

# ФІЛОСОФСЬКІ НАУКИ

UDC 141

## THE PROBLEM OF WESTERN MARXISM FROM K. KORSCH'S POINT

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Karl Korsch was the prominent member of Western Marxism. The deaths of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels led to separation of Marxists in Western Europe. K. Korsch was more independent and critical than others. His approach to Marxism was defensive in the context of its philosophy. In this case, he emphasized the relationship between Marxism and philosophy. According to K. Korsch, variety of statements about this relationship was the main factor of separation between Western Marxists. In addition, the analysis of Marxism by K. Korsch to revive it as theoretical expression of proletarian movement, and his emphasis on relationship between theory and practice made his philosophy debatable between 19-21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Thus, the problems of western Marxism will be analysed from K. Korsch's point in this paper. The investigation will focus on his Marxism philosophy.

**Keywords:** Karl Korsch, Marxism, Western Marxism, Philosophy, Marxists.

**Introduction.** Many scholars continue to maintain their writings on Marxism ideology in the present century. The separation of Marxism seems to be a debatable issue since the death of Marx and Engels till contemporary century. When thinkers of 21<sup>st</sup> century analyse the split of Marxism or situation in Marxism, they apply Western Marxists' approach as Karl Korsch. For instance, Costas Panayotakis in his "A Marxist Critique of Marx's Theory of History: Beyond the Dichotomy between Scientific and Critical Marxism" (2004) stated that K. Korsch's attitude on Marxism was vital factor for scientists to link separation of scientific and critique Marxism about economic and political development (Burawoy 2000). K. Korsch attempted to find out original ideas of Marxism, thus curiosity increased in his works, many articles were written about his philosophy (Lindemann et al., 1978). K. Korsch's emphasis on practice makes him different from other Western Marxists. He expressed Karl Marx's writings more scientifically compared with other scholars (Lippincott 1939). K. Korsch's main aim was to revive Marxism during his life. K. Korsch's point was that the aim of Marxism was to prevent society to be built in one consciousness by authority. (Korsch 1935) Thus, K. Korsch's difference from other Western Marxists emerged from his approach about the relationship between Marxism and philosophy, the role of Marxism in proletariat struggle.

This paper will analyse problems of western Marxism from K. Korsch's point.

**1. Problem** is the question of separation of Marxists according to their ideology in Western Europe.

**2. The object** – K. Korsch's Marxist philosophy.

**3. The goal** – to analyse the main factors in separation and decay of Marxism according to K. Korsch.

**4. The tasks:** a) K. Korsch's attitude to Marxism and philosophy; b) to analyse the main problems of Western Marxism from K. Korsch's point; c) to evaluate K. Korsch's approach to Marxism from the aspect of proletarian movement.

### K. Korsch's Philosophy.

K. Korsch tried to link philosophy and Marxism because, there were many attacks to Marxism about the absence of philosophy in its roots. These attacks were from different sides like bourgeois philosophers, orthodox Marxists. The philosophical side of Marxism was underestimated by some Marxists. K. Korsch criticized Marxism from the theoretical and practical aspects. The reason why he criticizes from these two points was to find a relation between philosophy and Marxism. Firstly, he had to find the answer, therefore, he searched reason for rejection of Marxism as a philosophy by some groups like bourgeois historians, orthodox Marxists. Afterwards, he researched philosophy from point bourgeois side during all history, and K. Korsch passed to Marxists. "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) is the most vital work by K. Korsch (Mattick 2003). This book was firstly published in Frankfurt school (Craven 1994). His "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) appeared in the period of revolution in Germany (Bokina 1984). For him, relationship between Marxism and philosophy was superiority (Sher et al., 1973). In this book, K. Korsch shows, there were discrepancies between bourgeois and orthodox Marxists but in one point, the agreement was available. This consensus was that bourgeois philosopher professors agreed that Marxism had not philosophical roots. Orthodox Marxist thinkers agreed with this idea. K. Korsch claimed that the negative attitude of bourgeois and orthodox Marxists connection between philosophy and Marxism is the result of weak research on the historical and logical side of that and these both extremes came to this conclusion in completely different ways.

