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ABSTRACT

JOHN TIERNEY

POLITICS AND DEVIANCE: THE POLITICAL STATUS
OF WORKING CLASS DELINQUENCY

The thesis looks at the question of whether working class adolescent delinquency can be conceived of as a form of political action. Beginning with the 1960s, when major changes in terms of models and perspectives occurred within the sociology of deviance, the first section traces the development of various attempts to formulate a relationship between deviance and politics. Particular attention is then given to the so-called new criminology, where a rigorous application of Marxian method and theory to the area of crime has been attempted, and to the work in deviance and youth sub-cultures produced by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

One of the central arguments is that an analysis of the political status of working class delinquency must consider the forms of consciousness involved, consequently part of the thesis is devoted to a discussion of working class consciousness and its relationship to ideology.

The final part of the thesis represents an attempt to construct a theoretical framework within which the politics of working class adolescent delinquency may be analysed, and includes detailed consideration of specific studies of delinquency.

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POLITICAL STATUS OF WORKING
CLASS DELINQUENCY

John Tierney

1979

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INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses itself primarily to the question of whether certain types of working class adolescent delinquency, such as paki-bashing, "mugging", truancy and vandalism, can be regarded as a form of political action. As the discussion unfurls it will be necessary to situate this main theme within the broader issue of the relationship between politics and deviance.

I will take as my starting point the 1960s, and attempt to show how major innovations in models and perspectives in the sociology of deviance, especially in America, laid down important foundations for its subsequent development. This "Renaissance" in the sociology of deviance will be linked to wider social and cultural changes - involving principally the counter-culture and the New Left - and particular attention will be paid to the development of an interest in the political dimensions to deviance.

Much of this paper will be concerned with quite rapid changes within the sociology of deviance over a relatively short period of time. At the outset it should be stressed that the subject is still very much in a state of flux, with controversy and disagreement continuing to separate not only the "traditionalist" from the "radical", but also those who are ostensibly within the same "camp". The political status of deviance

remains high on the list of controversial issues.

As I will try to illustrate, of particular importance has been the move away from the "soft" politics of the 1960s to the "harder" politics of the 1970s, where a more rigorous application of Marxian method and theory to the area of crime and deviance has been attempted.

In the main the discussion will be carried out at the theoretical level, though I will include examples of empirical research where it has been suggested that the delinquencies concerned represent a form of working class political action.

CHAPTER ONE

NUTS, SLUTS AND PREVERTS: NEW DEVIANCY AND A FRESH LOOK
AT POLITICS

Changes in Perspective

Developments in the sociology of deviance during the 1960s marked an important break with earlier orthodox criminology. These developments should be seen as part of a wider socio-cultural process involving the so-called counter culture and the New Left. The new deviancy fashioned in the 1960s, and variously called labelling theory, social reaction theory, transactionalism and interactionism, produced subversive orientations and perspectives, though in essence what was subverted was not so much the wider society as academic sociology. It was thus incestuously subversive. It did not provide a fundamental critique of advanced western capitalist societies, and generally would not have wanted to, though it raised questions which subsequent writers, using different perspectives, utilised in the construction of a very much more radical sociology of deviance: a sociology of deviance very much to do with the underlying political and economic structures of capitalism.

Orthodox criminology had reflected the causal/corrective concerns of the judicial apparatus: crime was by definition bad because it was against the law, deviancy was bad because it was against the norms. All right-thinking people would appreciate the logic in this. Authoritarian versions stressed the individual's personal

responsibility, and the need for punitive action by the agencies of the state. More liberal versions emphasised more or less deterministic "social factors", or individual/family "problems" on the psychological level; problems which could be cured, or solved, or adjusted to, providing help was given by those with the (professional) expertise. In each case it was assumed that deviancy represented a pathology, and the important questions were what caused it? How can we stamp it out?

The new deviancy theory was part of a much wider revolt in the social sciences against a set of assumptions contained in the positivist paradigm. Hargreaves very broadly defines the debate as being between positivism and phenomenology:

"In an oversimplified form the debate can be characterised as a battle between the more traditional social scientists of this century, who are grouped together under the general label of 'positivists', and the growing supporters of the alternative paradigm, who are grouped together under the general label of 'phenomenologists'... Nowhere has this debate been more sharply felt than in that area of social science...which is traditionally referred to as deviance."¹

Stan Cohen described the new deviancy theorists as "sceptical theorists", and for him the new deviancy was

part of a revolution:

"This reorientation is part of what might be called the sceptical revolution in criminology and the sociology of deviance. The older tradition was canonical in the sense that it saw the concepts it worked with as authoritative, standard, accepted, given and unquestionable."²

Wiles speaks of a "renaissance":

"The 1960s saw a renaissance in sociological criminology in Britain."³

Making the point that:

"...while labelling theory was the vehicle for change, the majority of the new criminologies which were to emerge were not derivative of it. Labelling theory is perhaps best seen as a transitional stage in the move from traditional criminology to the new criminologies."⁴

In a recent book Geoff Pearson has attempted to draw together a number of important cultural threads which formed the backcloth to these changes in the sociology of deviance. He describes the new perspectives which gathered momentum in the 1960s as follows:

"This area of scholarship is an odd theoretical cocktail, constructed out of sociology, psychiatry, criminology, social administration, media studies, law, social work, political science, cultural criticism, social psychology, and even some strands of popular culture and music. This interdisciplinary

misfit finds its focus in the study of deviants... the sociology of labelling is only one of its elements. Within the same domain one finds what passes for 'phenomenology', and also a sort of 'Marxism'. Anti-psychiatry has left its mark, and Schur, again, points to the affinities with existential psychology. To add to this mix, one of the central contributions in the area owes a considerable debt to Durkheim. Here, clearly, is an area of high theoretical dispersion, a zeitgeist of sorts which allows for an apparent harmony between some widely differing perspectives. It is also, rightly or wrongly, a theoretical jigsaw which has earned the reputation of being 'radical'...I call this space which opened out in social thought in the 1960s, misfit sociology."5

The New Left, the Counter Culture and a New Politics

This period is important for the purposes of this paper in that some connections between politics and deviance begin to be explicitly made, and in the process politics takes on a wider meaning than was found in the orthodox criminologies, where the term was usually reserved for discussion of political parties and the formal machinery of government. Deviancy theorists such as Becker saw the creation of social rules as political, whilst Horowitz and Liebowitz argued that deviant behaviour

itself may be conceived of as political.

In his study of the period Pearson shows how the New Left searched for a fusion of the personal with the political. For the New Left advanced capitalist societies were characterised by a soul-destroying consumerism. Social order was maintained, not by overt measures of social control, but by focusing men's minds on an overriding concern with consumer goods. Important social and political questions took second place to questions about the best after shave or washing machine to use. Capitalist societies were, to use Marcuse's term, one-dimensional. In the midst of this fundamentally pessimistic picture (containing, incidently, similarities with embourgeoisement theory) stood a hint of the one hope for mankind: a personal liberation of thought, which will create a critical basis revolutionary change. The libidinal subjectivism of the counter culture represented this hope. Yet, ironically, it was commercial interests which followed on the tail of the counter culture, eagerly seizing and marketing, in a vulgarised form, anything that would sell. If the "Politics of Ecstasy" meant little to the working class boy in the East End of London or the ex-Ted in Manchester, in the Summer of 1967 on his holidays in Southend or Blackpool he would have seen Indian love beads, cardboard headbands and plastic daffodils by the score. Whatever was happening within the counter culture that represented a "new dawn", it is important to remember that those involved still had to be content with the mighty force

of capitalist consumer culture. Jeff Nuttall paints the image well:

"From UFO the fad for freakouts on a San Francisco scale spread through 1967 - UFO held freakouts at Wesker's Roundhouse and the Alexandra Palace and commercial promoters picked up the habit and put them on throughout the country. The national press assisted splendidly, particularly the People and the News of the World, bandying around the Castalia Foundation's term 'psychedelic' like any popularised psychoanalytic phrase, talking about 'flower power' and drug-crazed youths with that menopausal tone of total scandal that is guaranteed to bring the English clustering like flies to the subject as participants or sight-seers. Nine months after the first gatherings in Haight-Ashbury mill girls and office workers were wandering down the Brighton and Blackpool seafronts, jangling their souvenir prayer-belts, trailing their Paisley bedspreads, brandishing daffodils and trying to look tripped out. The Beatles had gone 'flower power' and it was up to the kids to do their best to follow."⁶

The source of the "great refusal", as Marcuse called it, represented by the counter culture of the 1960s was white affluent middle class youth, though the enthusiasm with which individual members of this stratum attached themselves to

the counter culture varied enormously. And it should also be noted, though it often is not, that it would be wrong to believe that working class youth was totally excluded from the action.

Basically the counter culture was a reaction against what affluence was reputedly doing to men's minds:

"For here were people protesting not against material hardship, but against the emotional containment of affluence, a feeling that affluence was not all that there was to life and that public success in the affluent world might be personally meaningless."⁷

This, of course, was a sentiment that had been voiced by the Left in Europe for a long time. For the New Left, though, groups such as the Communist Party had become moribund; their strategies and political equations had ceased to provide a meaningful alternative vision.

Pearson argues that the arrival of the counter culture, born not out of material hardship, but out of the very affluence that was supposed to have welded a post industrial social harmony, marked the end of the "end of ideology" thesis. However, we must be careful here. In the late sixties the New Left (the overtly political wing of the counter culture) had made a significant impact on this social harmony dear to the hearts of the end of ideology theorists by generating social unrest e.g. events in France in 1968, but to generalise that the counter culture as a whole led to

the abandonment of the 'end of ideology' is perhaps going too far. The end of ideology thesis not only asserted that affluence would lead to the accommodation of all interests as partners in prosperity - thus creating social harmony - but it also contained the promise of classlessness ("we're all middle class now"), and it is this latter element in the end of ideology thesis which a number of commentators actually saw the counter culture as offering. Thus the dawning of the Age of Aquarius became a romantic celebration of youth, leading us back to the Garden of Eden, though we could take our electric mixer with us. For those within the counter culture, of course, electric mixers were anathema, identified as they were with middle class suburbia, though, paradoxically, certain products of capitalist technological affluence were allowed: synthesisers, records, electric guitars, stereo units were infused with non-perjorative social meaning. It was a "classlessness" age, for divisions in society were between the young and the old, and no longer between classes. Youth would change society, but capitalism would still exist. There was no middle class or working class adjective in front of the term youth, the new consciousness of youth had transcended old fashioned notions of class.

The whole flavour of this kind of analysis is captured in Charles Reich's literary hotpot "The Greening of America". In Britain the ex-editor of Oz, Richard Neville, argued that members of the counter culture were prophets of a new

era of computerised leisure, harbingers of new personally fulfilling strategies for coping with a future based on leisure. The American sociologist Fred Davis, in a paper entitled "Why all of us may be hippies someday", also celebrated the prophetic nature of the counter culture, arguing that the hippies were:

"Rehearsing in vivo possible cultural solutions to central life problems posed by the emerging society of the future."⁸

The "society of the future" would be middle class, freed from the antagonisms laid down by the first Industrial Revolution, a society built on affluence and leisure. By the 1970s major economic crises throughout Western capitalism had altered the whole picture, and relegated those halcyon days of the 1960s to the status of another short-lived temporary (though influential) period in history. More than all the academic arguments from the Left against the proponents of the end of ideology thesis, cold economic events have effectively demolished bourgeois complacency.

In the 1960s the New Left did confront capitalism as a system, though in a manner which many older European socialists found strange. In the main this was because of the importance attached to the relationship between the personal and the political mentioned earlier. The term politics was itself conceptually expanded, so that it came to be used in ways quite alien to standard political discourse. And this expansion of meaning is important in

any discussion of politics and deviance. In this context Pearson quotes Marcuse:

"Can we speak of a juncture between the erotic and political dimensions?"⁹

Adding:

"The 'new sensibility' of the counter cultural deviant imagination was, for Marcuse, a highly significant political event."¹⁰

Pearson then goes on to indicate the intellectual roots of Marcuse's work in the Frankfurt School, which was at its most creative in pre-war Germany, and during the war when its members were in exile in America. There is no doubt that the Frankfurt, or "Critical", School held a formidable array of intellectual talent: Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Walter Benjamin and Leo Lowenthal for example. The Frankfurt School believed that the view of man's relationship to nature which grew out of the Enlightenment, although it discarded the naive animism of an earlier period, was not fulfilling the promise of real social progress. As men had manipulated nature, so men used technology to manipulate men, but not simply in a physical sense, for their consciousness and senses were also manipulated, and the Frankfurt School argued that men were in need of a "sense" liberation. Marcuse saw in the sometimes serious, yet at other times silly and childish behaviour of the counter culture the possibility of the liberation taking place. A later member of the Frankfurt School, Jurgen Habermas, comments on the

political content of the counter culture:

"I consider the politicisation of private conflicts a singular result of the protest movement.. What is peculiar is the short term displacement of the culturally normative border between private and public conflicts. Today, difficulties that a mere 2 or 3 years would have been passed for private matters...now claim political significance and ask to be justified in political concepts. Psychology seems to turn into politics - perhaps a reaction to the reality that politics, in so far as it relates to the masses, has long been translated into psychology."¹¹

Habermas also wrote (and quoted by Pearson) that in the new protest movement there was a convergence of politics and deviance which:

"...brings to light the cryptopolitical substance of derivative psychic disturbance."¹²

The last quotation has some significance for Pearson's own view of the relationship between politics and deviance, in that the term "cryptopolitical" is used by him in an account of one example of deviant behaviour, namely paki-bashing, in a North East Lancashire town. The argument put forward by Pearson in this study is very relevant to the basic theme of this paper, which is one reason why I have spent some time outlining his interpretation of the relationship between the New Left and the counter culture in the 1960s. Indeed it is

worthwhile pursuing Pearson's work further, in order to see how he views the development of a "new" sociology of deviance - misfit sociology as he calls it - in the 1960s. As I have said earlier, deviancy theory was influenced by what was going on around it, and what is of especial interest for our purposes is the introduction of a political dimension.

Using one of the best known statements on the political status of deviant behaviour written at this time (Horowitz and Liebowitz)¹³, Pearson illustrates how some of the new deviancy theory extended the argument presented by Becker earlier in the decade. Becker had stressed that the labelling process was subject to an unequal distribution of power, i.e. it was a political process, however, by the late sixties some sociologists were attempting to show how deviant behaviour was itself political. As Pearson puts it:

"Or, more specifically, that deviance should be grasped as a primitive crypto-political action, in the same way that social bandits in peasant societies, or the maching smashing of the Luddites, represented a primitive political force."¹⁴

It is here that Pearson latches onto Habermas's term "crypto-political", and he underlines the point by referring to Hobsbawm's concept of "primitive rebel". He then outlines examples of research where the authors have also broken with traditional approaches to deviance and attempted to show how certain deviancies may be viewed

as political acts. Goldman's study of school-directed vandalism¹⁵ is an attempt to show that such behaviour is far from arbitrary or aimless, but is frequently directed at the vandal's own school (where he has experienced problems associated with high staff turnover, poor equipment, low teacher morale etc.) Such vandalism is thus seen as revenge against felt injustices. Likewise, truancy represents a "political" comment by the children as they "vote with their feet".

His final example is the well known study of soccer hooliganism by Ian Taylor. Here the "trouble" associated with football matches is seen as an inarticulate attempt to recapture earlier working class links with a game which, because of increasing professionalisation, supporters have become more and more isolated from at club level.

Whether one views a particular type of deviant behaviour as political depends, of course, on one's definition of "political". The world of academic sociology is not without its fights over concepts, though rather than being simply a semantical squabble for its own sake, this in-fighting is an expression of the paradigmatic heterogeneity of the discipline. Concepts such as "political", "alienation" and "class" have been defined and used by different sociologists in different ways, depending on preferred orientations to the study of society in general. "True" definitions of such terms do not exist, of course, in the sense,

that is, of being hewn on stone tablets as absolutes; they are human concepts, culturally derived in the on-going process of man attempting to understand his social world. The usefulness of concepts is measured by their status as heuristic devices.

In the 1960s the fusion between the New Left and the counter culture produced definitions of "political" notable for their extreme fluidity and flexibility. In a range of publications almost anything was likely to be prefixed by the term "the politics of": the politics of ecstasy, of madness, of sexuality, of shoplifting, and so on. Although part of the New Left counter cultural configuration, those involved in making everything "political" did so from a number of perspectives, and with varying degrees of sophistication. Poets, journalists, novelists, psychiatrists, sociologists, as well as a range of "turned on" cultural pundits, carried forward this break with traditionalism. Many of them also began to use the term "radical" to underline opposition to traditional ways of thinking, thus there appeared movements such as radical social work, radical education and radical philosophy.

