Marxist Perspective on Communication Theory

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1. Why Marxist Perspective?—Its Contemporary Meaning

Communication which comprises the bulk of fundamental processes of human society, has become a dominant contemporary concern, and the practices of communication and their supporting theories have become crucial areas for study in the social sciences.

The writer has a firm conviction that specific communication practices and the theoretical rationales should be understood in the context of the problems of contemporary societies, which in turn can be explained by identifying or developing, if necessary, the theoretical paradigm which can be most appropriately applicable to them. With this concern in mind, the writer, from the liberal position, will initially uphold two major points in this essay. The first point is that the Marxist perspective on communication theory can be more effectively illuminated by comparing it with liberal perspective. The second point is that Marxist states are seen as making interpretations of original Marxism and Marxist theories related to communication for their specific interests. The former concern will naturally cover such issues as the problems inherent in original Marxism, however briefly, which have been under attack particularly from liberals. The latter will cover actual practices of communist states, the difficulties they have in the practices and their communication policies.

The two main routes to understanding contemporary societies have been traced by liberal and Marxist theories, and despite all differences, both share a common conception of the unity of mature modern societies. Liberals include a diverse group of theorists
including social philosophers and most contemporary social scientists writing on the problems of modern societies. What they have in common is the belief that the fundamental character of industrial society is determined by particular technologies and by social relationships and groups they generate. This view they share with Marxists, however much they may differ on other critical points. For Marxists and liberals, to simplify greatly, an industrial society comes into being as technologies based upon machine production in large scale factories for mass market spread through the economy and generate a capitalist and a working class. The most important mechanism which integrates society in both liberal and Marxist theory is the market, for it is through competition that backward enterprises and the groups working in them are defeated and absorbed or else transformed to resemble firms of the typical industrial model. The unitary character of industrial society, which is the overarching structure in liberal and Marxist thought, derives from the processes of integration immanent in industrialization that tend to iron out the differences inherit from their pasts and from the fundamental similarities of the principal social groups in an industrial economy. In the case of liberal theories, these similarities lead to cooperation, whereas in the case of Marxism, they are predicted to produce conflict.\(^1\)

Consequently, the two fundamentally different theories of problems of industrial societies today, end up with different philosophical interpretations of them and the ways to cure them. Since communication is viewed as an essential part of the body of phenomena which can improve or complicate the problems of contemporary societies, a theoretical analysis of the subjects related to communication is expected to pay primary attention to the two major theories. The Marxist perspective on communication theory will then be viewed in comparison with the liberal perspective.

Differences in communication practices and interpretations of the role of communication in human society reflect the different social and political structures within which communication systems operate and communication analysts live. Schramm presents a precise explanation of why different societies have different communication practices. "In trying to understand why mass communication develops as it does in different societies, then we begin by looking at the societies. And we start with a look at a certain basic assumptions which any society holds……assumptions concerning the nature

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1) One of the most concise conception of this is Suzanne Berger and Michael J. Piore, *Dualism and Discontinuity in Industrial Societies* (London; Cambridge University Press, 1980), ch. 5.
of man, the nature of society and the state, the relation of man to the state, the nature of knowledge and truth and moral conduct." In other words, the basic assumptions of both Marxist and liberal theories are considered important determinants of social character.

In the most general sense, the characteristics of the liberal paradigm are that politics and economy are seen as fundamentally autonomous, independent spheres of human activity. So that politically liberal economics figures only as external, extraneous, intervening events the state has to deal with. All of the acts of society and state are seen as somehow external to the economic system, which as a result can be systematically explained. Politics, instead, involves unexpected events such as disasters, tornados, acts of God; the accidents which intervene in a scheme which can otherwise entirely be described in terms of regular laws, normal tendencies, etc. Thus the main characteristic of liberal paradigm, originally represented by John Locke, is its separation of politics as a wholly independent set of human activities from economy. Locke's basic argument is that in order to understand society we have to take the individual as a basic unit of analysis. Society is a collection of individuals, he says, and the state has to be understood as a limited institution which is created by individuals to serve the purposes that individuals cannot achieve by themselves.

Not only Locke but also all liberal theorists see the function of state in this way. Social problems which cannot be resolved by individuals alone and thus require a kind of coercion by a binding authority as an impartial judge are bound to produce the need of state. So the state is basically limited to preventing private coercion as against individual rights. The liberal paradigm holds that all individuals are born with certain rights. In fact, human beings have inherently rights to life, to free communication, to happiness, to property, etc. as absolutely inseparable parts of what is to be human beings. If you violate any of those, you make the person less than person. Sometimes in his book, Locke use the word property to mean all of human rights and in fact he spells out those are the rights which do not belong to state or society but individuals. The rights have to be a part of a person. What this does mean is whatever you find in human beings, be he an African tribeman, a thirteen-century nobleman or a peasant, human beings are everywhere the same. They are same and equal with respect to the fact that they have these rights. The function of state which is made of this collection of

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individuals is to protect one individual from violating the rights of another's. Now when does economics come in? Individuals have the rights to property, which ensures them the rights to freedom. But Locke says in this first sense that this right has come from the fact that an individual puts his labor into what he is doing. As Locke imagines there is enough land for everybody, he avoids all the real economic problems from scarcity. There is neither the theory of economics here nor the theory of how individuals become different according to the situations in economic system. There is also no theory of how society become different according to, say, its stages of economic development. So there is no economic theory in this basic understanding of the relationship between individuals and state.

