

“A” Level Sociology

A Resource-Based Learning Approach

Deviance and Social Control

Unit M9: Orthodox Marxism

Introduction

As is becoming traditional in this series of "Crime and Deviance" Notes, it's useful to begin this examination of the way various **Marxist conflict theorists** have attempted to theorise the nature of crime and deviance by outlining some of the **main theoretical features of the perspective** involved.

Thus, these **Notes** are organised around **three main themes**:

1. An **outline of Marxist conflict theory** as a distinct sociological perspective.
2. A discussion of the way in which "**Orthodox**" or "**Traditional**" **Marxism** has **examined the nature of crime and deviance**.
3. Finally, an introduction to a more-**modern** form of **Marxist criminology**, that of the "**Radical Criminology**" perspective pioneered, in Britain, by the sociologists **Paul Taylor, Ian Walton and Jock Young**. A **further development** in Marxist thinking ("**New Left Realism**") will also be examined in detail.

Marxist Conflict Theory: The Theoretical Background.

Marxist Conflict theory originated through the work of Karl **Marx** (1818-1883) and can be initially classified as a "**Structuralist**" or "**macro-sociological**" form of analysis (always remembering that this **simple form of theoretical pigeon-holing** may obscure the fact that writers working within the perspective may hold very different views about the nature of the relationship between "**structure**" and "**action**").

As I've suggested above, "**Marxism**" - as a **School of Thought** - has a number of **variants** and has been developed / elaborated over the past 100 or so years in ways that make it difficult to adequately summarise here. However, what I intend to do is to **introduce** you to a number of **fundamental concepts** in this area of sociological thought, with the focus of attention initially being upon the way Marxists generally have theorised the nature of social existence. We can begin, therefore, by looking at the way Marxists understand the **nature of social relationships** within various societies.

Marxist forms of analysis tend to begin with the **assumption** that the most **fundamental** - and hence most significant - forms of **social relationship** are those which involve the **production of the basic means of people's existence**. this includes things like:

- Food.
- Clothing.
- Shelter.

In all societies, the provision of such things is a **fundamental social necessity** and it involves devising some means whereby such things are:

- Produced** by a population.
- Distributed** to people and
- Exchanged** in some way.

In addition, it is important to note that **the production, distribution and exchange** of such things as **food** and **shelter** is a **communal activity** - people have to **co-operate** in some way to produce these things. In order to **produce**, therefore, people are **"forced"** (willingly or unwillingly) to enter into a **variety of social relationships**.

Marx argued that, throughout human history, the way people "co-operated" - or organised themselves - to produce the **"means of their social existence"** (the kinds of things I've noted above) has been **different**. To understand this idea - and its significance - we need to understand the **basic mechanics** involved in the **social production of commodities** (a "commodity" is simply defined as something that can be produced - food, a chair, a car or whatever - distributed and exchanged).

Production of the means of social existence involves, for Marx, three basic things:

1. The Forces of Production: These "forces" involve such things as:

Land,
Raw materials,
Tools / Machines,
Knowledge (scientific / technical and the like),
People (or, more correctly, their labour).

In the above, all we are noting is that such things are **necessary** - at various times in the social development of any society - if commodities are to be produced. As I've suggested, **different societies at different times** in their historical development involve some or all of the above as part of the general production process.

For **example**, in **Britain in the Middle Ages**, the **forces of production** would have involved:

Land - since this was basically an agricultural society.
Raw materials - basically anything that could be grown...
Tools - but not machines, as such.
Knowledge - but not particularly "scientific" as we might understand the term.
People - the "labour power" of peasants, for example, working on the land.

2. The Relations of Production:

As I've noted, people cannot produce anything without entering into various **social relationships** and this idea simply encompasses the different kinds of social relationships into which people have to enter at various times in order to produce commodities.

This involves both individual / personal relationships (for example, in the Middle Ages the main productive relationship was between a Noble / Lord who "owned" land and the peasant / serf who worked on the land. In our (Capitalist) society, the main productive relationship is between an employer and an employee) and, most importantly, group relationships.

