**SOC 3290 Deviance**

 **Overheads Lecture 15: Conflict Theory 2:**

Today we will cover 4 basic topics:

 (1) Karl Marx on deviance & social control;

 (2) Various applications of Marxist theory;

 (3) Marxist theory & social policy; &

 (4) Critiques of Marxist conflict theory.

 **Marxist Critical Thought: An Introduction:**

**\*** Karl Marx (1818-1883):

 - Experienced inequality/alienation in 1800's Germany

 - Tried to critically understand/alter oppressive, hierarchically

 imposed social structures

\* Intellectual Influences:

 (1) Georg Hegel (idealist):

 -Life=progressive, dialectical unfolding of Absolute Spirit

 -Driving force in history=synthetic resolution of contradictions

 (2) Ludwig Feuerbach (materialist):

 - Hegel’s ideas an illusion

 - Life=struggle for material existence

 - Thought proceeds from material being, not being from thought

\* Marx’s Synthesis (“dialectical materialism”):

 - History proceeds in dialectical movement

 - Contradictions/resolutions are material

 - Turns Hegel “on his head”

 - Central historical forces=social production of economic relations

 - Permeates all aspects of social life

\* Consequences of Marxist synthesis:

 - Practical political struggle against capitalist inequalities

 - Theoretical understanding

\* Marx’s two critical theses:

 (1) Capitalist theft of “unpaid labor” (“surplus value”)

 (2) The “fetishization of commodities”

\* Deviance and social control:

 - Focus on historical organization of material existence

 - Originally egalitarian (acephalous societies)

 - Technological development encourages inequality

 (e.g. emergence of exploitative “supervisors”)

 - Some eventually benefit more from social control

 - Aided by rise of centralized state authority

 - Inequality affects entire network of social relations

 (e.g. controllers vs. the controlled)

 - Ideologies justify/mitigate impact of inequalities

 - Acts which threaten dominant groups most strongly condemned

 - Reflected in laws in slave, feudal, and capitalist societies

\* Marx:

 -Did little formal writing in area of deviance/social control

 -Viewed these issues as inseparable from political economy

 - Suggests dealing with inequality first, then deviance.

 **Applications of Marxist Imagery:**

\* Later European theorists inspired by Marx:

 (1) Willem Bonger: Crime a result of:

 - lower class social conditions; and

 - cultural logic of capital (egoism and greed)

 (2) Rusche & Kircheimer:

- changes in labor markets reflected in severity of punishment and control

 - principle of “less eligibility”

 (3) E.B. Pashukanis:

 - terms of imprisonment in capitalist societies related to

 capitalist commodification of time.

\* American theorists inspired by Marx:

 (1) Richard Quinney:

 - individualistic myths prevent us confronting structural

 barriers encouraging crime

 (2) Steven Spitzer:

 - Potentially deviant “problem populations” arise through

 (i) contradictions in mode of production (surplus labor); and

 (ii) indirect contradictions produced by social control

 (expectations)

 - Identifies factors increasing likelihood of control of such

 populations

 (3) Raymond Michalowski:

 - Focuses on dynamic relations between;

 (i) mode of production;

 (ii) hierarchical workings of state control

 (iii) hegemonic cognitive, emotional and bodily ritual

 processes

 (e.g. Race=set of social and material relations over time)

\* Ultimately the Marxist approach:

 -Locates deviance/social control in recurrent historical

 struggles to control material existence

 - Solutions predicated on transforming society

 **Marxist Theory & Social Policy:**

\* Meaningful social change impossible without overthrow of capitalist economy & state / replacing with socialism:

 - power to unfairly criminalize will be eliminated

 - social inequality will be eliminated, thus less crime

 **Evaluation of Marxist Conflict Theory:**

\* Instrumentalist position of state (“conspiracy theory”) is untenable.

\*Replaced with structural position (including “class factions” & relative autonomy” of the state). Explains conflict within ruling class & occasional laws contrary to interests of capital.

\* Some laws serve everyone’s interests, not just capital (e.g. murder)

\* “Romanticizing” criminals as “political prisoners,” etc.

\* Lack of realism in social policy

\* Untestable, *ex post facto* explanation (“ideology”)

\* Yet, Marxist conflict theory has its positive points:

 - its focus on uses/misuses of legal power

 - stimulating research into political/business crime

 - focusing attention on ideology

 - stimulating additional critical theorizing