Marxists have a fundamentally different view of the relations between society and individuals. Basically Marxists say that in order to understand any society, what we have to start with is the fact that all human beings must work to live. And the most important fact in any society is how human beings have organized themselves in order to earn a living. So a fundamental unit of society is the mode of production, by which Marx means largely technology. Now there are many arguments about what exactly could be called technology in Marx. Nevertheless, technology is the means of production. Marx argues that every technology has associations with the means of production, on the basis of which there are particular relations of ownership called the relations of production, or ownership patterns. These two together are what Marx calls the base of society which is the underlying determining force. A capitalist society has large-scale mechanized units, factories, etc. and their ownership is concentrated in a very few hands, while the majority of people own nothing at all. So the relations of production are expressed in a particular class structure, defined entirely by the relations of individuals to the means of production. In capitalism, the principal classes are the bourgeois class—the capitalists, who own the means of production—and the proletariat class does not own the means of production but is instead forced to sell its labor. The two classes tend to be polarized. This base of society contrasts with the so-called superstructure comprising politics, culture, religion, ideas, etc., which is in turn determined by the base, however. Then the base is essentially economy that determines politics. Individuals are entirely determined by their places in the economic system.

For all Marxists including continental socialists and present-day Marxist theorists, who see technology or means of production as the means on the part of the management to
control labor, Marx’s doctrines are attractive because they seem to solve the riddles of past history and the serious problems of the day. For liberals, however, Marx is regarded as a very different phenomenon precisely because of his apparently absolute assumptions and fanciful predictions. They tend to be sceptical of panaceas, whether metaphysical or political. They preferred the empirical methods of the sciences which were proving so successful; and they preferred to establish free institutions not on the basis of theoretical assumption but by trial and error. Many of them have tried to reject the ‘abstract’ democracy of Marxist revolutionaries.3

Man has always dreamed of utopian societies and, in a few instances, all of which failed, has even tried to implement these dreams in experimental societies. Despite Marx’s denunciation of utopian socialism, there was nevertheless a utopian strain in his thinking. Utopianism, however, is not limited to socialist or Marxian schemata. In a real sense, the pure theory of competitive capitalism is the biggest utopian dream of them all.4 What is the basic difference between the two utopian schemes? Needless to say, the Marxian scheme calls struggle, whereas the liberal one expects a cooperative and complementary relationship between the two dominant classes of society. The communication relationship between the two conflicting or cooperative classes is then obvious. It is either conflicting or cooperative. It will lead to revolution or peaceful coexistence. Of the two possibilities, what is more plausible outcome? The following pages will seek to answer this question.

What is clear so far, however, is that both Marxist and liberal theories share the view that technology plays an important part in determining the fundamental character of contemporary industrial societies, and that the fundamental character results in class conflict in the Marxist paradigm or in cooperation in the liberal paradigm. What is important for the present discussion is not the important role of technology itself but the common ground from which the two different paradigms start. Put differently, it is very significant that they have an initial agreement on a very crucial aspect of the nature of society. Going a step further, even more significant is that in view of the agreement the two theories show a great similarity in identifying the problems of industrial societies.

The similarity makes it easier for us to discuss the probable outcome of the social relationships contemporary societies generate and maintain simply because of the fact that

mistakes and contradictions the two theories may have will be found in the process of the development of the ideas concerned, not in the very starting point.

The ways of diagnosing and curing the problems of industrial society are totally differently decided according to the different paradigms, and the essential aspects of the ways to diagnose them will include communication-oriented analysis of the social and political systems in question. As it is generally agreed that all problems and disputes are and can be coordinated and resolved through communication, a theoretical analysis, of how communication works in a certain society or political system is expected to provide various ideas of how to solve the problems of industrial society, and a hard look at the Marxist perspective on communication theory on the basis of a comparison with its liberal counterpart seems to make much sense on this ground.

2. Marxist Theory of Human Nature and its Implications for Communication

Man, the self-creative being, is, so Marx tells us, a part and a product of nature, even though a part differing in crucial respects from the rest of nature. He is, for all his self-creativity, a limited being dependent upon a natural environment. Even his specifically human activities, those that distinguish him from everything else in nature, are physical as well as mental, and in being mental are also necessarily physical. Marx never speaks of the mind as if it were something separate from the body, though causally related to it. What is external to man is as much external to his body as of his mind; and if we can say that he has to understand and control his body, we can say as much of his mind.\textsuperscript{5} If man is a part of nature differing in crucial respects, what are the crucial respects? One of the crucial respects is obviously the ability to communicate. Man’s self-creativity is also possible, only when is given the ability to communicate. Marx’s unwillingness to separate mind from body suggests a difficulty to distinguish human being’s communicative act by means of mind from that by body.

