

Social Theories :Capitalism, Functionalism and the Conflict Theory

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SJS14070 Assignment 2

What is a social theory?

Social Theory can be defined as the study of scientific ways of thinking about social life. It encompasses ideas about how society can change and develop, and methods of explaining social behaviour. About power and social structure, class and ethnicity, modernity and 'civilization', revolutions and eutopias and other concepts and problems in social life' Harrington (2002)



(Social Theory, 2018)

What is the Conflict theory?



(Marx conflict theory, 2017)

- ‘The idea that it is conflict rather than consensus that underpins social order and change.’ Slattery (2003)
- ‘Conflict theory views social and economic institutions as tools of struggle between groups or classes, used to maintain inequality and the dominance of the ruling class’ Chapperlow (2019)
- ‘Social conflict theory is a macro-oriented paradigm in sociology that views society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and social change’ (Study.com, 2019)

Where did the conflict theory originate from?

Karl Marx - (1818 – 1883)

‘A hugely influential revolutionary thinker and philosopher, Marx did not live to see his ideas carried out in his own lifetime, but his writings formed the theoretical base for modern international communism.’ (BBC, 2014)

In the 19th century a time defined by radical inequality and rapid technological, social and political change in Europe. Marx was concerned with one question. What does it mean to be free? Starting from this question Marx developed an entire theory of history and in doing so he laid the foundations for the paradigm of Conflict theory. Video Karl Marx and conflict theory (2017)

This lead to the questions on power and control in society and how these can lead to change.

‘It might not surprise you to hear that even theoreticians differ in how they view conflict’ Bartos and Wehr (2002) This would be due to each theoreticians own theories and belief's.

The social inequality example: Class

- **Capitalists**
- **Wealth**
- **Low labour outputs**
- **Has majority of control**

Bourgeoisie

However according to Tittenburn (2013), Dahrendorf believed Marx considered class too narrowly and not allowing for modern day social structure, such as middle Class workers.

Conflict

Marx believed this inequality should be eliminated.

Ultimately those appressed by class conflicts would push for change resulting in a societal shift of class barriers

- **Socially constricted**
- **Working Class**
- **Low income**
- **High Labour outputs**
- **Little or no control**

Proletariat

Several other theorists like Ludwig Gumpowicz and Max weber expanded on the conflict theory with different variations and factors which effect the theory.

Those factors can be groups such as race, age or gender

Functionalism and Conflict Theory

CONFLICT THEORY

FUNCTIONALISM

Theory that states all aspects of a society serve a function and are necessary for the survival of that society

States that all elements of the society are interdependent and they serve a function for the overall stability of the society

Pioneer is Emile Durkheim

CONFLICT THEORY

Theory that states there is a perpetual class conflict in the society due to the unequal distribution of resources

Focuses on the concept of social inequality in the division of resources and therefore, the conflicts that exist between classes, which will eventually trigger social change

Pioneer is Karl Marx

General Diagram of Structural-Functionalist (fcragun,2018)

Conflict theory today

- 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.' (Marx and Engels, 1848)
- **Is this still relevant today?**

Conflict theory in Britain today



(Brexit puzzle, 2019)

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