

Marxism - key arguments, critique, features

[Politics](#), [Marxism](#)



Introduction

Marxism is based upon the works of philosopher Karl Marx, he didn't actually write extensively about crime but his ideas of inequalities of a capitalist system have been applied by criminologists to explain crime and societies responses to it. The reason Marxism is part of the Victimised Actor perspective is because crime is the result of oppression upon the working class by those in power, therefore making them victims and crime is a response to this victimisation.

Context- ideas of Marx and his main ideas around class conflict

The powerful produce goods and services we all consume and do so for profit, they then employ the less powerful who sell their labour for a wage and thus are exploited because they need money to buy the goods they have made. " This results in a conflict in society between capital and labour". The argument goes on to say that it is this fundamental unfairness that produces crime.

Introduce the main concepts/arguments and key thinkers you will discuss

The concepts I am going to discuss is how Marxism explains crime and criminal behaviour as a result of capitalist society and the interests it passes on. The key thinkers I am going to mention in this essay is Willem Bongers, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Capitalism as criminogenic

Willem Bonger argued that capitalism is criminogenic and created 6 propositions to support this, some of which are: the criminal law exists to protect the interests of the powerful, capitalism is held together by coercive exploitation rather than co-operative consensus. He also said that capitalism encourages greed and egoism, the pursuit of these pleasures lead both the powerful and powerless to turn to crime and that poverty prompts crime to the extent that it creates a desperate need for food and necessities. The emphasis on financial success and the individualised, selfish pursuit of pleasure produced a form of 'egoism' which increased criminal conduct.

Class conflict and struggles

Root cause of crime is the conflict created by the unequal distribution of wealth and power in society. "Victims of an unfair social and economic system may simply rationally choose offending behaviour as a way of coming to terms with a system that had failed to accommodate their interests". The interests of both classes are in opposition due to the unequal distribution of wealth and power only within the upper class and them using this power to infringe punishment upon the poor so they can maintain this position of power. They do this by punishing those who don't conform and defining acts of the working class as criminal. Therefore crime is a result of this demoralizing capitalist society, crime can be seen as a form of rebellion against this capitalist class. This was called Primitive Rebellion Thesis by Engles, for example stealing from the rich is an act of rebellion but in the most primitive form.

Law as a tool of oppression

According to Marxism, the law is used by the powerful as a tool of oppression against the powerless, this can be seen because 'hardly any act is punished if it does not injure the interests of the dominant class'. Therefore, the law in capitalist society punishes the poor whilst allowing the wealthy to act in selfish and greedy ways without fear of punishment. Similarly, Edwin Sutherland in the 1930s said that major corporations were involved in activities that were 'criminal' but avoided being defined as such because of their economic and political status. Chambliss is a key scholar in Marxism and said that the law is simply a tool used by the powerful to control the working class.

Explaining crime and criminal behaviour

Crime defined by capitalist class to protect their interests

Marxism says that it is the rich and powerful who create the laws to infringe upon the working class in order to maintain their wealth and power and keep those beneath them poor. 'hardly any act is punished if it does not injure the interests of the dominant class'. There is a socially uneven application of criminal labels, the working classes acts are defined as deviant, such as murder but when a large corporation is the cause of someone's death no criminal label is applied to them. This indicates how those in power defined crime in order to protect their interests and keep control over the less powerful.

Working classes are criminalised, but the real criminals are the capitalist, egotistic class

Those in power define the working classes actions as criminal in order to create this sense of false consciousness. The government present through the media their crime tackling actions and say they are doing everything to reduce crime yet ignore any criminal activity of the powerful. They tackle street crime and divert our attention to it so that we won't notice the criminal acts that they are committing right in front of our eyes, such as the many homeless people that die every winter because there is barely any help for them. Therefore by forcing us to focus on the acts of the working class that are defined as criminal such as street crime they are able to get away with many other harmful acts that aren't defined as criminal.

Strengths/weakness

Romanticises crime?

Crime is often committed by the poor against the poor so primitive rebellion thesis isn't really valid.

Taylor et al said that Willem Bongers work on Marxism is merely a "recitation of ' Marxist catechism' in an area which Marx left largely untouched"

What Is To Be Done About Law and Order says Marxism fails to offer any realistic solutions to crime other than to change the social order.

Crime is an actual real thing, not just a form of rebellion or a form of criminalisation by the capitalist class. The suggestion of this would be rejected by the public because murder, rape, domestic and child abuse have

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nothing really to do with those in power and offer no way to change this class conflict, therefore Marxism may not be the most adequate explanation for the causes of crime.