Although influential writers from other disciplines are important, e.g. R.D. Laing, it is the work of sociologists studying deviant behaviour that is of primary concern in this paper. Both Becker¹⁶ and Lemert¹⁷ stressed that the power to impress the deviant label was concentrated in the hands of the powerful few,

and at least to this extent they saw the deviant process as political. Others, e.g. Horowitz and Liebowitz and Stan Cohen took the discussion further, and argued that traditional divisions between "ordinary" social deviance and "political" deviance were suspect and in need of being redrawn. The arguments put forward by these and other theorists will be examined in more detail later on, for the present I wish to briefly return to the work of Geoff Pearson on the relationship between politics and deviance. I would suggest that his own position is not as clear-cut as it might appear to be from a first glance. Although there is an apparent elegant simplicity about his basic argument, there is also a certain moral, or judgemental, ambivalence pervading his work.

Pearson and Political Deviance

During his discussion of the influence of the New Left and the counter culture on the "misfit" sociologies of the 1960s he gently eases himself into the position of an ally of some of the writers he is dealing with. When he takes up the argument put forward by Goldman on the politics of vandalism (and includes the work of others such as Ian Taylor) we can educe certain parallels with his own work on paki-bashing, and it is here that Pearson introduces some indications of his own thoughts on what constitutes "political" deviance:

"Vandalism in terms of the preceding discussion, is a primitive inarticulate attempt to 'right' wrongs: in that sense, it is a crypt-political act."¹⁸

What is of interest here is how does Pearson view the people who actually engage in this type of deviance? At one moment he seems to be casting them in the role created by the counter culture of the sixties, i.e. as Robin Hood figures, striking out against an unjust society, yet at other moments he is well aware of the naivety and over-romanticism of writers who in the sixties said this.

His own study of paki-bashing is offered as further evidence of "primitive rebellion", comparing paki-bashers with the machine-bashing handloom weavers of 19th century Lancashire. Rather than view the racial violence as meaningless pathology, he attempts to endow those involved with rational (from their point of view) purpose, and locate the behaviour in the socio-economic changes taking place in that part of Lancashire at the time of the violence. Thus (some) vandals, truants, football hooligans and paki-bashers (as well as the machine smashers) are lumped together within the same analytical scheme as representatives of crypto-political action, as "folk heroes". The problem, however, is in what sense does Pearson conceive of these groups as folk heroes, or Robin Hood figures? Whilst we do not expect Pearson to make moral judgements regarding each type of behaviour, the use of the term "folk hero" implies that some kind of judgemental position is being adopted by someone.

Indeed this raises a whole range of problems relating to the nature of deviancy itself, e.g. if a deviant is also a folk hero, then who is applying the social censure whereby the deviancy is defined? It is worthwhile pursuing Pearson's definition of a "folk hero", or, put another way, how he is able to define certain deviants as "folk heroes". The label "hero" is ordinarily applied to someone who achieves admiration for great deeds. The prefix "folk" presumably indicates that the admiration comes from among the ranks of "ordinary" people, thus a folk hero would be, literally, a hero of the people, whether they be rural peasants or an urban working class. If this is the case, then Pearson must be arguing that "the people", or a section of the people, admire the deeds of the vandal, truant and paki-basher, yet at the same time this social audience is at variance with another (and presumably more powerful) defining audience who successfully apply the deviant label. Whilst it is perhaps slightly vulgar within the sociology of deviance to speak of a quorum of definers, a minimum number of people necessary for the deviant to qualify as a folk hero, it is necessary to identify the definers if the term is to have any meaning. Calling someone a folk hero implies a moral judgement on the part of some social audience; those doing the labelling must approve of the deviant behaviour involved. The obvious question to ask is who in society is approving of the behaviour of (say)

vandals, truants and paki-bashers? Those who approve of the "primitive rebellion" of the vandal etc., may be classmates, neighbourhood mates, or various individuals or groups dotted about society, however, could we not take any form of deviant behaviour and find someone who admires it? It is possible for some deviants to be admired by comparatively large numbers of people, but are these folk heroes? Pearson's way out of this is to relate folk hero to "crypto-political" action i.e. it is not just the size of the admiring group that qualifies the deviant as a folk hero (this is necessary, though not sufficient) the deviant must also be engaged in "crypto-political" action. We thus return to square one, and must attempt to fathom what "crypto-political" action means.

As mentioned earlier, when reading Pearson it is sometimes difficult to know whether he is simply describing the views of a particular author, or whether he is also endorsing those views. For instance he suggests that for the counter culture:

"The misfit's delinquencies surface as an inarticulate political consciousness: personal distress turns into the murmurings of personal and crypto-political dissent whether it finds its expression through running away from home, illicit drug use, marital infidelity, truanting, vandalism, thieving, promiscuity, suicide, psychosis, hooliganism, or whatever...No longer a marginal conglomerate of paki-bashers, telephone

kiosk wreckers, and feckless psychopaths".¹⁹

Certainly Pearson would agree with the counter culture/misfit sociologists as far as at least some of the above examples of deviant behaviour are concerned, but he does not make it clear where he draws the line. He is fully aware of the dangers of romanticism contained within the counter culture, as is Paul Rock who criticises the:

"...romanticism which views all criminals as primitive innocents who are engaged in inarticulate political conflict with institutional authority".²⁰

Though curiously enough Pearson strongly criticises Rock. Rock states his case simply and solidly:

"...politicised deviancy may be defined as that activity which is regarded as expressly political by its participants".²¹

Pearson objects to this because it:

"...reduces politics to a 'meaning': specifically the meaning which any act has for the actors".²²

Thus, paradoxically, each is in effect criticising the other for misplaced romanticism - Pearson for making criminals into Robin Hood figures, Rock for equating deviance with subjective intent. Furthermore, and to add to the confusion, each views the other as being misled by the counter culture/misfit paradigm of the sixties. Rock is seen by Pearson as unwittingly

expressing "misfit" sentiments in his attack on the misfit paradigm:

"It is ironical that he thus becomes contained within the romantic, libertarian, subjectivist politics at which he aims his criticism. Such is the force of the misfit paradigm, and so extended are its boundaries, that many who believe that they are its critics use tools of criticism which express its core sentiments."²³
(emphasis in original)

This debate does raise the important question of the place of consciousness in deviant behaviour, and specifically the place of consciousness in Pearson's political deviance: this will be returned to later on. Again, we are reminded here of Pearson's ambivalence, for although he attacks Rock for introducing subjectivism, the final section of his chapter reads as a celebration of subjectivism, and a critique of more recent criminology which emphasises "objective" conditions.

The Main Features of the New Deviancy

Developments in the sociology of deviance in the 1960s, producing the so-called new deviancy, made for important re-orientations in the study of deviant behaviour. Although most of the new criminologies that emerged in Britain during the 1970s were not, as such, derived from the labelling perspective, the impact of "labelling theory" was sufficient to raise a number of issues eventually taken up by the new

criminologies. These new criminologies, in so far as they relate to this paper, will be examined later.

Labelling theory²⁴ marked an important break with the causal/corrective approach of traditional criminology, where crime and deviance were investigated and explained within the context of social policy and legal and penal processes. In orthodox criminology crime and deviance tended to be conceptualised as being pathological, and the search for causes (of a more or less positivist nature) was linked to the eradication of the crime or deviance. Implicit in this approach was a denial of the authenticity of the deviant's account, thus subjective motivations and purposes were rendered invalid.

Labelling theory had its roots in the earlier work of G.H. Mead and the symbolic interactionist school, though it did come in a number of somewhat different guises. However, certain essential elements allows a general overview to be made. Following the symbolic interactionists, the focus was on the individual, and the processes whereby social actors develop self perceptions and perceptions of others through social interaction. And it was this subjectivism within labelling theory which allowed for the assimilation (albeit sometimes crudely) of certain phenomenological notions. More importantly though, from the point of view of the subsequent development of the sociology of deviance, it brought into the open a number of problems

which eventually formed the focal concerns of those sociologists working within a phenomenological framework.²⁵

Matza, whose "naturalism" derived from a phenomenological perspective, introduced in the late sixties the influential concept appreciation. This concept came to be used as a counter to what were seen as the corrective concerns of orthodox criminology. As Wiles points out:

"The stress on methodological individualism which was injected into criminology by interactionist sociology created a long-term interest in the authenticity of deviant action and in the social processes by which such authenticity is acknowledged or denied."¹⁶

For Matza appreciation meant that the sociologist should aim for truthfulness and accuracy in his descriptions of social phenomena. Thus instead of carrying out one's study on the basis of presuppositions regarding the (immoral) nature of deviant behaviour, with the aim of eradicating it, the sociologist should attempt to present the behaviour in its own terms. As Matza puts it:

"To appreciate the variety of deviant enterprises requires a temporary or permanent suspension of conventional morality, and thus by usual standards inescapable elements of irresponsibility and absurdity are implicit in the appreciative

stance. Deviant enterprises, and the persons who engage them, are almost by definition troublesome and disruptive. How silly and perhaps evil, therefore, seem the appreciative sentiments of those who have been guided by the naturalist spirit. These appreciative sentiments are easily summarized: We do not for a moment wish that we could rid ourselves of deviant phenomena. We are intrigued by them. They are an intrinsic, ineradicable, and vital part of human society."²⁷

This has taken us away from the new deviancy and into later developments; it will, however, be useful to now return to the early and middle 1960s and the labelling perspective itself. The extraction of certain features from the symbolic interactionist tradition led labelling theorists to place emphasis on the social psychological implications for the actor of being labelled "deviant". The relationship between definers and defined was conceived of as processual, that is individuals are involved in a process of subjectively constructing a symbolic world on the basis of their interactions with, and, specifically, labelling by others. A deviant is someone who has been so labelled, and who in the process comes to accept this label on the psychological level. The acceptance of the deviant label is then understood to have crucial implications for his future behaviour.

The notion of deviancy amplification²⁸ was introduced as a way of explaining the consequences of the societal reaction for behaviour labelled deviant. In simple terms this postulated that the actions of the rule enforcers aimed at stamping out the deviance, or at least containing it, could under certain conditions lead to the opposite effect, that is to an increase in the amount of deviance. In this way a vicious circle of reaction and counter-reaction is put in motion.

For the labelling theorists, then, the actions of the rule-makers and the rule enforcers are at least equally as important as the actions of the rule-breakers. This stands in contrast to traditional criminology where attention tended to be focused on the rule-breakers and the "social factors" causing the infraction. Lemert's statement illustrates the change of focus:

"This is a large turn away from older sociology which tended to rest heavily upon the idea that deviance leads to social control. I have come to believe that the reverse idea, i.e., social control leads to deviance, is equally tenable and the potentially richer premises for studying deviance in modern society."²⁹

It was Lemert who introduced the idea of primary and secondary deviation, described by Schur as "a distinction that has been central to the work of recent labelling theorists."³⁰ Primary deviation is meant to apply to those instances of deviant behaviour where the deviant

is not involved in any radical re-orientation of his symbolic world; the deviation itself has only marginal implications for his self perception and social role. In these circumstances the rule-breaker is able to maintain a picture of himself as a non-deviant, and feels no need to change his self identity in order to cope with a punitive societal reaction. Secondary deviation, on the other hand, occurs when the rule-breaker is aware of strong disapproval of his behaviour, and in the process reconstructs his symbolic world and perceives himself as he is labelled, that is as deviant.

Becker, by stressing the importance of the societal reaction, wished to show that deviance itself was a relative concept, rather than an absolute quality inherent within certain acts. This famous quote from Becker illustrates his position:

"...deviance is created by society. I do not mean this in the way that it is ordinarily understood, in which the causes of deviance are located in the social situation of the deviant or in 'social factors' which prompt his action. I mean, rather, that social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular persons and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view deviance is not a quality of the act a person commits,

but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label."³¹

However, to say that "deviance is created by society" in the sense that social control leads to or creates deviance can, as Taylor, Walton and Young suggest, be interpreted in a number of ways:

- "a. It can simply mean that whilst massive amounts of rule breaking goes on in our society, this is not really deviant behaviour, or is not to be regarded as deviant behaviour until some social audience labels it deviant.
- b. It can be the possibility that an actor will become deviant as a result of experiencing the social reaction to an initial rule-infraction. In short, reactions by 'social control agencies' to an initial deviant act is so powerful in its implications for self that an individual comes to see himself as deviant and becomes increasingly committed to deviation.
- c. It can mean that the everyday existence of social control agencies produces given rates of deviance. In this sense it is obvious

that actual indices of crime or deviation are produced as a result of the everyday workings of the police, courts, social workers etc., which probably do not reflect actual amounts of deviance, but are merely indices of the deviance which is processed or handled by the social control agencies themselves."³²

By the early 1970s the whole of labelling theory had come under heavy criticism (Gouldner 1968; Mankoff 1971; Akers 1968; Schervish 1973; Walton 1973). The point needs to be stressed though that it is not so much labelling theory as a body of knowledge that is directly relevant to a discussion of the political status of delinquency (indeed labelling theory as such had nothing to say regarding the political nature of deviant acts in themselves) rather, as mentioned earlier, it is the way that labelling theory was received (especially in Britain) and functioned as a transitional stage in sociological thinking that is important here. With this in mind we can try to understand the impact of labelling theory on some British sociologists in Britain in the 1960s.

The Importation of Labelling Theory

Sociologists working in the area of crime and deviance were in Britain up until the 1960s almost trapped within the imperatives of academic traditionalism. The causal/corrective orientation, employing positivistic techniques of social investigation, was firmly placed

within the constraints of social policy and legal and penal practices. The criminologist's task was to "explain crime". Institutions such as the Home Office financed research as part of the "battle against crime." Coupled with this was a tendency for sociologists working in this field to find their work being treated as peripheral to the main concerns of sociology within the academic community. Stan Cohen has expressed this in the following terms:

"In terms of having congenial people to discuss our work with, we found some of our sociological colleagues equally unhelpful. They were either mandarins who were hostile towards a committed sociology and found subjects such as delinquency nasty, distasteful or simply boring, or else they were self-proclaimed radicals, whose political interests went only so far as their own definition of 'political' and were happy to consign deviants to social welfare or psychiatry. For different reasons, both groups found our subject matter too messy and devoid of significance. They shared with official criminology a depersonalized, dehumanized picture of the deviant: he was simply part of the waste products of the system, the reject from the conveyor belt".³³

Caught up as they were in this sort of climate, any criminologist or sociologist of a radical political bent,

who was also sceptical of traditional approaches to crime and deviance, must almost inevitably have received the new deviancy as it arrived from across the Atlantic with some enthusiasm. New deviancy would have been a breath of fresh air, bringing with it an invigorating sense of new possibilities. There was a promise of a radical alternative to the moribund perspectives of traditional criminology. We must also remember, as the discussion of "misfit sociology" tries to show, that this was a period of more general cultural reappraisal, and sociologists were not immune to the influences and attractions of the counter culture. Did none of those who embraced the new deviancy not appreciate something of the coolness of the poolroom hustler, the hipness of being "On the Road", the lyrical anarchism of Dylan's songs, the mysteries of the acid trip, or the softly spoken message and loose demeanour of the head or freak? Stan Cohen referring to those who formed the National Deviancy Conference writes:

"They had all been through the generational experience which only a few commentators such as Jeff Nuttall (1968) have tried to comprehend. Talking or doing something about deviance seemed to offer - however misguided this might now look to an outsider - a form of commitment, a way of staying in, without on the one hand selling out or on the other playing the drab game of orthodox

politics, whose simplicities were becoming increasingly irritating."³⁴

And according to Cohen the two books which did most to turn them on to the new deviancy in the early days were Becker's "Outsiders", and Matza's "Delinquency and Drift".

The alternative to positivist criminology offered by the new deviancy allowed a broader spectrum of sociological theory and method to enter the arena, as well as the development of more sophisticated approaches to theory and method. In the early stages this was tentative, but the results of the reappraisal became clearer in the post new deviancy period of the 1970s, though disagreements and rifts still flourish, both within the new criminology and between the new criminology and other approaches. Indeed it is probably true to say that the area of deviancy has, since the 1960s, provided an arena for the coming together and discussion of the most fundamental theoretical concerns of sociology. These are concerns which go beyond the immediate study of deviance, and lie at the heart of sociology itself. I am thinking here of such things as the relationship between theory and practice, between ideology and science, and the society producing man/man producing society tension, as well as the development of specific types of sociological orientation (e.g. neo-marxist, phenomenological, ethnomethodological).