In **Capitalist societies** such as our own, it's possible to identify different broad social groupings - groups of people who share a basically-similar position in the production process. Marx called these groups "social classes" and we will look at their theoretical significance in more detail in a moment.

3. The Means of Production:

The third, very significant element, relates to **those parts of the Forces of production** that can be **legally owned** - for example, in **Capitalist** societies, **land raw materials** and, in some cases, **Knowledge**, but **not** such things as "**people**".

According to Marx, **different historical periods** have **different dominant means of production**:

In **Feudal society**, **land** was the most important means of production.

In **Capitalist society**, land is still significant, but the most important means of production are things like **factories**, **machines** and so forth.

A couple of points are important to note:

1. Some sociologists have started to argue that, in **post-modern society**, **knowledge** becomes the **most important means of production**.
2. **Legal ownership** of the means of production is going to make you a very **powerful** individual / social group.
3. Only in **slave societies** are **workers** part of the means of production (in Capitalist society, for example, employees are not owned by their employers - all that the employer buys (through wages) is the ability to use an employee's labour (hence, their "**labour power**" - the ability to put someone to work)).

Marx argued that **your relationship to the means of production objectively determined** your **social class** and, if we accept this idea for a moment, it follows that he initially identified **two great classes in Capitalist society**:

1. The Bourgeoisie (Upper or Ruling class).

Those people (a minority) who **owned the means of production**.

2. The Proletariat (Lower or Working class).

Those people (the majority) who **did not own the means of production**.

For Marx, the concept of **social class** was of fundamental significance, precisely because it could be used to explain the basis of **social change** (in a way that contemporary theorists could not).

Marx argued that all societies involved **conflict** - sometimes open but more usually submerged beneath the surface of everyday life - that was based upon **fundamental inequalities** and **conflicts of interest**:

The **most important** of these **conflicts** was that **between social classes** - the **bourgeoisie** and the **proletariat** - and it was the constant **antagonism** between these two great classes that **created social change**.

The **basis** of this conflict lies in the fact that although wealth is created by the proletariat (the working class), it is appropriated (that is "taken away") **privately** - by the bourgeoisie - in the form of profits.

In this respect, Marx noted a **basic contradiction**, within Capitalist social systems, **between**:

1. The **forces of production** (the things that are required to produce commodities) and
2. The **relations of production** (in basic terms, who benefits the most from these arrangements).

Thus, although the **forces of production** involve, as I've noted, **co-operation** (that is, they are fundamentally social in nature), in **Capitalist** societies **the relations of production** have a **private, individualistic, nature**. Although people necessarily co-operate to produce things (commodities from which everyone should, ideally benefit), **one class effectively exploits another** by their ability to accumulate profits in private hands.

However, if, as I've suggested, the relationship between social classes is:

Unequal,
Exploitative,
Founded on a "conflict of interest",

why do the exploited put-up with this situation?

More importantly perhaps, why does society not dissolve into a perpetual civil war - a conflict between the rich and the poor, the exploited and the exploiters?

Marx argued that this was indeed a **fundamental problem for the bourgeoisie** in any Capitalist society - and they **resolve** it through somehow making the proletariat believe that the economic system is based upon freedom, fairness and equality. This is where the concepts of both "**power**" and "**ideology**" come into the equation - and we will look at these ideas in greater detail in a moment. Fundamentally, therefore:

Capitalism involves both shared endeavours and unequal rewards. It is the (**structural**) nature of this form of economic production that produces these things.

On one level, people in any society do share fundamental values, but Marx argued that this "consensus over basic values" (which Functionalists, for example, tend to take for granted) was by no means the whole story. In effect, Marx argued that the bourgeoisie are able to **use the power** that comes from **economic ownership** to "control" the way in which people think about and see the nature of the social world.

Rather than "**value consensus**" being a necessary, fundamental, condition for human society, Marx saw this **consensus** as being **manufactured** by the bourgeoisie (through the primary and secondary socialisation process, for example).

