**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