

Conflict theory

Government, Capitalism



Tasha Easton March 19, 2007 Essay #2 Soci 181 Conflict Theory With the end of World War II three perspectives on sociological theories emerged- structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. These three theories reflected " national cultural and political trends" in Northern America (Garner, 307). Structural functionalism created an ideology that society consisted of shared values and a system of social cohesion. In contrast of the functionalist theory; conflict theorist repudiated the notion that society was relatively harmonious. In fact, conflict theory by no means viewed society as a system; rather it was depicted as dichotomous groups inhabiting unequal power and unequal life chances. The conflict theory argues that the unequal distribution of wealth, power, status, and opportunity is the center feature of our society. The conflict theory was inspired by the works of the great historian, Karl Marx. Marx was the most influential socialist thinker from the 19th century. He was considered to be a great historian, philosopher, social scientist or revolutionary. Through Marx's works, such as *The Power Elite*, he proposes the theory of conflict within many aspects of society. One of these aspects are in our economy. The competitive nature in capitalism creates a gap between the haves and the have nots. People engage in conflict everyday to gain more power than others in society. Marx pays close attention to the conflicts between different social classes. As the industrial revolution moved forward in society, so did the widening gap between class structures. Karl Marx.. Marx was he saw conflicting interest of the owner class and the the great theorist and and political activist, has inspired many social theories, including the conflict theory. Marx argues that our capitalist driven society is in constant conflict due

to our competitive manner. Marx stresses the importance of structures within our society, and the role they play in the influences of individual behavior. The emergence of conflict theories in post war North America is portrayed by the works of C. Wright Mills. Mills was a sociology professor at Columbia University during an intense winter. The 1950's post Cold War was a period of ascetic political attitudes and a vastly enforced abiding environment. Despite the conditions, Mills opposed the "political timidity in his writing and teachings" (Garner, 322). Mills analyzed and attacked the tautology of sociologists, especially structural functionalists. He argued that terms such as 'functional imperatives' were concepts "that were drained of political meaning" (Garner, 322). Through the writings of Mills it shows his increasingly interest in public issues, political concerns, and people's everyday lives. In his book *The Power Elite* he identifies the three fold elite as the ruler of the United States. The three fold consists of the following: executives of large corporations, the executive branch of the federal government and the decision makers in the military industry. These institutions continuously hold the power; which consequently leave the public powerless with no means to voice concerns. Ideally these institutions are established to protect and assist the civilians of the United States. But what the conflict theorist believes is quite the opposite; we have been plagued by government corruption, an increase of demagogue, and false promises to the powerless public. Oppression, capitalism and are key concepts within the conflict theory. Karl Marx, a German philosopher and political activist. Economic exploitation leads directly to political oppression, as owners make use of their economic power to gain control of

the state and turn it into a servant of bourgeois economic interests. Police power, for instance, is used to enforce property rights and guarantee unfair contracts between capitalist and worker. Oppression also takes more subtle forms: religion serves capitalist interests by pacifying the population; intellectuals, paid directly or indirectly by capitalists, spend their careers justifying and rationalizing the existing social and economic arrangements.,

The theory is mostly applied to explain conflict between social classes, proletarian versus bourgeoisie; and in ideologies such as capitalism versus socialism. The theory attempts to refute functionalism, which considers that societies and organizations function so that each individual and group plays a specific role, like organs in the body. Competition. Competition over scarce resources (money, leisure, sexual partners, and so on) is at the heart of all social relationships. Competition rather than consensus is characteristic of human relationships.

00. Structural inequality. Inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained.

00. Revolution. Change occurs as a result of conflict between social class' competing interests rather than through adaptation. It is often abrupt and revolutionary rather than evolutionary. War. Even war is a unifier of the societies involved, as well as war may set an end to whole societies.