

A-Level Sociology

BRIDGING WORK 2019

The bridging work **MUST** be completed for each of your courses by the time you start your course.

Your work will be assessed in September.

Anyone not completing the work or producing such poor quality will be re-interviewed about their place on the course.

The aims are for you to understand if you like the course and for you to be ready to start learning at post-16 level.

SPECIFICATION - OCR SOCIOLOGY: AS-LEVEL (H180) and A-LEVEL (H580)

Unit 1 covers – SOCIALISATION, CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Unit 2 covers – RESEARCHING and UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

Unit 3 covers – DEBATES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

ASSESSMENT

In the summer of **Year 12**, you are assessed through **TWO** end-of-year **AS-level (H180)** exams:

Unit 1(H180/01) and Unit 2 (H180/02)

In the summer of **Year 13**, you are assessed through **THREE** end-of-course **Linear A-level (H580)** exams:

Unit 1 (H580/01), Unit 2 (H580/02) and Unit 3 (H580/03)

There is no coursework.

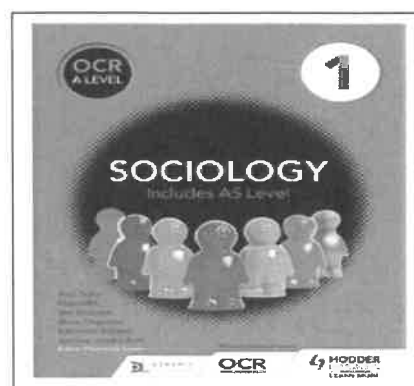
Please **DO NOT** purchase until advised in September.

OCR Sociology for A Level Book 1

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Author – Taylor, Ali, Brisbane, Chapman, Roberts, Jacobs-Roth

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The Seven Principles of Learning

Remember you learn best when:-

- 1. Use your initiative, have a go and clarify later; it's your ideas that matter.**
- 2. Take a risk and be creative.**
- 3. Talk about what you are learning and what you know.**
- 4. Work together to explore how you would solve a problem.**
- 5. Reflect on your needs and how you learn best in terms of interests, abilities and styles of learning. Make changes if necessary.**
- 6. Respond positively to feedback from your teachers and your peers.**
- 7. Take responsibility for your own learning.**

TASK 1

During AS/A-level Sociology, you will explore aspects of identity and inequality including age, gender, ethnicity and social class. This task is focussed on social class identity in the U.K.

Social Class Identity

Read article one from the BBC: Class calculator: Can I have no job or money and still be middle class? <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21953364>

Answer the following questions: -

What are the traditional classes?

What are the new class groupings?

Historically, what has class been defined by?

How has this changed?

What concepts were developed by Bourdieu?

TASK 2

To write a report on

Social Class Inequalities in the UK

Refer to appendix, as required

Using the information in the appendices, explain the following two views using the guidance given:-

1. **Explain the view that social class inequalities disadvantage the working-classes.**

- a) **Marxist theorists** view social class relationships in capitalist societies, based on the exploitation of the working-class by the ruling-class, through the economic system.

Karl Marx (appendix, textbook pg 250)

Explain: - two new classes in capitalist societies; class conflict; contradictions or problems with capitalism; capitalist class ideology.

b) **The bicentenary of Karl Marx's birth**

Read the following articles and then write one or two detailed paragraphs, explaining the relevance of Marxism to UK society today.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/marx_karl.shtml

<https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/sociology/education-and-sociology/karl-marx-and-education/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/05/karl-marx-200th-birthday-communist-manifesto-revolutionary>

2. Explain the view that social class inequalities are a positive function of a society, benefiting everyone.

- a) **Functionalist theorists** view stratification/inequalities as an inevitable and beneficial part of society.

Talcott Parsons (appendix, textbook pg 246)

Explain: - value consensus; achievement and reward; entrepreneurs and executives.

Davis and Moore (appendix, textbook pg 246)

Explain:- stratification as functionally necessary; allocating the right people to the most important roles; performing most important roles to the highest standards; functional uniqueness (e.g. surgeon/porter); degree of dependence on other (e.g. consultant surgeon/chief executive)

- b) **New Right theorists** claim that a degree of inequality is desirable and functional in a society.

