

An analysis of Marxism in industrial relations theory in light of capitalism, neoliberalism and globalisation: A petite critical review from Bangladesh's RMG perspectives

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Academic

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Abstract

Often, scholars have questioned whether Marxism has any relationship with modern industrial relations theory. Some scholars have portrayed Marxism as an evaluation of the mode of production where capitalism is a powerful force that exploits workers in many ways. Workers' exploitation is evident in the capitalist mode of the production system, mainly in less regulated developing countries like Bangladesh. On the other hand, neoliberalism and globalisation have sparked the workers' exploitation debate between old and contemporary scholarship. Scholars further argue that neoliberalism and globalisation work as a supportive force of capitalism; at present, therefore, Marxism is again in the academic discourse. However, other scholars find Marxism less effective or invalid in industrial relations theory. Therefore, this short article focuses on whether Marxism is still valid in current industrial relations theory within the perspective of neoliberalism and globalisation. Moreover, this article aims to provide some critical analyses from the viewpoint of the Bangladesh RMG industry and its workers' dilemma in the capitalist mode of production to find whether there is a correlation between Marx's exploitation and the surplus-labour theory.

Keywords: Marxism, industrial relations theory, neoliberalism and globalisation, trade unionism, exploitation, unethical business, supply chains and Bangladesh's RMG

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ASM Anam Ullah's Bio: Anam's expertise is in globalisation and neoliberalism, ILO, WTO, HRM, employment and industrial relations, workplace safety and OHS regulations, Bangladesh and global RMG industry, international business and supply chains management, ethical business, CSR and CSV. Anam was appointed academic by The University of New South Wales, The University of Sydney, The University of Wollongong, Charles Sturt University, The University of Newcastle, and CQUniversity, Australia.

Method: This is a quick review of scholarly work published in international journals covering the current research topic. Moreover, the author's observation and long research experience in Bangladesh's RMG industry on its labour exploitation have been supportive in constructing narratives in this article.

Contribution to knowledge through findings and analysis:

Several scholars have discussed whether industrial relations have a relationship with Marxism. Scholars have also discussed Marxism in light of capitalism and how globalisation is associated with Marxism. Several other scholars perhaps aimed to explore the labour exploitation in industrial relations theory and incorporated the discussion of trade unionism in industrial relations based on Marxian discourse. However, scholars have probably neglected to explore whether Marxism is valid in the theory of industrial relations based on Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, where exploitation is one of the significant academic discussions that has been prominent since the industry's establishment in the 1980s. Therefore, this article suggests through its in-depth understanding and interpretations that Marxism is still valid in industrial relations theory as long as exploitation and surplus labour exists in the capitalist mode of the production system, mainly from the Bangladesh RMG contexts.

Introduction

Since the 1980s, globalisation and neoliberalism and their structural changes (e.g., political and economic) at the state and national levels have forced scholars to examine industrial relations theory critically (see Harvey et al., 2002; Rahman, 2013; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Harvey, 2007; Harvey, 2022). Scholars have consistently published essays, articles, books, etc., based on their research findings, beliefs and observations in Marxist, Pluralist, and Unitarist approaches (Kochan et al., 2019). As a result, industrial relations debate has found intensity in recent years, both in academic and professional arenas (Kaufman, 2004; Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020; Hayman, 2008; Gall, 2012). The current research shows that in many countries, mainly in developing countries, the role of governments, employers, and unions are under significant criticism due to their structural adjustment with neoliberal globalisation (see Harvey, 2007; Munck, 2010; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Hiba, 2021; Ullah, 2022). Scholars, e.g., Rahman (2013); Siddiqi (2019); Alamgir and Banerjee (2019) and Ullah (2022), argue that developing countries, such as Bangladesh and their governments, have adopted and practised neoliberal globalisation with a free-market economic policy. More specifically, Alamgir and Banerjee (2019) further mention that since the 1980s, successive governments in Bangladesh have shown a reluctance to change the working conditions, minimum wage structures and well-being of RMG workers (see also Siddiqi, 2019; Rahman, 2019). Contemporary scholarship suggests that, in order to maintain the competitive position with Bangladesh's RMG goods in the global garment market, the Bangladesh governments and RMG traders have deliberately kept the minimum wage and operating costs of workers lower than the major garment-producing countries of the world (see Rahman, 2013; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Ashwin, Kabeer & Schuessler, 2020; Ullah, 2021a; Ullah, 2021b; Ullah, 2022).

While evaluating the RMG workers' working conditions and well-being in light of neoliberal globalisation, it becomes apparent what Marx had written in his famous "Das Kapital" (Kritik der politischen, 1867 (Capital Volume I - "A Critique of Political Economy" - English version published in 1887). For example, Marx, in Chapter 9: "The Rate of Surplus-Value"; and Section 1 has discussed "The degree of Exploitation of Labour-Power," in which my interest lies and I have aimed to connect Marx's exploitation theory with the current upheaval of Bangladesh's RMG workers' conditions. For example, integrating with Marx's surplus labour theory, it is again seen that the Bangladesh RMG industry has created many lower-paid jobs for much less skilled labour (Rahman, 2020; Rahman & Yadlapalli, 2021; Ullah, 2021b; Ullah, 2022). Notably, RMG has created extensive employment in the industry since the 1980s; however, workers' exploitation has been a considerable concern. Therefore, the discussion of Bangladesh RMG workers' minimum wages, well-being, working conditions, and other issues have been rational, logical, and timely (e.g., Rahman, 2013; Crinis, 2019; Bair, Anner & Blasi, 2020; Rahman & Ishty, 2020; Ullah, 2022).

Bangladeshi RMG workers are low skilled and less-educated workers who have lost the ability to bargain with the RMG employers due to a lack of opportunities in other informal economic industries in Bangladesh (see Ullah, 2020; Hossain, 2021). Thus, it has been an excellent opportunity for local and international capitalists to exploit RMG workers (Crisis, 2019; Ullah, 2021a). In addition, more than 84 or 85 per cent of rural Bangladeshi women are employed in the sector. Therefore, despite the call of the RMG employers for the so-called empowerment of women, scholars still see the industry as a terrible place where the minimum well-being and fundamental rights (e.g., collective bargaining power, decent minimum wages, health and safety, bonuses etc.) of workers have not yet been established (Islam & McPhail, 2011; Rahman, 2013; Siddiqi, 2019; Ullah, 2021a.; Ullah, 2022).