Marx rejects the metaphysical idealism within which Hegel casts the dialectic. Materialism he substitutes for idealism, and he conceives of the dialectical process as operative in the world of nature. The essential point of Marx is that it is matter, not mind, which is the basic causal factor in the historical process and in the evolution of

\textsuperscript{5} John Plamenatz, \textit{Karl Marx’s Philosophy of Man}\textsuperscript{a}(London; Oxford University Press, 1975), p.65.
social and political systems. Classical materialism emphasized that nature shapes man. Marx agrees that this is so, but he insists that man shapes nature as well, that human activity is causally significant, and that we cannot understand human history without understanding man’s interaction with the forces and objects of nature. Implicit in this idea is that man can interact with the forces and objects of nature through communication.

What is Marx’s concept of social man? Marx deduces man’s social nature from his quality as an object-creating being. Man’s relation to members of his species thus determines not only the means of his existence but its contents as well. Marx postulates ‘man’s communist being’ against an individualism that ultimately reduces man to self-defeating hedonism. Marx calls this image of man *Gattungswesen*, man as a species-being. This mode of human existence cannot be derived from man’s existence as an atomistic or individualistic creature, but presupposes his reciprocal transsubjective activity and orientation. The wider significance of Marx’s view of the individualistic model is obvious. Individualism holds that one can conceive of a sphere of human activity which belongs wholly and exclusively to the individual. This situation, if any, indicates that one can conceive of a sphere of human activity where one can communicate with nobody except for himself. This, however, is possible only when he comes to be somehow isolated from the rest of the world, against his will in most instances.

The link between the human predicament (alienation, class struggle) and the revolutionary act is revolutionary consciousness. Marx advances a materialist explanation of consciousness in general, at the same time insisting that consciousness is immanent in economic and social relations—in history. Marx says that the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the languages of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics of a people. Men are producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.—real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else

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than conscious existence, and the existence of men and their circumstances appear upside
down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical
life-processes as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.\textsuperscript{8}

Then, according to Marx's arguments, all communicative acts should be construed with
reference to material behavior. A corollary of this is that man's communicative act should
be based upon his material intercourse and determined by his mode of production.

Marx continues that consciousness is therefore from the very beginning a social product,
and remains so as long as men exist at all. Consciousness is at first, of course, merely
consciousness concerning the immediate sensuous environment and consciousness of the
limited connection with other persons and things outside the individual who is growing
self-conscious. At the same time it is consciousness of nature, which first appears to men
as a completely alien, all-powerful and unassailable force, with which men's relations are
purely animal and by which they are overawed like beasts; it is thus a purely animal
consciousness of nature (natural religion).\textsuperscript{9} This view of Marx is directly related to his
notion of the alienation of man. Marx was inclined to reject any notion of an inherent,
 eternal human nature, as distinct from man's actual, and constantly changing, behavior.\textsuperscript{10}

Marx attacks Feuerbach. Feuerbach, according to Marx, resolves the essence of religion
into the essence of man. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each
separate individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.\textsuperscript{11} Natural science
has invaded and transformed human life all the more practically through the medium of
industry; and has prepared human emancipation, however directly and much it had to
consummate dehumanization. Industry is the actual, historical relation of nature, and
therefore of natural science, to man. If, therefore, industry is conceived as the exoteric
revelation of man's essential powers, we also gain an understanding of the human essence
of nature or the natural essence of man. In consequence, natural science will lose its
abstractly material tendency, and will become the basis of human science, as it has already
become the basis of actual human life, albeit in an estranged form. One basis for life and
another basis for science is a priori a lie. The nature which comes to be in human history
is real nature; hence nature as it comes to be through industry, even though in an

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{10} Caut, op. cit., p. 53.
\textsuperscript{11} Karl Marx, \textit{The German Ideology}, p. 198.
estranged form, is true anthropological nature. The philosopher sets himself (that is, one who is himself an abstract form of estranged man) as the measuring-rod of the estranged world. The whole history of the alienation-process and the whole process of the retraction of the alienation is therefore nothing but the history of the production of abstract (i.e., absolute) thought—of logical, speculative thought.

Capitalist society, based on private ownership of the means of production, or technology, is characterized not only by economic exploitation and political oppression but also by the alienation and self-alienation of man. In the social order based on division of labor and private property, the product produced by the working man and his own knowledge become the private property of another. The more goods and values the worker produces, the more insubstantial and poorer he himself becomes, and the more powerful grows the hostile world of capital confronting him. In this alienation of man from the product of his work Marx saw the most fundamental form of all human alienation. It is reflected in the fact that his work, which as a process of self-realization should be his prime requirement of life, is felt by him, under the prevailing conditions, a crushing burden. The increasing division of labor changes work from being a means of man's development to a means of his degradation. The result is that machinery or technology, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labor, we behold starving and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange, weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy.