Peter Saunders (appendix, textbook pgs 247-248)

Explain why:- rejects equality of outcomes; critical of left-wing governments.

Charles Murray (appendix, textbook pg 248) – addresses the effects of policies of providing welfare benefits.

Explain how:- dependency culture created; to reduce poverty.

Task 3

'How has family life in the UK changed since the 1970s?'

Study the following sources and answer the questions to help gain an understanding of some of the changes in family in the UK since the 1970s.

Section 1:

AS/A-level SOCIOLOGY: INTRODUCTION TO HOUSEHOLDS:

Research and match the following concepts with the definitions:

(a) ONS (b) Census (c) Sample (d) Concept (e) Secondary evidence

(f) Household (g) Primary research (h) Quantitative data (i) Trend

(j) Operationalising (k) Qualitative data

1 _____ : A pattern or change in the statistics over time. It can be described as increasing or decreasing.

2 _____ : Data in the form of numbers / statistics / figures, rather than in words

3 _____ : Evidence that already exists and has been collected by someone else

4 _____ : The publisher of official government statistics

5 _____ : A group of people selected by the researcher, from whom the researcher collects their evidence

6 _____ : Original, new research carried out by the sociologist

7 _____ : Defining a concept and making it measurable

8 _____ : Data in the form of words rather than in numbers or statistics

9 _____ : A label or term used to describe something in society

10 _____ : One person or a group of people who share the same address and either one meal a day or the living accommodation

11 _____ : A government survey carried out every ten years to collect data from every household

Section 2:

Study the table below and answer questions

GB Household size: number of people	1971	2005
1 person	18%	29%
2	32%	35%
3	19%	16%
4	17%	13%
5	8%	5%
6+	6%	2%
	100%	100%
Total households (million)	18.6	24.2
Average household size	2.9 people	2.4 people
Source:	The Census, ONS	Labour Force Survey, ONS

Questions: Using the table above answer the following questions.

Q1. What does GB mean and include?

Q2. What is the trend in

(a) average household size between 1971 and 2005?

(b) number of 1 person households between 1971 and 2005?

(c) number of 6+ households between 1971 and 2001?

Q3. Using textbook and other sources research explanations that might explain these trends.

Task 4

SOCIOLOGY - RESEARCH SOMEONE, AN EVENT or a THEORY OF INTEREST CONNECTED TO THE SUBJECT AREA

STUDENT NAME

A LEVEL OR BTEC NATIONAL COURSE

SOCIOLOGY

YOU MAY WISH TO SELECT ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FOR THIS TASK:-

i) Karl Marx

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4CVpPWQkwbDzt4w2RjNHf2S/forward-thinkers-how-marx-nietzsche-and-freud-shaped-the-lives-of-millions>

ii) Centenary of female suffrage and Feminist Theory

You may wish to focus on how the campaign for women to vote 100 years ago, inspires women today campaigning for equal pay.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/far-have-womens-rights-advanced-century/>

<https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/vote-100-celebrating-centenary-female-suffrage>

<http://sociology.about.com/od/Sociological-Theory/a/Feminist-Theory.htm>

http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2010/08/domestic_duties.aspx

NAME OF THE PERSON/EVENT BEING RESEARCHED

I CHOSE THIS PERSON/EVENT BECAUSE...

WRITE ABOUT WHAT YOU FIND INTERESTING ABOUT THIS PERSON/EVENT

Areas you might comment on are:

What are their/its notable contributions to the subject?

Try to work out why they/it are successful – what seemed to drive them/it?

What skills do they have that stand out?

Has their life/it been one of constant development or has it been uneven or barriers they needed to overcome?

What questions do you have about them/it?

Task 5

SOCIOLOGY – FINALLY, SELECT ONE OF THE FOLLOWING TO BROADEN YOUR INTEREST

i) Search & listen to some of the podcasts on this Sociology page:

<http://www.podology.org.uk/#/home/4556339389>

ii) <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/what-is-sociology.aspx>

Appendix

Textbook

pgs 246-250

7a.3 How can patterns and trends in social class inequality and difference be explained?