Furthermore, RMG workers mostly compromise with accepting the work offer at the unhealthy and unsafe factories. As a result, while they get a job to survive, they often face severe injuries and brutal death in factory fires or building collapses, like the Rana Plaza building collapse (The Guardian, 2014; The Guardian, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Salminen, 2018; Bair, Anner & Blasi, 2020; Ullah, 2022). These tragic accidents have a devastating effect on their family and social life (see Siddiqi, 2019; Bair, Anner & Blasi, 2020). Although their families often lose their last earning person and the family member in factory accidents, they do not receive adequate financial compensation from the governments, RMG factory owners not even from the clothing brands that are regularly outsourcing from those unhealthy and unsafe factories (Islam & MacPhail, 2011; Siddiqi, 2019; Ullah, 2021a; Ullah, 2022). As a result, scholars, media reports and anti-sweatshop campaigners show concern about the supply chains' unethical business behaviour in developing countries during globalisation (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2013; Haque, 2018; Crinis, 2019; Siddiqi, 2019; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; BBC News, 2019; Rahman & Yadlapali, 2021; Amnesty International, 2021; Ullah, 2022; Clean Clothes Campaign, n.d.).

Nevertheless, international scholars still argue that Bangladeshi RMG workers' productivity is very low compared to other RMG producing countries. For example, Hossain (2021) published a report in the English newspaper in Bangladesh, i.e., The Business Standard. According to the report, the average productivity of garment workers in Bangladesh is lower than all competing countries except Cambodia, which assessment was based on Asian Productivity Organization (APO) 2020. In the report, Hossain further shows that the annual productivity level per worker in Bangladesh is \$10,400, compared to \$12,700 for Vietnam, \$15,800 for India and \$23,800 for China. Furthermore, it was said in the report that the main reasons behind the low productivity of Bangladeshi workers are a few essential things that both Bangladesh Government and RMG employers intentionally ignore. For example, lack of training, low wages, lack of nutritious food, unhealthy living conditions and lack of suitable working environment for women workers are the main obstacles (see Rock, 2003; Ullah, 2015; Butler; 2019; Rahman, 2019; Ullah, 2020a; Hossain, 2021).

However, as inspired to write this article based on Marx's exploitation and surplus labour theory, my purpose is not to generalise or over-generalise Marxism. Instead, I aim to discuss the theory of industrial relations (e.g., Marxist, Pluralist and Unitarist approaches) from the work of scholars. And then, while I aim to explore Marxism in industrial relations, my arguments mainly reflect upon Marx's theory of surplus labour and labour exploitation in light of capitalism, the current market and economic force. Scholars argue that capitalism has been more potent with the support of neoliberal globalisation. But, at the same time, its severe consequence, for example, workers' exploitation, is evident in the global south, particularly in the RMG sector in Bangladesh (see, e.g., Harvey, 2007; Rahman, 2013; Ullah, 2020a; Ullah, 2020b; 2021a; Ullah, 2021b).

In addition, I further aim to see whether there is any correlation between the exploitation of RMG workers and Marx's exploitation theory in this article. Therefore, the research questions for the present article are: (a) why does exploitation occur, (b) is Marxism still considered an essential component of industrial relations in light of the exploitation of RMG workers in Bangladesh, and (c) how can the exploitation of RMG workers be controlled? Thus, the present article is probably the best source for understanding how Marxism is legitimate and how capitalism still undermines the emancipation of workers in a country like Bangladesh. I also investigate the state's (e.g., Bangladesh) nature and function as a rising capitalist state and whether it behaves ethically to benefit RMG workers in Bangladesh.

The definition of industrial relations, and what do they mean?

An Anglo-American influential industrial relations writer Kochan defined industrial relations as "an interdisciplinary field that encompasses the study of all aspects of people at work" (cited in Hayman, 2008). However, from most old and contemporary scholarship, the ideal definition of industrial relations refers to the relationship between employee and management, which arises directly or indirectly from the union-employer relationship (see, e.g., Hayman, 2008; Edwards, 2009; Kochan et al., 2019; Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020). Moreover, when

one or more people are engaged in productive work, it can be said that those people are “industrious”. So then, relationship in industrial relations refers to any relationship between an employer and its employees and the union representing them in a productive field. So again, industrial relations refers to the relationship between the employer and the employees. To get specific work done in the workplace, it needs to be a good relationship between employers and employees. However, contemporary scholarship (e.g., Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020) suggests that conflicting relationships are not a great way to achieve high productivity in industrial relations, so employers and employees should look for reciprocal and friendly relationships. Therefore, both parties (employers/managers and employees or their unions) need to work together as efficiently as possible to maximise the potential for economic gain and industrial growth. Scholars argue that industrial progress and financial gains will come to a standstill without cooperation between these two departments (employers and employees) (see Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020).

Furthermore, the relationship between the employer and the employee may be directly or indirectly affected by the union representing the workers. Therefore the industrial relationship is the interaction and relationship between the employer, the employee and the government and the organisation and the association through which such exchange is mediated (Kaufman, 2004; Abbot, 2006; Eberhard, 2007; Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020; Edwards, 2009).

Origin and ideas of industrial relations

In the 1920s, the term Industrial Relations (IR) first came to knowledge as the industrial revolution was underway mainly in Britain and America. However, IR theory was initially associated with Personal Management (PM) and Human Resource Management (HRM) in the 1980s. According to Kaufman (2003), in the 20th century, the field of industrial relations in the United States was primarily contained by John R. Commons and Wisconsin schools. Kaufman described the documentation and their strategies and proposed policy approaches for improved industrial relations at that time. The three main elements of their system were market stability, equality of bargaining power and constitutional government in industrial establishments. Therefore, Kaufman saw that Commons and its affiliates think about the best way to achieve these three goals, particularly their views on trade unionism, labour law, labour management, and the proper blending of macroeconomic/monetary policy through four distinct aspects. The process initially started in the 1900s and ended in the late 1930s.

However, in 1929, the Great Depression saw a reorganisation of the social and theoretical conflicts in the 1890s. Still, this time featured a new generation of economists: Joseph Schumpeter in the German-speaking and in the English-speaking world, John Maynard Keynes. The previous generation laid down the primary arguments against the basis of the science of civilisation - today called neoliberalism (Reinert, 2013).