The working class thus feels annihilated in its alienation and in it sees its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence. In order to overcome alienation, whose roots Marx believe to be in private ownership, social conditions had to be fundamentally changed—by means of the proletarian revolution, through the realization of the communist classless society. Communism to Marx, therefore, meant not only the abolition

13) Ibid., p.149.
of the exploitation of man by man, but also the overcoming of all kinds of alienation of man.\footnote{Wolfgang Leonhard, \textit{Three Faces of Marxism} (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), pp.15-16.} “To be radical means to grasp things by the root. But the root for man is man himself”; it was therefore necessary “to overthrow all conditions in which man is humiliated, enslaved, forsaken and contemptible being.”\footnote{Marx, “Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, Einleitung,” \textit{Werke}, I, 385.}

For Marx, the way to solve the problem of alienation of man is clear. To overthrow all existing contradictory conditions is the only way to overcome the problem. No alternative is possible. Therefore, if it were not for the only solution, the life of human being is nothing but a permanent despair. And it is natural from this logic that the current conditions of the world which has yet to overcome the alienation problem are in despair. What is then the real situation of the world? Is it really in despair? A fresh look at both capitalist and socialist camps gives us the evidence of despair alone? The function of communication is viewed as the process to increase the despair mood toward the ultimate goal of the overthrow or rather compromise and cooperation?

3. The Soviet Practices of Communication

The Soviet practices of communication are no doubt rooted in the political theory of Marxism, which was, though, later transformed to Leninism. Lenin endeavored to adapt the political theory of Marxism to the conditions of the socialist workers’ movement in the czarist Russia of his day. Lenin’s very first writings reveal a certain conflict between the Marxist theoretician and the active revolutionary Marx says that the social transformation of society is possible only in an economically advanced country, where the industrial workers constitute the majority of the population. This point was not the case in czarist Russia at the turn of the century. Lenin, the practical revolutionary, rebelled against the theory to which he had committed himself. Lenin shifted the emphasis from the social and economic prerequisites of revolution, as stressed by Marx and Engels, to political factors. Lenin replaced the “social revolution” with the concept of the “socialist revolution.”

Perhaps Lenin’s most conspicuous contribution to twentieth-century politics is his conception of the Communist Party as a creative history-making force and as the general staff of the world revolution. In the Bolshevik movement, he created the model on which
many other modern totalitarian parties have been built. Lenin must therefore be considered a pioneer of the totalitarianism of our age.\textsuperscript{199}

In a sense, Marxist perspective on communication theory can best be discussed by placing its main emphasis upon Leninism. As a matter of fact, the communication theory is only loosely related to Marx’s own ideas on communication theory as such. Karl Marx had little communication theory in explicit and formal terms, although it is implicit in his notion of false consciousness. The Marxist perspective discussed here then include the Leninist, Stalinist, neo-Marxist one. At the core of the discussion is the fact that original Marxism remains at the base of any Marxism-related discussions.

To a large extent the Communist Party of the Soviet Union bases its claim to legitimacy on the grounds that it is operating according to the scientific principles of Marxism. In the U.S.S.R. any action may be justified or condemned on the basis of the assertion that it adheres to or departs from Marxist doctrine. Despite the repeated protests of both Lenin and Stalin that Marxism is not an inflexible dogma but simply a guide to action, it constitutes in fact a kind of orthodoxy. And in so far as this is the case, it manifests the features that are characteristic of orthodoxies. The Party, it is clear, must and indeed does maintain in its own hands a monopoly of the right to interpret Marxism, and this monopoly is in the last analysis exercised directly by the top party leadership.\textsuperscript{200} Not only the Soviet Union but also all totalitarian regimes have the aspirations to have every citizen organized as a cheering, active member of a party-controlled organization.\textsuperscript{21}

We can attribute to Lenin the formulation of the totalitarian approach to politics. He did not think he was the inventor of it, for in his mind he was implementing efficiently and on a national scale an approach to mass-mobilization that had been emerging throughout the nineteenth century. Lenin, Hitler, Mao and Che Guevara were geniuses for propaganda, but they never succeeded in creating a dynamic and stimulating communications system which can effectively mobilize the general public. The policy of total control of propaganda messages has always had inherent limitations in achieving what is intended by a propaganda message. As a result, throughout the totalitarian world the censor has triumphed over the propagandist.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.466.
Against this background, an analysis of the Soviet communications system should consider a number of crucial areas such as cultural setting, press and censorship, the social and economic system, basic ethos and values, the changes the press generate, Soviet mass communications function, structure, control, etc. Of them all, three aspects of the Soviet communications system—theory, censorship, control methods—will briefly be considered in the following.

**Communications theory**

Soviet communist theory regarding the place, purpose, and function of communications media in society grew out of Marxist philosophy which is fused with authoritarian principles. The authoritarian controls include monopoly ownership by government and party of the communication channels. While both libertarian and Marxist theory have similar goals—the development of the ideal society and the evolution of a superior man—they dramatically differ in the means of achieving those goals. Marxist theory holds that the improvement of society must come first; therefore, man and his institutions exist to produce in and create the good society; but only after this task is accomplished, or in the process of accomplishment, will man himself benefit accordingly. The all-consuming goal of Communism then is to improve man by first improving society. So the total use of communication as an instrument for building the society is seen as a primary means of attaining the goal.