To close this opening section (?), therefore, we can look briefly at the way Marx argued that **economic ownership** produces **economic power** which in turn is translated into **political** and **ideological power**.

As we have seen, for Marx - and Marxists generally - **economic relationships** are seen to be the **most significant** in any society because they relate to the very means of social existence itself. However, it is evident that, in any society, there are **other types of social relationship**, namely **political** and **ideological** relationships. Marx argued that these two basic types of social relationships represented two parts of the overall nature of relationships within capitalist society:

1. **Economic relationships** - the "**infrastructure**" or "**economic base**" of society.
2. **Political / ideological relationships** - the "**superstructure**" of society.

Superstructural relationships, in effect, develop out of the nature of the way economic relationships are organised (it might help you to understand this idea by visualizing the superstructure of any society as a kind of dome that rests upon the ground (which represents the economic base)).

Although superstructural relationships are important, they ultimately rest upon the **economic base** of society - according to Marxists, these kinds of relationships are **dependent** upon - and **reflect** - the **nature of economic relationships** in society. Thus, **if economic relationships** are fundamentally **unequal**, then **political and ideological relationships** will both **reflect** - and help to **reinforce** - **inequality**. For example:

Political relationships:

Capital dominates labour in the workplace.
Requires certain types of law to cement this relationship in terms of contracts, property rights and so forth.

For Marxists, therefore, **those who dominate the economic sphere** in any society will **also dominate politically and ideologically** - and, in this respect, an important idea in relation to the study of **crime and deviance** is that **the ideology of the ruling class** is the **dominant ideology** in society.

To make this a little more clear, we can demonstrate this idea **schematically** in the following way:

An **economically powerful class** (the **bourgeoisie**) seeks to translate / **reproduce** its **economic power** across all **other institutions** in society. This ensures that:

1. Their economic interests dominate the economic interests of all other classes in society.
2. All other institutions help to **reproduce** the economic dominance (or "**hegemony**") of the bourgeoisie.

The **ideology of a ruling class** is the **dominant ideology** - there are others but economic power of bourgeoisie ensures they are:

Not heard.
Marginalized.
Disregarded.
Etc.

In terms of **crime**:

Laws are created by bourgeoisie (or their political representatives) to basically safeguard economic interests of bourgeoisie. For example:

Laws governing order.

Laws relating to private property / contracts etc.

Traditional Marxism

In a **similar way to Functionalist theory**, **Marxist conflict theorists** see:

1. **Institutions** as significant objects of study, in terms of why institutions are created by people, the kind of purpose each (inter-related) institution serves and so forth.
2. The **socialisation** process as significant for our understanding of both "society" and our general position within that society.
3. **Social structures** - not individual meanings - are the most significant object of study.

Unlike Functionalist theory, however, Marxist conflict theorists:

1. **Do not** see "society" as a "living thing" that exists over and above people. Marxists do not commit what is called the "**error of reification**", insofar as they recognise that "society" is the product of people's behaviour. If people create the social structures within which behaviour is ordered then, of course, they are perfectly capable of changing the social order...

2. **Do not** see the basis of **social order** as being "**shared values**" and basic **consensus** over agreed social goals / ends. On the contrary, they see "shared values" and "consensus" as being **mystifications** - a way of manufacturing and manipulating people's perception of the social world to suit the basic interests of a ruling class.

3. See society / social systems as being in a constant - inevitable - state of **conflict**. **Social order** exists **not** because it is:

a. The "natural" state of things or,

b. Because everyone is in basic agreement about how order should be maintained and so forth.

Order exists because **powerful social groups** (or **classes**) are able to **impose** a sense of order, permanence and stability upon all other classes in society.

As I have suggested, therefore, **power** is a very significant concept in Marxist theory and, as we have seen, power is ultimately seen to derive from economic ownership. By owning the "means of production":

- a. You exercise personal power over the lives of the people who work for you.
- b. You make profits which can be used to wield power and influence in a wider social setting.

In this respect, the possession of power gives you:

1. Economic power

Wealth,
Status.

2. Political power

Control over political institutions
(government, the State).