After World War II, John T. Dunlop (1958) developed a systematic industrial relations theory in his Landmark 1958 volume, *Industrial Relations Systems* (Bellemare, 2000; Lieberman et al., 2006). In his writing, he described the system as consisting of three actors: the trade union, the employer, and the state. The International Labour Organisation, established in 1919, had a similar tripartite structure, state, manager and trade union as workers’ representatives (see Standing, 2008; ILO, n.d.). Later, other scholars have also discussed an industrial tribunal to see proper regulations of industrial sectors of the state or nations. Interestingly, these three have standard features in practice based on a single concept (human management) (see Edwards, 2009). However, international scholars, e.g., Stone, Cox and Gavin (2020), also argue that IR involves employees/workers and their unions, employers and their associations and state and national governments.

The focus of this article should be based on aspects that have changed the total market shapes of the world since the 1980s due to the direct impact of globalisation and neoliberalism (see Harvey, 2007; Munck, 2010; Rahman, 2013; Hiba, 2021; Ullah, 2022). I also argue that we live through a groundbreaking shift in industrial relations marked by the collapse of labour collectivism, organisation, and militancy (see Kelly, 2012; Mahmood & Banerjee, 2020). Therefore, before starting the discourse of Marxism and its valid connections with the current article, I should present a short analysis of other industrial relations forms.

The unitarist approach to the industrial relations system

Under the unitarianist approach, industry relations involve the interrelationships between employers and employees. This process mainly encourages both parties to agree on specific conditions in the workplace to avoid industrial disputes by sharing common objectives and values, and trade unionism is not enabled in this way, which significantly gains the influence of management in the workplace (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020). Furthermore, international scholars, e.g., Kochan et al. (2019), suggested that those who use a single frame of reference assume that the interests of workers and employers are consistent. The authors’ argument is the voice of workers could express “positive” actions or “organisational citizenship” behaviour. Doing so, however, will improve individual, group, or organisational outcomes that potentially increase commitment, hiring, trust, and job satisfaction and meet employee voice shared goals. Moreover, the unitarist approach works with the concept of HRM, which does not encourage the state government or industrial tribunals to be involved in minimising industrial disputes between employers and employees. Therefore, governments have less influence in achieving good industrial relations (Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020).

The pluralist approach to the industrial relations system

The pluralistic view reflects the inevitable conflict between employers and employees because there is disagreement in the distribution of power between parties in the workplace, i.e. between employers and employees. Moreover, pluralist advocates often argue that conflict is inevitable in democratic

and pluralist societies such as in Australia (Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020). Kochan et al. (2019) suggested that the “worker’s voice” is embedded in the pluralistic approach to employment relations. Scholars argue that a pluralistic approach can acknowledge workers’ wants, and they would get to know and contribute to organisations that share their values and interests. Ultimately, voices can combine individual and collective efforts to improve organisational processes and performance with efforts to assert employees’ claims in conflict with the interests of employers or other parties in the workplace (see Ackers, 2007; Kochan et al., 2019; Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020). Therefore, trade unionism is encouraged in the pluralist form of the industrial relations system because trade unions can be seen as a legitimate force that can act against any executive/managerial prerogatives and authority on behalf of the workers (Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020). However, an eminent scholar in industrial relations theory, Hayman, suggests that the pluralist approach is a temporary outcome and has a contingent interaction with social, political and economic forces. On the other hand, this approach increases economic growth through mutual understanding between employers and trade unions (Hayman, 2008).

The Marxist approach to the industrial relations system

The Marxist or radical approach reflects industrial conflicts mainly due to class conflict (Marx, 1887; Engels, 1890; Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020). Marxism has discussed the workers’ exploitation in the capitalist mode of production (see Wolf, 1999; 2004; Hayman, 2008; Gall, 2012; Howell, 2019). The Marxist point of view is also called the radical point of view. This view expresses the nature of capitalist society. It feels like workplace relationships are the opposite of history. It acknowledges the inequality of employment relations and power in the broader society as a whole.

Moreover, Marxism can serve as a mode of analysis by examining the relationship between ownership, power, and social change and thus illuminate the social transformation of a wider variety than what is present (Levin, 2005). One of the strengths of Marxism is that it analyses the social power and conflict between proletarians and capitalists. This explains why there is an unequal distribution of power and resources among the social classes. Marxism helps explain conflict and change and the change that comes through shining a new proletarian class or civil society (Marx, 1987; Wolf, 1999).

The current article looks at whether Marxism is still valid in industrial relations and how workers are exploited, mainly in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Scholars argue that under the influence of globalisation and neoliberalism, people are becoming more and more instrumental in adapting to the global production pressures (Harvey, 2007; Harvey, 2022). Another scholar, e.g., Reinert (2013), critically evaluated the capitalist mode of the production system, which intensified tensions between the poor and wealthy class, resulting in two types of people: the excessively rich and the abject poor (see also Ullah, 2022).

The capitalists are now much more greedy than ever before. At the same time, they are not concerned about their extreme exploitation (See Harvey, 2007; Ullah, 2021a). It seems that capitalism is just a way to fulfil their material aspirations (e.g., Harvey, 2022). Significant research evidence at various levels suggests that setting unrealistic goals, while seemingly utopian, can encourage people to make compromising choices in order to achieve their goals. As a result, in the case of industrial relations, the conflict continues to be severe, and the RMG industry in Bangladesh represents a horrific experience of exploitation in the modern century (Harvey, 2007; Siddiqi, 2019; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Ullah, 2021a; Ullah, 2022). Therefore, the next section will provide the theoretical reasoning derived from Marxism based on exploitation and surplus labour, the interpretation of other scholars of Marxism, and their counter-opinions in industrial relations theory.

Theoretical interpretations of industrial relations theory and the doctrine of Marxism

As inspired by British Born Marxist writer David Harvey, in this article, particularly while constructing some theoretical debate on Bangladesh’s RMG workers’ exploitation, I wish to provide the basis for the argument of exploitation from Marxism. Thus, my position is clear as I do not see myself as Marxist as Marx said: “all I know is that I am not a Marxist” (Engels 1890, cited in Sayers, 2021, p. 379). In this article, my clear intention is to find the relationship between Marx’s interpretations of capitalism and how workers are powerless in the capitalist mode of production. Furthermore, the scholarly discourse remains to be seen whether, after more than a century and a half, Marxism could be understood with some of its arguments and theories about the exploitation of workers with the rise of world capitalism.

