Marxian Lens On AI: Navigating Labour, Class, And The Future Of Society

Adhithyan C[1], Varun Vinu[2], Allen George[3]

Abstract

This article is about how Karl Marx's Marxist theory ideas can be connected to the effect of AI on work, class and society. Marx argued that capitalization leads to the exploitation of workers and they feel disconnected from their work.AI especially though automation, can make this worse by taking away jobs increasing inequality and making the gap between the rich and poor Nowadays AI reduces human labour in many fields by performing tasks that were done by the people. Here is where Karl Marx, Marxist theory became relevant, he explained how capitalism exploits the workers and how it creates inequality between classes. AI is gradually taking away the existing job opportunities and at the same time it also brings new job opportunities to the world. The new job opportunities introduced by the AI includes machine learning, robotics maintenance etc. All of these jobs require advanced learning and training .Lower class people can't afford it and this will intensify class struggle and create economic disparity. By these concepts, we can better address the challenges and opportunities presented by the AI era.

Keywords : Economic disparity, Exploitation, Automation, Inequality ,Class struggle

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most transformative forces of the twenty-first century. Its applications are reshaping industries, governance, education, and even daily life, promising innovation and efficiency on an unprecedented scale. Yet, alongside these opportunities, AI has introduced new tensions and inequalities, particularly concerning the organisation of labour and the structure of society. While some view AI as a tool for human advancement, others see it as a mechanism that deepens economic divides and strengthens existing hierarchies. Understanding this dual character of AI requires not only a technical perspective but also a critical social lens.

Karl Marx's theory of capitalism provides one of the most useful frameworks for analysing this phenomenon. Marx argued that technological development under capitalism is never neutral. Instead, it reflects the interests of those who control the means of production, typically the capitalist class. As technologies evolve, they are harnessed primarily to increase profit, discipline labour, and consolidate economic power. Workers, meanwhile, often face displacement, alienation, and greater insecurity. Marx's insights, although articulated in the nineteenth century, remain strikingly relevant to the digital era, where AI functions as both a driver of productivity and an amplifier of inequality.

The introduction of AI into workplaces has already begun to displace traditional forms of employment, from manufacturing and clerical roles to increasingly complex professional tasks. Simultaneously, new employment opportunities in fields such as robotics, data science, and machine learning demand resources and education that are unevenly distributed across social classes. This creates a widening gap between those who can adapt and thrive in an AI-driven economy and those who cannot. The global scale of AI also introduces additional concerns, as powerful corporations and wealthy nations dominate technological infrastructure while marginalized communities risk being excluded from its benefits.

A Marxian perspective is particularly useful here because it highlights the contradictions inherent in this process. AI has the capacity to reduce human drudgery, shorten working hours, and create the conditions for a more fulfilling social life. Yet, within the framework of capitalism, it often becomes a tool for greater exploitation and inequality. The contradiction lies in the potential of AI to liberate versus its actual use as an instrument of control and profit accumulation. This tension raises important questions about the future of labour, class relations, and the direction of human progress in the age of AI.

This article examines the rise of AI through a Marxian lens, focusing on its impact on labour, class dynamics, and the organisation of society. The analysis will show how AI reflects capitalist priorities, intensifies alienation, and reinforces inequality, while also revealing the possibilities it creates for alternative social arrangements. By situating AI within Marx's critique of capitalism, it becomes possible to see both the dangers of technological exploitation and the potential for a more equitable and collective future.

Methodology

This study uses Marx's ideas to look at how Artificial Intelligence is changing work, class, and society. It is based on reading and analyzing books, articles, and other writings instead of collecting new data. The research compares Marx's views on capitalism with today's use of AI, showing how automation and new jobs affect inequality.

Analysis

The integration of Artificial Intelligence into the global economy reflects the contradictions Marx identified in capitalist development. Far from existing in isolation, AI is shaped by the dynamics of capital and labour, and its effects cannot be separated from these broader social relations. While it offers unprecedented levels of efficiency and productivity, it simultaneously deepens the structural inequalities that Marx argued are inherent to capitalism. Examining AI through this lens reveals not only its technical capabilities but also its role in reshaping class structures, labour relations, and social life.