The question of the relationship between the deviant and the sociologist is of especial importance here. The sixties saw a move away from a situation where the sociologist as it were lined up with the rule enforcers,

to one where the stance adopted was either ambivalent, or even explicit on the side of the deviant. Becker, for instance, argued that the researcher had no alternative, but to take sides. Now this development had, I would suggest, important implications as far as the reception of the new deviancy in Britain was concerned. There are, however, important differences here between the more liberal sociologists, and those on the left, especially the New Left. For the liberal there was, somewhere within the new deviancy, a promise of a more humane welfare state, where the "outsider" was treated with dignity arising from a fuller understanding of the authenticity of his actions. Their stance was what "law and order" letter writers to the newspapers would describe (derogately) as "soft". For those on the left the promise led in a different direction, and brought to the surface what may be described as latent moral ambiguities regarding deviants and their actions. In a review of the new deviancy Young has written:

"Attacking a theoretical position to which one is opposed often tends towards the erection of an alternative position which is merely an inversion of one's opponent's."³⁵

The inversion of traditional criminology created an interesting situation. If crime was previously pathological it was now 'normal'; if criminologists had previously sided with "official" versions of reality, they now side with the deviant's; if previous research was aimed at correction,

it was now aimed at "appreciation"; and (wherein lies the crux of the problem) if previously crime was "wrong", is it now "right"? Is there something in crime which the left can positively appreciate, i.e. explicitly approve of?

The new deviancy raised the idea of relativism. Writers such as Becker,³⁶ Kitsuse,³⁷ and Erickson³⁸ argued that no behaviour was intrinsically deviant, deviant status depended on the power to label. Leaving aside for moment a discussion of whether or not deviance is a quality of the act, this relativism does relate to one dimension of the societal reaction to deviance which is arguably endemic to any society. Not only do different groups within society judge so-called deviant acts according to different moral criteria, but the same person may possess moral ambivalence regarding these acts. Thus, for example, stealing may be thought "wrong", whilst at the same time stealing things from work is acceptable if you can get away with it. Sociologists and criminologists who occupy a more or less conservative position vis a vis crime may publicly produce work which reflects official attitudes to crime, but even here the potential for personal moral ambivalence exists. However, for those sociologists on the left, the potential for moral ambivalence can also operate on another level, and indicates one of the reasons why they should find the new deviancy in the early and middle sixties attractive.

The orthodox left (exemplified by the journal "Marxism Today") in one sense occupied a similar position to that of the conservative criminologist in that although moral ambivalence on the personal level may have existed, publicly crime was adjudged to be "wrong", though of course their respective explanations and solutions would have been different. For the Old Left crime was the brutal response of the "lumpen" to the brutalities of capitalism, and with socialism there will be no need for anyone to break the law. For the New Left, however, caught up as it was with the counter culture, the new deviancy provided a mode of analysis which led to questions over the actual demarcation of crime/non-crime and deviance/non-deviance. If nothing was intrinsically immoral or evil, why should we accept official (ruling class) definitions? Put very simply, this general development raises the notion that perhaps some of the acts labelled deviant (and therefore immoral) are in fact acts to be approved of. This is a move beyond the argument that more evil things occur which are legal than illegal (exploitation of labour, land speculation, arms deals) within capitalism, to one where certain deviant acts are to be welcomed because they are, say, harmless, or even beneficial in socialist terms. This has obvious implications for the relationship between social science and the social world being studied, and as later developments showed, led to the introduction of the concept praxis into the discussion. Having said this, I am not suggesting it invalidates the sociological

work on deviancy done by the Left in the sixties in Britain. I stress the above because it does relate to the central discussion in this paper: the political status of delinquency. A great deal of the work on the politics of deviance in this country since the late 1960s has been done by sociologists who were influenced by the new deviancy, and as a consequence formed the National Deviancy Conference. Geoff Pearson, for instance, was at one time the secretary of the Conference. I would suggest that the moral ambivalence I have been speaking of has since worked its way, in various guises, into current criminology and the sociology of deviance.

A sociologist on the left, and especially one who was a Marxist, in the early and middle sixties found himself with an interesting range of possibilities emanating from knowledge of the new deviancy:

- a. He could reject the radical promise and carry on working within a paradigm that sided with the rule makers and the rule enforcers.
- b. He could aim for total "scientific" neutrality and take no sides. Many taking the first option would of course say they were doing this anyway.
- c. He could side with some, or all, of the deviants.

From these options the last one would seem to have been the most likely choice. However, to say that one "sides with the deviant" can mean a number of things. It can mean that one organises research and theory around the deviant's version of reality, or it can mean that one supports the actions of some deviants, or both. The question of supporting the deviant's actions is where the moral ambivalence enters, eventually leading to statements such as "the mass of delinquents are literally involved in the practice of redistributing private property."³⁹ It can also lead to a full-blooded romanticism, where all deviants are viewed as courageous non-conformists fighting an evil system. If the working class are thought to be frustratingly docile, or at best wrapped up in strategies based on economism, then deviance may be latched on to as an example of struggle against the state apparatus of capitalism. Should a sociologist who is also a socialist align himself with judges, magistrates, the police and prison governors, all of whom are in the business of maintaining the status quo, or with the deviant? This niggling problem, I would argue, has since the sixties been present in neo-marxist (and other) sociologies, though it has not necessarily been given explicit attention. The issue seems to have been especially confused in the 1960s, though even now it has by no means been resolved.

Part of the problem stems from what Jock Young has called an "inversion" of traditional criminology by the new deviancy. The left has to face the question of whether certain deviant acts (as defined within capitalism) will continue to be strongly disapproved of in a truly socialist society (even though the criminalising of rule infraction is removed). Leaving aside a metaphysical discussion about moral absolutes, and even a discussion of specific types of deviancy, the left must bring into its analysis a clearer understanding of their own, and the community's moral sentiments. In fact two issues have merged into one here, and should be separated out. Firstly, can all moral sentiments be condemned simply because they developed within capitalist society? And secondly, accepting (although it is rather vague) Taylor, Walton and Young's idea of "diversity" within socialism, will any behaviour be disapproved of in a socialist society, and if so, how is this disapproval generated and sustained? It is the first of these that is particularly relevant here, for this is where the potential for moral ambivalence on the part of the sociologist is located.

If we go back to the original material published as new deviancy we can see that whether it was really "on the side of the deviant" (although initially it may have been thought to be) is not at all clear cut. During the late sixties and early seventies labelling theory was subjected to a stream of criticism, and the

fact that this criticism came from all directions - from the Left, the Centre and the Right - illustrates this point. As Becker has written:

"Moral problems arise in all sociological research but are especially provocatively posed by interactionist theories of deviance. Moral criticism has come from the political centre and beyond, from the political Left, and from the left field. Interactionist theories have been accused of giving aid and comfort to the enemy, be the enemy those who would upset the stability of the existing order or the Establishment. They have been accused of openly espousing unconventional norms, of refusing to support anti-Establishment positions, and (the left field position) of appearing to support anti-Establishment causes while subtly favouring the status quo."⁴⁰

The "true" nature of labelling theory is, in a sense, not especially important here, however, but what is important is its role in the generation of issues and problems and their subsequent development. It is from the left that the strongest criticisms have come, with the argument that labelling theory was in essence only American liberalism, and substantially less radical than some commentators had originally thought. Labelling

theory, it has been suggested, was at the best only taking the side of the deviant in a very limited way, and at worst appeared to do so when in reality it was supporting the status quo. This, incidently, is my own position regarding labelling theory, but the point remains that when it was initially received by the left in the field of deviancy research, it appeared to promise radicalism, and seemed to be taking sides against the Establishment. To this extent it provided a fillip to what was a rather jaded area of research, and led to new important directions being taken in the late sixties and early seventies.

One of these directions was the development of a phenomenological sociology of deviance, notably in the work of Matza in America and Phillipson and Roche in Britain. The link with labelling theory is located in the concept of meaning, one of the central concepts in the new deviancy. The other direction (and they are not mutually independent) was developed on the basis of labelling theory's concern with the social organisation of reaction to rule breaking. Whilst labelling theory had tended to fall short of a critique of the wider social structure, the new "political" sociologists were very concerned to analyse the structural bases of rule creation and rule enforcement. The conflict theories of writers such as Turk and the Marxist influenced Quinney, and the neo-marxist criminology of, notably Taylor, Walton and Young,

represented attempts to locate crime and deviance within the context of social and economic power relationships. For Marxists this entailed not only seeing and analysing crime and deviance as a feature of industrial society, but, crucially, as a feature of capitalist society. It was not, therefore, simply a question of producing a radical critique of the state, but the application of Marxian concepts and models to the analysis of the state and its apparatus as a social formation in a capitalist mode of production. This politicisation of the study of deviance manifests itself in a number of ways, not all of them directly relevant to the problems I am addressing in this paper, though inevitably we cannot avoid these wider issues.

Basically there appear to be five analytically distinct ways in which deviance and politics have been related. These can be summarised as follows:-

1. Following on from the limited beginnings of the new deviancy writers, the creation and application of rules, and the societal reaction to deviance is viewed as a political process. Research along these lines has involved a wide range of analyses, including such things as a theory of the state vis a vis deviance; exposé (of the powerful) criminology; the law as an expression of ruling class interests; the importance of

- the institution of private property;
the historical material basis of crime;
the political nature of criminal statistics.
2. The recognition of a convergence between "ordinary" crime and ideological crime, especially as more deviant groups are becoming politicised, and the view that some or most deviance is in itself political.
 3. The recognition that deviant acts can have political consequences. This is to stress the results of deviant acts, rather than the reasons men and women give for committing them.
 4. The recognition that the effects of wider political structures create conditions which can facilitate deviant acts. This is to place the deviant (and everyone else) within the context of relations of power.
 5. A feeling that the sociologist of deviance (or anything else) must recognise the unity of theory and practice, and use his sociological work politically in the struggle for socialism.

Although each of the five approaches above are important, it is number 2 that directly relates to the main theme of this paper. It should be stressed that the present state of the sociology of deviance in Britain, especially the disagreements and controversies within radical Marxian-informed criminology, makes it impossible to make neat parcels of 1 - 5 above, and allocate them to particular

"camps": the subject remains in a state of flux.

Pearson has made a similar point:

"...the aggressive noises which misfit sociology makes towards the social-control apparatus takes on the appearance of a politics, and misfit sociology becomes transformed into a theoretical conception of deviance and deviance control as politics, even if it is not altogether clear as to what kind of politics this is."⁴¹

Post New Deviancy: Horowitz and Leibowitz, Cohen and Hall

Having in a general way discussed some of the political issues that emerged out of the new deviancy, and the factors facilitating its reception, I would now like to consider examples of research where the relationship between politics and deviance has been explicitly analysed.

Both Becker and Lemert had shown how the designation of certain acts as deviant was determined by the distribution of power in society, that is, that the labelling process was a political process. Lemert⁴² also stressed that powerful elites were able to strongly influence how deviant behaviour would be dealt with: whether, as Lemert puts it, to "control or decontrol" deviance.

In 1968 Horowitz and Leibowitz⁴³ published an influential paper on the politics of deviance which considerably extended the argument put forward by the

labelling theorists. Not only was the labelling of certain acts as deviant a political process, they argued, but some forms of "socially" deviant acts should be more properly viewed as "politically" deviant acts. Their paper shows how the labelling process is based on a consensus welfare model of society, which leads to a false dichotomy being made by sociologists, law makers, social workers etc. between deviant and political acts. For them society is made up of struggles between groups who are differentiated on the basis of power, with elites, by definition, holding positions most favourably suited for determining whether acts are to be accorded political status or not. The labels attached will have important implications, in terms of social response and treatment, for the groups concerned.

Their charge that traditional definitions of political are too narrow and inflexible was obviously in tune with some of the ideas emanating from the New Left/counter cultural configuration in America and Europe at that time. This criticism of orthodox ways of assessing whether an act is political or not has already been discussed as a facet of what Pearson calls the misfit paradigm.

For Horowitz and Leibowitz the labelling of an act as deviant or political is itself a political act, and the essence of their paper is that in reality these

traditional labels are becoming increasingly redundant. In other words, developments in the 1960s, in particular protest based on the experience of the ghetto, have produced a convergence between the "deviant" and the "political":

"The result of this trend is estimated to be an increase in the use of violence as a political tactic, and the development of a revolutionary potential among the expanding ranks of deviant sub-groups."⁴⁴

Thus political minorities are increasingly stepping outside the repertoire of acceptable tactics to further their causes, and taking up methods, as well as life styles, normally associated with deviant groups. On the other side, deviant groups in an effort to make their voices heard, are increasingly adopting what are normally thought of as political strategies. Thus:

"The traditional distinction between social problems and the political system is becoming obsolete."⁴⁵

Horowitz and Liebowitz argue that this convergence has occurred because the "right to dissent", traditionally enjoyed by powerful political minorities in society, has come to be questioned by the elites as these minorities have increasingly used deviant tactics. Obversely, deviant minorities have become increasingly less willing to confine their problems to the private sphere, and so have adopted modes of protest traditionally thought of

as political. However, powerful interests in society tend to deny political status to their protests as they have, so to speak, already been written off as "social problems". Thus if the actions of political minorities come to be defined in traditionally deviant terms, so these minorities will be responded to in ways similar to the responses given to deviance. A classic example of this would be the labelling of dissenters in the Soviet Union as "mentally ill".

It is important to recognise the limits of what Horowitz and Liebowitz are saying regarding the political nature of deviant acts. Whilst it is true that they argue that some socially deviant acts should now be properly seen as being politically deviant, this is not the same as saying that deviant acts are by definition political. They are referring only to certain types of deviance, taking place within certain contexts. Pearson seems to have read more into their paper than is actually there:

"But what emerges in the literature of misfit sociology from the analysis provided by Horowitz and Liebowitz is the imperative that one should understand not only the labelling process as a politically derived judgement, but also that deviant behaviour itself should be accorded political status. Or, more specifically, that deviance should be grasped as a primitive crypto-political action....."⁴⁶

The issues raised by Horowitz and Liebowitz have since been taken up and developed by a number of sociologists working in the area of crime and deviance. In Britain the work of Stan Cohen and Stuart Hall is particularly relevant.

Cohen's position is presented in a paper published in 1973,⁴⁷ though he presents the same points, in a simplified form, in an earlier paper published in 1969.⁴⁸ Basically his paper is a reiteration of Horowitz and Liebowitz's arguments with additional support from other relevant material. To begin with he is concerned with making deviance into a political issue in the sense that (following the transactionalists) the labelling process and the decision to treat deviance as a social problem is political. This can have fundamental consequence in terms of the social responses to those so labelled. As Horowitz and Liebowitz had also stated, assigning certain kinds of political behaviour to the deviant category negates any social criticism informing the behaviour. To define the behaviour as deviant classifies it as another example of a "social problem", thus invalidating the social protest involved by placing it firmly within a social policy framework. As a consequence the possibility that the "deviants" concerned are reacting rationally to "wrongs" in the social structure is removed.

Following Horowitz and Liebowitz, Cohen then extends the argument to show that a convergence is taking

place between criminal violence and ideological violence. This blurring of the lines separating the two forms of violence is said to have led to a serious challenge to orthodox, common sense definitions of what is meant by "political":

"There is much talk of alienation, dropping out, disaffiliation and youth on the streets. There is confusion about the line beyond which 'stealing' becomes 'looting', 'hooliganism' becomes 'rioting', 'vandalism' becomes 'sabotage'. When do 'reckless maniacs' become 'freedom fighters'? Are the everyday encounters between the police and urban slum youth throughout the world somehow stripped of their political significance if what is happening is not defined as a 'riot' or 'disturbance'?"⁴⁹

I have already mentioned the possibility of a temptation to read into Horowitz and Liebowitz's paper more than is present, we could make the same point with respect to Cohen's paper. Cohen himself does recognise the limits within which Horowitz and Liebowitz's paper is written - specifically they do not suggest that all, or even most, deviance is political - and he confines his own argument to the same sort of limits. Cohen is not trying to make all deviants into political rebels fighting the capitalist system, as the following quote indicates:

"Behaviour which in the past was conceived of as deviant is now assuming well-defined ideological and organisational contours.

The politicisation of groups such as drugtakers and homosexuals is only the most obvious manifestation: any attempt to resist stigmatisation, manipulation in the name of therapy or punishment is a self-conscious move to change the social order and in any conception of the political process in terms other than looking at matters such as voting figures, these activities are political."⁵⁰

Thus for Cohen deviance becomes political when it is "politicised", i.e. when it becomes "a self conscious move to change the social order". This raises a very important point, and indicates the conceptual problems when analysing the political content in socially defined deviant groups. I would suggest that we have to clearly distinguish between three types of activity:

1. Activities which constitute "ordinary" deviance and, according to some pre-determined definition, are not "political".
2. Activities which are political according to this definition, but which are carried out by a deviant group whose basic deviant behaviour is not in itself political.
3. Activities which are political according to this definition, carried out by a deviant group whose basic deviance has become the political activity because of a change in consciousness.