3. Ideological power

Control over the way people are able to visualise and interpret the social world. This is carried-out through various forms of **socialisation** through the mass **media**, the **workplace**, the **family**, the **education** system and so forth.

Because economic production is so fundamentally important in any society, it follows that all other institutions in society direct their efforts towards servicing this institution. In so doing, they are clearly **subordinate** to this institution and hence, those who **dominate the economic sphere** will also, by default almost, **dominate in all other spheres** of social life.

However, as I've noted, this is not a nice, easy, peaceful process whereby a ruling class simply transmits its interests to all other classes in society. On the contrary, subordinate classes also have interests which they attempt to pursue in many different ways. For example,

People try to get the best education they can.

People organize in the workplace to agitate for better working conditions, increased levels of pay and status and so forth.

In short, there is a **power struggle** in society predominantly in terms of those who own the means of production (the **bourgeoisie**) and those who do not (the **proletariat**), but also across many other areas of social life.

One of the main ideas that should be coming through about **Marxist perspectives** on the social world is that **social order** is **not permanent and unchanging**. On the contrary, although it may **appear** that way in our everyday lives, the reality beneath the appearance is that **people** have to **continually produce and reproduce** the social world by attempting to maintain and challenge existing forms of power relationships.

Thus, the ruling class, for example, must continually reproduce capitalist forms of economic production, since it is only by "delivering the economic goods" that their hegemony can be maintained. The working class, on the other hand, are not simply passive consumers of a "Capitalist dream" - they are continually organizing and agitating for a greater share of power - both economic and political.

In simple terms, the reason for the **appearance of social order** over time (even though greater or lesser conflicts may erupt from time to time) is that **one class** has fundamentally **greater levels of power** than other classes in society.

Society, in this sense, may have the **appearance of a biological organism** (where no conflict between the various parts exists), but for Marxists this is simply an **inaccurate analogy** - precisely because **conflict** is all around us in our everyday lives.

Thus, whilst **Functionalist theory** tends to be both **politically** and **scientifically conservative** (it is difficult to see how things change since, according to Functionalist theory, the present state of political / economic affairs must be the best possible precisely because if an institution exists it must, by definition, be functionally necessary), **Marxist conflict theory** is **revolutionary**. This is not only because, as Marx made very clear, the historical triumph of communism as the only free, fair and ultimately rational way of organizing social systems. It is also because it sees the (capitalist) social world as inherently based upon conflict and power struggles.

In the above, we can start to see the likely Marxist view about the nature of crime and deviance in capitalist society.

Question:

**How do you think a Marxist might approach the study of crime?
(Think about how laws are created and by whom).**

Orthodox Marxism and Crime

In order to understand the Marxist approach to the study of crime, we have to initially understand something about the **theoretical background** to this approach.

For orthodox Marxists, therefore, a number of ideas are evident:

Firstly, as we have seen, there is **no form of human behaviour that is inherently deviant**. As Hagan ("The Disreputable Pleasures"), for example, makes clear, conceptions of crime are clearly based upon **subjective interpretations** as to how we **react** to various forms of behaviour.

Subjective reactions are, however, only a **starting point** since it is evident that in order to proscribe any form of behaviour by making it illegal, for example, a **decision** has to be made by someone or some **group**. In short, "**laws**" - however self-evident and "right" people may think them to be - are the **product of conscious decisions**...

Secondly, therefore, orthodox Marxists tend to begin their analysis from a position of wanting to know **how laws are created** - **who**, for example, is **included** in the **decision-making process** and **who**, of course, is **excluded**.

In relatively **abstract terms**, people who have **little power** in society (the vast **majority**) have **little or no actual say in the law creation process**. People who occupy **positions of power**, however, clearly do have an input into the **decision-making process**. If we follow the line of reasoning developed earlier, it should be evident that, for Marxists, the people with **real power** in our society are those who are **economically powerful** (first and foremost). These are the people who have the **most to lose** if **social order and stability are threatened** - and conversely, they have the **most to gain** from the establishment of **order and stability**.