The displacement of labour is one of the most immediate consequences of AI. For centuries, automation has threatened certain categories of work, but AI extends this threat to occupations once considered immune. Algorithms now write reports, diagnose medical images, predict consumer behaviour, and even generate creative outputs. These developments reduce the need for human labour in many sectors. For capital, the advantage is clear: costs are cut, production becomes more efficient, and profits rise. For workers, however, the results are often devastating. Marx described capitalism as dependent on a "reserve army of labour," a pool of unemployed or underemployed individuals who could be drawn into production when needed and discarded when not. AI contributes to the growth of this reserve army by displacing workers across diverse fields, from blue-collar manufacturing to white-collar services. The existence of this surplus population places downward pressure on wages and weakens the bargaining power of those still employed.

Yet, AI does not simply eliminate jobs. It also creates new forms of employment, but these are unevenly distributed. Highly paid roles in machine learning, robotics, and data analysis are concentrated among individuals with advanced education and resources. Meanwhile, the majority of workers encounter AI in

ways that undermine rather than enhance their positions. Content moderation, data labelling, and platform-based gig work are examples of low-paid, precarious labour that exists in service to AI systems. The result is a polarisation of the workforce. A small minority enjoy the benefits of secure, well-compensated employment, while the majority face instability and downward mobility. This polarisation reflects Marx's account of the division of labour under capitalism, where the pursuit of profit fragments the working class and reinforces inequality.

This dynamic is closely tied to the Marxian concept of alienation. In the age of AI, many workers are further separated from meaningful control over their labour. Gig workers in particular experience this alienation acutely. Their work is managed by algorithms that track performance, assign tasks, and even determine pay, often with little transparency or accountability. This loss of agency reduces the worker to a mere appendage of the machine, echoing Marx's description of labour under industrial capitalism. Even in more conventional workplaces, AI is used to monitor keystrokes, emails, and productivity metrics, embedding surveillance into the daily routine of workers and exacerbating feelings of disempowerment.

AI also transforms social life outside the workplace. Recommendation algorithms on social media platforms shape patterns of communication, attention, and even political opinion. Human interaction becomes commodified as every click and view is converted into profit for corporations. This extends alienation into cultural and personal spheres, where individuals are increasingly distanced from genuine self-expression and collective participation. From a Marxian perspective, this reflects the commodification of human life itself, with AI serving as a mechanism to extract value from even the most intimate aspects of existence.

The concentration of power in the AI sector is another feature consistent with Marx's analysis of capitalism's tendency toward monopoly. Developing and deploying AI requires enormous resources: vast datasets, immense computational power, and highly skilled labour. These resources are controlled by a small number of corporations, including Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta. The result is a concentration of technological and economic power that allows these companies to dominate markets, set terms of access, and accumulate wealth on a massive scale. This monopolistic control creates barriers to entry for smaller competitors and consolidates the dominance of a few global actors.

This concentration has global dimensions. Many of the most advanced AI tools are developed in wealthy countries, while poorer nations remain consumers rather than producers of these technologies. Data generated by users around the world flows into the servers of corporations based primarily in the Global North, reinforcing patterns of dependency and inequality. This dynamic has been described as a form of digital colonialism, where the resources extracted are not raw materials but data, and where the value created benefits corporations rather than local communities. From a Marxian standpoint, this represents a new stage of capitalist accumulation, in which exploitation is extended through digital rather than material means.

Despite these negative outcomes, AI also contains within it possibilities for liberation. Marx's theory of capitalism emphasised its contradictions: the very forces of production that intensify exploitation also contain the potential to transform society. AI is capable of reducing the burden of repetitive labour, shortening the working day, and creating space for creativity, leisure, and education. If applied within a collective and equitable framework, AI could help address social needs, distribute resources more fairly, and improve the quality of life for all. The issue lies not in the technology itself but in the social relations that determine how it is used.

At present, these relations are governed by the logic of profit. Decisions about AI development and deployment are made with the interests of capital in mind, often with little consideration for workers or marginalised communities. However, alternative possibilities exist. Policies that democratise access to education and training, regulate monopolistic practices, and ensure fair distribution of technological gains

could reorient AI toward collective benefit. Worker cooperatives, public ownership of digital infrastructure, and international cooperation on ethical standards are among the measures that could help shift the balance. Marx's analysis reminds us that such change will not come automatically; it requires conscious struggle and organisation by those who are disadvantaged by the current system.