### K. Korsch's view on bourgeois philosophy.

Bourgeois historians had attempts to prove that philosophy doesn't have relation with reality and so historical development doesn't affect their history and it is just pure philosophy. K. Korsch stated that:

"In the normal presentations of the history of the nineteenth-century philosophy which emanate from bourgeois authors, there

is a gap at a specific point which can only be overcome in a highly artificial manner, if at all. These historians want to present the development of philosophical thought in a totally ideological and hopelessly undialectical way, as a pure process of the 'history of ideas'." (Korsch and Halliday 2013).

As had been noted in this quote, there was a false interpretation about history of philosophy belonging to 19th century. German historians wanted to separate philosophy and Hegelian, thus, they tried to research development of philosophy though in an undialectical way as a process of the 'history of ideas' as it had been mentioned in "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923). They tied the history of philosophy with Immanuel Kant without any reason. There were three limits in explanation of the bourgeois history of philosophy in the 19th century and it would be able to be characterized as a 'pure philosophy'. According to this statement:

"The third limit, however, cannot in any way be surpassed from within the realm of the history of ideas; consequently, it has not yet been overcome even in principle by contemporary bourgeois historians of philosophy. <...> However, bourgeois philosophers and historians are quite unable to overcome a third limitation on their historical outlook, because this would entail these 'bourgeois' philosophers and historians of philosophy abandoning the bourgeois class standpoint which constitutes the most essential a priori of their entire historical and philosophical science." (Korsch and Halliday 2013).

As it had been mentioned in this book, the third limit which is the most important part where bourgeois historians failed to explain their statement. According to "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) this limit was about their historical background as a class. Bourgeois failed to explain the third limitation which was the related to their class standpoint. In the nineteenth century, a bourgeois philosophy developed depending on historical changes, therefore, bourgeois historians were incapable to explain their philosophy as a pure ideology which doesn't have any connection with historical development. Accordingly, when we consider philosophy as an ideology altering and suiting with historical improvement, it means that it is impossible to re-establish and apply its old original form in new time condition.

Bourgeois tended to emphasize the relation of historical improvement of philosophy with its own history and rejected Hegelian as a philosophy, in this way they would be able to prove that there is no relation between philosophy and Marxism. Bourgeois scholars rejected Friedrich Hegel's philosophy of laying on the reason that philosophy and theory is far from reality and practice since F. Hegel's time. Because K. Marx and F. Engels took some basic principles from F. Hegel. However, Hegel brings some description from I. Kant and others, while he wrote his works.

#### **K. Korsch and Marxists.**

Orthodox and other Marxists had attempts to emphasize the unphilosophical side of Marxism. Like Ludwig Feuerbach didn't accept Hegelian as a philosophy, it appeared on Marxists' attitude to the philosophy of Marxism. K. Korsch wrote in his "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) that:

"Thus, for example, Franz Mehring more than once laconically described his own orthodox Marxist position on the question of philosophy by saying that he accepted the 'rejection of all philosophic fantasies' which was the precondition for the masters' (Marx and Engels) immortal accomplishments'. This statement came from a man who could with justice say that he had 'concerned himself with the philosophical origins of Marx and Engels more thoroughly than anyone else'." (Korsch and Halliday 2013).

As it had been noted in this quote orthodox Marxists like F. Mehring rejected philosophy as well. The rejection of philosophy of Marxism came from those who were saying that he was on side of Marxism philosophy but their main opinions came to light in the Second International in 1884. The importance of Marxism for them was epistemology and methodology aspects and philosophy of Marxism was useless. However, they accepted this discussion, but also came to point that this issue is not vital for proletarian movement, just wasting time, and they brought fact that Marxism was not utilized from philosophical side, therefore it is pointless to discuss this issue. In addition, from Vladimir Lenin's point, practical side of philosophy is more necessary than theoretical one because he thought that materialist philosophy was useful for revolutionary struggle of working class. According to K. Korsch, V. Lenin criticized K. Marx's this view because according to him it is impossible to apply practical side of philosophy unless realizing its theoretical philosophy (Korsch and Halliday 2013). The reason why V. Lenin had this opinion was that he wanted to spread revolutionary struggle in countries.