Both Horowitz and Liebowitz and Cohen agree that some examples of deviant behaviour will fall into the first category, i.e. will not be political, but neither paper clearly differentiates between 2 and 3. In both papers 2 and 3 seem to merge into each other so that they become the same phenomenon: one side of the deviance/politics convergence. In spite of this, though, the two possibilities are present in the papers, and can be separated out. Therefore, when Cohen refers to the politicisation of drugtakers and homosexuals, he is in fact talking about case number 2 above. Here the deviant behaviour does not become political when the groups protest, rather the political behaviour occurs when those involved step outside their usual patterns of behaviour and undertake new kinds of acts as protest. In other words, whereas in the past deviant minorities carried out their deviances more or less privately, they are now entering the public realm and taking up political modes of protest. It is this new activity which is political, not the basic deviance. Being a homosexual or engaging in homosexual acts is not conceived of as political by Cohen (or Horowitz and Liebowitz) but the militant activities of homosexuals as part of gay liberation are seen as being political. It is not being "gay" that represents political activity, but the new tactics involved in attempting to gain certain rights. Likewise smoking marijuana is not in itself political, but if marijuana users take actions

aimed at a redefinition of public attitudes and responses then they engage in political activities (according to Cohen's definition of political).

As far as this paper is concerned number 3 above is the important case. Here the actual deviant behaviour is seen as being political, because it is carried out with a certain form of consciousness. When Cohen says that "There is confusion about the line beyond which 'stealing' becomes 'looting', 'hooliganism' becomes 'rioting'..." he is dealing with this case. He seems to be arguing that during the 1960s/early 1970s such types of deviance were increasingly accompanied by a changed consciousness so that we can no longer write-off, say, ghetto confrontation with the police as "hooliganism".

Cohen uses the term "reversible images" to express the process of convergence - political activists engaging in deviant acts, and deviants engaging in political acts. As he points out anarchists have sometimes welcomed the "political potential of criminals", whilst the "Old Left" have usually denounced criminal behaviour as counter-revolutionary. He does point out, though, that there has existed a minority tradition within socialism that has not written-off the revolutionary potential of the criminal:

"They might see deviance such as industrial sabotage as some sort of revolutionary consciousness and would certainly be concerned at politicising delinquent working class youth - such as football hooligans - rather than writing them off as being merely troublesome."⁵¹

This point about politicising football hooligans is an interesting one in the light of recent attempts by the National Front to recruit young working class football supporters into their ranks. Both Cohen and Hall (see below) discuss the politicisation of deviant groups in terms of left wing politics; it should not go unnoticed that if a political potential exists within deviant groups in society, the politics that emerge do not necessarily have to be socialist in orientation.

From the obverse side ("political" to "criminal") Cohen highlights the increasing tendency to conceptualise political acts in criminal terms. Although, he suggests, this strategy has a long history among agents of social control, a significant development in recent times has been the emergence of more and more political minorities "by-passing the established processes and occupying a no-man's land between political marginality and privatised deviance or ordinary crime." Hall's paper addresses itself to this development, which, as Cohen points out, often involves a contradiction:

"One might note that the functions of labelling, say, demonstrations or protests as delinquent are often contradictory. On the one hand, emotive terms such as 'thugs' or 'hooligans' increase the threat by conjuring up a screaming horde of atavistic beings. On the other, the delinquent definition is reassuring; the threat can be contained within the familiar limits of the penal and social services."⁵²

Hall's paper⁵³ deals with the relationship between deviance, politics and the media, and is, as he puts it, "largely speculative". He also acknowledges those labelling theorists who stressed that the process of labelling deviants was a political one, and uses the notion of convergence expressed in Horowitz and Liebowitz's paper as a springboard for his own ideas. In particular he emphasises that there has been a tendency for students and practitioners of law to play down the political element in the interactions between deviants and "straight society", and that studies and practices have been wrongly tied to a traditional and "highly formalistic" definition of politics, which in itself is seen as political.

The main focus of Hall's paper is on those political minorities pointed to by Horowitz and Liebowitz who are marginal to the more powerful and respectable political groups, and who frequently become involved in deviant or criminal activities. According to Cohen, in advanced capitalist societies an increasing number of such groups are springing up. Now whilst such political minorities are, again, not what this paper is essentially concerned with, Hall's discussion does bring out certain points which are very relevant to an analysis of the politics of delinquency. It is also worth noting that Hall is the Director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, and recent material from the Centre (discussed later) is directly connected to the

main thrust of this paper.

Hall agrees with the convergence argument put forward by Horowitz and Liebowitz and Cohen:

"The crisp distinction between socially and politically deviant behaviour is increasingly difficult to sustain."⁵⁴

And he suggests five reasons why this is so. These can be summarised as follows:-

1. Many socially deviant groups are becoming politicised.
2. Many politically activist groups have "deviant" life styles and values.
3. Deviant groups have a political content (as an expression of their dissociation from the status quo) which is expressed in cultural or existential terms rather than "objective" class conflict terms.
4. Such minorities have begun to organise and thus make their voice into a more obviously political one.
5. Consensual models of social inquiry are being increasingly challenged so that traditional definitions of politics and deviance are being questioned.

An examination of the work of the Birmingham Centre (see below) will show how number 3 of these reasons occupies an important place. It raises the question of whether the "ordinary" delinquent, badly treated by the bourgeois institutions he comes into contact

with, and caught up in wider structural changes, rebels on the cultural or existential level e.g. styles of dress, cultural objects and demeanour. Is the delinquent, using what to him are accessible modes of protest, in fact engaging in a form of political activity on the cultural or existential level? Certainly, more formally articulated modes of political protest will generally be inaccessible (for all kinds of reasons) to the working class delinquent because of his structural location in the class system.

Having rejected traditional approaches to politics and deviance, Hall is clearly aware that the construction of alternative definitions is a difficult, though crucial task. Even Lemert's distinction between "deviant groups" and "political minorities" is seen as problematic:

"Groups of individuals whose values are being sacrificed by intoxication and drunkenness may have no structure to formulate their vaguely felt dissatisfactions. On the other hand, minorities, because their programmes are defined and their power is organised and well timed, more readily have their values cast into an emergent pattern of social action."⁵⁵ (quoted by Hall).

Hall's comment is:

"This distinction, too, is no longer so clear-cut. Certainly, we need some way of distinguishing between behaviour labelled deviant, where the

participants formulate no programme of action, and require only to be left alone by the authorities of control, or more organised form(s) of political activism. Many so-called 'crimes without victims' or 'crimes' where the only victims are the participants themselves, fall within the first category. Such forms of action differ from the actions of political minorities whose 'values' are more readily cast 'into an emergent pattern of social action'. Yet, deviant groups who regularly, because of their deviation, fall foul of the law, and are harassed by law-enforcing agencies and the courts, may, in response, develop programmes, organisations, and actions directed at ending their stigmatization or redefining the legal injunctions against them."⁵⁶

Hall is obviously aware of the need for some distinction to be made between social deviance and political deviance; he does not argue that all deviance is political, though he does want to broaden the concept of political. Thus he distinguishes here between those who actively work to alter their status in and treatment by society. When such groups do begin to take action it represents for Hall:

"...at the very least, the inception of a process of politicization of deviant subcultures along at least two dimensions...

they undertake to 'alter the shape of the hierarchy'...(and) define the social stigmas against them in political terms."⁵⁷

This carries with it an echo of the paper by Stan Cohen discussed previously, for once again the deviant groups isolated, this time by Hall, as becoming "politicised", are groups which are not acting politically when engaging in their basic deviance, but when they begin to employ, as it were, extra "protective" measures and attempt to "alter the shape of the hierarchy". The difficult question, however, is are there examples of delinquent behaviour that represent in themselves some sort of political deviance?

Hall devotes much of his paper to an expansion of Horowitz and Liebowitz's argument that deviance (at least from liberal perspectives) has generally been analysed on the basis of the "majoritarian formulation of politics". This means that American (or British) society is seen as operating on the democratic principle of the right to have one's voice heard, even if it is a small one, and that appropriate channels exist to facilitate this. Large or small political groups therefore have the right to present their cases, and their views are respected and legitimated provided that they keep within the institutionalised framework, within, that is, the accepted rules of the game of protest. In this way, it is posited, governments can exercise the "will of the people". As Hall makes it clear though, society has become increasingly

complex, and at any one time many competing interests will co-exist. The contest between them, however, is not an equal one. Those groups who enjoy access to the more powerful elites will obviously be better placed to make their voice heard, and have their wishes taken into consideration than weaker minority groups who have no contacts with elites. Furthermore, the cause with which a group is associated will determine the reception which that political group receive and some causes lie outside what are seen as "legitimate" limits. These groups, lying at the margins of the "legitimate" political system, are very vulnerable to being labelled deviant, and consequently being placed into the category of a social problem. This acts to invalidate any rationality or justness which their causes may possess.

We can relate this to an earlier point made during this commentary on Hall's work: that delinquency may be a cultural or existential expression of political activity, this being easily overlooked because its articulation does not conform to accepted standards. Working class youth who hold certain grievances or face certain problems (e.g. treatment by teachers which they resent, unemployment) may find that their "cause" is unacceptable to those with power in the hierarchy, and that access to this hierarchy is severely restricted anyway. To this extent they share the same situation as marginal political groups. The difference is that

unlike delinquent groups, political minorities will organise around recognisable, articulated ideologies. For the working class youth delinquency will represent one of a limited range of options: lack of knowledge, education or desire, effectively blocking the formation of a definite political group. The question we have to face, then, is whether delinquency can be viewed as an alternative response to forming a political minority, a response determined by constraints located in the youth's milieu. Choice is present, but it is exercised within structures over which he has had little control, though delinquency may be an attempt to resolve this.* Crucially we have to decide whether this response can be defined as "political" (or primitive political/crypto-political) or whether it is something else.

Although Hall speaks of a form of politics being present in the deviant process:

"The latent political content of the deviant process and the deviant element in radical politics now emerge together as a single phenomenon."⁵⁸

His emphasis on political minorities means that he neglects to expand in any detail on the possible nature of this political content within deviance.** Indeed when Hall spells out what he means by

* See Phil Cohen "Sub-Cultural Conflict and Working Class Community", Working Papers in Cultural Studies, No.2. 1972, C.C.C.S. University of Birmingham.

** He does deal with this in more detail in "The Hippies: An American Moment", Uni. of Birmingham 1968, though here the focus is on hippies.

political deviance he constructs a definition which excludes a whole range of deviant groups - including "ordinary" delinquents. For him politically deviant groups are characterised by the following:

- a. The group's projects must contain some manifest political aim or goal as well as perhaps a latent content of deviant attitudes and life style.
- b. They use "illegitimate" means to further or secure their ends.
- c. In life style, attitude and relationships they are socially unorthodox, permissive, even subversive.
- d. They are marginal to more powerful groups.
- e. They challenge the established political framework.
- f. They by-pass "left" "reformism" and trade union "economism".

He then gives examples of the kinds of groups he has in mind:

"The types of deviant political activities involved include student militancy and protest...militant extra-parliamentary demonstrations...; urban rioting and rebellion...and urban insurgency...; sporadic incidents of bombing incendiarism, attacks on property for political reasons...; squatters' movements,

rent strikes, militant tenants' action; ethnically-orientated 'Black Power' or Panther-style activities."⁵⁹

In his 1969 paper Cohen wrote:

"Who now, are the alienated, the drop-outs, the dispossessed, the youth on the streets - criminals or potential revolutionaries? Hooligans or heroes? Vandals or Visionaries?"⁶⁰

Unfortunately, although Cohen and Hall (and before them Horowitz and Liebowitz) raise some important issues, none of them provides anything like a clear answer. This is because the task that still has to be completed is the construction of an overall model of political deviance, potentially political deviance, non-political deviance and deviance that leads to political action.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW MARXIST CRIMINOLOGY¹

I have attempted to outline the ways in which, since the 1960s, the explicit infusion of a political dimension into the sociology of deviance has developed. So far this discussion has been located within the context of two "periods" in the sociology of deviance: the so-called new deviancy of the sixties, and the post new deviancy of the late Sixties and early seventies. Now I would like to move on and examine the new Marxist criminology.

The Validity of the Enterprise

Although a number of writers in Britain and the United States (especially since the 1960s) have produced work on crime and deviance influenced by Marxism, it remains true that attempts to construct what we might call a Marxist theory of crime and deviance have been rare:

"We can think of no theorist of crime and deviancy in this country, and only two in the U.S.A. (John Horton and Tony Platt who could be accused of the 'Marxism' in deviancy theory he (Hirst) sees to be prevalent. None of the other 'conflict' theorists of crime... borrow in any significant fashion from Marxism..."²

Indeed the dearth of Marxist criminology was such that until relatively recently the work of William Bonger

was seen by many as definitive, as the Marxist criminology. Thus the publication in 1973 of "The New Criminology" by Taylor, Walton and Young marked an important development, attempting as it did:

"...to open out the criminological debate by pointing to certain formal and substantive requirements of a fully social theory of deviance, a theory that can explain the forms assumed by social control and deviant action in 'developed' (capitalist) societies."³

Inevitably the book generated a certain amount of criticism and debate. The most fundamental question thrown up by this debate is whether a Marxist theory of deviance is possible at all. Hirst has argued that Marxists should have nothing to do with deviance:

"There is no 'Marxist theory of deviance', either in existence, or which can be developed within orthodox Marxism. Crime and deviance vanish into the general theoretical concerns and the specific scientific object of Marxism. Crime and deviance are no more a scientific field for Marxism than education, the family or sport."⁴

Hirst's essential objection to a Marxist theory of deviance revolves around the concept of deviance itself. For him the theoretical objects of analysis for Marxists are laid down and structured by the concepts Marx himself devised:

"The objects of Marxist theory are specified by their own concepts: the mode of production, the class struggle, the state, ideology, etc. Any attempt to apply Marxism to this pre-given field of sociology is therefore a more or less 'revisionist' activity in respect of Marxism; it must modify and distort Marxian concepts to suit its own pre-Marxist purposes."⁵

"Deviance", from this standpoint, is a concept given by bourgeois society, and is not a "real" object of study. It has no meaning for Hirst outside of bourgeois meaning, and thus if Marxists take deviance as their object of study they are falling into the trap of organising their work around a bourgeois rather than a Marxian concept. For Hirst one of the problems with doing this is to implicitly assume that deviant behaviour is of itself fundamentally different to non-deviant behaviour. However, Ian Taylor is well aware of the dangers involved. In the Introduction to "Politics and Deviance" he, together with Laurie Taylor, discusses the problems with traditional approaches to deviance which assume that deviance is a distinctive type of behaviour, in the sense that all deviant behaviours can be lumped together as an object of study. Unfortunately, in "The New Criminology" Taylor, Walton and Young do not provide a precise definition of deviance,

the concept at the centre of their study. If a Marxist theory of deviance is to be constructed, then it would seem crucial to define the concept at the outset, though if they agree that deviant behaviour is not fundamentally different from conformity, then how can anyone separate out deviance for study? Their answer to this problem is less than adequate, for they seem to be saying that deviance is different to conformity in so much as it is purposive infraction of (ideological) rules. Thus people who deviate are aware that they are deviating because they know that large numbers of people disapprove of their behaviour. The authors therefore separate deviance from conformity on the basis of deviants being committed to modes of behaviour generally frowned upon by society. The problem is that this implies a consensus in society; a notion that they thoroughly disapprove of when criticising traditional approaches to deviance.

In my view Hirst's criticism is, up to a point, a valid one, but this does not mean that we have to accept his argument in toto, and in so doing write-off deviance as an object of study for Marxists. As Sumner⁶ has argued, the crucial task is to construct an adequate concept of deviance, so that deviance may be studied as an integral part of Marx's social theory. One might also add that by following Hirst there is a danger of cementing Marxism to the 19th century, and embalming

Marx's work as if it were lifeless and unsuited for development.

