

Describe and Explore Marxism

Social inequality refers to any difference between groups or individuals in society which results in one having inferior life chances than the other. Marxists believe these inequalities are the result of the bourgeoisie owning all the power, and therefore the working class are being controlled. Karl Marx felt that the most important relationship between groups of people is economic. Therefore, those of the wealth also have the power to control society in their own interest. Many argue that this representation of inequality is true, and that Marxism can give a valid explanation as to why inequality exists.

The Communist Manifesto (1984), which was written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, attempts to explain the goals of communism, as well as the theory underlying this movement. It argues that exploitation of one class by another, are the motivating force behind historical developments (Marx, 1984). It also states that class relationships are defined by an era's means of production. However, eventually these relationships cease to be compatible with the developing forces of production. At this point, a revolution occurs, and a new class emerges as the ruling one. This process represents the "march of history" as driven by larger economic forces. The manifesto argues that capitalism is inherently unstable, and communists intend to promote this revolution. Marxism believes that the 'poor' are led into a false consciousness as they believe that the capitalists have their interests at heart and do not realise that they are being used, therefore showing how inequality is being achieved. It is argued that the wealth, if spread evenly, would be enough for everyone to have a very good standard of living. Marxists believe that the causes of inequality come from the structure of society. It also divides the working class, making them a weaker social and political force, thus showing inequality. Society is organised to benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor.

Marx came up with the term 'Alienation' and created four types. The first being Alienation of the worker from their product. By this he meant the design and development of a production rest not in the hands of a worker but within the decisions of the capitalists. A worker does not have control over what he or she intends to produce or the specifications of his or her product. The second being Alienation of the worker from the act of production, therefore meaning, the production of goods and services within a capitalist society is repetitive and mechanical that offers little to no psychological satisfaction to the worker. Labor seems coerced because a worker undertakes this as a means of survival. The third type is, Alienation of the worker from their species-essence, meaning the species-essence or "Gattungswesen" of an individual comprises all his or her innate potentials. Under a capitalist mode of production, an individual loses identity and the opportunity for self-development as he or she is forced to sell his or her labor-power as a market commodity. Finally, Alienation of the worker from other workers: The reduction of labor to a mere market commodity creates the so-called labor market in which a worker competes against another worker. Labor is traded in a competitive labor market instead of considering it as a constructive socioeconomic activity characterized by collective common effort. From the perspective of Karl Marx and within the context of capitalism, alienation is the surrender of control and the separation of an essential aspect of the self. A society based on a capitalist economic system promotes norms and standards that reduces an individual worker to a mere commodity or instrument of production who lacks control over his or her vocation.

Simply put, for Marx and his adherents, capitalism involves the objectification and commodification of the experiences and activities of workers.

Gramsci (1871) stated that in modern society it is imperative to have 'consent' to the hegemonic rule, this is fathered through ideologies promoted through education and media as well as other institutions. But this hegemony isn't always certain. This view argues that the proletariat can realise they are being exploited so the ruling class need to win them over by a degree. At times when the working class are stronger, the bourgeoisie need to appease them to prevent a revolution, e.g. after the war many reforms were passed to reward the working class, for example the NHS, welfare etc to prevent a revolution of the proletariat. Gramsci suggests that complete false class consciousness doesn't exist. His concept of hegemony, rule by winning consent, maintains that complete ideological dominance is achieved so the ruling class must grant concessions to the working class to convince them that they are working within their interests.

This essay is going to be focusing on the theory that the capitalist system is criminogenic, which simply means that by nature, capitalism causes crime. Marxists see crime in the capitalist system as 'a tool of the ruling class' where they can control the working class and crime is an unavoidable result because of the oppression the working class are subject to. In addition, sometimes the working class may feel frustrated that they are under the control of the bourgeoisie and act out in crimes such as violence and vandalism as a way of venting their anger at being alienated from society. However, they do state that crime is not just committed by the working class. They claim that capitalism creates the need to 'win at all costs' and encourages self-interest and greed. A study conducted by Chambliss (1976) argues that most law in the US and in the UK is property law. In his famous 1978 study of Seattle, he argued that members of the ruling class were part of a crime syndicate who used their wealth and influence to bribe officials, therefore avoiding punishment. He wrote that this included politicians and business owners. His argument was that the criminal justice system was not there to catch them; nominally universal laws were applied selectively to control the working class while protecting the rich. This viewpoint is how the law making widely supports the ruling class over the working class. Marxists claim that law enforcement is very selective and the repressive apparatus (the police, justice courts etc.) largely ignore crimes of the powerful in society and instead focus on criminalising the powerless groups such as the workers. They also state that laws are passed which clearly benefit the ruling classes. Snider (1993) argued that the capitalist system is reluctant to enforce laws which will harm the bourgeoisie, such as laws that will threaten profit-making of businesses.