To understand the world trade system, I aim to incorporate some scholarly arguments in this article. For example, Harvey has perhaps closely observed the current global political-economic situation; his work can be used as an excellent reference source. When he portrays globalisation, capitalism, and workers’ exploitation, in his views, these are inevitable debates (e.g., Harvey, 2007; Harvey, 2022). Harvey recently published an article that aims to clarify how Marx attempted to restructure various pre-capitalist modes of production. He showed some different reflections and how the history of humanity has been exposed to the rise of capitalism in Marx’s interpretations (see Harvey, 2022). Here that legacy is seen as deeply problematic, where it forms a primary and perhaps indomitable barrier to the establishment of a rosy socialist future. Marx emphasises the centrality of isolation, emptiness, the loss of money, the sacrifice of all human potential to the God of money power, and the obscenity of capitalist developmentalism (see Harvey, 2022).

The simplest way to explain these two aspects of capitalism and globalisation, and to ‘merge’ them in one sense, is to suggest that the first is globalisation, the expansion of the capitalist mode of production, which has leveraged and strengthened capitalism in the world (Munck, 2010; Harvey, 2007; Harvey, 2022; Ullah, 2022). And the second is the power of capitalism

which has become much more influential than ever before, especially after the fall of communist rule in Eastern European countries in 1989 and the most significant dramatic change in the state policies of the former USSR (Russia) by demising communism through a revolution in 1991. The current communist states in the world are China, Cuba, Laos and Vietnam. These communist states often do not claim that they have achieved socialism or communism in their country but are building and working to establish socialism in their country. However, in the light of China's socio-economic reform that has been seen as the capitalist mode of production over the past four decades, in contrast to the state power controlled by one party, could we state that China is still in the doctrine of traditional communism, perhaps not (e.g., Sayers, 2021). Academically, in this article, I have to abstain from such debate about whether China still adheres to the idea of Communism or deviates from its core state political ideology. Instead, I try to understand how and why Marxism is still a valid theory in industrial relations for evaluating workers' exploitation globally, mainly in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

As Harvey recently discussed in his article about Marx's representation of the bourgeois utopian vision of what they were achieving and what they were destined to achieve, the second is a dramatic rendition of Marx's dystopian fiction of what the bourgeoisie was accomplishing (2007; 2022). So, here are two variables in his discourse: (a) the way the so-called reformists have seen this world has changed with the balance of capital distribution between the upper and lower-income groups, which has not happened, and (b) the bourgeoisie has failed to do its job, mainly in developing countries (e.g., Bangladesh). As a result, they create a hostile atmosphere between employers and employees as there is no ethical distribution of wealth (see also Gilbert, 2018; Ashwin, Kabeer & Schubler, 2020; Ullah, 2021b, Ullah, 2021c; Ullah, 2022). Also, many developing countries have agreed to provide cheap labour and non-unionised factories to attract foreign capital for FDI. As a result, in most informal economic sectors, mainly in the RMG sector of Bangladesh, the state government and local and foreign capitalists were equally responsible for the extreme exploitation of workers (see Siddiqi, 2019; Crinis, 2019; Ullah, 2021).

Furthermore, international scholars, e.g., Chhachhi (2014), precisely portrayed capitalism in Indian society from a more sociological perspective. Her portrayal is a harsh critique of India's new 'bourgeoisie'. Her research, however, revealed that the urban industrial workers who were in full-time employment now find themselves in precarious jobs after a decade of liberalisation of fairness and celebration of equality, which was even a false promise. She further stated that an unethical capitalist class has developed in the grip of vicious capitalism, demising workers' power significantly. Chhachhi's critical analysis of the Indian capitalist class is no different from that of the capitalist class in Bangladesh, which is rooted in the unethical business ideology and exploitation of workers (see also Harvey, 2007; Rahman, 2013; Ullah, 2021a, Ullah, 2021b).

Therefore, the question is whether scholars should consider Marxism with the current upheavals in the workplace worldwide, or more specifically in the RMG sector in Bangladesh? Before I try to find the connection between Marx's exploitation and surplus labour theory and the current working and workers' actual conditions in Bangladesh, it is crucial to know first, what is Marxism. To identify what is Marxism, while the question is simple, it lacks a straightforward answer. Scholars argue that Marxism has been developed over time and under each of the unique events in the world (see Marx, 1887; Engels, 1890; Hayman, 2008; Sayers, 2021). Marxism mainly represents a joint write up by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the "Communist Manifesto" first published in 1948. The "Communist Manifesto" was written for Communist League. Still, unfortunately, the small revolutionary groups could not see success in Europe, resulting in demising their activities as they were smashed. Marx and Engels were forced to flee from Germany to settle in England. Later, Marx devoted himself to more academic work than his political motivation. Scholars saw Marxism had become famous after Marx's death in 1883; it had spread and steadily grown (Sayers, 2021).

After Marx's death, his great friend and follower Engels continued to work on Marxism, and he took the initiative to establish the concept of Marxism in the world (see Engels, 1890). This process continued until he died in 1885. However, World War I was a turning point for the socialist movement that first came to Russia in 1917 through the Bolshevik Revolution. The Russian Revolution of 1917 comprised two revolutions. The first one was in 1917, which overthrew the imperial government in February. And the second of these, the Bolsheviks, came to power in October 1917 (see Trotsky, 2008; Wade, 2017; Fitzpatrick, 2017). However, research shows that the revolution began initially on 23 February 1917. But, originally, neither the movement was organised nor any existing party or political group recognised the potential of the movement, which later came under the structural process. Some workers in the Petrograd factory (e.g., the total number of workers was about 130,000) led the major campaign where women's participation was significant as they celebrated International Women's Day. The workers' strike spread, and students and the general public participated in the strike. Several elite regiments of the Imperial Guard revolted and increased their support for the protesters, which accelerated the growing progress of the revolution. Under Stalin's rule in Russia, despite the narrow orthodoxy, Marxism was still widespread (see Trotsky, 2008; Wade, 2017; Fitzpatrick, 2017).

Moreover, in the second wave of the communist movement, China, Korea, and Vietnam saw success. By 1959, Cuba and other Latin American countries had witnessed communist revolutions. Again, in this article, I have no intention of discussing the Russian Revolution of 1917 or evaluating whether there was intense domination of communism in the world or whether it could fight against capitalism or not. Still, academically, I would like to highlight some notable facts related to Marxism's ideas in evaluating the workers' power that can be assessed because the workers in the Russian revolution were the central players against the imperialist government (see Trotsky, 2008; Wade, 2017; Fitzpatrick, 2017).

