

Functionalism and social conflict theories

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THEORETICAL Introduction There is no widely accepted precise definition of the middle class, but it is generally considered to represent the middle 60% of the population in terms of income level.(Levine 2012) Thoma argues that middle class life is becoming less secure as measured by the Middle Class Security Index because in general they now have fewer assets, more debt and fewer savings than their predecessors.(Thoma 2007)

Functionalism and Social Conflict Theories

The functionalism theory views society as operating because of the interaction of each of its' parts to promote a stable society, whereas the social conflict theory looks at society as a conflict between the interests of the relatively few who own the means of production and the majority who must make their living by supplying labor to those owners. I would argue that the social conflict theory better explains the underlying causes of the problem of the increasing income gap between the top 20% earners and the 60% comprising the middle class because while there has not been a revolution to date by the 2 lower classes, there have been angry demonstrations which could well escalate. Therefore the notion promoted especially by the Republicans that lower taxes providing increased net income for the upper class will always cause them to invest in businesses which will grow and ultimately benefit lower classes in a trickle down effect is suspect, as the results of the Bush tax cuts have shown. The idea that society will automatically adjust itself to function in a stable, productive manner with little government regulation has shown to lack credibility.

Possible Solutions

I would argue that the social conflict theory best interprets the issue because it recognizes that current society is a dynamic evolving organism and must

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respond to change caused by globalization and advancing technology, unlike the functional theory which is more appropriate to a stable unchanging society isolated from contact with others like a primitive one. I do not advocate revolution by the proletariat to take over the means of production as Marx did. Instead I propose a proactive role by government in tempering demands by the upper class for ever more wealth and power through appropriate higher tax levels and fewer loopholes with greater targeted transfers to lower and middle classes to provide a safety net and stimulate economic growth. Some tax incentives may be necessary to meet economic objectives, but they should be of limited duration and not renewed unless their proven economic benefit overrides considerations of equity. In other words, since we are living in a dynamic changing society rather than a static stable one, there is a potential for social conflict which cannot be addressed by a functional theory that cannot adapt to changed circumstances. It is up to government and other national organizations to anticipate the potential for social conflict and advance policies to control such conflict in the interests of promoting social peace and economic development for the nation as a whole.

Factual and Statistical Claims

The Thoma article was written in 2007 before the crash in the fall of 2008. The subsequent severe recession the downturn in in housing values, foreclosures and higher unemployment has validated both the facts and objectivity of his analysis. In American ideology home ownership is the hallmark of membership in the middle class, and the record foreclosures due at least in part to predatory lending practices showed that mortgages provided to people who should not have gotten them As expected the <https://assignbuster.com/functionalism-and-social-conflict-theories/>

downturn hit the African American and Latino communities the hardest because home ownership was often their only asset.

Integration to other Reading

The Congressional Research Service report by showing the widening gap between upper and middle class real earnings, and the stagnation of middle class income helps to explain why economic security has deteriorated for middle class families.(Levine 2012).

References

- 1) Levine, Linda " The US Income Distribution and Mobility Trends and International Comparisons" Congressional Research Service November 29, 2012 retrieved from <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42400.pdf>.
- 2) Thoma, Mark " Economic Security for Middle Class Families " Economist's View November 28, 2009 retrieved from <http://economistsview.typepad.com/economistsview/2007/11/economic-securi..htm/>.