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Q8(a)

How does Marx view social conflict as an essential element in social change?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- How does **Marx** view social conflict as an essential element in social change?
- Keep the discussion within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

- **Marx**: class struggle is the essential motor of historical change.

Forces versus relations of production create structural conflict.

The state is a stake, not a referee.

Everyday exploitation is conflict; revolution is its decisive form.

Weber, gender, and caste add other essential conflicts.

Without struggle, the mode reproduces with crises.

Introduction

For **Karl Marx**, history moves through contradiction in the mode of production. Social conflict, above all class struggle, is not a breakdown of order. It is the essential motor that transforms one set of relations into another. Peaceful growth without that conflict is, in his view, a surface.

Body

Conflict as the motor

- **The Communist Manifesto**: the history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.
- Forces of production develop inside relations of production until they fetter. Conflict then becomes revolutionary.
- The state is a stake in that conflict, not a neutral umpire.

Essential, not accidental

- Unlike **Emile Durkheim**'s pathology of conflict, **Marx** treats antagonism as structural.
- Unlike a simple riot, class conflict can be more or less conscious. Ideology delays, it does not cancel, the essential role.

- Alienation and exploitation are the everyday form; open struggle is the political form.

How change happens

- Quantitative fights over the **working day** prepare qualitative change of the mode.
- A new class becomes universal in its claim, then founds a new order.
- Colonial and peasant wars were later fitted, unevenly, into this engine.

Limits to mark while answering "how"

- **Max Weber**'s status and party conflicts also change societies without a two-class script.
- Gender and caste struggles are essential in India and were under-theorised in the classic texts.
- Ralf **Dahrendorf** and later conflict theory kept conflict as motor while dropping the guaranteed socialist end.

View in one line

- No class conflict, no transformation of the mode; only reproduction with crises.

Flow diagram

Mode of production -> Contradiction

Contradiction -> Class struggle

Class struggle -> Social change

Ideology -> Delayed consciousness

Conclusion

Marx views social conflict as essential because contradiction in production must be fought out as class struggle to change the historical form of society. Exploitation is the standing conflict; revolution is its decisive pitch. Use the view as a theory of structural change, and add **Weber**, gender, and caste so "essential" does not mean "only".

Facts & figures

Manifesto

History as class struggle; bourgeoisie and proletariat as the modern pair.

Forces and relations

The contradiction that makes conflict historically necessary, not optional.

Working day

Capital I: conflict over time as a concrete class struggle that changes law.

Dahrendorf

Later conflict theory: authority conflict as motor without **Marx**'s end-state.