#### **K. Korsch and Orthodox Marxists**

According to K. Korsch impossibility of restoring Marxism to original form is seen in the practical action of Orthodox Marxists (Korsch and Halliday 2013). Firstly, he investigated historical development of Marxism. K. Korsch stated in his "Crisis of Marxism" (1931) that:

"After 1850 the altered historical conditions of the new capitalist epoch and of the working-class movement itself prevented the further development of a living Marxist theory within the unfolding praxis of the workers' movement. By the year 1850, the first great cycle in the historical development of capitalism had come to a close. During this cycle and on the basis of its limited capacity at that time, capitalism had completed all stages of its development to the point where the class-conscious sector of the proletariat was in a position to place social revolution on the historical agenda" (Bathrick 1974).

As it had been mentioned in this quote, K. Korsch divided progressing of Marxism to two periods which one of them is till the 1850 year, another one is after 1850. After 1850, Marxism ceased to develop because of changed conditions in capitalist epoch and revolutionary movement of proletarian. By 1850, development of capitalism was close to culmination point from the aspects of accomplishing of steps and it was impossible for proletarian to utilize Marxism in its original form. At the same period working class was aware of revolu-

tionary movement and theoretical expression of proletarian was established by utopian socialism which had efforts for aims and content of working class. K. Marx and F. Engels allocated content of new working class from new condition of that period and criticized theories of utopian socialists. After the changed situation in 1850th years, the other development happened in capitalism from technological, geographical, organizational aspects and in this situation, the original form of Marxism was useless for working class to use and adopt it theoretically or practically (Bathrick 1974). Afterwards, Marxist theory was changed by European workers to be suited to the real and new condition

Marxism theory stopped to develop after the death of K. Marx and F. Engels, afterwards protectors of Marxist principle commenced struggling against theoretical and practical reformism. So, the crisis was inescapable and orthodox Marxists emerged because of the crisis inside of Marxism. K. Korsch in his "Crisis of Marxism" (1931) article, explains the materialistic side of Marxism and research reason of separation of Marxism into some groups like "orthodox", "revisionist", "vulgar Marxists". Firstly, the crisis started separation of "pure" theory from a historical movement which caused establishing of three Marxist groups afterwards in the second half of the 19th century.

According to K. Korsch, the reason for the separation was the historical conditions which were related to the movement of workers (Bathrick 1974).

"At this time the most important impetus for further developing the theory of proletarian class struggle came from three different directions, each of which consciously and unconsciously stood opposed to orthodox Marxist theory. These three were: unionist reformism, revolutionary syndicalism and Leninist Bolshevism." (Bathrick 1974).

As it had been mentioned in this quote, during this period, three groups (unionist reformism, revolutionary syndicalism and Leninist Bolshevism) of Marxism, which saw themselves as a path on the theoretical development of proletarian movement and all these tendencies opposed to orthodox Marxism. However, they could not sustain the revolutionary character of their theory for working class. During the struggle of working class, there was not any theoretical or practical solution by these three groups, however, orthodox Marxists had a solution for proletarian, which it became an important obstacle in their way according to this quote. K. Korsch described the solution of Orthodox Marxists as a negative factor for working class and according to him, this solution founded by orthodox Marxists was not sufficient for proletarian movement. In his next article, "Marxism and the Present Task of the Proletarian Class Struggle" (1938) K. Korsch again reemphasized necessity of Marxism for working class as a guideline in their struggle. Between 1847–1864 years, some labour organizations were established like Communist League, Working Men's International Association. However, Marxism theory was static and development was not observed Marxism theory after the death of K. Marx and F. Engels. K. Korsch stated that:

"The ideological character of this wholesale identification of an established doctrine with the revolutionary struggle of the work-

ing class is further enhanced by the fact that the leading representatives of the Marxian orthodoxy of the time, including Kautsky in Germany and Lenin in Russia, persistently denied the very possibility that a true revolutionary consciousness could ever originate with the workers themselves" (Korsch 1958).

