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| **TRADITIONAL MARXIST AND NEO-MARXIST THEORIES OF CRIME (RADICAL CRIMINOLOGY)** | |
| **Key assumptions:**   * **They largely reject official statistics on crime, making them part of their subject of study. They see them as a social construction (police bias etc) and so underestimate crime (especially middle class crime).** * **They believe that crime and deviance is structurally caused (focusing on the way society is organised, offenders social background, upbringing, social position) and socially constructed.** * **They link crime and deviance strongly to the concept of power and social control.**   **They favour qualitative secondary case studies.** | |
| TRADITIONAL MARXISM THEORIES OF CRIME  ***-Capitalist society is criminogenic****:* ‘Criminogenic’ means that crime is an in-built and ‘natural’ outgrowth of a capitalist society which emphasizes economic self-interest, greed and personal gain. Crime is a rational response to the competitiveness and inequality of life in capitalist societies, in which profit, individual gain and looking after number 1 are seen as more important than concern for the well-being of others. Relative poverty means some struggle to survive or are excluded from participation in the consumer society, encouraging crimes like theft, or vandalism and violence arising from hostility to and frustration at social exclusion. Gordan (1971) suggests that what is surprising in these circumstances is not that the working class commit rime, but that they don’t do it more.  ***-The law reflects ruling class interests and ideology****:* Laws are not an expression of value consensus, as functionalists contend, but, as writers like Chambliss (1975) argue, instruments of the ruling class, and they reflect the values and beliefs found in ruling class ideology. At the heart of the capitalist system is the protection of private property and other ruling class interests, and the state defines acts as criminal in line with these basic concerns. Box (1983) argues that what is defined as serious crime is ideologically constructed. Serious crime is identified as offenses such as property crime and violence committed by members of the working class, rather than as the major harm caused by corporations – such as environmental damage caused by oil spoils or the production of dangerous and faulty products – or by governments – such as human rights violations, illegal wars and genocide. The agencies of social control protect ruling-class interests and power, criminalize those who oppose them, and are used to control the workforce.  Snider (1991) argues capitalist states will pass health and safety laws, or laws against pollution and other laws that regulate private business, only when forced to do so by public crises or union agitation. They will strengthen them reluctantly, weaken them whenever possible, rarely enforce them or enforce them only in a manner calculated to do as little as possible to seriously impede profitability or frighten off potential investors.  Laws that appear to benefit everyone, or the occasional prosecution of members of the ruling class, have an ideological, manipulative function of providing a smokescreen suggesting that the law is impartial and even-handed, and that even ruling-class offenders are properly handled, when the opposite is more often the case.  ***-Selective law enforcement:***The impression in official statistics that crime is mainly a working class phenomenon is largely due to the selective enforcement of the law. Chambliss suggests there’s one law for the rich and another for the poor, with rime control focused on the working class, who are those most likely to be prosecuted for crime. Those of higher social classes are less likely to be prosecuted for offences, and, if they are, generally get treated more leniently. The biggest crimes of all are those committed by the ruling class-what Pearce (1976) called ‘the crimes of the powerful’-in form of white collar and corporate crime like fraud, tax evasion, corporate manslaughter and breaches of health and safety regulations. Such crimes are rarely prosecuted, even if they are discovered. Selective law enforcement gives the false impression most crime is committed by disturbed working class individuals, and this diverts the working class’s attention away from the exploitation thy experience and the crimes of the capitalist class, and directs it toward other members of their own class. Individuals, not the system of inequality, are blamed for crime. | NEO-MARXISM THEORIES OF CRIME  Neo-Marxists are more recent Marxists theorists who attempt to develop a more sophisticated approach to crime than the rather crude traditional Marxists view that the law and law enforcement are simply aspects of ruling class power and control of the working class. Neo-Marxists argue that traditional Marxists theories are too deterministic in suggesting people are driven into crime by forces beyond their control. They suggest no one is forced to commit crime, and many facing the same circumstances do not commit crime, and so choosing crime is a voluntary act.  Neo-Marxists theories couple this choice to commit crime with a view that working class crimes like theft, burglary and vandalism are meaningful and symbolic political acts of resistance to ruling class oppression. Working class criminals are seen almost as Robin Hood figures, taking forms of political action against inequalities in power and wealth, misdirected into criminal activities rather than more traditional forms of political protest. This was the approach adopted by Gilroy (1982) in his discussion of black crime in the 1970’s, in which black crime was seen as a form of resistance to ruling class oppression in the form of police racism and harassment.  ***The new criminology:*** The Neo-Marxist approach is generally associated with the (new-not-so) new Criminology developed by Taylor et al (1973). Taylor et al., while accepting many of the features of traditional Marxist theories, suggested that, to fully understand crime and deviance, how it was socially constructed and the motivation of offenders and the meanings they gave to their crimes, it was necessary to draw on both structural and interactionist approaches. They sought therefore to develop what they called ‘a fully social theory of deviance’ blending labelling theory and Marxism, involving an exploration of six dimensions: 1. The wider structural origins of deviant acts. 2. The immediate origins of deviant acts. 3. The deviant act itself and the meanings it offers. 4. The immediate social reactions to acts of deviance. 5. The wider social reactions to acts of deviance. 6. The effects of labeling.  ***Toxteth riots:*** This theoretical proposal explains the Toxteth riots well. These were the result of:  1. Long term unemployment amongst Toxteth residents, especially blacks.  2. Racist policing strategies.  3. The riots were political protest against economic inequality and discrimination.  4. The media coverage was biased (behind the police lines), the police response was confrontational and Mrs Thatcher refused to accept allegations of police racism.  5. Inappropriate regeneration schemes were created.  6. Blacks remained under police suspicion and were more likely to be stopped and searched than whites. |
| EVALUATION   * ***Marxist theories have gained empirical support***. Bennett (1979) has found evidence of selective law enforcement amongst the police. He discovered that middle class offenders were more likely to be cautioned than working class offenders for the same kind of offence. This suggests there is some validity in Marxist ideas.   Sampson (1986) provides evidence that the powerless are more likely to be policed. He found that the police tend to concentrate their patrols in poorer localities because of the belief that more crime takes place in such areas.   * ***Marxist theories too readily dismiss official statistics on crime.*** Realists accept that official statistics have problems and are subject to bias (e.g. under-recording). However, they argue that they show the basic reality of crime and can be useful for generating causal explanations of crime and deviance. This suggests that the Marxist response to official statistics is not adequate. * ***They over emphasis property crime***, and don’t have much to say about non property offenses like rape, domestic violence, the physical and sexual abuse of children and murder. It is difficult to conceive how the vast majority of such offences could ever have any political motivation or meaning. * ***They over emphasize class inequality in relation to crime***, and neglect other inequalities like those relating to ethnicity and gender. * ***Traditional Marxist theories are too deterministic,*** in the sense that they see people as forced into crime by circumstances beyond their control. They ignore the point made by neo-Marxists that people might choose crime for various reasons, and certainly most working class people, even the poorest, do not commit crime * ***It is difficult to interpret all laws as reflecting ruling class interests;*** there are many that are in every ones interests, such as traffic and consumer protection laws, those against household and vehicle theft and personal violence of all kinds. The police do try to protect the public from victimization, and are simply ruling class agents in the business of repressing and criminalizing the working class. * ***They pay little attention to the victims of crime.*** Neo-Marxists, in particular, tend to romanticize working class crimes as symbolic political acts. Left realists point out that the crimes that matter most to people in their everyday lives, such as burglary, vehicle crime, street violence and anti-social behavior, are mainly committed by working class criminals against other working class people. It is therefore difficult to see them as Robin Hood figures who rob the rich to feed the poor. * ***Theoretical evaluation:-***   •Feminists regard many Marxist theories of crime as malestream, for focusing primarily on male criminality, and making assumptions that their theories can automatically be applied to women.  •Functionalists also criticise Marxists for offering a conspiracy theory. They argue laws are created which reflect a value consensus (shared by everyone) and protect the interests of society as a whole, not just a ruling class.  •Left realists attack Marxists for too readily explaining away a lot of young, male, working class, black crime as a social construction. They argue that such groups do commit more crime and there are real wider external social/structural causes for it, which Marxists in part accept. However, they criticise classical Marxists crude deterministic explanations of crime (e.g. unemployment and poverty = crime). Left realists argue instead that young, male, working class, black crime can be understood as a response to marginalisation, relative deprivation and subcultures. Furthermore they suggest that Marxism lacks any practical social policy focus. Left realists put forward realistic solutions to try and reduce crime, for example restorative justice programmes. | |