Marxist theory as applied to the development of twentieth-century Communist states, together with their communication systems, has been adapted and modified considerably to fit the individual cultures in which they were expected to grow, and to meet changing conditions. Marx himself mentions the press. It remained for Lenin and Stalin to adapt Marxist doctrine to the newly emerging Soviet society after the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917. The national communication system developed slowly, to a considerable extent by trial and error. The public communication system was developed as an integral part of the social system. As Siebert and others point out, “in the Soviet system there is not a theory of the state and a theory of communication: there is only one theory.”

Since it is the Communist Party that determines the goals of Soviet society, it is the

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23) The best of this study is James W. Markham, *Voices of the Red Giants; Communications in Russia and China* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1967)
24) Markham, Ibid., pp. 98–99.
party that controls the press. The conception of the press as being primarily an instrument in the party's effort to eliminate the remnants of capitalism in the consciousness of the people, and to transform them into active builders of communist society, has had its impact on every aspect of the Soviet press. In the first place, the basic communist position has a marked influence on the Bolshevik conception of press freedom. As a political and social theory, Bolshevism rejects the notion of absolute freedom in society. As Lenin phrased it, "to live in a society and to be free from society is impossible." Consequently, the Bolsheviks maintain that assertions about the freedom of the press under capitalism are hypocrisy or worse, on the grounds that in a society based on money there can be no freedom from money. The Soviet press would be free, declared Lenin, in that it would be free of capital, careerism and bourgeois anarchistic individualism.\(^26\)

In his statement renouncing Western-style freedom of the press, Lenin was using the term according to its Western meaning. He argued that their mass communications are free. Moreover, the constitution of the Soviet Union and the constitutions of each of the federated republics guarantee freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of street processions and demonstrations. However, such questions as when such rights are exercised in conformance with the interests of the working people, who is to determine this difficult question arise. The party, of course, determines the question. The abstract Soviet concept of freedom is subject to different connotations, and for American and Soviet journalists, freedom of the press has widely different meanings.

In a real sense, the Soviet public uses and enjoys access to its press for members of the public are invited to write letters to newspapers. Many thousands are published each year. Thus the people participate in mass communication by contributing to media content. In theory the public owns and has full access to the media, while the party merely holds the media system in its custody. In practice the party owns and uses the media primarily to serve its own ends—ends which need not always conflict with those of the general public, of course. While the Soviet system flatly denies freedom of expression to those who would use it against the state, the press is free within prescribed limits to engage in loyal criticism. However, criticism of the basic tenets of the system, writing or utterances advocating a modification of the system, or questioning of any decision or dogma are punishable as crimes. In the Soviet view, freedom of the press is now closely associated

\(^{26}\) Inkeles, op. cit., p.136.
with the concept of responsibility. The Soviet view holds that mass media are assigned the task of promoting the best interests of the working people and or strengthening the regime, of imparting to the people the ultimate "truth," as revealed in Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist doctrine as interpreted by the party.27)

**Communications censorship**

Karl Marx mentioned censorship. "The censored press has a demoralizing effect. The archvice, hypocrisy, is inseparable from it, and from this, its basic vice, stem all its other weaknesses which indeed lack any disposition to virtue, its vices of passivity which even from an aesthetic standpoint are detestable. The government only hears its own voice, knows that it only hears its own voice, yet acts under the illusion that it hears the voice of the people, and demands from the people to accept this illusion as true. So the people for their part sink partly into political superstition, partly into political disbelief or withdraw completely from civic life and become a rabble interested only in its own affairs.

Since the people must look upon free writings as illegal, they get used to consider what is illegal as free, freedom as illegal, and what is legal as unfree. Thus the censorship kills civic spirit."28)

Lenin said that "the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party sets as its immediate political task the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and its replacement by a republic on the basis of a democratic constitution, guaranteeing...... unrestricted freedom of conscience, speech, press and assembly.29)

To understand, however, at least in part the polemical nature of Marx’s writings including the one on the communications censorship, one has to keep in mind that in his day, journalism was not a neutral occupation. On the European continent, where Marx made his debut as a newspaperman, journalism could not be possibly objective. In a Europe ruled by absolutist monarchs and oligarchs, the press was tolerated only insofar as it conformed to the rules and restrictions of the widely prevailing censorships. A newspaper desiring to be other than a mouthpiece for the authorities was, almost by definition, in actual or potential conflict with the censorship. Journalists had only two choices—defending or refraining from criticizing, the status quo. Marx, by

temperament and conviction a rebel determined to rearrange the universe, chose the latter alternative.\textsuperscript{30)}

The Marxian choice, in a way, has become the cornerstone of the Soviet communications censorship. A theologically or ideologically oriented society which depends upon commonly held doctrine for its legitimacy, requires a myth of unanimity\textsuperscript{31)} and censorship no doubt helps lead mass communications to serve the buildup of such myth. As a result, nothing can be printed about the government without prior approval of the responsible official. This principle was modified in 1928, but this revision stresses the negative aspects of censorship rather than the positive aspects of propaganda and mind conditioning. The modifications, at the same time, did not relieve the rigor, absurdity, and narrowness of its application. All forms of expression come under regular review of the authorities and the liberty of the press, though limited, is still encroached upon. Not only are publications licensed, but the heavy hand of censorship extends to manuscripts.