Whether or not a Marxist theory of deviance is possible, then, depends upon the definition of the object of study. Taylor, Walton and Young take up Becker's relativistic view that "deviance is not a quality of the act", and argue that deviance is a quality of the act. Basically they say that Becker is conceiving of deviance as behaviour, rather than as action, and from this point of view, obviously nothing is intrinsically deviant. However, by conceiving of deviance as action (in a Weberian sense) deviants are seen as generally endowing their deviancy with subjective meaning, these meanings being derived from the stock of cultural meanings present in society. As a result, they argue, the deviant knows that he is going against approved behaviour at the time of the infraction, and does so purposively. Therefore, because deviance takes place in a specific socio-historical context, it is deviant in itself, as a quality of the act. Again, the problem here is that it implicitly posits the existence of a consensus, and it does not define deviance. As Sumner puts it;

"...there is a difference involved in doing something deviant and doing something that is approved. From practical experience we know that is true, but what does it tell us about the nature of deviance?"⁷

Sumner's answer to the problem is to begin by locating deviance in the ideological superstructure, an approach

which, from a Marxist standpoint, would seem to make most sense. The essential difference between Sumner and Taylor, Walton and Young is that he conceives of deviance not from the point of view of "deviants", of people doing deviant things, but from the point of view of a social censure existing at the level of ideology. Deviance is not seen, then, as a quality of the act at all, but rather as a type of ideology. It therefore stands, conceptually, on a different level to deviant behaviour or deviant action, and enters a Marxian conceptual framework ^{by} being seen as a type of ideology. Deviance in this formulation does not exist because people decide to break certain rules, or because (in a labelling theory sense) people increasingly have the deviant label impressed upon them and see themselves as "deviant". Deviance exists as an objective phenomenon, though at an ideological level, so that even if someone breaks this social censure and is totally unaware of having done so, the social censure, the deviance, still exists. This view of deviance, therefore, rejects that strand of labelling theory which implied that deviance only exists when someone is labelled "deviant": the question of whether or not someone accepts the deviant label himself is irrelevant as far as the essential definition of deviance is concerned. Whilst Taylor, Walton and Young tend to implicitly fall back on a notion of deviance as action that is publicly disapproved of, albeit disapproval

that is generated ideologically, Sumner defines deviance by reference to the social censure as an ideological formation. Sumner argues that we cannot assume that every social censure, every type of "deviance", is strongly disapproved of by large numbers of people; in other words we cannot assume that a consensus exists. In some cases there will be widespread disapproval, in other cases a high degree of tolerance: public attitudes depend on a number of socio-historical factors, not the least of which will be the amount of effort invested by the dominant institutions in an attempt to influence public opinions.

The Politics of Deviance: Marx, Engels and the New Criminology

I want to now leave this wider discussion and return to the question of political deviance, by looking at how it is treated by the new Marxist criminology as represented by Taylor, Walton and Young. In this context the notion of purposiveness is crucial to their position. In spite of a lack of a clear definition of the concept deviance, they do pose important questions regarding the origins and functions of rules as they are constituted in law or as dominant morality. Deviant acts are seen as the outcome of conscious decisions to go against moral strictures, and thus consciously challenge approved patterns of behaviour. Their aim is to recognise:

"...in 'deviance' the acts of men in the process of actively making, rather than passively taking, the external world."⁸

This formulation, although it is intended to be "Marxist", does however seem to be at variance with Marx's own writings on crime. In general Marx seems to view the criminal as "passively taking rather than actively making" the world. Their resolution of this problem is to argue that Marx's writings on crime are misleading, and that one should utilise his general body of theory rather than those instances where he takes up empirical challenges. One of the main problems to be overcome by Taylor, Walton and Young was the fact that Marx saw crime as being concentrated in the lumpenproletariat; indeed, this provides Hirst with one of his strongest criticisms of "Marxist" criminology. From Hirst's point of view Marxists should follow Marx and treat the lumpenproletariat with the contempt they deserve. Lying outside the relations of production, and living a parasitic mode of life, they are of no interest to Hirst as far as revolutionary struggle is concerned. Following Marx he is viewing the lumpenproletariat not as individuals, but as an aggregate forming a definite stratum in society, and, moreover, a stratum that has no historical revolutionary role to play, except perhaps as reactionary tools.

Marxists who return to source to look for detailed analyses of the phenomenon of crime are likely to be disappointed; Marx had little more than a passing interest in crime. When Marx addresses himself to the

subject of crime it is treated as a constitutive part of his wider concern with the political economy of law and right,⁹ or as a vehicle for making a more general point. And there is always the danger of embarking on a Grail-like quest for original references, and then treating any that are found as ossified final words on the subject. Engels spent rather more time specifically on the subject of crime, especially in "The Condition of the Working Class in England". As Taylor, Walton and Young point out, Marx's treatment of crime is not typical of his work in general, and any Marxian-derived criminology must be based on a wider reading of Marx's social theory. However, although I agree that a Marxist criminology must construct itself around a certain fundamental conceptual framework, this is not to suggest that all we need to know about crime lies somewhere buried in Marx's work. A Marxist criminology must not blinker itself from developments in the sociology of crime and deviance, to do so is to fixate Marxism at source, and be left with a sterile orthodoxy. On the other hand, far-reaching revisions will obviously produce a situation where to call the end result "Marxism" becomes meaningless. The task is to utilise Marx's conceptual framework and method, and, where necessary, construct on the basis of this framework appropriate Marxist concepts for handling the specific object of study. The above discussion of

the concept of deviance indicates such an attempt, and as Sumner says:

"This new concept of deviance will arrive out of a Marxist critique of the old concepts: its embryonic space is its place in the structure of Marxist thought."¹⁰

A Marxist criminology should also be able to admit that Marx's writings on crime as such are less than adequate. His faith in criminal statistics and the correlation between economic conditions and amounts of crime, and his lack of interest in criminal motivations are notable examples of this inadequacy, and in the context of this paper his identification of crime with the lumpenproletariat is particularly important:

"The 'dangerous class', the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there be swept into the movement by the proletarian revolution, its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue."¹¹

Marx makes no secret of the contempt in which he held the lumpenproletariat:

"On the pretext of founding a benevolent society, the lumpenproletariat of Paris had been organised into secret sections,

each section being led by Bonapartist agents... Alongside decayed roués with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaus (procurers), brothel keepers, porters, litterati, organ-grinders, rag-pickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars - in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term la bohème... this scum, offal, refuse of all classes."¹²

Engels is equally disparaging:

"The lumpenproletariat, this scum of depraved elements from all classes, with headquarters in all the big cities, is the worst of all possible allies. This rabble is absolutely venal and absolutely brazen. If the French workers, in every revolution, inscribed on the houses: Mort aux voleurs! Death to thieves! and even shot some, they did it not out of reverence for property, but because they rightly considered it necessary above all to get rid of that gang. Every leader of

the workers who uses these scoundrels as guards or relies on them for support proves himself by this action alone a traitor to the movement."¹³

In order to understand why the lumpenproletariat is viewed in this way one must appreciate the historical role that Marx associates with particular classes in society. In this context he is not concerned with individuals, but with aggregates of people whose character is based upon their relational position in a capitalist mode of production. Only the proletariat carries within itself the historic role of socialist struggle; the lumpenproletariat, on the other hand, is economically parasitic, and stands outside of the production process. This castigation by Marx of the parasitic mode of life of the lumpenproletariat is not a reflection of some Victorian morality, though, but is based on a view of this stratum as being more likely to inhibit than further a revolutionary socialist cause.

Now in modern Britain (and on available evidence perhaps also at the time that Marx was writing) whilst such a stratum may be criminally orientated, it would be difficult to sustain an argument that the bulk, or even most of crime is concentrated there. I am thinking here of crimes committed by people who on the basis of Marx's formulation stand well outside of the lumpenproletariat,

e.g. individual and corporate tax evasion, "fiddling" at work, theft from stores and supermarkets and traffic offences. The fact that there may be high community tolerance of some of these crimes does not alter the fact of their illegality. To take one of these examples, Pearce has argued that:

"...the richest 1% of the American people defrauded the majority of more than \$ 9 billion in one year alone."¹⁴

Therefore to begin from a position which states that the bulk of crime takes place in the lumpenproletariat is to neglect the wider appeal that criminal activity has. To argue that Marx was thinking here of certain kinds of crime only serves to reinforce my point that Marxist criminology cannot ignore 20th century criminological research, and where appropriate use it for its own development. There is a further problem when using Marx's notion of the lumpenproletariat. This is that when Marx was writing, the lumpemproletariat, created out of major social and economic changes at that time, constituted an extremely significant section of society, however throughout this century the historical importance of the lumpenproletariat has been declining. Thus in contemporary Britain other strata can be identified, whose composition and nature within capitalism is rather different to that of the lumpenproletariat of the 19th century, e.g. a "sub-proletariat" made up of black unemployed.

In order to appreciate how Marx saw the lumpenproletariat we need to understand his concepts productive and unproductive labour. Indeed a frequently quoted "criminological" passage from Marx constitutes part of his general discussion of these concepts. In Volume One of "Theories of Surplus Value" Marx has written a short piece entitled "Apologist Conception of the Productivity of all Professions". Crude readings of this passage see it as a version of functionalism, where crime is conceived of as being functionally useful for society, and hence inevitable. Some have focused on the reference to the criminal arousing the "moral and aesthetic feelings of the public", taking it to mean that Marx is arguing, a la Durkheim, that crime fulfills the important function of reinforcing the community's sentiments. Marx's statement that crime keeps society "from stagnation" has led some to believe that he saw crime fulfilling an innovatory function. However, any interpretation along these lines hopelessly misses the point.

As Taylor, Walton and Young and Hirst stress, almost to the point of overkill, the passage is full of irony, taking as its reference point a situation where, as Hirst puts it:

"The most upright citizens depend for their livelihood on the criminal classes."¹⁵

The passage was written, however, primarily as an attack on those "vulgar bourgeois apologists" who ascribed the

quality of "productive" to an almost infinite range of human activities. Marx was aware that theoretically anything could in some sense be described as productive, but in "Theories of Surplus Value" he was concerned to put across a precise definition of productive (and, conversely, unproductive) labour as it relates to his concept of surplus value. The passage cannot be understood if it is taken out of the context of his criticisms of the models of productive labour then found in contemporary political economy. For Marx it is not a question of whether some activity is "useful" (which is a moot point anyway), or even whether, as some political economists said, the activity creates physical objects. Productive labour is labour that produces surplus value for capital. This point is made in the "Grundrisse":

"Adam Smith was essentially correct with his productive and unproductive labour, correct from the standpoint of bourgeois economy. What the other economists advance against it is either horse-piss (for instance Storch, Senior even lousier etc.), namely that every action after all acts upon something, thus confusion of the product in its natural and in its economic sense; so that the pickpocket becomes a productive worker too, since he indirectly produces books on

criminal law (this reasoning at least as correct as calling a judge a productive worker because he protects from theft). Or the modern bourgeois economists have turned themselves into such sycophants that they want to demonstrate to the latter that it is productive labour when somebody picks the lice out of his hair, or strokes his tail, because for example the latter activity will make his fat head - blockhead - clearer the next day in the office."¹⁶

"Theories of Surplus Value" is full of examples of labour that does not, according to Marx's definition, qualify as productive. For example:

"A singer who sells her song for her own account is an unproductive labourer.

But the same singer commissioned by an entrepreneur to sing in order to make money for him is a productive labourer, for she produces capital."¹⁷

In the passage relating to the "productivity" of crime, Marx has taken as an example the most despised type of behaviour in order to emphasise his point. Thus, on this account the lumpenproletariat stands outside the matrix of productive and unproductive labour, existing only as a parasite on production. The lumpenproletariat, then, form a stratum whose mode of

life places them outside of relations of production, and, importantly, outside of the historical revolutionary role earmarked for the working class.

Hirst has criticised Taylor, Walton and Young on the basis that:

"The romanticisation of crime, the recognition in the criminal of a rebel 'alienated' from society, is, for Marxism, a dangerous political ideology. It leads inevitably, since the 'criminal' is an individualistic abstraction of a class position, to the estimation of the lumpenproletariat as a revolutionary force."¹⁸

Here Hirst has in mind the professional criminal, and certainly to romanticise (in socialist terms) their criminality does have as a logical consequence "the estimation of the lumpenproletariat as a revolutionary force." However, as I have said above, a great deal of crime involves those who are not members of the lumpenproletariat, and the lumpenproletariat, as Marx knew it, has to a large extent disappeared; in order to sustain his argument Hirst would have to show how all crime, wherever it occurs in society, is somehow lumpen-type behaviour, and, by definition, therefore an expression of lumpen-type consciousness. In fact, in order to remain true to his basic argument he cannot lump all crime together, for this would simply be

accepting a bourgeois ideological category. Thus he states:

"Mob agitation and street fighting are primitive forms of political action."¹⁹

And later on:

"Crime is not only the business of professional criminals; other illegal actions, machine smashing, industrial sabotage, the murder of landlords and officials by peasants, have a more obviously 'political' character."²⁰

What we need to know now is the extent to which Marx and Engels themselves distinguish between different types of crime. Engels spent rather more time specifically on the subject of crime. "The Condition of the Working Class in England" stands as a denunciation of the life conditions that the English working class was subject to at that time (1844-45), and a denunciation of the capitalist mode of production which produced and sustained these conditions. The phenomenon of crime is situated by Engels within the context of a brutal capitalist wage labour system. Out of this system arises economic deprivation and the demoralisation of increasing numbers of people within the working class. For some people crime is seen by Engels as an inevitable response to these conditions:

"The contempt for the existing social order is most conspicuous in its extreme form -

that of offences against the law. If the influences demoralizing to the working-man act more powerfully, more concentratedly than usual, he becomes an offender as certainly as water abandons the fluid for the vaporous state at 80 degrees, Reaumur. Under the brutal and brutalizing treatment of the bourgeoisie, the working man becomes precisely as much a thing without volition as water, and is subject to the laws of Nature with precisely the same necessity; at a certain point all freedom ceases."²¹

Commenting on Hirst's critique of Marxist criminology, Young²² has pointed out that Hirst uses the "deterministic" quote above from Engels, and ignores other passages in the "Conditions of the Working Class" where elements of "voluntarism" are to be found. And certainly Engels does deal with different forms of consciousness; the situation where a man becomes "as much a thing without volition as water" is only one of a number of possibilities.

The crucial point that Engels is trying to make is that in 19th century capitalist England the worker, when faced with economic deprivation (at certain times severe in the extreme), either "merely strives to make life endurable while abandoning the effort to break the yoke",²³ or he in some way revolts. For Engels the history of capitalism is the history of continual conflict arising out of economic relations, though the

conflicts are by no means confined to workers vs. bourgeoisie; certain crimes are committed by the working class against the working class, and represent a caricature of capitalism itself:

"This war of each against all, of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, need cause us no surprise, for it is only the logical sequel of the principle involved in free competition."²⁴

In some cases, though, crime was directed against the rich:

"The working man lived in poverty and want, and saw that others were better off than he. It was not clear to his mind why he, who did more for society than the rich idler, should be the one to suffer under these conditions. Want conquered his inherited respect for the sacredness of property, and he stole."²⁵

Engels stresses the inevitability of this conflict, and its potential for development into more mature class-based economic, then political, struggle against the bourgeoisie:

"The revolt of the workers began soon after the first industrial development, and has passed through several phases... The earliest, crudest and least fruitful form of this rebellion was that of crime."²⁶

Engels is, however, quick to show the futility of this kind of protest:

"The workers soon realized that crime did not help matters. The criminal could protest against the existing order of society, as one individual; the whole might of society was brought to bear upon each criminal, and crushed him with its immense superiority. Besides, theft was the most primitive form of protest, and for this reason, if for no other, it never became the universal expression of the public opinion of the working man, however much they might approve of it in silence."²⁷

Thus crime which involves the worker stealing from the "rich idler" is not associated by Engels with socialist class consciousness; as an end in itself it does nothing for the liberation of the working class. Consciousness is present, but it is a consciousness revolving around self, with the criminal reacting against the "rich idler" who is seen to be unfairly better-off than he. Essentially it is the individual worker striving (illegally) for a piece of the action. Class consciousness has to involve a broader-based motivation, where those taking part have to some extent collective class interests, rather than individual interests, in their minds. As Engels puts it:

"As a class, they first manifest opposition to the bourgeoisie when they resisted the introduction of machinery at the very beginning of the industrial period... factories were demolished and machinery destroyed."²⁸

Engels then goes on to document a number of instances where workers have been involved in this kind of class-based action. In none of these examples are the workers involved in "straight" stealing of rich men's property; the actions consist of strikes, demonstrations, destruction and damage of machinery and factories, and physical attacks on individual capitalists. But even this form of struggle is short-lived:

"This form of opposition was isolated, restricted to certain localities, and directed against one feature only of our present social arrangements. When the momentary end was attained, the whole weight of social power fell upon the unprotected evil-doers and punished them to its heart's content, while machinery was introduced none the less.