According to this quote, some attacks appeared against Marxism to find some problems which would estrange working classes from Marxism but orthodox Marxist Karl Kautsky and V. Lenin rejected the statement that proletarian can create its own ideology to utilize in their action. They again declared that, working class if they set up their own ideology separated from Marxism, must use some principles from thinkers like K. Marx, F. Engels, Ferdinand Lassalle. This statement of K. Kautsky shows that Marxism is the guideline of proletariat movement thus, Marxism is in the progress from theoretical and practical aspects because it doesn't matter if Marxism changes its form because of current condition, but it is static in basic form and all movements or new theories related to working classes utilize this basic form and it is risky to create new ideology between Marxism and present movement of working classes, which even radical Marxists didn't think about that. K. Korsch's article (Marxism and the Present Task of the Proletarian Class Struggle 1938) rejects the independent ideology of working class. Though V. Lenin started to restore revolutionist Marxism and some organizations like a trade union and Second International did the same thing to revolutionist Marxism. K. Korsch indicated that:

"When amidst the storm and stress of the revolutionary struggle of 1917, in view of a "clearly maturing international proletarian revolution," Lenin set himself the task to restate the Marxian theory of the state and the tasks of the proletariat in the revolution, he no longer contented himself with mere ideological defense of an assumedly existing orthodox interpretation of the Marxist theory" (Korsch 1958).

According to this quote, V. Lenin saw himself as a person who would restore Marxism. This restoration by V. Lenin led to the first triumph of working class, which later this Marxism was converted to Leninism that was against not only bourgeoisie also to anti-Russian countries. According to K. Korsch, it would be wrong to perceive Russian revolutionist Marxism as a true way in restoring the principle of Marxism and guideline for proletarian because this kind of Marxism faced with the same end as happened to western orthodox Marxism during the war and it did not develop (Korsch 1958). In this direction, we can see that Leninist Marxism was not a new tendency, it was only developed as a form of Marxism of Marx keeping its pure content. It is intelligible now to see the reason of unsuccessful same results of workers' movement in Russia, Germany, and Austria.

In K. Korsch's opinion, the other reason of rejection by Orthodox Marxists was Rudolf Hilferding's statement that Marxism was static and there was not any critical statement. Thence, Orthodox Marxist theoreticians rejected new reformism and shaped back Marxism in the first version and pure theory. According to them, Marxism does not in-

volve reformist feature in its concept and it must stay in basic form and thus, this proletarian movement was called un-Marxist (Korsch 1958).

#### **K. Marx and F. Engels's attitudes to philosophy in K. Korsch's view**

K. Korsch reemphasizes that in the renovation of Marxism, philosophy was a significant fact which would face different negative claims. The philosophy was rejected by K. Marx and F. Engels according to vulgar Marxists. But this declining was in a different meaning in these two philosophers' opinion. When considered the time, philosophy was in different meaning according to vulgar-Marxism, K. Marx and F. Engels (Korsch and Halliday 2013). In "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) K. Korsch says that:

"We have already mentioned that Marx and Engels themselves always denied that scientific socialism was any longer a philosophy. But it is easy to show irrefutably, by reference to the sources, that what the revolutionary dialecticians Marx and Engels meant by the opposite of philosophy was something very different from what it meant to later vulgar-Marxism" (Korsch and Halliday 2013).