The situation results in the question of interpreting the news. Even though the intelligentsia makes the most use of the official media, it nevertheless also most frequently utilizes rumor, and has most confidence in it. The intelligentsia is also the group which shows the least tendency to distort Soviet reality, the greatest willingness to praise Soviet achievements, the least hostility to the leaders and the system. Then it is not unreasonable to argue on this basis that even those most committed to the Soviet system were aware of the distortions which crept into official Soviet communications, and felt a need to develop informal ways of learning about events and of the interpreting the news for themselves. Like all peoples whose news sources are censored and controlled, the Soviet citizen tries by inference to detect that which was withheld, or the truth that lies behind what he considers to be untrustworthy statement.\textsuperscript{32)}

\textbf{Control methods}

Since the entire Soviet social system is a planned system, press and broadcasting have been increased in the successive 5-year plans. Planning determines such matters as

\textsuperscript{30)} Saul K. Padover, Karl Marx—"The Propagandist as Prophet" in H. Lasswell, et. al., ed., \textit{Propaganda and Communication in World History} (Honolulu, Hawaii; East-West Center), vol. II, p.211.


location, size, type of content, format, nature of audience, periodicity, power and frequency, area covered, and circulation size. Systematic planning also determines on a regular basis all media content and format. Each department of newspaper and broadcasting units regularly submit advance plans for the approval or next high echelon of the directing hierarchy. Plans detail the subjects and themes of articles to be published and programs locally originated.

As owner and operator of the nation's communications system, the Communist Party has exerted special effort to see that all media and their related institutions are staffed by persons who are, above all, loyal to the party. Employees must be well-grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideology. Major editors and directors must be party members. Journalists not only must be able to interpret the system faithfully and persuasively, but also be able to organize and agitate. In the training of communications personnel, education in Marxism and in the philosophy of the Communist state has taken precedence over the teaching of journalistic knowledge and professional skills. In centrally administered organizations, direction and supervision flow from the top down. Staff and "Line" below the top must be kept informed of party decisions, policy changes, or advised on unexpected situations not covered by standing regulations. Directives are based upon party decisions which are published at irregular intervals and circulated to the management.

Planning, staffing, directing and instructing are not enough. Without proper supervision, assessment of results, criticism of performance, and the fixing of responsibility—that is, without efficient follow-up—goals cannot be achieved. The manager supervises line functions, controls personnel and budget, and deals with unions for technical services. A degree of national uniformity and centralization, however, characterizes government procedures regarding staff and budget functions, such as the mechanical, financial, and transportational operations for all media. As for controlling information, Tass is the gatekeeper. Its position as gatekeeper of a large volume of information reaching the Soviet people makes it a significant arm of the control mechanism. Tass also sends a large proportion of officially approved information from the Soviet Union to the rest of the world. Tass ranks slightly below Pravda in its authority and and prestige as an official spokesman of the regime.

The party and press mechanism's administrative and regulatory function extends of course to the distribution of the print media and to broadcast dissemination. The determinants of circulation capacity—newsprint, supplies and equipment—are assigned to
the various organs by rank of the organizations publishing them, and according to the medium's relative importance to the program of the moment. The communications system is expected theoretically to be self-sustaining and even make a profit, although in practice profits are not insisted upon. Budget of the communications media are a part of the public budget.33)

All these control methods are based upon, of course, the Soviet press theory which maintains, in harmony with general Soviet political ideology, that the people and the government are one. They have no essential differences of goal. The government—specifically the Communist Party, which remains the effective government in the Soviet Union—draws its power from the people. Armed with principles of Marxism-Leninism, as the Soviet rhetoric goes, the party directs and leads the people in the building of a new society.34)

4. A Liberal Critique of Marxist Communication Theory and Practice

In this section of the essay, the writer, from the liberal position, would like to criticize both Marxist communication theory and practice.

First, a word or two may well be said as to Marx's historical scheme, or the synthetic reconstruction of capitalism. This reconstruction attempted by Marx with the conceptual instruments available to him is hopelessly outdated. His historical scheme no longer works. In short, the economic and sociological theory of capitalism, which from his thirtieth year he regarded as the essence of his work, has not escaped the common fate of all learned works. It is still a monument, but it has been surpassed, because knowledge progresses and history continues. Hence those who still call themselves Marxists can only choose between equally precarious solutions.35) Lenin's elite, recruited from students and intellectuals who are children of the possessing classes, might well seize power not, as Marx expected, where the economy was most advanced and the working class most "conscious," cultared, numerous, and politically most active; it might seize power most easily, nay, even more easily, where the economy was backward, the workers neither

