

## COURSE OVERVIEW

Do you know what it means to be a Marxist? Do you want to learn a new way to analyze the world around you? Can you explain class relations to a non-socialist?

In this course we will explore the answers to those questions and more by delving into two major concepts in the philosophy of Karl Marx, and that is ***dialectical and historical materialism*** and the economic concepts of ***commodification and class relations***. Gaining a better understanding of the world around us makes us better organizers, so let's get started!

### Course Schedule

Part 1: Dialectical and Historical Materialism (2 hours)

Part 2: Class Struggle (2 hours)

Part 3: Imperialism: The Next Stage of Capitalism (2 hours)

## PART 1: DIALECTICAL AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

### HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Before class, watch the following two videos, read the articles, and respond to the discussion questions below.

- Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGPSKZgFH70>
- Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AANoppZyWvM>

Additional reading material:

1. Unknown – [“Review of Dialectical Materialism”](#)
2. Mao Tse-Tung - [“On Contradiction”](#) (1937)
3. Lenin – [“The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism”](#) (1913)
4. Engels – [“Anti-Duhring: Dialectics - Quantity and Quality”](#) (1877)
5. Engels – [“Anti-Duhring: Dialectics - Negation of the Negation”](#) (1877)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. After watching Video 1: Think of a material condition in your own life (i.e. where you grew up, economic conditions of your upbringing or current life, sibling or friend relationships, etc). What elements of this material condition do you think

shapes the way you view the world? Do any of these elements shape your political opinions?

2. After watching Video 2: Dr. Wolff discusses the notion that the existence of contradictions in a particular way of thinking or actions does not necessarily imply that these are failures or flaws. (For example, how do we solve the climate crisis while ensuring that working class people around the world are able to survive) What is an example of a way of thinking or a set of actions that exhibit contradictions? What are those contradictions?
3. Do you think that your ideas about the world are innate, or did you learn them from your experience interacting with the material world (which includes your parents, friends, teachers, what you see on TV, etc.?) Think about ideas about race.
4. Can ideas derived from experience in the material world interact with and change the material world? If so, is this inconsistent with materialism?
5. Why do we say that contradiction is the basis of all processes? Can anything change without this process?
6. What do we mean by a “unity of opposites?” Can we see this in the class structure under capitalism? Other examples?
7. How do contradictions develop (quantitative change) and how are they resolved (qualitative change)? - As an example, consider the personal relationship of a couple? Could this also be a good example of how everything is related to everything else?
8. When looking at a contradiction is there such a thing as an external force? In the war in Ukraine is the US an external force? Is the manufacturer of automatic weapons an external force to the killing of elementary school children?

## WHAT IS DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

### MATERIALISM

**Idealism:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materialism:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Mechanical Materialism:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

FROM HEGEL TO MARX

What is the Hegelian approach to dialectics?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What did Marx change about the Hegelian concept of dialectics?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is a contradiction?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

DIALECTICS SECTION REVIEW

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1. Where do we see idealism reflected in society?

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2. What class does mechanical materialism appeal to? Why would the working class reject it?

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3. Do ideas intersect with and change material reality? Does this contradict Dialectical Materialism?

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HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

What is the fundamental contradiction of capitalism?

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How do Marxists believe this contradiction can be resolved?

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HISTORICAL MATERIALISM SECTION REVIEW

In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, what were the changes in the means of production?

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How did this lead to revolution or qualitative change?

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How do we see the dialectic working in the development of capitalism?

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## PART 2: CLASS STRUGGLE

### HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Before class watch this video about [Commodification](#) and respond to the questions below.

Additional reading resources:

1. Friedrich Engels - [“Anti-Duhring: Theory of Value”](#) (1877)
2. Karl Marx – [“The Commodity”](#) (1867)
3. Karl Marx – [“Private Property and Communism”](#) (1844)
4. Paul Lafarge – [“The Evolution of Property from Savagery to Civilization: Feudal Property”](#) (1890)
5. Paul Lafarge – [“The Evolution of Property from Savagery to Civilization: Bourgeois Property”](#) (1890)

### Comprehension Quiz

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is an external object, which satisfies human needs.
2. A useful thing has two key properties: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The utility of a thing for human life is what provides its \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ value represents the proportion or number of objects with a use-value that equal the use-value of a different object.
5. Given that commodities can all be represented as values, the unifying element of all commodities is \_\_\_\_\_.

### Discussion Question

In your own life, think of an example where you did not control the means of production and the work that you did was different than if you had otherwise been able to have control over your work. What were you forced to do versus what would you have done? How did this alienate you from the act of production? Did this alienate you from other workers too? If so, how?

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LABOR AND PRODUCTION

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WHAT ROLE DOES MONEY PLAY IN THE ECONOMY? WHAT DOES IT REPRESENT?

Monetary key terms:

**Universal**

**Commodity:** \_\_\_\_\_

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VALUE AND PRICE

**Value:**

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**Price:**

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What are the costs associated with a certain item?

- Fixed costs:

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- Necessary Value / Variable costs:

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- Surplus Value / Profit:

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CLASS RELATIONS AND EXPLOITATION

CLASS RELATIONS

The sale of labor from the worker to the capitalist: \_\_\_\_\_

How does a worker differ from a capitalist?

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EXPLOITATION

Given the understanding of class relations, why might we say that capitalism is exploitative?

What about the taking of profit by the capitalist might be considered wrong?

**Private property:**

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## PART 3: IMPERIALISM: THE NEXT STAGE OF CAPITALISM

### HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Before class, read the following [article](#) on Imperialism and answer the following questions.

1. What change(s) in the capitalist economy are necessary to create the conditions for imperialism?
  - a. Colonialism has no more room to expand; small firms are no longer competing but instead conglomerating and becoming large firms; new avenues to counteract the tendency of the rate of profit to fall are needed
2. Why do we say that capitalism *needs* to dominate every resource and worker?
  - a. The primary objective of capital is to maximize rate of return. The only way to do this is through production of commodities and through constant growth. The eventual end of constant growth is domination of every aspect of the world.

### MONOPOLIZATION

Competition under capitalism becomes its opposite through\_\_\_\_\_.

Analyzing this dialectically, what is the quantitative?

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What is the qualitative change that occurs as a result?

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Bourgeois economists refer to the expansion of firms across multiple industries as \_\_\_\_\_ or across multiple elements in a single industry supply chain as \_\_\_\_\_.

Lenin states that as firms become monopolies “production becomes social, but appropriation remains private. The social means of production remain the private property of a few.” What do you think he means by that? What might that mean for us as workers and socialists?

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## MERGING OF INDUSTRIAL AND BANKING CAPITAL INTO FINANCE CAPITAL

Banks' initial role in the economy:

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Banks' new role in the economy:

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Finance Capital:

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Lenin's Characteristics for Capitalist Imperialism:

1. 

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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**CONCLUSION**

What is one thing you learned?

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What is one thing you would like to learn more about?

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How did this course help you gain a better understanding of the world?

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When talking to non-socialists, how might you change the way you present anti-capitalist or socialist talking points?

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