Returning to the idea of Marxism, it is only thoughts of Marx that he understood from his experience and observation about many things in society from historical and worldly points of view (Marx, 1887). For example, the exploitation of the proletariat and the capitalist production system in his time was one of the significant works that he aimed to formulate under theoretical construction, but this is not all about Marxism (see Sayers, 2021; Harvey, 2022). However, we may argue that there is no significant labour movement in Europe, North America, Asia, or other countries; however, does this mean that Marxism does not exist in the world (see Abbot, 2006; Kaufman, 2004; Kaufman, 2010)? Perhaps, this would be a straightforward assessment of Marxism and an over-generalisation of Marx's interpretation of many essential things in the society that still exist, and we as citizens of the world often confront them (see Chidi & Okpala, 2012; Worsley, 2013). For example, Worsley (2013) has suggested that instead of treating Marxism as an abstract philosophy, we (scholars) should focus on applying Marxism and emphasise the connection between theoretical debate and political struggle in the real world.

Other international scholars, e.g., Abbot (2006), Kaufman (2004), and Kaufman (2010), asserted that Marxism, however, emerged unequivocally to establish a general theory of society and social change with a wide range of implications for the analysis of industrial relations within capitalist society, which did little or nothing. And it does not have any relationship with industrial relations theory. Interesting indeed! Again, scholars, e.g., Kaufman (2004), argues that for potential industrial relationship students, however, the concept of labour relations or industrial relations does not belong to Marxism (see Kaufmann, 2004). Theoretically, as the controversy grows, Ogunbameru (2004) offers an idea for such a debate. For example, Ogunbameru (2004) argues that the application of Marxist theory related to today's industrial relations, that later Marxist scholars did not look directly at the writings of Karl Marx.

Again, Kaufmann (2010) notes that the term industrial relations between 1870 and 1920 originated in a limited number of works in response to the global "labour problem" (or "social question") since industrial development and the emergence of industrial society. Research has shown that there was a conflict between capitalism and socialism, and both were revolutionised, while Marx observed all the changes very closely in his time (see Marx, 1887; Engels, 1890). Also, the labour reform project faced many obstacles and objections during that period. Therefore, the world was divided on the concept of orthodox classical and neoclassical economics.

Chidi and Okpala (2012) quote Hyman (1975), who defined industrial relations as "a study of the mechanisms of control over work relations and in these processes, the collective worker organisation and those involved in the work are of particular concern". Hyman, an orthodox Marxist, gave a firm idea of industrial relations theory. Heyman insisted that Dunlop and Flanders, among those who were hitherto giant industrial relations, theorists. However, Hyman (1975) thought that the issue of industrial relations theory specifically came from Dunlop (1958) and was somewhat limited, explicitly finding out the role of actors and actresses in the labour or employment control process (see also Jayeoba, Ayantunji & Sholesi, 2013).

Hyman's main point is that it is almost impossible to come up with a complete industrial relations theory at one time, but rather it develops through an ongoing process and maintains and stabilises performance in industrial control (Chidi & Okpala, 2012; Heyman, 1975; Kaufman, 2004; Gentz, 2004).

However, scholars like Kaufman (2004) emphasise how Marx's core institutions focus on industrial relations, free labour markets, and the factory system, where Kaufman finds key elements in Marx's analysis. Moreover, industrial capitalism was a keen observer; thus, he extensively discussed labour issues in trade unionism. However, Kaufman's point is that Marx's primary focus was on classifying the distinct gap between labour and capital. Although his ideology was based on trade unionism, scholars also point out that he did not show how trade unions can be a fruitful organisation in achieving ultimate success through a collective wage process: inequality and other labour problems.

But, a century earlier, Marx adequately portrayed trade unionism as the white dominant class's influence in England. Trade unionism was under severe threat as trade unions were close to the capitalists rather than uniting themselves with the proletarian power for social change in England. Marx, therefore, stated that the decision of the Hague Congress of the International Workingmen's Association (held from 2 September to 7, 1872) is very significant in this regard (Lozovsky, n.d). The Hague Congress, in Marx's proposal, adopted a resolution "on the political activity of the proletariat". In his explanation, it was clear that the working class can take action as a class only after organising its political party in opposition to all the old parties established by the proletariat in the struggle against the collective power of capitalists or merchants. Such organisation of the proletariat into a political party is necessary to ensure the victory of the social revolution and its ultimate goal-class extinction. Marx stated:

The consolidation of the workers' forces attained in the economic struggle will also have to serve as a lever in the hands of this class for the struggle against the political power of its exploiters. In view of the fact that the owners of the land and of capital always utilised their political privileges to guard and perpetuate their economic monopolies and to enslave labour, the conquest of political power comes to be the great task of the proletariat (cited in Lozovsky, n.d).

Marx emphasised the importance of trade unions as the organisational centre of the massive population of working people and fought against merging the party and trade unions. He believed that the political and economic organisations of the proletariat had the same goal (economic liberation of the proletariat). Still, each applied its specific methods to fight for this goal. The predominance of economics in such a way that, in the first instance, he gave higher priority to the political all-class work of trade unions than to personal, corporate jobs. Secondly, the proletariats' political party must have the goal of economic emancipation and then should have led trade union organisations themselves towards success (see also Rahman & Langford, 2012).

A century later, from Marx's portrayal of trade unions, while evaluating trade unions' performance, it is identified that their characteristics have not changed a lot (see Ashraf & Prentice, 2019; Ullah, 2022). On the contrary, association with bourgeois and employers and even with the right-wing political party mainly undermines working-class power and association with capitalists has worsened the situation for workers (see Munck, 2010; Rahman, 2011; Rahman & Langford, 2012). For example, in Bangladesh, from Rahman's scholarly work, it is well understood that trade unionism is not very popular, mainly failing to protect workers' safety and well-being (see Rahman, 2011). Other international scholars, such as Ashraf and Prentice (2017) and Ullah (2022), evaluated the condition of trade unionism in Bangladesh. Their scholarly work shows that trade unions in Bangladesh are fragmented and are not united and are often involved in power struggles between the sectoral and federation level trade unions (see Ashraf & Prentice, 2019; Khan, Braymer & Koch, 2020).

