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Karl Marx's Views on the State

Karl Marx explained the nature of the state from a materialistic and class-based perspective. According to him, the state is not a neutral institution; rather, it is an instrument used by the economically dominant class to maintain its control over society.

State as an Instrument of Class Domination

Marx argued that in every historical period, the state represents the interests of the ruling class. In a capitalist society, the state functions to protect the interests of the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) against the proletariat (working class). Laws, political institutions, police, and the army are used to safeguard private property and capitalist exploitation.

Relation between State and Economic Structure

According to Marx, the state is part of the superstructure, which is based on the economic base of society. The nature of the state changes with changes in the mode of production. Thus, the political and legal systems reflect the economic relations prevailing in society.

State and Class Struggle

Marx viewed the state as a product of irreconcilable class antagonisms. As long as class divisions exist, the state remains necessary to suppress the oppressed class. The state, therefore, plays a key role in maintaining class inequality and preventing revolutionary change.

Withering Away of the State

Marx believed that after a successful proletarian revolution, a classless society would emerge. In such a society, the state would no longer be needed as there would be no class conflict. Hence, the state would gradually “wither away.”

Dictatorship of the Proletariat

During the transitional phase between capitalism and communism, Marx proposed the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, where the working class would use political power to abolish capitalist structures and establish social equality.

Criticism of the Capitalist State

Marx criticized the capitalist state for promoting inequality, alienation, and exploitation. He rejected the liberal idea that the state represents the general will or common good.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Marx viewed the state as a temporary and class-based institution that serves the interests of the ruling class. In a communist society, the state would become unnecessary and eventually disappear.