

Describe and Explore Marxism - SJSI4017

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 suggests that class relationships are defined by an era's means of production. However, eventually these relationships fail to be compatible with the developing forces of production. Due to this, a revolution occurs, and therefore 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, (1844) came up with the term 'Alienation' and created four types. The evolution of capitalism proved to be inviting and it brought alienation on a scale previously unimaginable. The first being Alienation of the worker from their product. The worker feels separated from the object he creates because it is a possession that is owned and then disposed of by another, the capitalist. People from all societies use their creative talents to make objects which they use, trade or sell, however this becomes an alienated activity because 'the worker cannot use the things he/she produces which results in them disengaging in further productive activity. The worker's needs, no matter how great, do not give them permission to acquire the product that they have produced, as all their products belong to another. For example, workers produce

foods for the market when they are starved, they build houses which they will never live in, make cars they can never afford to purchase, make shoes they cannot afford to wear. By this he meant, that the design and the development of a production does not reside in the hands of a worker but within the decisions of the capitalists. Therefore, worker does not have control over what he or she intends to produce or the specifications the 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 very little, or no psychological satisfaction to the worker at all. Labor seems pressured, due to the worker undertaking 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 asset. 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 contends 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. For Marx and his adherents, capitalism involves the objectification and commodification of the experiences and activities of workers.

Gramsci (1921) 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 seen to be criminogenic, which simply means that by natural default, capitalism causes crime. Marxists see crime in the capitalist system as 'a tool of the ruling class' which simply means they can control the working class and crime is inevitable due to the oppression the working class are subjected to. As well as this it is thought that, the working class may feel frustrated and feel like 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. Yet, 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 greed and self-interest. A study conducted by Chambliss (1975) argued that most common law in both the UK and US is property law. In the famous 1978 study of Seattle, Chambliss argued that the members of the ruling class were part of a 'crime syndicate' who expose their influence and wealth to bribe officials, therefore avoiding punishment. He stated that this included politicians and business owners. His argument was that the criminal justice system was not present to catch them; nominally universal laws were applied selectively to control the working class while protecting the rich. This viewpoint depicts how 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 and rich in society and therefore, mainly focus on criminalising the powerless groups such as the workers. They also state that laws are passed which clearly benefit the ruling classes. Snider (2000) 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 believe that often, when laws are passed, they may appear to benefit the working class. However, Pearce (1976) insist that the laws are to benefit the ruling classes. For example, health and safety laws in the workplace. While it seems as if the employers are trying to protect the well-being of their workers, it is believed that they inf act create a sense of false consciousness within the working class. When really, the health and safety laws are there to ensure that the ruling class have enough workers to maintain a profit. Carson (1971) found that health and safety laws are rarely enforced, and discovered that of 200 firms surveyed, all had broken health and safety laws at least once, however only 1.5% had resulted in punishment. Social control agencies like the media, often use working class criminals as a distraction to

claim they are the cause of crime, when in fact it is the nature of capitalism which causes crime. Marxist view points however, can often produce criticism for being too deterministic and assuming that everyone who is 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 much on class. This is where Neo Marxism has developed the traditional Marxist theory.

Neo Marxism, which is also known as critical criminology, is a development of traditional Marxism which was established in the 1970s. It discusses more contemporary ideas of crime and ideas, an example being that crime results due to political anger. They realise that the traditional Marxist perspective is too deterministic and therefore, try to incorporate 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 that capitalist society is based upon inequality and conflicts between the working and ruling classes. They also state that wealth is unevenly distributed. However, they disagreed with traditional Marxism views that regarded crime having a conscious political motive behind them, and people who commit crime are dissatisfied of capitalist inequality. Taylor et al (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' (1978), studied the moral panic in the UK with regards to 'mugging'. Mugging is a concept brought over by the US in the 1970s, and usually refers to being robbed by black men. The moral panic was built upon collective fear of an 'enemy within'. Stuart Hall contemplated at the idea that the 'black mugger' was just a scapegoat for other social ills of the period. The 1970's brought economic decline and is 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.”

This means that, what makes something deviant is not what act has been taken out, 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 stated that he is not interested in what causes people to behave in a deviant way, yet instead is interested in why people choose to label their behaviour as deviant and what effect the label has on society and the individual. The London Riots of 2011, saw that then London mayor Boris Johnson and Prime Minister David Cameron had exposed themselves as being 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 inclusive, 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. As stated before, and a more contemporary example would be the riots of 2011. Due to the media sensationalising the riots to such an extent, the general public blamed all youths for the violence. This may have been used as a way for the leaders in society to occupy the attention away from the economic problems which were happening at the time and use the youths as a scapegoat to focus anger and frustration at the riots instead of the government.

Another example would be Paul Gilroy's (1987), 'There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack'. Gilroy rejected the assumption that blacks resorted to crime because of poor socialisation. He stated that it was a result of ethnic minorities defending themselves against the unjust society. Gilroy argued that crime amongst black British ethnic groups was just 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 marginalisation, yet 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 are identifiable as a separate group in 1968 due to their distinctive dress and appearance, the type of music which they listened to and the aggressive and tough behaviour that they displayed. Skinhead style depicted a counter-revolution. This revolution took place amongst the working-class youth of London and other cities. For example, resembled what they would have worn when they were at work. Brake observed that working class people feel and experience the same frustration at the absence of opportunities and problems like not being able to find work. They therefore vent this frustration through forming working class subcultures in order to feel a sense of identity, therefore resisting the bourgeoisie in society. An example of subcultures could include Goths, Punks etc. They invert society's morals as a way of showing their resentment. The subculture therefore develops their own way of speaking, a different music taste as to 'normal' people e.g. The Punk rebellion was being played through the music of the Sex Pistols, with songs such as 'God Save the Queen' and 'Anarchy in the UK'. Subcultures also have 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 criticism of Brake's theory. Functionalists believe that working-class subcultures do not hate capitalism, however they 'buy into it' to form their identity; An example being 'chavs' purchasing branded trainers and jewellery in order to fit in with the subculture. Functionalists believe Brake's theory is incorrect at assuming subcultures are formed to combat capitalism. Although critical criminology does aim to explain aspects of crime and is arguably successful at representing aspects of crime that the traditional Marxist perspective missed, it does have its weaknesses. Feminists often claim that the critical criminology theory is 'gender blind' and therefore fails to consider crime committed by females. In addition to left realists have claimed that neo-Marxism 'romanticises' working-class criminals and then uses crime to explain their actions and blame it on the structure of society rather than on the individual doing it for their own gain. As Roger Hopkins Burke (2005) states, critical criminology is too general to explain every single crime efficiently and is incapable of tackling crime. Also, Taylor et al (1973) 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.

Overall, both Marxism and Neo-Marxism have relayed ways in which crime can be explained. They believe that crime is a result of people 'acting out' against capitalist societies and the inequality and unfairness which they experience. Even though these theories are useful at explaining certain types of crime (such as burglary and fraud), Marxist theories focus too much on social class's effect on crime but fail to explain gender and ethnic factors which could influence crime. Yet Neo-Marxism has helped this issue by developing a more contemporary theory, which looks at gender and ethnic factors.

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