Functionalism

Parsons: Value consensus and stratification

Functionalism is often described as a consensus theory because it suggests that society works best when there is agreement or consensus over shared values. For the American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1951), different forms of social stratification, including social class, reflect this value consensus. Parsons argued that in all societies some individuals are better than others than at achieving things that are regarded as worthy of reward according to the prevailing value consensus. In the Middle Ages, knights were highly rewarded because being a successful warrior was seen as important. Similarly, he suggests that most people agree that in modern industrial societies, entrepreneurs and executives who successfully run businesses creating wealth and jobs deserve the highest rewards as they contribute most to the smooth running of society.

Davis and Moore: Some principles of social stratification

Perhaps the most famous functionalist theory of stratification was offered by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945). They argued that social stratification of some kind has been a feature of all human society and therefore concluded that stratification is functionally necessary. They argued that the main function of social stratification is to ensure effective role allocation and performance. Social stratification therefore does two things:

- 1 It allocates the right people to the most important roles. This ensures that the most important positions in society are filled by the most able people by offering them higher rewards, such as in terms of income and status. Thus training to be a doctor requires people with very high educational qualifications and demands a long period of training and a lot of responsibility. To motivate the best people, we need to offer doctors higher rewards than other less demanding jobs.
- 2 It ensures that people in these roles perform them to the highest standards. People in key positions such as doctors or chief executives of companies have many others depending on them so it is

important to motivate them to work to the best of their ability for the good of the whole organisation.

Davis and Moore argue that we can tell which positions are most important by two factors:

Functional uniqueness. A position is functionally unique if only one person or a small number could carry out the role. Thus only one surgeon in a hospital might be able to lead a team performing a heart transplant, whereas many people (including the surgeon) could, if necessary, do the porter's job and wheel the patient into the operating theatre. So the consultant surgeon is functionally unique and requires a higher reward.

The degree of dependence of others. Similarly, many other people depend on the consultant surgeon to do their jobs, including more junior doctors and nurses who operate under his or her orders. In the same way, the chief executive of a company is not only functionally unique but makes decisions and gives orders to many employees lower down the organisation and is dependent on nobody else above himself or herself except perhaps the shareholders.

Tumin: A critique of Davis and Moore

Another American sociologist, Melvin Tumin (1953), offered a series of criticisms of Davis and Moore which resulted in a lengthy debate about their theory.

- **Is it possible to determine the functional importance of a position?** After all, the low-paid cleaner who ensures the operating theatre is disinfected is perhaps just as important to the patient's survival as the highly paid heart surgeon. Which positions are most important is perhaps a matter of opinion rather than fact.
- **Is there consensus about rewards?** Arguably there is considerable conflict and resentment about the unequal distribution of rewards such as incomes. **Power and rewards.** It can be argued that the high pay of some jobs such as top business executives reflects their power rather than agreement among the rest of society that they deserve it.
- **The pool of talent.** Davis and Moore seem to assume that only a small number of people have the unique talents to perform top jobs. In reality, many more people may have the ability to be doctors or business executives but have simply never been given the opportunity.
- **Is training a sacrifice?** Davis and Moore suggest that higher rewards are needed to motivate people

to undergo the long training needed for top jobs. In reality, going to university has its own rewards, such as freedom and the chance to learn what we are interested in, and most graduates more than make up for lost earnings in their first ten years of work.

Motivation. Davis and Moore seem to assume that only monetary rewards motivate people to do demanding jobs. This does not account for people who may be motivated by altruism or a sense of service; for example, professionals in many public services such as teachers, nurses and social workers earn less than similarly qualified workers in the private sector but often choose these professions out of a desire to serve others.

The dysfunctions of stratification. Tumin points out that, far from stratification helping society to run smoothly, it often creates hostility, suspicion and mistrust between different sections of society.