In this quote, K. Korsch indicated that difference of time condition led to misinterpretation of K. Marx and F. Engels's statements by vulgar Marxists. K. Marx and F. Engels worked on scientific socialism which was utilized as a tool for proletarian movement, and this ideology of K. Marx and F. Engels opposed to bourgeois philosophy which was claimed to be "pure". However, R. Hilferding and some Marxists kept claiming about only "pure philosophy" and it was based on weak evidence. K. Marx and F. Engels opposed philosophy of bourgeois which was separated to economics, history or sociology and because this philosophy was not revolutionary, thus, it is understandable why the rejection of K. Marx and F. Engels was accepted as an abolition of philosophy (Korsch and Halliday 2013). Therefore, the standpoint of vulgar-marxism about the connection of scientific socialism of K. Marx and F. Engels to philosophy, the answer is that there is no relation between them. This tendency rejected philosophical side of Marxism and in their perspective, Marxism contains only capitalism and philosophy is an only fantasy in their opinion. In contrast, K. Marx and F. Engels showed that philosophy or other ideologies are not only worthless fantasies, they are a reality. Marx indicated in *Kölnische Zeitung* newspaper that this philosophy belongs to the world, it was not prepared for outside of the world. Later, he wrote again in "Critique of Hegel's philosophy of Right" (1943-44) that their philosophy can be an idealist but it is not fantasy.

To show that K. Marx's theory is still philosophy, K. Korsch demands to consider that from I. Kant, German idealism was philosophical and after its universal role, it did not stop to be philosophical (Korsch and Halliday 2013). The one must think the same situation on K. Marx's materialist theory and don't have to be judged because of his practical and revolutionary aims. K. Korsch noted in this quote that:

"Bourgeois consciousness necessarily sees itself as apart from the world and independent of it, as pure critical philosophy and impartial science, just as the bourgeois State

and bourgeois Law appear to be above society. This consciousness must be philosophically fought by the revolutionary materialistic dialectic, which is the philosophy of the working class" (Korsch and Halliday 2013).

As it has been in this quote, why Marx opposed to bourgeois philosophy was that in their mind bourgeois saw their philosophy as pure philosophy an apart from the real world and it doesn't have any relation with the world and this one stands in a superior position compared with society. K. Korsch perceives relation of Marxism with practice, even in the last sentence, we can see that philosophy of Marxism is not a pure one. Because Marx indicates that it is impossible to remove any philosophy without practical way. To do that, in the example of the struggle between bourgeois philosophy and working class is the best way to apply to the practical way, in other word, society must destroy its own economic basis after that it is possible to abolish bourgeois philosophy in theory (Mattick 1962)

According to K. Korsch restoring back Marxism to its original form for proletarian to use as a guideline in their struggle was utopia (Korsch 1975) In my opinion, I agree with his statement that realizing this action is impossible from the philosophical and practical aspect. Because its original form was useless for working class in the new century. K. Korsch illustrated in his "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) that:

"Arranged in this way, the historical development of Marxist theory presents the following picture. The first manifestation of it naturally remained essentially unchanged in the minds of Marx and Engels themselves throughout the later period, although in their writings it did not stay entirely unaltered. In spite of all their denials of philosophy, this first version of the theory is permeated through and through with philosophical thought" (Korsch and Halliday 2013).

As K. Korsch indicated in this quote, K. Marx and F. Engels did stay in the original form of Marxism and afterwards made some alterations in their works because of changing time conditions. There were many attacks and attempts to reject the original form of Marxism, however, Marxism was adopted through some time. According K. Korsch, Marxism was ideology which was the path for society to develop (Korsch and Halliday 2013). In the middle of 19th century, working class was seen to have improvement in their movement and aim was to change their living condition in a better direction. It happened in many European countries especially in Germany. During that period, K. Marx and F. Engels started to write and published "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (February 1848) as a pamphlet which shows goals of the middle class with demands of Communist League that involving requests of working class as proletarian organization. But in Germany, this movement failed in 1848 because, in Frankfurt assembly, there was not any consensus among its members about interests of working class. K. Korsch noted that:

"When Marx in 1864 drafted the Inaugural Address and the Statutes of the First International he was perfectly conscious of the fact that time was needed for the reawakened movement

to permit the old audacity of language. This is, of course, true not only for language but for all the other components of the theory of the movement” (Korsch and Halliday 2013).