A new form of opposition had to be found."²⁹

As Young has pointed out, certain types of crime carried out by the working class is seen by Engels as containing a consciousness which "presages the more developed form of rationality of the final instance: the collective

struggle for socialism."³⁰ Engels's model is a developmental one, where workers evolve more mature forms of protest - some legal some illegal - these protests being related to wider societal changes, e.g. the legal right to form trade unions. This movement, and (ultimately) through it the generation of rational class consciousness, is not viewed by Engels as passing through near linear stages: the development is uneven. At given moments "immature" and "mature" forms of protest can, as it were, exchange places, one giving way to the other; yet throughout there is for Engels an over-riding historical movement leading to a mature socialist struggle.

In his discussion of Engels's work, Young has suggested that we can draw out from Engels four possible responses by the working class:

"He could, firstly, become so brutalised as to be, in effect, a determined creature, 'as much a thing without volition as water', giving way to the disorganizing social forces that beset him. Or, secondly, he could accept the prevalent mores of capitalist society, and enter into a war of all against all... Thirdly, the working man could steal the property of the rich... And, finally, of course, Engels argued, the working man could struggle for socialism."³¹

I would suggest that Young's typology would be more

comprehensive and accurate if we added to the list another category of (criminal) action: class-based action involving a primitive form of class consciousness. Here I have in mind actions such as machine smashing where primitive class consciousness is involved; this category is thus differentiated from a more mature political struggle for socialism.

Crime is seen by Marx as an inevitable response to the conditions of life created by capitalism. Capitalism, at its inception, had "sown the seeds of its own destruction", for contained intrinsically within capitalism are myriad historically developing contradictions. Crime itself arises as a symptom of these contradictions, and as capitalism progressed Marx expected the total amount of crime to increase. In general, however, crime is for Marx a self-oriented struggle:

"the struggle of the isolated individual against the prevailing conditions."³²

Marx was aware that crime covered a spectrum of behaviour, though in each case his over-riding concern was with the efficacy of the behaviour for the workers' struggle for socialism; in this sense the fact that crime is "against" the capitalist law (or redistributed wealth) is irrelevant. In the "Communist Manifesto" Marx and Engels echo the "developmental" point made by Engels in "Conditions of the Working Class":

"The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers, then by the work-people of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages."³³

Certain types of crime, then, such as machine smashing, have a special significance for Marx and Engels: they represent forms of criminal activity which presage a more mature political struggle. This kind of crime carried out by groups of workers does, therefore, occupy a different place in Marxian analysis than, for instance, crimes such as casual theft. However, machine smashing and the like is not welcomed by Marx as an end in itself, its value lies in its potential for more developed organised responses by the working class as a

revolutionary class. Hirst states the point succinctly when he writes:

"To glorify such primitive forms would be to fixate the workers' movement in its infancy."³⁴

Thus, with reference to the remarks I made earlier, Hirst is quite correct from a Marxist standpoint to separate out different types of crime, so that machine smashing, for instance, represents an early stage of a developing struggle against capitalism. Consequently these types of crime are not viewed by Hirst in the same light as professional crime, but are seen to represent a primitive form of working class struggle. If this is the case then he is not seeing all crime as lumpen in nature, or as an expression of lumpen-type consciousness, which means that Hirst must concede that the identification of some working class crime with class struggle does not by definition lead to the "estimation of the lumpenproletariat as a revolutionary force." In certain cases the crimes involved are, in fact, seen as the primitive stages of proletarian revolutionary practice.

The question of "romanticising" working class crime is an important one, and I have already referred to this during my discussion of "moral ambivalence". Marx locates the law in the ideological superstructure, and sees that law as essentially serving the interests of capital. And for Marx all ideological forms arise

out of the material reality of capitalist relations of domination and subordination, though the ruling class will be concerned to present the dominant ideas as universal, transcending particular sectional interests:

"For each new class which puts itself in the place of the one ruling before it, is compelled, simply in order to achieve its aims, to represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society, i.e. employing an ideal formula, to give its ideas the form of universality and to represent them as the only rational and universally valid ones."³⁵

However, whilst Marx was aware of the ways in which law functioned in the interests of capital, he was never led into the position of romanticising criminal activity - a point which has certain implications when we analyse the work of Taylor, Walton and Young. Crime is not, as a matter of course, applauded by Marx because it, for instance, represents a "fight" against bourgeois ideology. Criminal activity was assessed by Marx, according to what he saw as scientific principles, on the basis of its usefulness for the socialist struggle. Engels, too, in no way romanticises crime. Even crime that involves workers stealing from the "rich idler" is described as the "crudest, and least fruitful form of this rebellion".

Taylor, Walton and Young: Deviance as Political Action

Taylor, Walton and Young see deviance not simply as behaviour, but as action, which means that deviant acts have meaning for the actor; meanings are derived from the stock of cultural meanings present in a society. The fundamental difference between a deviant and a non-deviant act is that the former is subject to public disapproval, and is often against the law. The deviant is seen, then, as making choices; he actively decides (albeit within certain socio-historical constraints) to go against public standards. As these public standards are not seen by Taylor, Walton and Young as being generated autonomously or spontaneously by members of society, but have their origin in bourgeois ideology, the deviance is therefore seen as representing a rebellion against bourgeois ideology. In this way:

"...men may consciously choose the deviant road, as the one solution to the problems posed by existence in contradictory society."³⁶

This position leads them to argue for an approach:

"...which recognises in 'deviance' the acts of men in the process of actively making, rather than passively taking, the external world. It might enable us to sustain what has until now been a polemical assertion, made (in the main) by anarchists and deviants themselves, that much deviance is in itself a political act."³⁷

Taylor, Walton and Young have already advanced the argument that deviance is a quality of the act, now they are arguing that "political" is also a quality of the act. One of the problems here is that they provide no clear definition of political. All that we have is the assertion that an act is political if it is deviant, and it is deviant if it is against public standards as expressions of ideology. Crucial for their position is the fact that the deviant consciously breaks the rules, which suggests that by saying "much deviance is in itself a political act" (my emphasis) they exclude those deviances that are carried out by individuals who are not consciously breaking the rules. Unfortunately they do not spell out exactly which types of deviant behaviour fall into the category of "non-political". By implication this would depend upon empirical verification, in the sense that we would have to take specific examples of deviant behaviour and see if the deviant concerned was consciously breaking the rules. If he was then, according to their formulation, it is political, if not then it is not political. Thus as some deviant behaviour is not purposive, some deviance is not political. The obvious question to pose, therefore, is which examples of deviance do Taylor, Walton and Young see as being without conscious purpose? Are forms of mental illness, for example, non-political according to their definition, or crimes committed under the

influence of alcohol perhaps? These are only guesses, for nowhere in their book do they deal with this problem of classification.

In their reply to Hirst, Taylor and Walton reject the charge that they romanticise crime:

"It would require little 'science' and no imagination to erect a study of society which sees all opposition, however, lumpen, as somehow progressive. But radical deviancy theory, at least as we see it is guilty of no such sin... present theoretical developments are directed against the romanticisation of criminality..."³⁸

In spite of this statement though they do not really answer the charge. By saying that much deviance is political because it is purposive, they have committed themselves to what seems to me to be a fairly contentious viewpoint, and one that is wide open to the criticism that it sees crime and deviance (or much of it) as progressive because it is action aimed against bourgeois ideology and its institutional forms. Whilst people generally do endow their acts with meaning, and the deviant is no exception, meanings are not constant or homogeneous. At one point in their book Taylor, Walton and Young, interestingly, make the same point:

"We are claiming...that deviant motivations run the whole gamut from total acceptance

of social morality...through to those cases where deviants are in total opposition to conventional morality and are in large part motivated by their desire to alter or destroy it.." 39

However, the fact of a disparity in motives, or forms of consciousness from one deviant to another does not appear to be that relevant for them when they suggest that much deviance is political. My argument in this paper is that forms of consciousness are crucial in the analysis of the politicalness of deviant acts. Different individuals and groups classified as deviant will possess different forms of consciousness regarding their actions; to say that there is an essential unity in that they are all "against" bourgeois ideology could expose one to the danger of seeing anyone "against" bourgeois ideology as "for" a socialist alternative. Much crime could arguably be seen as fascist in orientation, even though it is still "against" aspects of bourgeois ideology.

In conclusion, my quarrel with Taylor, Walton and Young arises over their application of the notion of consciousness to deviance. I agree that deviant acts are generally purposive: within the constraints of, for example, a person's position in the class structure, rational choices are made. However, to say that this decision to break rules makes the resultant action

political in nature raises more problems for Marxist criminology than it solves, and contains the inherent danger of seeing all deviance as progressive in that it is in "opposition" to bourgeois ideology. If people are being rational when engaging in deviant actions, then this means that they have reasons for the actions, and that the reasons make sense to them. Lumping all deviants together on the basis of a supposed common opposition to bourgeois ideology overrides the important fact that deviants will hold a wide range of reasons for going ahead with their deviances. Accordingly, it seems to me that a more useful way of assessing the political nature of deviant acts is to relate the behaviour to the forms of consciousness involved.

CHAPTER THREE

SUBJECTIVISM, CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDEOLOGY

Subjectivism

In "The Deviant Imagination" we have seen how Pearson attacks Rock for his subjectivism; though it is not altogether clear what place subjectivism takes in Pearson's work. At one time he seems to be criticising those whom he feels are stressing the social structural constraints on human behaviour, and at other times he criticises those who focus on the subjective dimension to human behaviour. This debate can be put into perspective if we return to Pearson's book.

In his interesting chapter on "The Great Refusal" he scoops up polemical arguments at a frantic pace, and culminates in an important, though speculative, construction of ideas, feelings and hopes. From the point of view of this paper it is the subjectivism inherent in the "misfit paradigm" and Pearson's response to it that is important. Essentially he believes that the "misfit paradigm" still has important things to say, though, following Gouldner, one must adopt a "reflexive" stance when listening:

"If anything the stand I am advocating in relation to the misfit paradigm is very close to Gouldner's expressed intention of building a 'reflexive' sociology.... a sociology which understands itself..not only theoretically but also sentimentally."¹

In his critique of the "misfit" sociology of deviance Gouldner, however, is said to have predetermined his reception of the "sound and the passion" of the misfit paradigm (and hence negated his "reflexivity") by writing it off because its "subjectivism is anathema to him." The crucial question though is what does this subjectivism mean to Pearson? The answer to this has, to some extent, to be prised out of his work, and we shall see that Pearson uses the term to refer to two different things. He is well aware of the dangers of subjectivism:

"I have demonstrated a measure of the utter subjectivism of the misfit paradigm, and it is this subjectivism from which the new political criminology recoils almost in horror. And here we can say that these critics of the misfit paradigm have got one thing quite right: misfit social thought does not take account of the realities of power and social structure in its appreciation of deviant conduct to the extent that it pretends. The misfit sociologists sometimes write as if men made history (and their lives) under conditions entirely of their own choosing: as if there was no such thing as 'economy', 'power', or 'social stratification.'²

Having said this, he leaps in to defend misfit sociology on the grounds that its subjectivism allowed

the deviant a voice, authenticity and hope. (The new political criminologies):

".....forget that men also have a psychology, motives and impulses."³

We have to separate out from Pearson's analysis two different ways in which he conceives of, and uses, the notion of subjectivism. Both are to be found in the misfit paradigm.

a. Men and women act subjectively as they negotiate their experience of the world in the process of constructing reality. This is to emphasise "man as the producer of society" rather than "society as the producer of man."

And, as an aspect of this,

b. Men and women's activities are endowed with subjective intent. Thus, for example, Rock believes that political deviance is deviance that has political meaning for the actor.

Pearson appears to be stressing the need to recognise the presence of subjectivism in sense 'a' in society, whilst his criticism of Rock for reducing politics to a "meaning" implies that subjectivism in sense 'b' is not that important. His criticism of the new political criminologies focuses on what to him is a lack of emphasis on the "phenomenology" of deviance and an obsession with "social structure" and its constraints. This debate between voluntarism and structural determinism

is of course a perennial one within sociology. Barry Smart, for instance, poses the problem like this:

"This brings us to the threshold of the distinction that is made between determinism and determination between on the one hand a praxis that is completely determined and on the other one which is situated historically through the determination of its possibility yet where the present and future possibilities for action are open."⁴

For Pearson the new criminologies are dominated by a stress on structural determinants of behaviour, and represent for him a dangerous drift towards a stance where subjectivity is an abhorrence. For example:

"What the new moves against the misfit paradigm do to some extent is theoretically to redress the balance of this subjectivist emphasis. Nevertheless, the sheer depth of the subjectivism which they oppose turns reappraisal into flight, and a trouble with all these critiques is that they fall into an old trap which is the tension between man-as-creator and man-as-constrained. Objectivity and subjectivity are approached by those who now reject the misfit paradigm as if they are constituted an either/or choice. Abstractly, that is, 'subjectivity' is ditched for 'objectivity'".⁵

Then later on:

"With one voice the new political criminologies urge: 'There is not enough power and social structure in the analysis', but they forget that men also have a psychology, motives and impulses, and this theoretical critique thus unwittingly perpetuates what the resurrected voice of the deviant imagination had cried out against: the petrification of the human subject, both in theory and in social practice."⁶

And, making a direct reference to one of the most important examples of the new criminology:

"And Taylor, Walton and Young in their embrace of one of the many faces of Marx state that their theory needs a 'social psychology of consciousness' which does not neglect the individual subject, and they pin their banner to something called 'human diversity'. But one must risk being unfair to the critics of the misfit paradigm in order to make the point: namely, that human subjectivity is tied abstractly, as an afterthought, to theoretical analysis."⁷

One feels that Pearson is being unfair in his presentation of the new political criminology. In the last quote the term "social psychology of consciousness"

is plucked out of context from Taylor, Walton and Young in order to show how subjectivism in their analysis enters only as an afterthought, and is thus for them of little consequence. In fact, as the fuller quote indicates, the authors are admitting that Marxism has traditionally been at fault in understressing the importance of subjectivity, and recognise the necessity of rectifying this:

"It is not merely that Marxism in the textbooks is necessarily a distortion of Marxism - in the way that Marx dealt with crime; it is also that the development of Marxism in the direction of a social psychology of consciousness and an understanding of rational actors involved in action choices has been delayed - and indeed has been obstructed - since the time of Marx's work."⁸

Their remarks leading up to this illustrate the importance they attach to the "subjective" aspect:

"Marxist theory...would assume that is a degree of consciousness bound up with men's location in a social structure of production, exchange and domination...Men's reaction to labelling by the powerful would not be seen simply as a cultural problem - a problem of reacting to a legal or a social stigma: it would necessarily be seen to be bound up with men's degree of consciousness of

domination and subordination in a wider structure of power relationships operating in particular types of economic contexts. One consequence of such an approach - which, it must be stated, has been conspicuous for its absence in deviancy theory - would be the possibility of building links between the insights of interactionist theory, and other approaches sensitive to man's subjective world, and the theories of social structure implicit in orthodox Marxism. More crucially, such a linkage would enable us to escape from the straightjacket of an economic determinism and the relativism of some subjectivist approaches to a theory of contradiction in a social structure which recognises in 'deviance' the acts of men in the process of actively making, rather than passively taking, the external world."⁹

Reading Taylor, Walton and Young's book we can see (contrary to Pearson's contention) that they are very sympathetic towards the requirement for a "subjective" element within a full social theory of deviance. Interestingly enough their discussion of labelling theory (an important part of Pearson's misfit sociology) is a critique of the determinism sometimes contained within this approach:

"As our exposition unfolds, we hope to

demonstrate that the social reaction theorist's reliance upon social psychological assumption..useful and necessary as they are in combating absolutist criminology, often lead either to a one-sided determination or an avoidance of structural considerations relevant to their own position."¹⁰

Specifically, their critique of Becker is an attempt to endow the actions of the deviant with subjective meaning, to move away from a view of the deviant as manipulated victim:

"We have here shifted the focus away from the view of the deviant as a passive, ineffectual, stigmatized individual (what Gouldner has called 'man on his back') to that of a decision-maker who often actively violates the moral and legal codes of society."¹¹

Pearson does make the important point that the tension between voluntarism and structural-determinism is paralleled by a tension between theory and practice, between the desire to provide abstract theories on the "human condition", and the practical problems associated with giving concrete help to particular groups of deviants. Social work is an area which particularly feels this tension, especially if practitioners subscribe to a "radical social work" orientation, and this is discussed

by Pearson later in his book.

However, although these issues raised by Pearson are obviously important ones, they do not directly relate to the main thrust of this paper, though they do impinge upon it at certain points. I agree with Pearson that the 1960s represented a watershed in ways of looking at the world and relating to others, and that the full implications of this have not really worked themselves through. In particular, certain deviant groups began to develop a new kind of self identity, and were able to radically assert themselves in ways that sometimes did bring dignity into their lives. Some deviant groups were able to take part in some reconstruction of the moral boundaries, and thus in the development of a degree of publicly recognised authenticity. However, Pearson's polarisation of "objective" and "subjective" approaches leads to a misleading picture of the new criminologies as representative of a perspective with little (if any) room for subjectivism.