Ultimately, AI embodies the contradictions of capitalism in the twenty-first century. It demonstrates humanity's capacity for innovation while simultaneously exposing the exploitative structures that govern production. Through a Marxian lens, the rise of AI is not simply a technological revolution but a moment that intensifies the struggle between capital and labour, between private accumulation and collective progress. The direction it takes will depend on how societies choose to organise production and distribute its benefits.

Conclusion

The rise of Artificial Intelligence marks a turning point in human history, reshaping labour, class relations, and the very structure of society. By examining these changes through a Marxian lens, we gain valuable insight into the contradictions and challenges of the AI era. Karl Marx emphasized that capitalism tends to exploit workers, alienate them from their labour, and create deep inequalities between social classes. The spread of AI and automation is intensifying these very concerns.

One of the most pressing issues is the displacement of human labour. Machines and algorithms are increasingly capable of performing tasks once carried out by workers in manufacturing, services, and even knowledge-based fields. For the capitalist class, this shift means greater efficiency and profit. For the working class, however, it often means unemployment, reduced job security, and a sense of disconnection from meaningful work. This mirrors Marx's prediction of how technology, when controlled by capital, serves the interests of the few while undermining the many.

At the same time, AI is creating new categories of employment, such as data analysis, machine learning engineering, and robotics maintenance. Yet, these opportunities are not equally accessible to all. They demand advanced education, technical training, and significant resources—requirements that many from lower socio-economic backgrounds cannot meet. This unequal access widens the gap between classes, reinforcing privilege for the wealthy and marginalization for the poor. In this way, AI becomes both a product and a driver of class inequality.

From a Marxist perspective, this dynamic can be seen as a continuation of the capitalist mode of production, where innovation is used not for collective progress but for maximizing profit. Workers become increasingly alienated as their role in production shrinks, and society witnesses the deepening of class struggle. The concentration of AI knowledge, infrastructure, and benefits in the hands of a few powerful corporations further reflects this imbalance, raising concerns about digital colonialism and monopoly capitalism.

However, Marxist theory also encourages us to see possibilities within contradictions. While AI poses threats of inequality and exploitation, it also offers opportunities for collective progress if guided by ethical and inclusive principles. For example, automation could reduce human drudgery, shorten working hours, and allow more time for creativity, education, and social engagement—if its benefits are shared fairly. Similarly, if education and skill training are made widely accessible, workers from all classes could participate in and benefit from the AI-driven economy.

The key challenge, therefore, lies in how society chooses to manage the AI revolution. Addressing this requires deliberate policies: democratizing access to technology, ensuring fair distribution of its gains, and protecting workers from exploitation. Marx's ideas remind us that technology is not neutral—it reflects the social and economic systems within which it develops. By applying a Marxian perspective, we can

better understand the risks of exploitation, alienation, and inequality, while also imagining alternative futures where AI serves humanity as a whole.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors' Biography

Adhithyan C – Undergraduate Student, Department of English Literature, Journalism and Communication, Marian College Kuttikkanam.

Varun Vinu – Undergraduate Student, Department of English Literature, Journalism and Communication, Marian College Kuttikkanam.

Allen George – Faculty Coordinator, Marian College Kuttikkanam.

References

1. Marx, K. (1976). *Capital: A critique of political economy, Volume I* (B. Fowkes, Trans.). Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1867)
2. Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2002). *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1848)
3. Braverman, H. (1998). *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*. Monthly Review Press.
4. Noble, D. F. (1984). *Forces of production: A social history of industrial automation*. Knopf.
5. Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. PublicAffairs.
6. Eubanks, V. (2018). *Automating inequality: How high-tech tools profile, police, and punish the poor*. St. Martin's Press.
7. Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. (2014). *The second machine age: Work, progress, and prosperity in a time of brilliant technologies*. W. W. Norton & Company.
8. Dyer-Witheford, N., Kjøsen, A. M., & Steinhoff, J. (2019). *Inhuman power: Artificial intelligence and the future of capitalism*. Pluto Press.