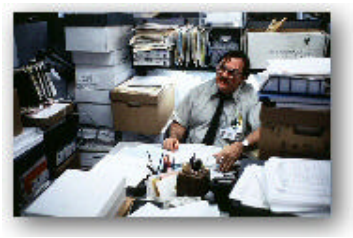
Marxism

Work

Economic behaviour is the most important activity in any society; all other forms of social activity (politics, family, culture...) cannot exist without people first having secured the means to their survival. How work is socially organised is the key to understanding how all other relationships are organised.



Competition

Competition is inevitable in Capitalist society and for Marxists, economic forms of competition and conflict are most significant (although competition occurs throughout society - between individuals, classes, genders, ethnicities...).

Capitalism

Owners want to keep as much of their profit as possible.

Non-owners want a larger slice of the economic pie. The working-class also want the desirable things society has to offer – it's in their interests, therefore, to demand more from employers.

Social Class

Involves grouping people in terms of their "relationship to the means of production". For Marxists, two basic classes exist in any Capitalist society:

Bourgeoisie
A ruling or upper class: Those who *own* the means of production.

Proletariat
A lower or working class: People who own nothing but their ability to work.

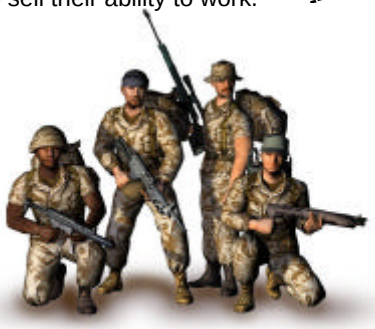
Conflict

The workplace is a key area of conflict in any society because of the way it is organised. In Capitalist societies the "*means of economic production*" (things like factories, machinery and land) are owned by one *class* (the *Bourgeoisie* or Ruling Class). The majority, on the other hand, own little or nothing and so are forced to sell their ability to work.

Class Conflict

The primary and most fundamental form of conflict in Capitalist society. Other forms (gender and ethnic, for example) are secondary forms that stem from class conflicts.
Example: Because competition is a fundamental principle conflicts occur over things like access to resources, power differences and the like.

Power



RSA's - as represented by men with very big guns...

Conflict is limited by the ability of a ruling class to impose their interests on other classes through *force* (what **Althusser** (1968) calls these "*Repressive State Apparatuses*" (RSAs) such as the police and armed forces) and *socialisation* (using "*Ideological State Apparatuses*" (ISAs) such as the media and the education system).

Problems

Determinism

Is work is the most important institution in society? While this may have been true in the past, some postmodern writers argue this is no longer the case. Consequently, they question the significance of social class as a source of identity.

Communism

Class conflict will only end once the economic system on which it's based (Capitalism) is replaced by a Communist form of society - a type of society where work is not organised around private profit. No advanced industrial societies have ever been economically, politically or ideologically organised around communist principles.

Conflict

Marxism over-emphasises the level of conflict in society and underplays the significance of non-economic types of conflict (gender or ethnic conflicts, for example).

How has the working-class changed over the past 100 years?