There is one aspect of subjectivism that is very relevant to this paper, and here I refer back to the point that Pearson uses the term in two ways. I have briefly discussed one way in which he uses it, but it is the second way that is crucial to an understanding of Pearson's, or anyone else's, definition of political deviance. As we have seen, Pearson believes that some truants, vandals and football hooligans, and the paki-bashers in his own study, engage in crypto-political action

and are even acting as latter-day Robin Hoods, that is, they are in some sense acting politically.

Pearson's criticism of Rock's assertion that: "political deviancy may be defined as that activity which is regarded as expressly political by its participants", implies a rejection of that strand of the misfit paradigm which stresses the primacy of subjective intent or "meaning". Taken out of context Rock's statement is tautological, in that by saying that the participants (the deviants) must subjectively regard their behaviour as political order for it to be political, still leaves unanswered the question of what is meant by "political" in the first place. In other words the statement only makes sense when it is related to the author's definition of political.

In his discussion of political deviance Rock argues that deviancy only becomes politicised when those classed as deviants actively work to change the attitudes and responses of the social audience by attempting to redraw the boundaries between "good" and "evil", "moral" and "immoral", "acceptable" and "unacceptable". Thus the "revolutionary" who does no more than adopt a pose is, to use Rock's term, an "expressive deviant", and only when he is engaged in making a revolution does his deviancy become politicised. For Rock political action presupposes political consciousness, and he cites Stone's work on feminist groups in support. Stone makes the point that the women's liberation movement was, in embryonic form,

made up of small "consciousness-raising" groups, this being an important prerequisite for its development on a large scale. Consciousness and action become inextricably linked as deviation becomes politicised:

"Out of such encounters (e.g. with the police) politicised deviation can grow and become transformed both by the interaction and by autonomous development. What may have been at one time conceived of as an unthinkable strategy becomes next an inevitable step in a culminating process. Mature politicised deviants do not emerge out of some social limbo, but are nursed by a succession of responses to situations of their own and other's making."¹²

But Rock takes great care not to stray into the position of making all deviants into political figures, a position which he sees as fanciful, misplaced romanticism:

"I shall restrict my discussion to deviancy which has become politicised in a conscious and recognised fashion by its members. Otherwise analysis can become metaphysical. Definitional complexities are produced by the fact that it is often moot whether crimes or deviances have a political basis. If political activity is taken to be concerned with the distribution of the ends and means of

power in a social order, many forms of deviation are clearly political in effect. Accordingly, some writers urge a kind of romanticism which views all criminals as primitive innocents who are engaged in inarticulate political conflict with institutional authority."¹³

And:

"It is the significance that the rule-breaker and, to a lesser extent the rule-enforcer, attach to the behaviour that are important. Otherwise one is forced to resort to a fanciful Zen catechism which poses such questions as, 'If the conflict of a thousand American Negroes with the police constitutes a political event, what does a solitary Black delinquent's encounters with the police represent?'"¹⁴

From this it is clear that Pearson's contention that Rock "reduces politics to a 'meaning': specifically the meaning which any act has for its actors", is an oversimplification of Rock's position. For Rock political "meaning" and political events grow out of each other; "meaning" alone has no logicity at all, it must be a constitutive part of actions. Consequently, Rock's "subjectivity", castigated by Pearson for being unintentional misfit sociology, is not one which says that political deviance is "all in the head", but is

tioned to events in the real world. This is supported by his point that it is not just the deviant's definition of the situation that is important, but also the rule-enforcer's definition.

Rock's dourly "anti-romantic" approach to political deviance obviously does not accord with Pearson's approach which makes the 1964 paki-bashing into a form of political deviance. From Pearson's point of view subjective meaning/consciousness does not seem to have primacy in the definition of deviant acts as political, though it is not easy to deduce from Pearson's work exactly what status he does give to consciousness. Furthermore, as far as definitions of political are concerned, the opinions of the rule-enforcers appear to be more or less irrelevant - in Accrington (see Chapter Five) the police and courts did not define the paki-bashing as "political". Rock's solution to the problem of deciding what is meant by political deviance is to bracket off what are now the relatively more obvious "political" deviances: the protests of the poor in the ghetto, Black Power etc., and to this extent deals with the same groups dealt with by Horowitz and Liebowitz, Stan Cohen and Stuart Hall. As is the case with these, his stance is not simply a traditional one, of course, for by using a more flexible and broader definition of political, he includes groups which traditional approaches would exclude. However, he refuses to go too far as the discussion would, in his terms, become metaphysical,

and he attempts to draw a line around a theoretical "pool" of politically deviant acts. Pearson widens the boundary, though he stops short of some of the more extreme positions found in the misfit paradigm. However, both of them ultimately face the same problem: where does the boundary between political and non-political deviancy come? In Rock's case; how do we assess whether a deviant group is trying to redraw the moral boundaries? And in Pearson's case whether they are trying to "right wrongs". Clearly, in certain cases it will be relatively easy to classify the actions of a deviant group, according to the initial definition, but at certain points the line gets blurred. Furthermore (as phenomenologists have pointed out) the sociologist must guard against imposing his own definition of the situation onto the actors involved. There is a real problem in ascertaining the nature of the "meaning" that rule-breakers and rule-enforcers are holding. The definition of certain activities as "political" by the rule-enforcers is problematical on a number of levels. As far as definitions are concerned, only when the definition of an act as political by the rule-enforcers accords with the initial definition posited by the sociologist does it have validity: we cannot assume that the rule-enforcers' definitions are always the same as the sociologists. By "validity", I do not mean, of course, ultimate validity, but validity in relationship to the

sociologists viewpoint. In other words, if, say, a policeman described a particular action as "political", the sociologist cannot take this as absolute fact, but must relate it to his own definition of "political". Rock suggests that:

"Most politicised deviants can be clearly recognised by outsiders because they are involved in public attempts to renegotiate the significance of ascribed or achieved social stigma."¹⁵

The existence of blurred edges is indicated by his use of the word "most", and in fact throughout this paper we shall see that sociologists have had great difficulty in finding a definition of political deviance which can provide a satisfactory element within a theoretical framework for the study of all deviance.

Finally, Rock does merge two analytically distinct types of phenomena into one in his discussion. He fails to distinguish between deviant groups who use extra political measures as protest, and deviant groups whose basic deviancy is itself political.

Class Consciousness

Now I would like to explain in more detail my argument that consciousness is the important consideration when analysing the political status of working class delinquency. I am not suggesting that because men's reasons for breaking certain rules are important, we

should uncritically accept that their actions are political simply because they say they are. When dealing with common sense definitions of concepts we should not, of course, assume that the sociologist's definition corresponds with the delinquent's definition. Thus, in the case of the concept political, the assertion by a delinquent that his action was political does not mean that analysis should surrender to his definition and categorise it as such. This relates to the point I made above when discussing Rock's position: that the rule enforcer's definition of the situation as "political" should not be seen as an absolute statement of fact. In spite of the fact that the rule breaker, the rule enforcer and the social scientist co-exist in what is ostensibly a common society, there is no reason to assume that concepts will be defined in the same way. Conversely, if a delinquent were to announce that his action was not political, this does not mean that the sociologist should agree with him. The issue is complicated, of course, because people cannot always honestly give reasons for doing things, and they may tell lies, or use "techniques of neutralisation". The problem hangs on the way in which concepts are being understood and used. However, as there is no absolute definition of "political" existing as an ultimate objective fact, the sociologist is placed in the position of having to devise his own definition on the basis of its usefulness for understanding the object of his study. Therefore,

although I have argued that the way the delinquent sees his delinquency is crucial, the sociologist cannot take the concepts used in delinquent accounts on face value, but must always relate them to his initial conceptual framework. Whilst such an approach raises a number of interesting questions and problems, the alternative of believing that every time a delinquent says that his action is political makes it political, individualises sociological analysis to an extreme. There is the further point that forms of consciousness are articulated by means other than verbalisation, and this will be taken up later on.

If we turn to the notion of class consciousness - which is especially relevant to the question of the political status of working class delinquency - we can see that the same problem occurs with the concept of class as with the concept of political, namely that there is no definitional unanimity. Frequently analyses of the extent of class consciousness among the working class in this country have failed to fully appreciate, amongst other things, the full implications of these divergences in concept definition.

For Marx class consciousness was an integral part of working class political action, therefore it is important to consider the relationship between class consciousness and delinquency. Class consciousness and political action do not, in Marx's writings, follow each other in a simplistic chronological order, the workers suddenly having a Road to Damascus

realisation that they are being exploited as a class, and as a consequence linking together in a common struggle against the bourgeoisie. Flashes of inspiration, explosions of consciousness and understanding may very well occur periodically for particular individuals and groups, but class consciousness arises out of, and as part of, working class material experiences. Revolutionary class consciousness - the grasping of fundamental explanations and the belief that radical changes are necessary and possible - develops as part of political action: they constitute an on-going dialectic.

Too often Marxist accounts of how socialism will be achieved do use an oversimplistic (and perhaps over-optimistic) model: it is as if class consciousness were a quantifiable "thing", which grows in volume over time, then at a critical moment revolution occurs. To approach class consciousness in this way is to use a very crude, and consequently misleading, reading of Marx. Historically, as well as at a given moment, individual members of the working class, groups within the working class and indeed the working class as a whole, can possess widely varying forms of class consciousness. Thus to see class consciousness as necessarily following an always progressive linear historical path is misleading, for it is quite possible for wild fluctuations to occur in the degree of class consciousness manifested from one historical moment to another. We must allow therefore for the possibility of regression, as well as progression.

In the 1960s the "end of ideology" thesis postulated that the working class had been (or were becoming) incorporated into a new type of affluent welfare-orientated "post-capitalist" society. From the point of view of a number of sociologists this had created a situation where the question of class consciousness had become redundant. Even Marxists such as Marcuse saw workers as being overwhelmed by the consumerist demands and rewards of advanced capitalism. Research conducted within this climate was likely to be influenced by a set of assumptions relating to "affluence", "consumerism", "incorporation" and so on. This raises the very real problem of sociologists being influenced by relatively short-term developments in the social structure. The actions of the workers in France in 1968, and the examples of working class militancy in Britain in the 1970s are indicative of what I said earlier: that class consciousness and class conflict, in terms of overt expression, can fluctuate in intensity, and lie dormant for a period of time. Although some of the Left may deride the economism which characterises trade union activities, economism must be understood as an aspect of class consciousness, as a particular form of class consciousness. And if you are a wage earner with family commitments, "economism" makes a great deal of immediate sense.

Murdock and McCron¹⁶ draw attention to the problematic nature of conventional social investigations

into class consciousness. Such investigations, generally relying on a written questionnaire or an interview, frequently fail to appreciate that working class respondents may feel very strongly that society is composed of relations of domination and subordination, and yet never refer to the word class. Furthermore it is wrong to assume that people will hold coherent, stable world views regarding such matters. As Murdock and McCron put it:

"Recent studies, including our own ongoing research, have indicated that conceptions of class are tangential or irrelevant to a number of people's understanding of stratification. This does not mean that they are not aware of deep-seated social divisions and antagonisms, but simply that this awareness has not crystallised around the notion of class."¹⁷

And they refer to a recent Australian study which found that:

"...a sizeable number of respondents saw class primarily in terms of a division between people who were snobbish and kept themselves aloof, and people who mixed in easily with a wide range of social groups."¹⁸

After all, people have got to have a good reason for wanting to work out a clear conception of class in the first place. Sociologists have obvious reasons for

pursuing an understanding of class, in the same way that a plumber, for instance, becomes knowledgeable about the tools of his trade. Why should a plumber expect a sociologist to become interested in furthering his knowledge of British Standard screw threads?

With questionnaires that are intended to illuminate people's feelings regarding class, not only do we have to contend with the usual problems associated with questionnaires (e.g. respondents feeling that they have to give some answer) but there is also the added problem that class is a word which has no universally accepted definition. This applies as much to laypeople as to the world of sociology. A further complication is that class has culturally specific emotive connotations. As Ossowski points out, if we were to substitute the term stratum for class:

"...as a signal for conditioned reflexes the term 'stratal enemy' would hardly take the place of 'class enemy'."¹⁹

Ossowski also refers to what he calls "terminological differences" and "conceptual differences". With the former, parties agree on the concept, but are using different terms when referring to these concepts. Thus an interviewee might hold the same sort of concept of class as the sociologist doing the interviewing, but uses different terminology. If there were conceptual differences it would mean that whilst both the

interviewee and the sociologist were using the same terms, they in fact meant different things to each party. With this in mind we can understand the crudity of, say, asking workers in a factory to tick off on a questionnaire the social class group they belong to, then if most of them choose "middle class", take this as evidence of embourgeoisement, or a lack of class consciousness. In this case it is crucial to know what respondents understand by the term "middle class". This point relates to efforts by some sociologist to "defuse" the concept of class by making it into a psychological notion. Centres, for example, writes:

"a man's class is part of his ego, a feeling on his part of belongingness to something; an identification with something larger than himself."²⁰

Any attempt to analyse class consciousness must develop a sensitivity to the problems outlined above. Interviews and informal discussion can be very useful, and indicate the ways in which people see the world, but only if people are given room to move, and if the researcher is willing and able to approach and interpret what is being said sympathetically. The implications of the crudity of some research methods is well illustrated by Beynon:

"Since the war sociologists have taken it into their heads to interview workers

and ask them whether or not they consider the factory to be like 'a football team'.

Affirmative answers have been taken as indicative of a lack of class consciousness. This, however, misses the fundamental point about capitalist production. It isn't an either-or question of being like a football team or being like two opposing camps.

Factory production involves both.

Because production has a social basis the factory can obviously be seen, at some level, as a collectivity with management operating in a co-ordinating role. The contradiction of factory production, and the source of contradictory elements within class consciousness, is rooted in the fact that the exploitation of workers is achieved through collective, co-ordinated activities within both the factory and society generally."²¹

Up to now I have concentrated on verbal articulations as indicators of class consciousness, but there is more than this to go on. As Murdock and McCron puts it:

"But even at their best these techniques have a major drawback. Because they concentrate on verbalisations of consciousness, they ignore the ways in which social consciousness is objectified

and expressed through other forms of social and cultural action."²²

And it is especially on this area that recent work from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies has focused. This raises the possibility, following the discussion through from class consciousness to the politics of delinquency, that delinquent acts are non-verbal expressions of class consciousness. I shall return to this in a moment.

It is commonplace for sociologists nowadays to say that class imagery on the part of the working class is often ambivalent, confused and downright contradictory. It is, of course, relatively easy for sociologists to say this, socialised as they are into a world of academic discourse which puts the highest premium on lucidity, logic and supportive evidence. Now whilst confusion and ambivalence does exist in working class articulations of class imagery, the extent is not easy to ascertain. An observer who is unable to "read the signs", to appreciate the full significance of what, however "inarticulately", is being said, can very easily misrepresent the ability of working class people to formulate pictures of the class structure and its effects. And, incidently, following Westergaard, I am not treating class imagery and class consciousness as if they were two entities. In Westergaard's words:

"The distinction between class imagery and class consciousness is spurious."²³

Most people do not read Marx or sociology, thus certain conventional modes of thought and expression found in Marxism and sociology will not enter into their social orbit. In their day to day lives there will be little space or desire for meditation on the topics that sociologists rivet themselves to, apart from the fact that the education system systematically excludes vast numbers of the population from developing such modes of thought and expression.