Activity: Aristocracy versus meritocracy

Item A: The Duke of Westminster

Gerald Grosvenor, Duke of Westminster, is Britain's wealthiest man with wealth estimated at £7.9bn. The Duke was educated at Harrow School where he passed two O levels. He then passed out (graduated from) of Sandhurst and became a Territorial Army officer, rising to the rank of Major General, as well as running the family business. He and his family own the bulk of their wealth to owning 77 hectares (190 acres) of Mayfair and Belgrave, adjacent to Buckingham Palace. As the value of land rockets in the capital, so too does the personal wealth of Grosvenor. The family also own 39,000 hectares in Scotland and 13,000 hectares in Spain, while their privately owned Grosvenor Estate property group has £20bn (£12bn) worth of assets under management including the Liverpool One shopping mall.

(Source: adapted from Elliott 2014)

Item B: Lord Sugar

Alan Sugar was born in the East End of London, the son of a Jewish tailor. As a child, he lived in a council

The New Right

From the 1980s onwards, a new approach to politics and economics emerged in Britain and the USA, often referred to as neo-liberalism or the New Right. This was a revival of nineteenth-century liberalism which believed that the economic system worked best when it was based on a free market. The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US presidents

For both Parsons and Davis and Moore, modern industrial societies are meritocracies. Those who achieve the top positions do so on the basis of merit rather than family background and inheritance. However, as the first part of this chapter demonstrates, not everyone in UK society has the same life chances. Access to the top positions is often denied to those from lower classes as much because of lack of opportunity as because of lack of ability or merit.

By the 1960s, functionalist approaches to stratification became unfashionable among most sociologists, partly because of the issues raised by critics such as Tumin. Many sociologists turned to the ideas of Marx and Weber for inspiration. However, in the 1980s, the rise of neoliberal or New Right approaches in politics and sociology led to a renewal of support for functionalist views.

flat and attended state schools. He left school at 16 and started selling car aerials and electrical goods from the back of a van, which he bought with savings of £50. He started his electronics company, Amstrad, in 1988, and sold it in 2007. In 2011, his estimated fortune was £700m and he was ranked 89th in the *Sunday Times* Rich List. In 1991, Sugar became chairman of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club, but sold his last shares in the club in 2007. Sugar became a life peer in 2009 and is also famous for his appearances on the BBC series *The Apprentice*. He is still involved in a number of business ventures including Amstair, Amstrop and Amstreen.

- 1 Compare the social background, education and career of the two wealthy men in Items A and B. What differences do you notice?
- 2 Using the two items and any other evidence, evaluate how far Britain can be seen as a meritocracy.

Ronald Reagan and George Bush have been seen to be strongly influenced by neo-liberalism in their policies. New Right ideas have generally not been popular with sociologists, partly because they emphasise the importance of the individual and free choice. Sociologists, by contrast, tend to see individuals as always operating in a social context and making choices influenced by their socialisation and the norms

of the groups to which they belong. Nevertheless, some sociologists have been influenced by New Right thinking.

Saunders: In defence of inequality

Peter Saunders (1990) draws on New Right ideas in his work on social stratification. Unlike functionalists, Saunders does not see stratification as an inevitable part of all societies. However, he argues that a society based on social equality would only be possible if considerable force were used – for example, the threat of death or imprisonment – to ensure that everyone did their jobs to the best of their abilities because they would not be motivated by economic rewards.

Saunders is not opposed to some forms of equality. He argues that it is right and just that everyone enjoys legal equality (being judged by the same laws and having the same legal rights). He also supports the principle of equality of opportunity (whereby everyone has the same chances to compete for unequal rewards); this is similar to the functionalist idea of meritocracy. It is a third type of equality, equality of outcomes, that Saunders rejects. This would involve everyone being rewarded in the same way whether they deserve it or not. Like the functionalists, Saunders therefore argues that a degree of inequality is desirable and functional in order to motivate people to compete, as long as everyone has an equal opportunity to take part in the competition.

Saunders is critical of attempts by left-wing governments (for example, Labour governments in the UK) to try and equalise society, as he sees them as misguided. For example, taxing the rich to pay for benefits or programmes to help the poor or supposedly disadvantaged simply interferes with market forces and reduces the incentive of the rich to invest in developing businesses. Similarly, in education, attempts to ensure that working-class children do as well as middle-class children are mistaken because he argues that middle-class children are probably more able and intelligent and deserve to do better than working-class children.