33) Markham, op. cit., pp.118-137.
mature nor conscious nor politically active, and all political parties of all classes rudimentary or nonexistent. Communists revolutionaries could seize power “for the proletariat” by means of peasants. Once in power the revolutionaries like Mao and Ho Chi Minh could do as Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev had done: use the “proletarian power” to rule society as a whole, to put all industry, all weapons, all means of communication, into the hands of the ruling “party,” to develop a power as total as the wayward spirit of man and the development of technology and controls permit.36)

What are the shortcomings and contradictions in the Marxist theory of communication? Marxist or authoritarian theory evolved from a trust in the superior wisdom of the ruling elite to govern and a belief in the relative inability of the average man either to participate in governance or to guide his own destiny without help. Libertarian theory challenged the validity of authoritarian assumptions and developed a system based on faith in the wisdom of people to govern themselves, the reasoning power and dignity of man, and man’s inherent ability, indeed right, to self-determination. According to the libertarians, society with its institutions exists to serve the needs and to better the welfare of mankind, and to help men work out their own destiny. The corollary of this was the belief that that society is best which serves man best. The libertarian philosophers like John Stuart Mill believed that communications in the free society can serve man and benefit the state best by being free and independent of government so that the self-righting process of truth might operate in a free marketplace of ideas.37)

The idea of the general will is impossible without the assumption that as a means of communication it realizes an equal relationship between the state and the sovereign. Rousseau says,38) “the public force must therefore have its own agent (the executive power cannot belong to the general public in its legislator’s or sovereign capacity, because this power consists solely of particular acts which are not within the jurisdiction of the law, nor consequentially of the sovereign......), which unites it and puts it into operation according to the directions of the general will; which serves as a means of communication between the State and the sovereign; and which does in a sense for the public person

37) Markham, op. cit., p. 98. Also see, Siebert, et al., Four Theories of the Press, pp. 43-56. Also see, John Stuart Mill, Representative Government (London; Everyman Edition, 1948). Mill says, “the capability of any given people for fulfilling the conditions of a given form of government cannot be pronounced on by any sweeping rule.”
what the union of the soul and the body does in man...... What is the government then? An intermediate body established between the subjects and the sovereign for their mutual communication, and charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of civil as well as political freedom." The Marxist perspective on communication theory can better be understood if attention is paid to the two different notions of the nature of political power involving the coercive aspects of government. The two notions are concerned with the longstanding argument whether the coercive aspects of government may be expected to recede in the long run with the increase in wealth, education, and perhaps in cultural and social integration, so that these aspects of the state might eventually "wither away," as envisaged by Marx and Engels; or whether coercive government will have to be with us in all eternity, or long as mankind lives. However, the perennial vision of an eventual noncoercive world, so attractive to many early radicals and revolutionists, has become somewhat embarrassing to the bureaucratic rulers of the Communist states. Economic abundance, the abolition of classes, and the withering away of the state, according to Marx and Engels, were to replace capitalism and oppression. This view pictured the world of politics as being at bottom actually or potentially good. However, this view had at the same time to explain the current existence of injustice and evil. On the other hand, the tradition of regarding politics as actually or potentially tragic or evil goes back to St. Augustine, who is followed by Martin Luther, Max Weber, Karl Jaspers, Hans J. Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr and George Kennan. Political will which may resist and correct the injustice and evil can enter into a certain political system through communication channels,39 which only "truly," democratic systems seem to make the most of.

Political will is an integral part of public opinion, which should be consulted in a responsible manner by any political power so far as it seeks to increase the well-being of people. "In more than half a century of Soviet rule, public opinion has been little consulted by the leadership, for reasons that are rather clear. Certain policies, whether dictated by ideology of simple by deep-rooted, "rational" convictions shared by sufficient numbers of the elite, have neither been submissive to plebiscitarian approval, nor popular enough to win it had they been. Opinion here has been irrelevant; coercion has made

up the distance between official commitment and mass opinion." 40) The Soviet situation, despite its "temporal" signs of calmness, should always cope with the increasing pressure from the invisible public opinion demanding greater autonomy in its articulation. "Having aided in raising the educational level of its audience, the Soviet press was then challenged to alter its content to appeal to a far more sophisticated and discriminating readership than existed fifty years ago." 41) This situation helps us understand an important dilemma the Soviet communications system confronts today. If Communist authoritarianism is an archetypal political system dedicated to economic and technocratic modernization, 42) it cannot afford to neglect the education of the masses for increased mobilization of resources to that end. However, the political system should solve at the same time the question of the increasing demand for information of all kinds. "The higher the level of education, the greater the demand for information of all kinds. Along with a generalized interest in information goes a demand for more information about foreign countries. Political information that comes through the oral propaganda network of party instruction and lectures is also received most critically by people with high school and college education, among whom members of the Communist party figure significantly." 43) On the other hand, the Soviet communications systems have been affected by the competition of Western media services. "Since Western media moved swiftly to new technologies and provided high-geared, up-to-date, and lively services, the Soviets could not remain behind indefinitely." 44) This has also been worsening the Soviet dilemma.