Marxists claim that sometimes laws are passed that appear to benefit the working class. However, Pearce (1976) argues that they are to benefit the ruling classes. An example of this is health and safety laws in the workplace. While it may look as if they are trying to protect the well-being of the workers, it is believed that they create a sense of false consciousness within the working class. When in fact, the health and safety laws are there to ensure that the ruling class have enough workers to maintain profit. Carson (1971) found that these health and safety laws are rarely enforced, and that he discovered that of 200 firms surveyed, all had broken health and safety laws at least once, however only 1.5% had resulted in prosecution. Media and other social control agencies often use working class criminals as a diversion to claim they are the cause of crime, when it is the nature of capitalism which causes crime. Marxist viewpoints often however can generate much criticism for being too deterministic and assuming that

everyone who is in the working classes commits crime. Due to this, there is critique of the Marxist point which states that it largely ignores the relationship between crime and gender or crime and ethnicity and focuses too strongly on class. This is where Neo Marxism has developed the traditional Marxist theory.

Neo Marxism (also known as critical criminology) is a branch of Marxism which was established in the 1970s. They discuss more contemporary ideas of crime and their ideas, such as saying crime results out of political anger. They note that the traditional Marxist perspective is too deterministic and try to implement an element of free will in their theory. Through time Marxism has had many negative assessments with regards to it not looking at gender or race inequality, therefore Neo Marxist theory was put into place. Some neo-Marxists share Marx's analysis of capitalism but do not share his belief in a communist revolution. It is argued that the most influential neo-Marxist contributors are Taylor, Walton and Young, who wrote 'The New Criminology' in 1973. They agree with the traditional Marxists that capitalist society is based upon the inequality and conflicts between the working and ruling classes and that wealth is unevenly distributed. However, they disagreed with the traditional Marxists because they felt that crimes often have a conscious political motive behind them, and people are committing crime because of their dissatisfaction of the capitalist inequality. Taylor, Walton and Young (1973) created a new model of crime, called 'Fully Social Theory of Deviance'. They identified seven characteristics evident in this new model of crime, which are evident in Stuart Halls work.

Stuart Halls 'Policing the Crisis' (1970), is a study of the moral panic in the UK regarding 'mugging'. Mugging is a concept brought over by the US in the 1970s, and usually refers to being robbed by black men. This moral panic was built upon the collective fear of an 'enemy within'. Stuart Hall looked at the idea of the 'black mugger' as a scapegoat for other social ills of the period. The 1970's brought an economic decline, referred to as a 'crisis of capitalism'. This period therefore resulted in high unemployment and a fall in living standards. Stuart Halls point therefore, was that making the black mugger someone to fear, it solidified a fractured UK society around the State. However, it meant that society allowed the state to perform 'stop and search' on black youths, which then resulting in labelling. Due to the labelling, it led to a process of deviancy amplification. Howard Becker (1963) made a key statement on labelling theory,

"Deviancy is not a quality of the act a person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. Deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label."

Becker therefore means, what makes something deviant is not what is done, but how people react to what is done. The only thing that deviant acts have in common is that they are labelled "deviant" by others. Becker is not interested in what causes people to behave in a deviant way. Instead he is interested in why people choose to label their behaviour as deviant and what effect the label has (on the individual and for society). At the time of the London Riots in 2011, some commentators pointed out that then London mayor (Boris Johnson) and Prime Minister (David Cameron) had themselves been part of a "delinquent" "gang" at university, called the Bullingdon Club. Despite the notorious student group being associated with a wide range of illegal behaviour, this behaviour was not subject to the same social control and punishment that

it would have attracted had they been poor people rioting, rather than rich people "letting off steam".

