (2019)

Far Right Ideologies

- Anti-Immigration: A significant focus is on opposing immigration, which is seen as a threat to national identity and cultural homogeneity. This often includes xenophobic and racist rhetoric.
- Populism: Far-right movements frequently use populist rhetoric, portraying themselves as defenders of the "common people" against corrupt elites and outsiders.
- Cultural and Social Conservatism: There is a strong emphasis on preserving traditional social norms and values, often opposing progressive social policies related to gender, sexuality, and family structures.

Based on Mudde, C. (2019)

Far Right Ideologies

- Economic Protectionism: Far-right ideologies may advocate for protectionist economic policies to safeguard national industries and jobs from global competition.
- Conspiracy Theories: Many far-right groups propagate conspiracy theories, such as those involving global elites or secret plots to undermine national sovereignty.
- Militarism and Law and Order: There is often a focus on strengthening the military and law enforcement to maintain order and protect the nation from perceived threats.
- These features can vary in emphasis and expression depending on the specific context and region.

Based on Mudde, C. (2019)

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