In these terms, the orthodox Marxist view of crime and criminality tends to be one in which the **economically powerful make laws** that (primarily) further **their political / economic interests**. In relation to legal developments, therefore, the main question to ask is not simply "who benefits from the introduction of laws" (since most clearly benefit from a law that proscribes the killing of another person) but rather "**who benefits the most?**"...

Thus, **underlying the creation of laws** - and **legal systems to enforce laws** - is **power**; in particular, the ability to **institutionalise power** to the extent that it is seen as "**right and proper**" that certain laws should exist. To understand this idea, we need to look briefly at the way Marxists theorise the nature of the relationship between the "real" nature of Capitalist society and its appearance...

For Marxists, it is evident that **Capitalist** societies are **fundamentally unequal** in relation to access to and achievement of **social rewards** (health, wealth, power, status and so forth).

Those who are "well-rewarded" (by which is meant those who own and control the means of economic production) will, for various reasons, have more power. The "**problem**" for this social class, therefore, is basically two-fold:

1. How to maintain their privileged economic / political position.
2. How to prevent others taking it away...

The "**solution**" can be expressed in terms of two basic ideas:

1. Firstly, a ruling class needs to be able to maintain a general form of social order - to try, in effect, to maintain the status quo. Conflicts, where they necessarily occur, need to be limited in both their extent and participation (that is, conflict must not be allowed to interfere with the basic process of creating profits).
2. Secondly, the need to control the behaviour of people. This can be done in two basic ways:
 - a. By **force** (or the threat of force).
 - b. Through **socialisation**.

Force may be effective in the **short-term**, but it also tends to create **conflicts** (between those doing the enforcement and those who are subject to that force).

Socialisation, on the other hand, tends to be more effective in the **long-term** (since people incorporate the basic ideology of Capitalism into their personal value systems), but it also tends to involve giving concessions (in terms of such things as increased wages, better conditions of employment and so forth).

Question:

If you think about your behaviour within the classroom, for example, which is the most effective means of trying to get you to learn:

By forcing you or

By trying to convince you that it's in your own best interests to learn?

In the above respect, **legal systems** are seen to **develop out of inequalities of power**, which, in turn, are based upon **fundamental, structurally-derived, economic inequalities**.

Although the fact that legal systems - in Capitalist society - have **benefits across the class structure** is important, the reason for this is seen to be basically **ideological**; that is, it is far **easier** for a **ruling class** to consolidate its **hegemonic role** if the people who are ultimately **dominated believe** in the **ideology** of both **capitalism** and "**equality under the law**" - a basic "socialisation type" argument that sees the **ideological framework** underpinning the socialisation process as being that of a ruling class, rather than "society as a whole".

Ideologically, therefore, **laws** that relate to **social order** are based upon the idea that:

1. The capitalist production process **requires** some form of overall social stability (people cannot be allowed to arbitrarily kill each other and so forth).
2. There is a **need** to maintain orderly social relationships at the individual / social group level (for example, laws relating to contracts).
3. People **must** be legally able to own private property and there must be laws to prevent these rights being infringed (there would, for example, be little point in creating wealth if someone could arbitrarily take it away from you...).

In terms of **social control**:

In an unequal society, those who "have" need to prevent those who "have not" taking too great a share of life's rewards.

Inequality has, therefore, to be **rationalized ideologically** and deviant behaviour that threatens the status quo must be quashed.

Political ideas that threaten the interests of a ruling class must be both ridiculed and marginalized (that is, seen to be the property of "cranks" or "extremists").

Thus, in the above terms, whilst the **potential for conflict** is inherent in the nature of the social relationships that characterize Capitalist society, the powerful have to devise ways of limiting and regulating these conflicts.

We can **sum-up** the above as it relates to crime and deviance is the following way:

1. **Law** in Capitalist society **reflects** the **interests** of a **ruling class**, mainly because this is the most powerful class in this type of society.