Critics of Saunders argue that it is mistaken to assume that capitalist societies based on the free market necessarily offer individuals more freedom than socialist or communist societies which seek to make people equal. After all, the system of slavery in parts of the USA in the early nineteenth century, the apartheid system of South Africa where black people were denied the same opportunities as whites, and military dictatorships such as Chile in the 1980s, were all based on free market capitalism but were

extremely oppressive in terms of the treatment of certain social groups. Many of the criticisms made by Turnin of functionalist theories of stratification could also be applied to Saunders and the New Right.

Murray: The underclass

One of the most famous proponents of New Right ideas is the American political scientist Charles Murray. Murray (1984) argued that US government policies of providing welfare benefits for groups such as the unemployed and lone-parent families were creating a dependency culture whereby poor people were given no motivation to better themselves – for example, by trying to find paid work – as they were allowed to remain dependent on the state. The result was the creation of an underclass of people trapped at the bottom of society. The underclass were not only a drain on taxpayers paying for their benefits but also tended to poorly socialise their children, meaning that they generally underachieved at school and turned to crime.

Murray visited Britain and argued that there were signs that Britain too was developing an underclass (1989). He suggested that rising rates of births outside marriage, crime and youth unemployment were all signs that the irresponsible attitudes found in the underclass were infecting certain neighbourhoods in the UK. Murray called for a reduction in welfare benefits, arguing that this did more harm than good. Like other New Right thinkers, Murray argued that disadvantaged social groups such as lone parents and the unemployed needed to be encouraged to stand on their own feet rather than expecting the state to support them.

Murray's work attracted considerable support from some politicians in the British Conservative party. However, his work is also highly controversial and has been criticised by many British sociologists.

Studies of poor people tend to suggest only a minority have the kind of attitudes described by Murray as typical of the underclass. Most people without jobs and on benefits want to work and earn a decent living.

It is unclear who exactly is responsible for the alleged problems created by the underclass. Sometimes Murray blames groups such as the unemployed and lone parents for behaving irresponsibly – for example, in refusing to work or by having children whom they cannot afford to support. At other times he blames the welfare state for

encouraging this kind of behaviour by giving benefits to those who are underserving.

Murray's work only focuses on those at the bottom end of society, the poorest. He makes no connection between the wider pattern of social class inequality and the growing gap between the rich and poor

Activity

The negative effects of inequality

In their study *The Spirit Level*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009) carried out an analysis comparing the effects of inequality in a range of societies. They ranked societies in terms of inequality by comparing the income of the richest 20 per cent with the poorest 20 per cent in each country. Thus, Japan proved to be the most equal country, with the richest 20 per cent having only four times the income of the poorest 20 per cent, whereas in Singapore, the richest had nearly ten times the income of the poorest.

Wilkinson and Pickett then devised an index of health and social problems based on measures of the following:

- levels of mental illness
- infant mortality
- life expectancy
- obesity
- teenage births
- homicide
- imprisonment
- educational performance of children
- drug and alcohol addiction
- social mobility.

They found a clear correlation between high levels of inequality and high levels of social and health problems. Wilkinson and Pickett also tested their theory on different US states and found a similar relationship between income inequality and social problems.

Wilkinson and Pickett offered a number of explanations for this relationship:

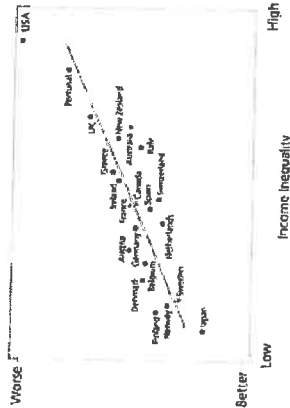
- High levels of inequality mean low status for those at the bottom, which in turn affects people's mental and physical wellbeing.
- Low status can also lead to a sense of shame, possibly encouraging higher rates of crime, including homicide.
- Countries with greater inequalities also have less social mobility as the poorest groups are likely to be more disadvantaged in competing for top positions.
- High levels of inequality lead to a lack of trust between people. This is dysfunctional for everyone, rich and poor alike.