Apparently rising are the signs that the Soviet communications policy may have reached the limit of its control. As recently as FBIS reported that Moscow's Sovietkaya Rossiya carried on Jan. 6, 1982, an interview article, in which a Soviet social scientist said,

"What I would like to mention first is the constant and rapid growth of the influence of public opinion on all aspects of our life. The causes of this phenomenon are to be found in the very nature of socialism and the Soviet state of all the people, where the involvement of the broad

messes in control of the affairs of the collective, region and country as a whole is an objective activity......Who to be, what kind of person to be, what goals to choose and how to achieve them—to each of these questions, which are basic for the personality of each of us, we seek an answer under the relentless impact of public opinion...." 

The interpretation of the remarks by the Soviet sociologist requires much attention, of course. It is evident, however, that how to lead public opinion has become the Soviet authority's major task on a policy level which is basically different from the past.

The problems of contemporary society such as industrial relations, technology and skill, poverty, population explosion, resources shortage, etc. cannot be explained only in terms of economic factors. "The crisis tendencies pregnant with the future are no longer located in the economic sphere but in the sociocultural sphere." From this position Habermas notes the legitimation crisis in advanced capitalism, not in Marxism. But he still disagrees, by saying so, with orthodox Marxism precisely because of its overemphasis on economic factors to the exclusion of "superstructural" considerations. As compared with this neo-Marxist position, a liberal position holds that "the problem of contemporary capitalism lies not chiefly in a deterioration of physical capital, but in a persistent subversion of the psychological means of production—the morale and inspiration of economic man." These two different positions seem to have a common ground; the ground that Marx was wrong in locating "the means of production in the material arrangements of the society rather than in the metaphysical capital of human freedom and creativity." If it is so, no political or economic system can work well unless it succeeds in maximizing free exchange of information among people because it is only through communication that human beings promote the metaphysical capital of human freedom and creativity.

5. Conclusion

"Marxism has been the greatest fantasy of our century.... Marxism is a doctrine of blind confidence that a paradise of universal satisfaction is awaiting us just round the corner. Almost all the prophecies of Marx and his followers have already proved to be

48) Ibid.
false."

It is a characteristic phenomenon of the day that critical reactions against Marxist theories of culture, ideology, psychology, state, communication, etc. prevail not only in the liberal camp but also within the Marxist camp. Jürgen Habermas is a leading figure representing such reactions within the Marxist camp. Habermas breaks with other Marxists in that he sees the economy to be one of several derivatives of an underlying structure which establishes the overall conditions of life rather than the determining force of history. It is no accident that a philosopher like Jürgen Habermas proposes a communicative theory of society, which elaborates the way in which the structure of discourse provides the foundation for social interaction. Society is evolving in a direction in which knowledge production is more important than commodity production, according to him. His suggestion is that the search for "undistorted communication" is equivalent to the craving for "truth" established by consensus which emerges once individuals are freed of barriers which prevent them from seeing each other's interests.

The relative strength of the liberal paradigm is evident; it is that paradigm that has supported in the most positive fashion the growth of democracy, in increase in civil liberties, free competition, and, among other things, the freedom of communication.

Abstract

The two main routes to understanding contemporary societies have been traced by liberal and Marxist theories and both share a common conception of the unity of mature modern societies. The unitary character of industrial society, which is the overarching structure in liberal and Marxist thought, derives from the processes of integration immanent in industrialization which tend to iron out the differences that societies inherit from their pasts, and from the fundamental similarities of the principal social groups in an industrial economy. In the case of liberal theories, these similarities lead to cooperation, whereas in the case of Marxism, they are predicted to produce conflict.

Communication, comprising the bulk of fundamental processes of human society, is believed to have played an essential role in societal evolution. The significance of study

50) Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Thomas McCarthy trans. (Boston; Beacon Press, 1979)
of Marxist communication theory is, then, that it can increase understanding not only of how the theory works with actual problems, but also of the prospects of the society in which the theory is dominant.

Conventionally, Marxist communication studies have put their major emphasis upon the description and explanation of the Marxist communication system in theory and practice. Although this essay is in no way a departure in this respects from the previous ones, an attempt has been made to see the present theory and practice of Marxist communications with particular attention to their implications for the future. As a result, the writer is particularly concerned with the problems of contemporary industrial society and its prospects, however briefly, on the basis of a comparison of Marxist communication theory with liberal theory.

According to this general idea, the first part of the essay poses the significance of the discussion of Marxist perspective on communication theory in the context of the problems of contemporary society. The second part is concerned with some essential assumptions in Marxism—the Marxist theory of human nature—and its implications for communication. The third part is devoted to the description of the Soviet practices of communication as an example. In the fourth part, writer, from the liberal position, criticizes both Marxist communication theory and practice. The conclusion takes note of the criticism of Marxism by Jürgen Habermas, a neo-Marxist, who proposes that society is evolving in a direction in which knowledge production is more important than commodity production. His suggestion is that the search for “undistorted communication” is equivalent to the craving for “truth” established by consensus which emerges once individuals are freed of barriers which prevent them from seeing each other’s interests.