However, to be **effective** (people must be encouraged to respect the law and so forth), laws must **appeal** to as **broad a range of people** as possible. If people feel that they are protected under the law, this creates a method of resolving conflicts. In addition, conflict between classes may produce laws which, whilst not directly of benefit to a ruling class do, in the long run, act as a "safety-valve" for the limiting of conflict.

Ideologically, whilst the ruling class are ultimately the major beneficiary of the laws they create, everyone gains something...

2. As Paul Q. **Hirst** argues, **social control** is maintained in Capitalist society through a **combination** of **ideology** (whereby people are socialized into an acceptance of basic values that are acceptable to ruling class interests) and **force** / the **threat of force** (whereby the police / army are able to intervene should conflict threaten to overwhelm social order).

3. Laws in capitalist society reflect both:

- a. **Class interests** (they ultimately exist to protect the powerful).
- b. **Structural imperatives** (the ability of a capitalist class to both maintain and reproduce capitalism over time requires certain forms of legal relationship - contract laws, laws relating to private property and so forth).

4. In terms of law enforcement:

- a. The activities of the powerless are carefully scrutinized, whilst the powerful enjoy more privacy...
- b. Certain types of criminal activity are more-likely to be enforced (highly visible forms of violent crime, rather than "invisible" economic crimes, for example).
- c. Different groups in society are treated with greater or lesser severity than others:

The young,
Blacks,
Working class,
"Respectable" upper and middle classes.

5. A major difference between Functionalist and Orthodox Marxist theories is that whilst the former view law as an extension of the "will of the people" (see Durkheim, for example), the latter view it as an attempt by the economically powerful to enforce their interests above those of all other classes.

Orthodox Marxism and Crime: Key Points**Key Sociologists:**

Karl Marx.

Paul Hirst "Marx and Engels on Law, crime and Morality" in "Critical Criminology" by I.Taylor, P.Walton and J.Young, 1975.

R.Quinney "Crime Control in Capitalist Society" (see above).

Key Concepts:

Ideology

Power

Economic ownership of means of production.

Key Ideas:**Social Order** is based on:

Ideological manipulation of the powerless by the powerful.

Rule of Law.

Force.

Social Control based on:

Socialisation - ideological manipulation (in terms of values, norms and so forth) that seeks to convince people that the interests of the bourgeoisie are really the interests of everyone in society.

Force - both through the use of the police as agents of social control and, ultimately, the armed forces.

Social Conformity:

The creation of ideological frameworks that convince people that such things as class struggle and class conflict are out-dated / out-moded concepts - that "society" is composed of individuals of differing abilities / aptitudes, all of whom have a part to play in the maintenance of a peaceful, ordered, society.

Economic power - from their economic ownership a ruling class is able to disseminate its interests and ideas throughout the class structure.

Non-Conformity:

Crime may be a response to structural pressures (poverty, unemployment, social deprivation, etc.). It may also be a rational response to being "blocked-off" from the possibility of attaining desired goals legitimately (note the similarity to Merton's concept of anomie argument. The major difference between the two is that whilst Merton sees the stress on material gain as a form of "undesirable social aberration", Marxists see greed as being built into the very fabric of Capitalism).

Political deviance may be an attempt to challenge bourgeois hegemony. That is, the socially-oppressed may "see through" the ideological distortions of capitalism and

consciously attempt to promote radical / revolutionary change. such deviance may range from membership of revolutionary political groups to "terrorism".

The Significance of Power:

Power is a crucial variable in this form of analysis - not just the power to force people to behave in particular ways, but also the power to make people believe that society is based upon consensus, equality, political democracy and so forth (ideological power).

Power ultimately rests upon the ownership of the means of production and is, therefore, theorised in structural terms. it is a person's position in relation to the means of production that determines whether or not he / she possesses power, rather than it being dependent upon individual attributes and so forth.

Possession of power is crucial because it enables the powerful to:

1. Carefully scrutinize the activities of the powerless.
2. Define certain forms of behaviour as criminal.
3. Target different social groups as "potentially criminal" (in effect. to create scapegoats (Blacks, Jews, young working-class males...) that deflect attention and criticism away from the crises created by the capitalist system.