Wilkinson and Pickett are not Marxists; they did not advocate total equality, but they did argue that

in trying to understand why poverty is a growing problem in both Britain and the USA. Many Marxist and Weberian sociologists would argue that it is the working of the capitalist system that leads to poverty and inequality. Blaming the poor for their own poverty is simply blaming the victims of the system.

societies such as Japan, Norway and Sweden with lesser degrees of inequality have fewer social problems and function more effectively than societies such as the UK, Australia and New Zealand that have wider income inequalities.

Wilkinson and Pickett have in turn been criticised. For example, it has been argued that they were selective in the countries they analysed and including countries such as South Korea, Slovenia and Hong Kong in their study would have produced a much less clear-cut relationship between income inequality and problems such as poor health and crime. Their study also adopts a fairly crude measure of social inequality: simply comparing the income of the richest and poorest 20 per cent in each country.



(Source: Wilkinson and Pickett 2009)

- 1 What relationship did Wilkinson and Pickett find between levels of income inequality and better or worse outcomes in terms of health and social problems?
- 2 Study the graph above. How does Britain compare with other advanced industrial countries in terms of its level of social inequality and its rating in terms of health and social problems?
- 3 How could Wilkinson and Pickett's findings be used to criticise functionalist and New Right views of social inequality?
- 4 What arguments might be put forward in defence of these perspectives?

Marxism

Karl Marx (1818–83) saw the economic system as the basis for all societies. Different societies have different kinds of economic systems or modes of production. According to Marx (1844 and Marx and Engels (1848), the earliest human societies were based on primitive communism where all members worked together to obtain what they needed, such as by hunting and gathering. As societies evolved and a more specialised division of labour developed, so class relationships began to emerge. In ancient societies like Greece and Rome, there was a division between masters and slaves and, under feudalism in medieval Europe, between landowners and serfs.

Much of Marx's work focused on capitalist societies like modern Britain. Capitalism emerged from feudalism between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries as goods began to be mass produced in factories and steam power was used to drive modern machinery. According to Marx, this gave rise to two new classes: the bourgeoisie, or capitalist class, who invested their wealth in financing the new industries of the industrial age, and the proletariat, or working class, the majority of society who owned no wealth and were forced to sell their labour for wages to the capitalists. The bourgeoisie were the ruling class because they owned the means of production: the factories, mines, banks and other businesses that were used to generate wealth. This in turn meant that they controlled the political system and cultural institutions that shaped people's ideas such as the media and the education system.

Class conflict

Marx argued that though the bourgeoisie and the proletariat depend on one another, their relationship is also based on conflict or class struggle. While the workers create the wealth of the bourgeoisie, only a fraction of what Marx called the surplus value that they create comes back to them in wages. For Marx, the workers are exploited by their employers who seek to keep wages low and profits high.

Marx argued that capitalism suffered from a series of inherent contradictions or problems which would eventually lead to its downfall.

- **Polarisation of social classes.** The divide between the working class and capitalists would grow steadily wider as the bourgeoisie tried to drive down wages and increase profits. Intermediate classes such as small business owners would be driven out of business by increasingly powerful big businesses, further widening the divide between the two main classes.

- **Alienation.** Workers would not be able to find any satisfaction or contentment because they would have no control over their own work, simply being used as commodities to increase production and profits. Outside work, people would be encouraged to find satisfaction in consumer goods and materialism rather than in real human relationships.
- **Economic crisis.** Marx argued that capitalist economies tend to suffer from periodic crises. Competition between companies creates boom periods but these are inevitably followed by recessions. Eventually, a crisis would lead to the collapse of the whole capitalist system.

The overthrow of capitalism

Marx argued that the working class had the potential to overthrow capitalism because the workers were in the majority and had only to realise their potential by uniting in a revolution. However, to achieve this, they had to throw off what Marx called 'false class consciousness' and become a class for itself. Marx argued that the capitalist class perpetuated an ideology or series of ideas that justified capitalism and its inequalities through the political system, law, mass media, religious beliefs and the education system.