Moreover, their (trade union) political association with right-wing political parties has seriously collapsed their reputation among the workers. Scholars are concerned about whether they want to see any positive change in Bangladesh's most informal economic sector, including RMG, where workers are severely exploited (Khan, Braymer & Koch, 2020; Ullah, 2022). Furthermore, trade unionism has been discouraged in Bangladesh since the 1980s, when capitalists changed the global political and economic policy under the doctrines of neoliberalism and globalisation. So, here again, we find the relationship between globalisation and capitalism. These forces exploit workers worldwide by undermining trade unionism (see Harvey, 2007; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Crinis, 2019; Rahman & Yadlapalli, 2021; Ullah, 2022). It is a clear fact that Marx wanted to say that unless the trade unions unite and form a significant political party in which civil society is involved, the emancipation of the proletariat and the end of their exploitation will not take place.

Again, from a critical point of view, I wanted to look at the features of Marxism. Discussed in the Marxian literature, though not the most notable feature of Marxism, but central themes are:

- How capitalist society is widely divided into two classes,
- Those who have the power of capital, control of other social institutions,
- How the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat,
- Ideological domination, false consciousness and finally but not least,
- Revolution and communism.

At least three significant features are relevant to this current article from the above list. Most importantly, due to the rapid expansion of globalisation, the process of corporate capitalism has spread extensively since the 1980s. As a result, the problem deepens rather than solving the issue of income inequalities and poverty between developed and developing countries (see Stiglitz, 2007; Harvey, 2007; Harvey, 2022). For example, Stiglitz, 2007 asserted:

So this is really amazing, and it's not just one year as I say for three decades and it was managed in ways that brought literally hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in spite of the fact that there was growing inequality within China. So while, while there have been some impressive successes and those successes of China and India are due to globalisation, access to global markets, access to global knowledge, it has not played out in the way that the advocates had hoped, that there are growing inequalities, disparities between the richest and poorest countries and growing disparities within most of the countries in the world, both the developed and the less developed and in which globalisation plays an important role (Stiglitz, 2007, pp. 3-4).

The question is how the above quote relates to Marxism and industrial relations analysis. Well, class struggle is the dominant feature of Marxian discourse. However, in light of the current dilemmas in most developing countries (e.g., Harvey, 2007; Rahman, 2013; Siddiqi, 2019; Ashwin, Kabeer & Schubler, 2020; Ullah, 2022), due to uneven distribution of wealth, the conflict between employers/bourgeoisie and trade unions and workers are common. On the one hand, global capitalists, with the help of local capitalists (e.g., Bangladesh RMG employers/traders), pay the low wages (e.g., Ullah, 2020; Ullah, 2021a; Ullah, 2021b; Rahman & Yadlapalli, 2021), to RMG workers in Bangladesh. On the other hand, they often control trade unions and other institutions of society with their capital power (Rahman & Langford, 2012; Ullah, 2022). Notably, trade unionism has lost its vision and failed to connect civilians in the trade union movement to establish workers' rights in many countries, including Bangladesh. At the same time, globalisation has also undermined trade unionism globally (see Munck, 2010; Siddiqi, 2017).

Moreover, when trade unions become useless and cannot help workers get their rights in the workplace, RMG workers have no choice but to protest on the streets or call for factory lockouts or strikes (see Khan, Braymer & Koch, 2020). The protest often leads to deadly violence between state authorities (police) and factory owners and their private musclemen in Bangladesh. As a result, an antagonistic relationship develops between employers/factory owners and workers/employees (see Siddiqi, 2017). However, we can best portray Bangladesh RMG workers' socio-economic condition and their ongoing struggle from Marx's interpretations. In the capitalist mode of production, workers are virtually powerless, as Marx clearly said in his several write-ups. Marx discussed that workers do not get proper wages or even equal distribution of profit the business. However, workers are the main power to generate revenue for those merchants or capitalists. Therefore, Marx's analysis reveals how workers are exploited, and surplus labourers are created in a country like Bangladesh (see Marx, 1887; 2018; Engels, 1890).

However, Marx had adopted Ricardo's labour theory of value (that the price of a commodity is based on the amount of labour it takes to produce) (Marx, 1887). Still, he subscribed to a theory of the payment of wages for different reasons given by classical economists; hence, what Marx asserted is very important to understand. For example, according to Marx, it was not the population pressures that pushed wages to the level of livelihood but the existence of a large number of unemployed workers. Marx blamed the bourgeoisie and capitalists for creating unemployment in a specific society. He reinstigated Ricardo's belief that the exchange rate is determined by the labour hours required to make it.

Moreover, Marx thought that labour was merely a commodity in capitalism: a worker would be paid a living wage in exchange for work. Marx speculated, however, that the owner of the capital might force the worker to spend more time working than was necessary for the income of this livelihood and that the employer would thus demand the surplus product or surplus value, which is also evident in the contemporary world. Bangladesh is no exception to Marx's interpretations of labour exploitation and surplus labour theory (Marx, 1887; Engels, 1890).

Global capitalism severely controls world economic sectors, and most developing countries depend on capitalists or external economies. The central focus of capital expansion from these Western and European countries is the exploitation and leverage of capitalism (Rahman, 2013; Crinis, 2019; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Ullah, 2021a). For example, while Bangladesh's RMG workers are paid meagre wages for their factory work, global clothing and fashion brands still make extensive profits, a clear symbol of modern slavery and extreme exploitation, which is also a critical discourse of Marxism. As inspired by Marx, here is a clear example of exploitation illustrated by the Clean Clothes Campaign in the global supply chains. For example, if we break down the cost of a T-Shirt made for European consumers, Figures I and II show how a Bangladesh worker is exploited.

Countries like Bangladesh are popular places to source work because they are skilled in making garments and have cheap labour (Rahman & Yadlapalli, 2021). The legal minimum wage for garment workers in the country is BDTK 8,000 (£73.85) or (US\$92.83) per month. However, workers' representatives demand BDTK (£171.65)16,000 (US\$185.67) for a comfortable life in Bangladesh. With such low wages, workers are often forced to take large amounts of overtime to meet the company's schedule, an example of the surplus-value of labour in the Bangladeshi RMG sector. Still, a worker gets minimal benefit (Butler, 2019).

Several international media and organisations reports, e.g., the Clean Clothes Campaign, suggest that workers' wages do not reflect the actual payment of clothes they made and what consumers pay because of deep-core structural energy dynamics. Clean Clothes Campaign illustrated a well-known example is the national kit of the England football team at the 2018 World Cup, the logo of a famous sportswear brand and the most expensive England kit ever. When the company sold them to fans for about €80 - when Bangladeshi workers made

them, they earned less than € a day. This is the absolute example of exploitation that Marx focused on in his writing.

