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Thesis Project: "Class Struggle as the Basis for Social Revolutions in the Historical Materialism of Karl Marx"

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Social revolutions have been recurrent in the history of human societies, often occasioning some sweeping changes from obsolete and dysfunctional systems of production and social relations to more functional ones. However, not many people bother to investigate the causes of these revolutions. Those who have studied revolutions have proposed different causes for social revolutions which are often received gleefully by some and sorrowfully by others. The functionalist theorists for example, believe that societies change as a result of the natural course of evolution. However, Karl Marx and some conflict theorists posit that revolution, arising from conflicts, presented in class struggles, is the main cause of social change.

Karl Marx, a German philosopher and student of G.W.F. Hegel, particularly postulated that the existence of class distinctions in society necessarily breeds conflicts which arise because of the divergent interests of members of the different classes. These conflicts or struggles, as he prefers to put it, are in turn a necessary vehicle for social revolutions which bring about the annihilation of an existing mode of production and social relations. This gives birth to a new system of ethically higher standard. Marx goes further to say that, because the new system also comes with another set of class distinction, it too will like its predecessor experience class struggles that will bring about its end,

and the cycle will continue till society attains a perfect system devoid of class distinction. This is what Marx termed scientific Communism.

Marx employed dialectical materialism, a combination of Hegel's dialectics and Feuerbach's materialism in his theory of history to substantiate his claim. He conceived it as an economic law of motion where struggle over the ownership and control of the means of production and subsistence defines the society. Class struggle for Marx adheres to a pattern of thesis, antithesis and synthesis as expressed in Hegel's Dialectics. In Marx's theory, a society's dominant class is the thesis, it produces its own opposite, the subordinate class, an antithesis, and a struggle ensues. This struggle destroys the untrue elements of the contending classes, to produce a synthesis which is the true indestructible elements from the thesis and antithesis, and this gives rise to a new mode of production and social relations. This was the logic employed by Marx to interpret how societies moved from Primitive Communism, to Slavery, to Feudalism, and then to Capitalism as modes of production. Marx believed that contradictions within Capitalism will ultimately bring about a fifth historical epoch which he termed scientific Communism which will be the end of history with the abolition of classes and withering away of the state, and thus, dialectics and class struggle will cease.

Marx's theory of history proved class struggle between the slaves and slave owners arising from exploitation of the former by the latter as the reason for the abolition of the Slave mode of production. Similarly, the struggle between the lords and serfs for the same reason was instrumental to the end of Feudalism. Using the same analytic lens, he predicted the collapse of Capitalism because of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat which will bring about Communism. The history of social revolutions especially the great social revolutions of the 18th and 20th centuries such as the French Revolution (1789-1799), the Chinese Revolution (1911-1912), and the Russian Revolution (1917), also reveals a common trend since they were all

consequences of class struggle. This vindicates the arguments of this research that Marx's Historical Materialism implies that class struggle is the basis for social revolutions.

Karl Marx was not alone in his claim that class struggle is instrumental to social revolutions. Other conflict theorists like Ludwig Gumplowicz and Lester F. Ward also affirm this in their theories. Both believe that throughout history, conflicts and war have been the forces most responsible for human and society's progress. The flaw in Marx's thought however lies in his use of the same paradigm for past revolutions to predict the collapse of Capitalism by stating that the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat struggle will culminate in the proletariat revolution which will in turn bring about the end of history in Communism which is the panacea for class distinction and struggle. Marx was however mistaken as history has proved him wrong in this regard because irrespective of the Capitalist exploitation and class struggle, Capitalism has waxed stronger rather than waned.

In conclusion, Karl Marx's theory of history makes a case for class struggle as the cause of social revolutions. Thus, Marxism has proved to be very relevant in contemporary times even more than when Marx wrote *Das Kapital* and the *Communist Manifesto* despite the notion by many philosophers that Marxism is dead.