

Comparing societies with reference to social organisation



Discuss the similarities and differences between any TWO societies. In your answer, make reference to the role of cultures, norms, values and inequality in social organisation.

The twentieth century is packed full of History. The revolution that hit Russia in 1917 is arguably one of the most economic interpretations of History in the twentieth century. This led to one of the first and definitely the biggest Communist state the world has ever seen. Spanning over Seventy years the Russian revolution had a huge impact on world affairs. This essay will look in to the similarities and differences in the norms, values and inequalities of social stratification, between Communist Russia and modern day Capitalist Britain.

Everyone in Communist Russia was required to have jobs. Children, retired and disabled were the only exceptions. If you did not have a job in Communist Russia you would then be considered a parasite on the proletariat (Jary, D. Jary, J. 1995) and could end up in jail for such an offence. Income was not the same: However, your salary was determined by the nomenklatura government. If you were a factory worker you would be able to achieve a bonus, this was only if you did not question and were a great worker. With your salary you were unable to buy land. The land was and maybe still is owned by the state. (Oxley, P. 2001)

In modern day Capitalist Britain we have cultural diversity, and perceive things in an ethnocentric way. Not everyone in modern day Capitalist Britain is required to work. We have a very beneficial welfare state (Jary, D. Jary, D. 1995) which looks after every member of society not just the people who

cannot work. Also if Britons wanted to buy land they could do such a thing. Saunders (1990) sees the old class divisions based on work becoming less and less relevant. For Saunders, what you do with your money is more significant than how you get it. (Saunders, P. 1990 cited in Moore, S. 2001)

In Modern day Capitalist Britain over the past few years, people from all types of heritage have had greater access to higher education through a meritocratic society. Because of this, wealth distribution is altering and social mobility is occurring. The British class system is still very much in tact although in a more subconscious way. The British believe the playing field has levelled, but British still pigeon hole people dependent on class. (www.kwintessential.co.uk).

In Communist Russia, despite Marxist-Leninist notions of a classless society, there were a Capitalist ruling class, the nomenklatura, which consisted of party officials and key personnel in the government and other important sectors such as heavy industry. This class enjoyed privileges such as roomy apartments, country dachas, and access to special stores, schools, medical facilities, and recreational sites. The social status of members of the nomenklatura increased as they were promoted to higher positions in the party. (<http://www.country-data.com>)

Many people in modern day Capitalist Britain believe in the idea of equal educational opportunity. They believe that everybody within the society should attain an equal chance and their educational qualifications should be based on merit, on their ability and effort. If a person is “clever” and works

hard they should do well no matter what his/her social class or background may be. (Haralambos, M. 1996)

People knew little about the educational system in Communist Russia. After the coup that brought down the Soviet Empire, Russia released many of its secrets including those involving its education. Communist Russia did not let non-Communist teachers teach. They had a huge mission to ensure Communism was drilled in to them at a very early age. (Corin, C. 2002 and Fiehn, T. 2002)

After 1917, Russia based its entire school system on the teachings of German philosopher Karl Marx (1818 - 1883). Marxism states that "one should achieve freedom through giving up the self to benefit the state". This Marxist theory created an unpopular form of government from a democratic point of view; however, it made Communism an efficient educator. (<http://www.milford.k12.il.us>)

Marxists argue that the working class rarely challenge Capitalism. This is because the people who have the control on economy also control the family, education, media and religion - in fact all the cultural institutions that are responsible for socialising individuals. Neo Marxist Althusser (1971) argued that the function of those cultural institutions is to maintain and legitimate class inequality. (Althusser, L. 1971 cited in Moore, S etal 2001). This is very similar to modern day Capitalist Britain

The social structure of Communist Russia was characterized by self-perpetuation and limited mobility.

“ Access to higher education, a prerequisite to social advancement, was steadily constrained in the post-war decades. Moreover, the sluggish economy of that period reduced opportunities for social mobility, thus accentuating differences among social groups and further widening the gap between the nomenklatura and the rest of society”. (<http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-11420.html> 20/10/2010)

In modern day Capitalist Britain Social class is an ‘ umbrella’ category. Being of a different class may involve differences in culture, economic circumstances, educational status, dietary preferences, housing conditions, property

Ownership and power. There will always be ‘ fuzzy edges’ with people who could be counted in more than one category and people who have encountered social mobility. (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk>)

There are many differences in norms, values and the social structure in Communist Russia and modern day Capitalist Britain. Looking at the impact the nomenklatura government has had on Russia and how that stopped any sort of meritocracy, and in turn they had a sort of ascribed status. If the people of Communist Russia did not work they could have faced a prison sentence. Also it looks at how Karl Marx had a huge impact on Communist Russia. How much affect did it have, as there was no room for non - Communist teachers? This was there secondary socialisation and it moulded how the youth of Communist Russia were to think. However it can be seen that social mobility is occurring in modern day Capitalist Britain. The British believe that there is a level playing field however; subconsciously, Britons

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are still classed individuals. Modern day Britons also believe everyone has a right to equal education opportunities. Evidently, social mobility in modern day Capitalist Britain is occurring. Posing the question, ultimately is there a difference between Communism and Capitalism?