Once the working class realised the nature of their exploitation, Marx was convinced they would rise up and overthrow capitalism. Marx believed that a new economic system called communism would replace capitalism where the means of production would be shared by the whole community. Everyone would be expected to contribute something to society 'according to their ability' and, instead of wages, would receive what they needed in terms of food, accommodation, health care and so on 'according to their needs'. This would mean that social classes based on economic inequalities would disappear and communism would result in a classless society.

Evaluation of Marxism

Marx's ideas have had a huge influence on political thought and inspired the rise of socialism and communism, leading to revolutions in countries like Russia and China. Marx has also influenced sociologists who have used his ideas to analyse the workings of capitalist societies and the nature of social class inequalities in them. Many sociologists who do not see themselves as Marxists draw on some of his key concepts, often combining them with ideas derived from the work of Weber.

However, Marx has also come in for extensive criticism, especially since the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, which led many critics to argue that communism as it was practised in such societies was an even more oppressive system than capitalism and simply did not deliver what it promised. Some of the main criticisms of Marxism are summarised below:

- **Economic determinism.** Marx argued that ultimately all societies can be explained in terms of the economic system and economic relationships. However, people may think or behave in certain ways for cultural reasons – for example because of the influence of religious or nationalist beliefs rather than because they are following economic or class interests. Marx's emphasis on economic or class class inequalities also tends to ignore the importance of other types of inequality such as those based on gender or ethnicity.
- **The middle class.** Marx largely dismissed the importance of classes situated between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, such as small business owners, highly paid professionals and managers who run businesses on behalf of the capitalists. However, critics point out that rather than shrinking or being absorbed into the two main classes, these groups have grown in size and importance, meaning that we should be talking about a middle class or middle classes.
- **Class consciousness and revolution.** Marx saw the downfall of capitalism in advanced industrial societies such as Britain, Germany or the USA as inevitable. In reality, communist revolutions have usually occurred in relatively under-developed societies such as Russia, China and Cuba. In Western societies there is little sign of class consciousness; for example, fewer and fewer workers support trades unions or even moderate socialist parties such as the Labour Party and support for revolutionary parties and political movements has waned since the 1980s.
- **The success of capitalism.** Capitalist societies seem to have flourished despite their inherent contradictions. Though capitalist economies tend to go through a cycle of 'boom and bust', in most cases discontent created by economic problems is contained. In most Western societies the working class have enjoyed rising living standards and access to ever wider consumer goods, while the political system of liberal democracy associated with many (though not all) capitalist societies allows everyone to elect their own governments and enjoy political freedoms and human rights.

In defence of Marxism

Modern Marxists have argued that, despite these criticisms, much of Marx's theory is still relevant to understanding social class inequalities in capitalist societies.

The continuing importance of social class inequality writing in the 1970s, Marxist sociologists John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler (1976) argued that there was little evidence of class divisions in British society disappearing and suggested that such inequalities could only be understood as the result of the way that the capitalist system operates. Arguably class divisions have actually widened since the 1970s.

The proletarianisation of the middle classes. Some sociologists claim that as the gap between the rich and poor widens, Marx's prediction about polarisation is coming true. American sociologist Harry Braverman (1974) argues that many so-called 'middle-class' workers have in reality been de-skilled. For example, the skills of clerical workers and even professionals have been programmed into machines or broken down into simple tasks that can be performed by less skilled workers. This reduces the control such workers have over work processes and also means that employers can pay them lower wages. The result is a process of proletarianisation, whereby more and more workers who might formerly have been regarded as middle class are reduced to the same class position as the working class or proletariat.

Neo-Marxism

Neo-Marxists have tried to develop and adapt Marx's ideas to deal with some of the criticisms made of Marx's work. For example, the Italian communist leader Antonio Gramsci (1971) developed the concept of hegemony to explain why the working class in western European countries had not risen up in revolution. Gramsci argued that the ruling class rarely need to use force to exert power because they rule through persuasion. Hegemony means using cultural and political means to encourage enough of the working class to side with the ruling class and the capitalist system to ensure the stability of the economic system. This involves using institutions such as the media and education to control people's minds. However, Gramsci argued that this hegemony is never complete; many of the working class have dual consciousness and are to some degree