Therefore, if we consider industrial relations from the perspective of workers, employers, and society, we can see how the state, society and workers are affected due to the direct impact of capitalism. More specifically, if labour is the significant component of industrial relations, Marxism cannot be overthrown in the academic discourse, so Marxism is again valid in industrial relations (Marsden, 1993, Gall, 2012; Rannie, 2016).

Critical discussions

I have been inspired by Alamgir and Banerjee's work (2019), in which the authors have discussed the politics that have defined the market and has shown Bangladesh's nexus with the global production network. Furthermore, the authors' critical analysis of Bangladesh's state and civil society dynamics has inspired me to create further arguments in the current article. Specifically, Alamgir and Banerjee's research reveals the types of classification, alignment, and fragmentation created in workforce development in Bangladesh, particularly for the RMG sector. Therefore, I would like to portray the characteristics of the peculiar capitalist class that has been developed in Bangladesh with the blessings of globalisation.

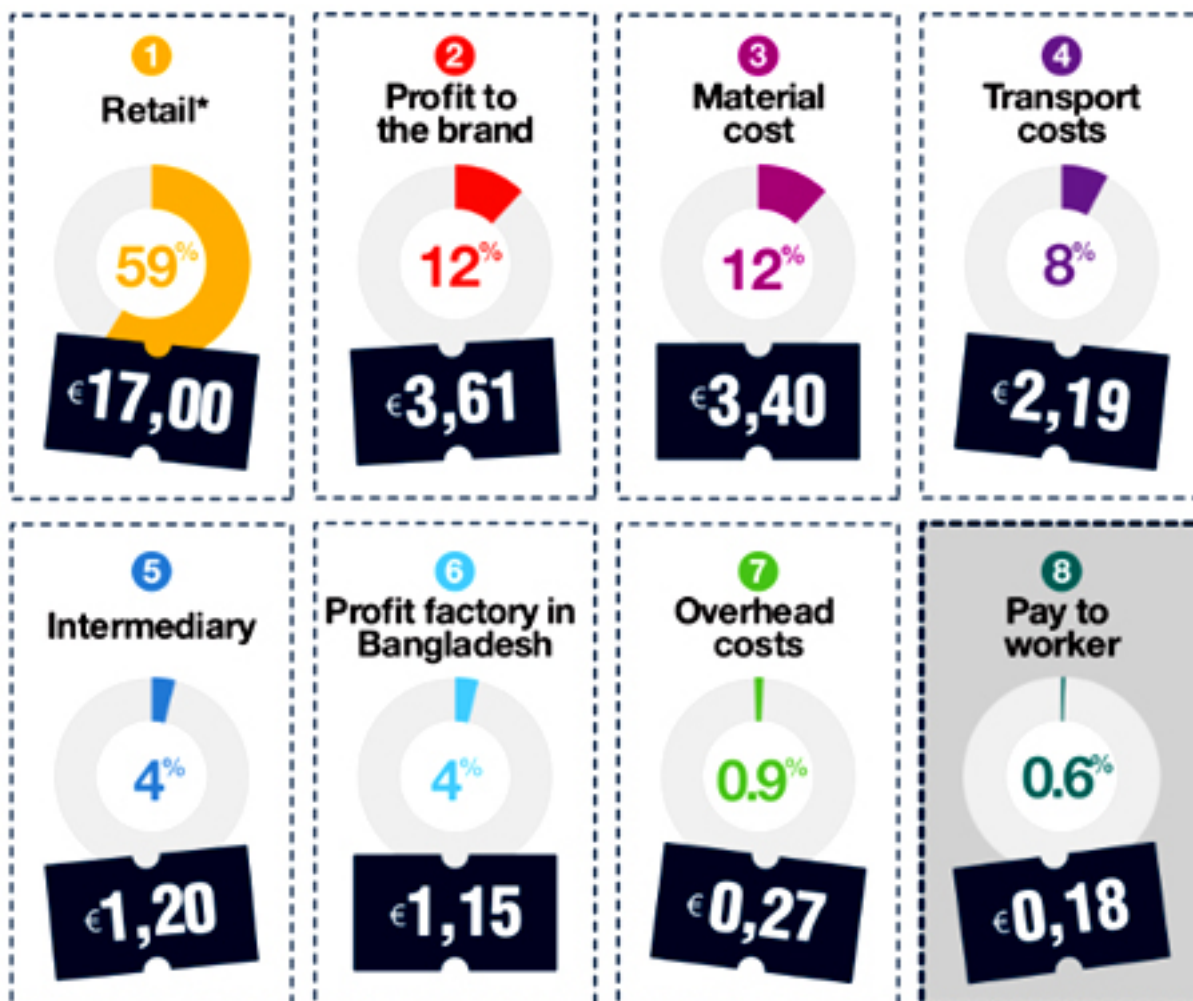
From my observations and from previous research experience in the light of Alamgir and Banerjee's research findings, it can be further said that economic relations between global capitalists and Bangladeshi capitalists are highly unsustainable for the overall social development of Bangladesh because these capitalists collectively exploit Bangladeshi RMG workers. As a result, although RMG workers may be able to survive by taking on low-paying RMG factory work, they continue to show low productivity. RMG workers' social and economic well-being remains under serious challenges in Bangladesh. At the same time, the state is much more reluctant to remedy the exploitation of workers. The current investigation through scholarly work suggests that developing countries like Bangladesh cultivate capitalism centrally and ensure the interests of the capitalists instead of the workers (see Gilbert, 2018; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Siddiqi, 2019; Rahman, 2019; Ashwin, Kabeer and Schuessler, 2020; Ullah, 2020a; Ullah, 2022).

The results of my new research on state capitalism in Bangladesh: As is well known, the governmental power of Bangladesh is in the hands of the national bourgeoisie, whose interests define the character and specific features of Bangladesh's state capitalism, its inconsistency and its conflict (see Ahmed, 2004; Muhammad, 2011). In fact, by definition, state capitalism in Bangladesh serves the interests of the nation's bourgeoisie. It also ensures that it is in the best interests of that particular group, to the extent that state capitalism in Bangladesh aims at overcoming economic backwardness and encourages independent economic and political development of the country. However, further arguments are established that it is a progressive phenomenon that responds to and serves the interests of crony capitalists rather than the mass people in Bangladesh. The state of Bangladesh has thus failed to ensure that it can protect the interests of the working classes but protects capitalists both at home and abroad (see Rahman, 2013; Gilbert, 2018; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Ullah, 2022).