Therefore, Hall's idea is more comprehensive, as it merges labelling, societal reaction, moral panics and deviancy amplification into a complete 'social theory of deviance'. Hall's perspective is classed as being neo Marxist as it examines the culture of law and order policies. A more contemporary example of this taking place would be the riots of 2011. The media sensationalised the riots to the point that much of society blamed all youths for the violence. This could have been used as a way for the leaders in society to divert attention away from the economic problems at the time and use the youths as a scapegoat to focus anger and frustration at the youths who were rioting instead of the government.

Another example is Paul Gilroy's: 'There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack'. Gilroy rejected the view that Blacks' resorted to crime due to poor socialisation, he said it was a result of ethnic minorities defending themselves against an unjust society Gilroy saw the resultant riots in Toxteth and Southall in 1981 as political acts he riots did remove of the 'sus' laws brought in by 1970s 'muggings'. Gilroy also argued that crime amongst Black British ethnic groups was a legacy of the struggle against White dominance in former colonies such as Jamaica. When early migrants came to Britain, they faced discrimination and hostility, and drew upon the tradition of anticolonial struggle to develop cultures of resistance against White-dominated authorities and police forces. While Left Realists such as Lea and Young (1984) argued that one criminal act such as rioting could involve protest against marginalisation, but Paul Gilroy goes much further, seeing most crime by Black ethnic groups as essentially political and as part of the general resistance to White Rule

Brake (1974) did a study on Skinheads, who were working class. Skinheads could be identified as a separate group in 1968 because of their distinctive dress and appearance, the type of music which they liked and the tough, aggressive behaviour they displayed. The emergence of the skinhead style represented a counter-revolution. This revolution took place amongst the working-class youth of London and other cities. They therefore still wore clothes which resembled what they would have worn when they were at work. Brake discovered that working class people experience the same frustration at lack of opportunities and problems like not getting work. They vent this frustration through forming working class subcultures in order to feel good about themselves and is 'magical' as they are resisting the bourgeoisie in society. They create their own identity (such as Chavs or Goths) and invert society's morals as a way of showing their resentment. They develop their own way of speaking, their own type of music to listen to and a distinctive way of dressing to separate themselves from mainstream society. However, this soon ends, and people are 'captured' back into capitalism when they need material wealth to be able to live and soon the illusion comes to an end.

There has been a lot of criticism of Brake's theory, and it comes from the functionalists who claim that working-class subcultures do not hate capitalism but 'buy into it' to form their

identity; For example 'chavs' purchasing trainers and gold jewellery to fit in with their subculture. Functionalists believe Brake's theory is incorrect at assuming subcultures are formed to resist capitalism. While critical criminology does aim to explain every aspect of crime and is arguably successful at accounting for aspects of crime that the traditional Marxist perspective missed, it does have some weaknesses. Feminists often claim that the critical criminology theory is gender blind and fails to consider crime committed by females. In addition, left realists claim that neo-Marxism 'romanticises' working-class criminals and uses crime to explain their actions and blame crime on the structure of society rather than on the individual doing it for their own selfish gain. As Roger Hopkins Burke (2005) argues, critical criminology is too general to explain every crime efficiently and is incapable of tackling crime. Another thing to note is that Taylor et al have all changed their views on crime since 'the new criminology' has been published, which could show that the theory has no real merit on explaining or tackling crime.

As Marxists do not see the law as a reflection of a value consensus among society's members, functionalists naturally also have critiques of neo-Marxism. Stan Cohen accuses neo-Marxists of bias and claims they fixed evidence to 'prove' their theories. Functionalists also claim that a crime-free society would be dangerous as then the most minor crimes would be severely punished, so disagree with the idea behind the neo-Marxist perspective.

To conclude, both Marxism and Neo-Marxism have put forward ways in which crime can be explained. overall, they believe that crime is a result of people 'acting out' against capitalist societies and the inequality and unfairness which they experience. While these theories are useful at explaining certain types of crime (such as burglary and fraud) the Marxist theories focus too much on social class's effect on crime but fail to explain gender and ethnic factors which could influence crime. They can often be accused (in the case of traditional Marxism) of being too deterministic and romanticising working-class crime and seeing them as 'Robin Hoods' who steal from the rich in society to help the working classes.

Max Weber does not include the unemployed or the elderly; he did however help considerably towards the new scales of class allowing for the working class to better themselves. Weber believes that as lower class has no identity with the middle class they will not come together for revolt, he was blinded to the fact that society is human and our first instinct is to survive, and if that means a coming together of different classes for a common cause, they would.