CONFLICT THEORY
(KARL MARX)

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
INTRODUCTION

Marx never gave theory of stratification, he gave a theory of social class on the basis of which we derive stratification or inequality in society. Marxian perspective provide a radical alternative to functionalist view of the nature of social stratification.
According to Marxian perspective, systems of stratification derive from the relationships of the social groups to the forces of production.

In all the stratified societies, there are two major social groups: a ruling class and a subject class.
The power of the ruling class derives from its ownership and control of the forces of production.

The ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class. As a result there is a basic conflict of interest between the two classes.
Marx focus on social strata rather than social inequality in general
Marx used the term “class” to refer to the main stratas in all stratification system.
A class is a social group whose members share the same relationship to the forces of production.
MARX BELIEVED THAT WESTERN SOCIETIES HAD DEVELOPED THROUGH FOLLOWING MAIN EPOCHS:

- 1) Primitive communism
- 2) Ancient society
- 3) Feudal society
- 4) Capitalist society
During each epoch labour power required for production was supplied by the subject class i.e. slaves, serfs, proletariat.

The subject class is made up of the majority of the population whereas, the ruling class forms a minority.

The relationship between the major social classes is one of mutual dependence and conflict.
However, the mutual dependency of the two classes is not a relationship of equal or symmetrical reciprocity. Instead, it is a relationship of exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed.
Marx argues that capital, as such produces nothing, only labour produces wealth.

Classes emerge when the productive capacity of society expands beyond the level required for subsistence.
Marx specified a number of variables to explain how different classes develop conflict among themselves.

1) conflict over economic rewards between the classes.
2) physical concentration of masses of people.
3) easy communication among the people in the same class position.
4) development of solidarity. (class consciousness)
5) political organization
6) Revolution
According to Marx, social stratification divides society into two classes and the unequal distribution of wealth leads to discontent and ultimately to revolution in the society. Marx presented a dichotomous model of class, he opined that with the development in capitalist system, the middle class will disappear.
When despite hard work and labour they would not be able to attain their objectives, they will join hands with subordinate class (proletariats) and thus over-throw the ruling class (bourgeoisie).
Many thinkers explain inequality in the society, Marx was the only one who gave the ray of hope that this inequality will be demolished in the post-capitalist society.
Criticism of marx’s theory

1) Societies are not simply reflections of economic systems.
2) There are interest groups in societies that are unrelated to social classes.
3) Those who possess power in capitalist society are not always those with the highest income or the owners of the most property.
4) Conflict in a large modern society is rarely bipolarized.
5) Social conflict does not always lead to structural social change.