As it had been illustrated in this quote, Marx wrote “Inaugural Address” (1864: Inaugural Address and Provisional Rules of the International Working Men’s Association) and the Provisional Statutes of the I.W.A.(1864) with the reason of changing condition and these works were prepared by K. Marx after defeat of proletarian class in 1848–49 years. After some changes, these works were accepted by the Geneva Congress in 1866. Difference of “Inaugural Address” (1864: Inaugural Address and Provisional Rules of the International Working Men’s Association) from “Communist Manifesto” (February 1848) was that K. Marx understood that working class need new inspiration keeping basic ideas like financial, collaboration, transferring these ideas to political atmosphere, removing old language, therefore the result was establishing of associations like International Workingmen’s Association (I.W.A.). As one can easily observe that, K. Marx and F. Engels changed some parts of their work but not basic ideas according to altered conditions of the period.

#### **The role of Marxism for proletarian movement from the K. Korsch’s point**

K. Korsch emphasized the role of Marxism in the struggle of the proletarian class. According to him, Marxism was not the main reason for the creation of proletarian consciousness nor movement, however, Marxism constituted new theoretical scientific weapon which suited to new time conditions, for the proletarian struggle which already existed (Korsch 1923). Therefore K. Marx applied compromise between scientific socialism of proletarian class, “Communist Manifesto” (1847) and “Capital” (1867). K. Korsch noted that:

“The transformation of the “natural” class viewpoint of the proletariat into theoretical concepts and propositions, and the powerful synthesis of all these theoretical propositions

into the system of “scientific socialism” is not to be regarded as a mere passive “reflex” of the real historical movement of the proletariat. On the contrary, this transformation forms an essential component of the real historical process” (Korsch 1923).

As it mentioned in this quote, proletarian transformed their wants, demands to scientific socialism and separated their struggle from previous ones which appeared naturally. Now they owned integrated, intelligible proletarian consciousness. Hence, K. Marx wrote “Communist Manifesto” (1847) and “Capital” (1867) in which expression of proletarian class suited new time condition and separated this class from bourgeois. The main aim of K. Marx and F. Engels was to be light in the struggle of proletarian.

K. Korsch came to conclusion that Marxism was the tool in the struggle of proletarian class and it did not create movement or new consciousness but modernized this movement.

**Conclusion.** Since discrepancy occurred between Western Marxists, accordingly different statements were claimed about Marxism after K. Marx’s and F. Engels’s death. K. Korsch’s approach to Marxism was defensive in the context of its philosophy. In this case, he emphasized the relationship between Marxism and philosophy. According to K. Korsch, the main problem of Western Marxism was the separation of statements about those two topics because of the weak or erroneous research (in an undialectical way) and underestimation. His independent and critical emphasis on relationship theory and practice made his philosophy debatable between 19–21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The underestimation of the dialectical relationship between theory and practice by Marxists of Second International was the main reason for K. Korsch to analyse a historical aspect of Marxism. This analysis by K. Korsch to revive Marxism as theoretical expression of proletarian movement in his time raises questions about the actuality of his Marxist philosophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## **ПРОБЛЕМА ЗАПАДНОГО МАРКСИЗМА С ТОЧКИ ЗРЕНИЯ К. КОРША**

### **Аннотация**

Карл Корш был выдающимся представителем западного марксизма. Смерть Карла Маркса и Фридриха Энгельса привела к разделению марксистов в Западной Европе. По сравнению с другими, К. Корш был более независимым и критичным. Его подход к марксизму был защитным в контексте его философии. В этом случае он подчеркивал связь между марксизмом и философией. По словам К. Корша, разнообразие высказываний об этих отношениях было основным фактором разделения западных марксистов. Кроме того, анализ марксизма К. Корша с целью его возрождения в качестве теоретического выражения пролетарского движения, а так же акцент на взаимосвязи между теорией и практикой вызывали споры вокруг его философии в XIX–XXI веках. Таким образом, в этой статье проводится анализ проблем западного марксизма с точки зрения К. Корша. Основное внимание в исследовании уделяется его марксистской философии.

**Ключевые слова:** Карл Корш, марксизм, западный марксизм, философия, марксисты.