Figure I: Breakdown of the costs of a T-Shirt made for the European consumer. Source: Clean Clothes Campaign (n.d.).



Figure II: Statistical breakdown of the costs of a T-Shirt made for the European consumer. *Includes all costs at a retail level, including staff, rent, store profit, VAT etc. Source: Clean Clothes Campaign (n.d.).



The industrial bourgeoisie of Bangladesh has a strong and significant social and political foundation for capitalist development (see Gilbert, 2018). Here I can find the relationship between my observation and other international scholars' propositions on the state characteristics that show capitalists are well protected but workers. For example, from Hayman's work, it can be illustrated that functionaries being an occupant of the state power have their political agenda, and they enlarge their network, influence and competence among their similar interested groups and organisations (2008). Such behaviour of the capitalist state is precarious, and it brings specific interest to the crony capitalists. For example, the capitalists influence major political parties as they often give an immense amount of donations to secure positions in the state's top office. In Bangladesh, capitalists are a symbol of inhumanity while exploiting workers and violating national labour law with no punishment (e.g., Sharma, 2015; Ullah, 2022). Along with the views of other scholars, I can explain that the state is the closest ally of those capitalists. Both capitalists and the Bangladesh governments work on the same plan where the workers' welfare and their future are not well secured (see also Siddiqi, 2019; Muhammad, 2011; Ullah, 2021a; Ullah, 2021b).

It is a Marxist or better approach from modernist-superstition that capitalism as a historical age will end when a new, advanced society is in sight and ready to implement a revolutionary cause for the betterment of humanity (see Streeck, 2014). So a conscious and developed civil class in Bangladesh is a cry now. First, however, a genuine and conscious civil class needs to be formed in Bangladesh to achieve a few common goals, mainly social justice and equality. And second, this mindful and unbiased civil class should put tremendous pressure on the government and capitalists to ensure civil rights, including the fundamental rights of workers and citizens of Bangladesh.

Not only in Bangladesh or other developing countries, but in the top economically stable countries, inequalities are at a high point (see Kochan et al., 2019). Historically, the lack of voice has led to a wave of union drives in many states, including the United States. For example, in the United States, the union density reached 35 per cent in 1945 and now stands at 11 per cent, which is shocking (Kochan et al., 2019). However, during neoliberal globalisation and a free-market economic system, the union collapsed dramatically, and inequality returned to the historic highs of the 1920s. Moreover, the type of work and the workforce have changed, and new voices have emerged in the workplace. Still, the question is, do workers now have adequate options for forming trade unions, and can they get a better working environment and wages in the United States, Bangladesh or elsewhere in the world?

On the other hand, since 1980, along with Bangladesh and the United States, other Western and European countries, including Australia, have been experiencing low trade union density. Research suggests that trade unions density has significantly declined in those countries because of the direct impact of globalisation (see OECD.Stat, n.d.). Scholars have identified the reasons for trade unions' low density in the current time. For example, most multinational and local companies from Western and European countries relocated to low regulated countries

like Bangladesh, where trade unionism has been undermined and discouraged (see Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Khan, Braymer & Koch, 2020; Parliament of Australia, n.d.).

At the same time, increasing the density of trade unions in Bangladesh is a significant challenge due to government and capitalist intervention in various ways, e.g., inadequate labour law provisions etc. (see Human Rights Watch, 2013; Afrin, 2014; Sharma, 2015). For example, Bangladesh's RMG sector has more than six million workers (Ullah, 2022). However, only 5 to 10 per cent are unionised, which is a significant obstacle to the trade union movement and the establishment of workers' rights in this sector (see Ashraf & Prentice, 2019; Ullah, 2021b; Ullah, 2022). Other scholars, such as Khan, Braymer and Koch (2020), have shown that only 2.25 per cent of Bangladesh's textile and garment sectors workers are unionised, which is the lowest in Asia.

As inspired by Marx, as he wrote in several of his write-ups on trade unionism, achieving ultimate success in a capitalist society is quite challenging. Therefore, trade unions need to be united, and they should raise their voices collectively with the support of citizens and by forming a political party. Marx clearly states that this organisation of the proletariat has become a class and, as a result, is becoming a political party; the workers are constantly being disrupted by competition among themselves. But if they rise again, they become more robust, firmer and mightier.

Thus, Bangladeshi trade unionists must unite and form an ideal united trade union party with the strength of the workers to succeed in the labour movement instead of establishing relations with capitalists and state governments and right-wing political parties. Moreover, in Bangladesh, trade unionism must be widespread among workers and other interested groups to succeed in the trade union movement (see Munck, 2010; Rahman & Langford, 2012; Ashraf & Prentice, 2019; Ullah, 2022).

Conclusions

Marxism has no straightforward answers. It is a complex area of study. However, Marx tried to establish his arguments through the lens of practical observation and identified crucial aspects that change human life and society in many ways. For example, he has aptly defined how an individual as a worker is exploited in the capitalist mode of the production process. The counterargument is also evident in scholarly work, as many believe that Marx was so interested in finding the economic relationship between workers and employers. And on this debate, for example, scholars argue that the Marxist view of using the state as an instrument of the rich and a device created at a particular time and still exploiting the poor is inaccurate. But, in this article, from my observation and other scholarly work, I have provided analysis more critically that the neoliberal state stands by the side of capitalists or bourgeoisies. However, my perception of Marxism is that it is still an ongoing process. Marxism can be defined in various political and ideological forms, mainly regarding industrial relations, trade unionism and the current industrial conflict, especially when describing its effectiveness in the Bangladesh RMG sector.

Moreover, my aim in this article was to evaluate whether there is a connection between Marxism and industrial relations theory. My brief understanding is Marxism has many branches. Yet, I suggest that when I consider Marx's theory of exploitation, it comes mainly from two variables, (a) low wages for workers and (b) surplus-labour, which comes from the pressure of capitalists or factory owners (employers). Therefore, these profoundly affect the relationship between workers and employers, affecting society, which means that Marxism is still valid. But, again, Marxism is not all about the Communist Manifesto. Most scholars often make a mistake by considering Marxism from Russia's, Eastern and Central Europe's communism fall and narrowing down the concept of actual Marxism in scholarly debate. With my profound realisation and long working experience in the Bangladesh RMG sector, I can state that as long as capitalism and exploitation continue (e.g., employers and workers' conflict continue), Marxism will remain valid in academic discourse and industrial relations theory.

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