Marxist explanations of Crime & Deviance

The Marxist approach views society as a whole system that is in conflict. This conflict is between two opposing groups and steams from the contradictions in capitalism. These are the owners wanting to maximise profit whilst the workers want to increase wages. The infrastructure is industry and the most important part of society, therefore controlling the superstructure, everything that isn't industry. The ruling class own and control industry and therefore manipulate the superstructure for their benefit. They do this through false class-consciousness of the proletariat. This system can only be overcome by violent revolution once the contradictions of capitalism have become apparent to the proletariat. This focus on power in society is central to the way Marxists view crime

Karl Marx studied less into crime than any other area however it is the Marxist approach that is most commonly used to explain Crime & Deviance.

The Marxist approach see's the upper class (Ruling-class) exploiting the lower class (Working Class). This is known as (White-collar crime), by which powerful groups in society can manipulate the definition of what is considered criminal.

Such crimes might include:
-Fraud
-Tax evasion
-Escaping punishment or walking away with a 'lesser' punishment

Corporate crime in much the same way as white collar crime 'bends' the definition of what crime is considered to be.
For example:
-Companies may commit crimes to increase profit (Breaking H&S laws or illegal dumping of waste)

Steven Box explains:
"In terms of harmed caused to individuals and losses to public in unpaid tax revenue, environmental costs and costs in health and welfare benefits, corporate crime is more serious than street crime/burglary. Estimated £16billion lost."

Marxists argue crime arises from definitions of crime imposed by the upper class in society. They focus on the extent of crime committed by corporations and white collar crime, which helps demonstrate the view that crime is diffused through society.

Stewart Hall puts forward the view that the Ruling class in fact don't affectively manipulate the activities of control agencies.
Instead these agencies are more strongly influenced by needs of capitalism but to some extent are autonomous. ('Relative autonomy')
According to Hall, sociologists must uncover links between the way control organisations operate, the effects upon people actually being controlled and benefits to the ruling class (upper-class).

Sutherland raised the idea of occupational crime in the 1940's. He explained this view as being:
"Crime committed by person of high social status and respectability in course of his occupation"

However, such crimes may not always be committed by people of high social status.

Other sociologist definitions of occupational crime would be Croall's:
"Crime committed in the course of legitimate employment involving the abuse of an occupational role"

But this ignores other aspects of crime, such as Tax evasion.

There are criticisms to the Marxist approach these would be:

-Ignores individual motivation for crime; concentrates on nature of capitalism and how economic factors 'force' people to act in certain ways. Perceptions, ideas and motivations are rarely discussed.

-Marxists claim high rate of crime amongst WC, youth and minorities is due to biased policing. They also argue that laws are biased against WC, forcing them into crime.

-Not all laws benefit UC, many come from genuine agreement. Marxists reject this; laws that seem to benefit everyone are useful ultimately to UC. By providing a few laws that are of use to everyone, they hide their real nature.

This is rejected by **MISHRA** – this form of Marxist analysis, 'left Functionalism' means that any law can be shown to be in some way 'functional' to maint enance of capitalism. This makes any meaningful debate with Marxists, impossible.

-Societies, which call themselves Marxist, have equal crime rate to capitalist ones, yet in Marxist society, there should be no crime.