

Post-Marxism

Source: Best, Griffiths and Hope (2000) *Active Sociology*

Post-Marxism refers to the collapse of Marxist theory since the USSR and eastern bloc countries in Europe have abandoned their communist principles. The expansion of liberal free market economies based on democracy has led many sociologists and political commentators to claim that Marxism is dead. In Western Europe there has been a notable absence in organised class action. Changes in employment have reduced the numbers of manual workers, which has fragmented the workforce. A consequence of this has been seen as a weakening of political orientation in society, with class no longer determining political behaviour to the same extent. Without class solidarity the predictions of Marx seem unlikely to occur.

The position of socialism in the West has also been weakened by the crisis of confidence in and within left-wing politics over the last 20 years. Post-Marxism, or literally 'after Marxism', offers an attempt to modernise Marxism in the face of social and political changes, taking into account the contemporary relationship between class and individuals (as Great Britain's Communist Party -CPGB - acknowledged in its 'Manifesto for New Times' in 1990). Some Marxists, such as Baudrillard (also known as a Postmodernist) may have abandoned Marxism. The social changes noted above and the difficulties of applying traditional Marxist notions to contemporary society do present a challenge in applying Marxism today, but modern Marxists are attempting to make their theories more relevant to contemporary problems. Also, issues of power and social inequality will always be central to a social world based upon capitalism. Therefore, the insights provided by Marxism will continue to be of relevance and use in our society and informing sociology for years to come.

Many of the answers are in the passage. Some are not! If you have difficulties, then make a note that you should return and revise.

1. Why have some people claimed that Marxism is dead?
2. Which political system exists in opposition to communism?
3. What change in the nature of employment has reduced the number of manual workers?
4. Which social theory talks of the fragmentation of class?
5. What is post-Marxism?
6. Name a Marxist who may have abandoned Marxism.
7. Suggest two difficulties in applying Marxist analysis to modern society.
8. Why is class consciousness and class solidarity essential to Marxist theorising?
9. Name a Marxist political party in Britain.
10. Suggest issues which will always be significant to sociologists and which therefore make Marxist sociology important if not his politics or his predictions.

Evaluate the usefulness of Marxist theory to the analysis of modern society.