Forms of consciousness arise out of material experiences, and in turn will work back in all kinds of ways on these material experiences. Consciousness is part of an on-going dialectic, and consciousness finds its expression in culture. Out of a range of major structural experiences and the minutia of everyday life will arise forms of consciousness through which people attempt to put meaning and sense into these experiences. The difficulty in understanding these forms of consciousness is in proportion to the difficulty in understanding what working class means as life. The struggle of one individual through his or her own life, and the struggle of a class through history, cannot easily be encapsulated within the print-out of the results of some social survey. This insistence on the need to be sensitive to the living and lived reality of culture is expressed particularly well by Paul Willis:

"The oppression of working-class youth,
the alienation of middle-class youth,

can be analysed. The social sciences show the oppression and share the alienation. They outline 'the problem'. They say something must give, something must happen. But it is only in the factories, on the streets, in the bars, in the dance halls, in the tower flats, in the two-up-and-two-downs that contradictions and problems are lived through to particular outcomes. It is in these places where direct experience, ways of living, creative acts and penetrations - cultures - redefine problems, break the stasis of meaning, and reset the possibilities somewhat for all of us. And this material experience has not had the benefit of prior validation, of collective discussion, of the security of the common line. It is embedded in the real engagement of experience with the world: in the dialectic of cultural life."²⁴

A specific example will illustrate the general point regarding the need to be sensitive to working class culture that I am making here. An important cultural characteristic among some sections of the working class is "taking the piss" out of those who are slow on the uptake, and weaker with their repartee. To always have a ready and witty answer at hand tends to be highly valued, especially among working class males,

and frequently this will involve extreme sarcasm. This kind of repartee can be a great leveller in face to face relations. Expertise, for instance, does not depend upon formal education, and in encounters with "educated" people it can function as a very effective ego-deflator. A researcher who does not "know" working class life can easily be taken for a ride. With this in mind a footnote to a recent study of working class girls in Birmingham makes interesting reading:

"The girls we have spoken to at the Birmingham Youth Centre constantly make jokes among themselves for the sole purpose of confusing or misleading the researcher who may well be infringing on their territory by asking personal questions, or whose presence at the weekly disco they resent. For example, one group of three fourteen year olds explained to us that the fourth member of their 'gang' had male genitals. The 'joke' lasted for about ten minutes with such seriousness that we were quite convinced until one of the girls said 'Dickie' came from Middlesex. The girls shrieked with laughter and the interview came to a halt."²⁵

Working class consciousness exists as a mental expression of the culture as lived experience; and lived experiences arise out of consciousness and class conflict. In a class-divided society class consciousness

will always be present. Some will express their class consciousness well, others badly; for some it will be a vehicle for action, for others a vehicle for passivity; for periods of time it may appear dormant, perhaps covered by a veneer of affluence. The perennial existence of class consciousness is predicated on the view that as a class-divided society capitalism contains "the seeds of its own destruction." This view stands in contradistinction to the one that argues that all interests can eventually be incorporated into a capitalism based upon harmonious relations. The following point made by Clarke et al is very relevant here:

"Negotiation, resistance, struggle:

the relations between a subordinate and a dominant culture, wherever they fall within this spectrum, are always intensely active, always oppositional, in a structural sense (even when this opposition is latent, or experienced simply as the normal state of affairs - what Gouldner called 'normalised repression')...a developed and organised revolutionary working-class consciousness is only one, among many such possible responses, and a very special ruptural one at that. It has been misleading to try to measure the whole spectrum of strategies in

the class in terms of this one ascribed form of consciousness, and to define everything else as a token of incorporation."²⁶

Ideology

Culture is not synonymous with ideology. In a society containing dominant and subordinate classes, the dominant class will always be concerned to make its ideas into universal ideas. If the subordinate class happened to possess a culture which totally corresponded to this ideology, then the hegemony of the dominant culture is total. In reality, though, working class culture is different to bourgeois culture, and by no means totally reflects the dominant ideology. As I argued in the chapter on Marx, ideology arises out of material conditions and experiences, and in essence finds its expression at the level of thought, although it can be externalised, e.g. in written laws, and represented by institutions. The extent to which ideology is assimilated by the subordinate class as culture depends not only on the energy and skill with which the dominant class attempts to universalise its ideology, but also on the material conditions and experiences of the subordinate class. Bourgeois ideology offers explanations and interpretations of this material reality, and its potency depends upon the degree to which it corresponds to the phenomenal form taken by reality.

One of the problems in attempting to assess the extent to which working class culture expresses bourgeois

ideology is that variations exist between one section of the working class and another, as well as, of course, variations between one moment in history and another. Another problem (discussed above) is that the tools of research are often too crude to penetrate into the relationship. There is not the space here to explore this in detail, but some general points must be made.

In order for bourgeois society to exist and reproduce itself there must be an acceptance to some extent of bourgeois ideology by the mass of the population. Therefore, although acceptance will not be total, there must be some acceptance at certain critical points. It is wrong to see the working class as some cultural enclave, cut adrift from hegemonic ideology. This is to romanticise working class culture as if it were an autonomous expression of values and attitudes etc., diametrically opposed, on all levels, to the bourgeoisie, and thus to see everything about working class culture as "good". Certainly the working class has developed its own cultural characteristics as part of its struggle with the dominant ideology at the workplace, in the home, and so on, but it is spurious to see all this as a "rehearsal in vivo" for socialism.

The concrete differences between bourgeois culture and working class culture are multifarious, and manifest themselves on a number of levels. Overt expressions of opposition to the dominant culture present themselves in

all kinds of ways, though quiescence does not necessarily mean total acceptance of the dominant ideology. This connects with a tendency on the part of some writers to equate certain strategies that are not normally associated with the working class with a total or nearly total acceptance of an alien bourgeois ideology, and a concomitant rejection of working class life. For example, Clarke et al from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies refer to the upwardly mobile working class boy who is "doing well" in the education system in the following terms:

"It involves the young person valuing the dominant culture positively, and sacrificing the 'parent' culture - even where this is accompanied by a distinct sense of cultural disorientation."²⁷

Now whilst I accept that education may lead inevitably to certain changes in cultural orientation, this does not mean that all working class boys (or girls) who achieve formal qualifications necessarily turn their backs on the working class from whence they came. The above statement makes a very sweeping generalisation, and has a rather disparaging ring to it, which, if taken to its logical conclusion, almost favours working class boys rejecting all formal education in order that they do not become alienated from their class.

In this context it is important to distinguish between what Corrigan and Frith³⁴ have called "institutional incorporation" and "ideological incorporation". The working class have to live their lives in contact with bourgeois institutions, e.g. the schools, there is thus an inevitable amount of institutional incorporation, but it would be wrong to equate this with a total acceptance of the ideologies contained within these institutions, that is with ideological incorporation. In some cases this shows itself in overt rebellion - vandalism, truancy, for instance - but even in cases where the working class boy "keeps quiet", and achieves formal success, we cannot assume that by definition he implicitly accepts bourgeois ideology.

I have argued that consciousness is produced by and is a producer of material conditions. Thus delinquent activities (and indeed most social activities) are viewed as the outcome of consciousness (or false consciousness), and are therefore located within a structural setting (e.g. class position, oppression), and also have consequences. In no way am I suggesting that society is "all in the head." To divorce certain structural features, at the level of casual analysis, or the consequences of activities, from consciousness provides only a partial understanding of men's behaviour. Using this reasoning, the question of whether a particular example of delinquency is political or not cannot be

answered without reference to subjective reasons existing at the conscious level. We cannot presume, for example, that because a group committing a delinquent act happen to be subject to oppression in society, their delinquency must by definition represent a striking out at that oppression, that it is a political act. In the same way, to simply look at the consequences of certain acts as a measure of their political status is inadequate. For example, a psychopathic killer who, in the course of randomly shooting at passers-by, happens to kill the Prime Minister, cannot be said to be acting politically, even though his action would have political consequences.

Taylor, Walton and Young are stressing the consequences that certain actions have when they write:

"...the mass of delinquents are literally involved in the practice of redistributing private property."²⁸

Here there seems to be an implication that such actions are to be approved of by socialists, in spite of the fact that Jock Young has made reference to the real harm that delinquency can do:

"...however exaggerated and distorted the arguments conservatives may marshal, the reality of crime in the streets can be the reality of human suffering and personal disaster."²⁹

Professional criminals and delinquents who engage in theft obviously redistribute wealth, though not necessarily from rich to poor. If we sidestep the emotive charm of the term "redistribute wealth", the fact is that theft frequently redistributes wealth from poor to poor, and from poor to rich. A further problem concerns the role of consciousness in all this. Surely they are not suggesting that "the mass of delinquents" are consciously (though inarticulately) expressing the "socialist" goal of an equal distribution of wealth. If this is the suggestion, then they would have to cope with the problem that a great deal of crime is intra - rather than inter- class.

CHAPTER FOUR

YOUTH CULTURES : SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Traditional Studies of Youth Cultures and Delinquency

I use the plural term youth cultures in order to emphasise the fact that cultural formations involving young people in Britain are not homogeneous, but are differentiated on the basis of sex, region, education and, most important of all, class. However, as this chapter will indicate, perhaps an even more appropriate term would be youth sub-cultures.

Although youth cultures and adolescent delinquency are not, of course, synonymous, one cannot be studied without an understanding of the other. Whilst most young people seem to travel through adolescence without committing themselves in any substantial way to deviant values, for others delinquency forms an integral part of their cultural milieu.

A great deal of criminology in both Britain and the United States has for a long time concentrated on adolescent delinquency, and most of these studies - indeed all those using sub-cultural approaches - have pointed to the class basis of delinquency. A glance at criminal statistics will show why this is so: over the years working class adolescent males have been significantly over-represented in official statistics. Even though the evidence indicates that a class bias in the system exaggerates the amount of working class crime as a proportion of total crime (that is, differential selection occurs) self-report

studies do appear to confirm the greater criminality of working class males. Studies of youth culture, however, have frequently ignored or minimised the importance of class, seeing youth culture as a largely classless phenomenon, structured simply around the fact of being a certain age. With this model deviants tend to be viewed as the pathological results of bad, or under socialisation. There is another, more subtle criticism that we could make of traditional studies of youth culture, and concerns the degree to which the researcher understands the object of his study, and is able to "read" what he or she is confronted with. Cyril Smith's book on adolescence republished (with corrections) in 1970, for instance, contains the following comments on "Britain's teenages":

"Teenage culture in Britain was generated, and is still largely sustained by male entertainers performing in coffee bars in city centres."¹

And:

"The coffee bar has been and still is the launching pad for the teenage entertainers."²

Then, indulging in a slight, and arguably uninformed generalisation, he writes:

"Most of them (the young) brought face to face with the sacred institutions of the Church and Monarchy readily bend their knees."³

Even more problematic is the strong infusion of his work with his own values. Without wishing to dwell over-long on this, these examples are instructive, and require no further comment from me:

"Gather a few Britishers together in a completely novel situation and in less than no time they will have evolved some workable but unwritten rules to govern relationships in that community. The deep-seated respect for law and order which lies at the back of this genius is still successfully transmitted to the young today, and though respect for tradition is strongest among those who have passed through the public schools and ancient universities, even the back street pub in the slums displays a picture of the Queen."⁴

And:

"The conformity of the young in Britain is in line with the conformity of the adult population...for they are the successful products of a stable family life. They have, most of them, belonged to youth organisations managed by adults permeated with the values of the

Establishment and breeding respect in them for the churches, monarchy, and their aristocracy...They have accepted without protest the weight on their young shoulders of tradition in the public schools and grammar schools, and they become charmed by their privileges."⁵

Even studies of delinquency which focus on class background, and are therefore ostensibly relating socio-economic conditions to delinquency, are not immune to the risks of misreading social structural developments. The author of one study on social class and delinquency (published in 1969), for instance, was able to write:

"The continual fear (for manual workers) of unemployment, the intermittent crisis of unemployment, bad housing conditions, large families, overcrowding in the home itself, the housing area, and the schools are all becoming less of a problem."⁶

Turning to the political dimension in traditional studies of youth culture and deviance, most of them operated with very narrow definitions of political, and thus a rigid distinction was made between ideological and non-ideological forms of deviance; with studies of youth culture, politics was ignored completely.

Now I want to focus on some theoretical considerations relating to youth cultures. In particular I am interested

in work that has located youth cultures within a class system, and analysed the importance of age as a mediator of class experiences. Some of the most promising and interesting work in recent years has come from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, to the extent that a large portion of this chapter will be concerned with their ideas.

The Birmingham Centre

Phil Cohen's⁷ seminal research on working class experiences and its consequences in the East End of London provides a good starting point. Cohen analyses the far reaching effects of redevelopment and rationalisation on working class life. Taking the family, the neighbourhood and the job market as the major structures around which working class life is lived, he shows how in the post war period the working class community in the East End of London has had to cope with fundamental change. The traditional extended family network became increasingly nuclear in form, pushing members into a more privatised existence (facilitated by high rise developments) and more intense domestic relationships; these tensions being especially felt between parents and their children. Neighbourhoods were destroyed as the area became depopulated, and the "communal space" of the street, the pub and the corner shop was lost. Coupled with this was an influx of immigrant workers, prompting even more of the indigenous population to leave, and

in some areas a certain amount of "gentrification" took place. The job market was traditionally closely interwoven with the life of the community, but the post war period saw a decline in local job opportunities as family and small craft businesses disappeared. This led to a "polarisation" of workers into two types: the highly skilled and the "lumpen" unskilled. According to Cohen it was the respectable working class who experienced these disjunctions most acutely. They found themselves in the middle of two conflicting ideologies; on the one hand the traditional puritanism of the "work ethic", and on the other the ideology of "spectacular consumption". This developing ideological contradiction has also been pointed to by Willis:

"The capitalist spirit has relied at least in part on self-denial, asceticism and devotion to duty to power its vast industrial achievements. In the late era of consumer capitalism, however, there is also a need for expanded consumption if expanded accumulation of capital and profit extraction is to continue.... More and more capitalism needs obvious, luxurious and unnecessary forms of consumption: it needs hedonism to maintain the driving-force of its asceticism."⁸

And, as we shall see, Pearson uses the same model in his study of paki-bashing in Lancashire.

At the economic level members of the respectable working class were caught between the two possibilities of upward mobility into working class suburbanism, or downward mobility into the lumpen. To choose the former was to part company with traditional working class relations, and opt for the promise held by the ideology of affluence, though in effect this only existed at the level of an "imaginary relation".

Cohen argues that these stresses and contradictions present in the respectable working class made it the primary source of post war youth sub-cultures. He uses the term youth sub-culture in order to emphasise that young people must be seen as members of a parent culture, rather than as independently created cultural groupings. Young people are seen as experiencing and registering these changes in material, social, cultural and economic forms as members of a class, and as members of a generation. Youth sub-cultures are, for Cohen, attempts to resolve the contradictions "hidden" or "unresolved" within the parent culture. However, as youth sub-cultures only remain at the level of negotiation, they do not provide a "real" solution to these problems. Their attempt to resolve the contradictions in the parent culture is carried on at the level of ideology, thereby providing only ideological solutions; and the different forms taken by these youth sub-cultures will depend upon the nature of the ideological solution involved. Cohen uses the

term "magically" in order to illustrate this:

"The latent function of a subculture is this - to express and resolve, albeit "magically", the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture. The succession of subcultures which this parent culture generated can thus all be considered as so many variations on a central theme - the contradiction at an ideological level, between traditional puritanism, and the new ideology of consumption: at an economic level between a part of the socially mobile elite, or a part of the new lumpen. Mods, parkers, skinheads, crombies, all represent in their different ways, an attempt to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in the parent culture, and to combine these with elements selected from other class fractions, symbolising one or other of the options confronting it."⁹

Taking Mods and Skinheads as examples, Cohen attempts to show how the Mods represented a sub-cultural exploration of the option of upward mobility, founded on "spectacular consumption", whilst the Skinheads on the other hand, explored the downward option, which expressed traditional working class values. It is not that the Mods realised

the relations of affluent consumerism in their sub-culture as a "real relation", they did not become socially mobile white collar workers through their sub-culture, rather it created an "imaginary relation", a relation experienced at the level of symbols and feelings. Here Cohen is using a theoretical concept derived from Althusser, who has written:

"In ideology, men do indeed express, not the real relation between them and the conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and the conditions of their existence; this presupposes both a real and an 'imaginary', 'lived' relation."¹⁰

Poulantzas (not) surprisingly) also makes reference to an "imaginary relation":

"Ideology is present to such an extent in all the agents' activities that it becomes indistinguishable from their lived experience. To this extent ideologies fix in a relatively coherent universe not only a real but also an imaginary relation: i.e. men's real relation to their conditions of existence in the form of an imaginary relation. This means that in the last analysis ideologies are related to human

experience without being thereby reduced to a problematic of the subject-consciousness. This social-imaginary relation, which performs a real practical-social function, cannot be reduced to the problematic of alienation and false consciousness."¹¹

In his study of the "cultural politics" of bike boys and hippies Willis makes a similar point to the one made by Cohen:

"The cultures penetrated, exposed and partially and locally resolved these contradictions, but only in a special disconnected and informal way which left their basic structures unaltered. It is almost that the cultures, in their silent contexts, lived as if the basic structures were changed - enjoying that in imagination while making no attempt to bring it about in reality."¹²

Youth sub-cultures for Cohen, then, represent attempts to recapture some of the socially cohesive elements of working class culture destroyed by wider social changes.

Cohen's research has provided an important backcloth to much of the work produced by the Birmingham Centre in the seventies. Some of this material has modified and extended Cohen's analysis, producing some sophisticated

theoretical models.

In their discussion of sub-cultures, cultures and class, Clarke et al¹³ provide a useful outline of Cohen's work, though in the course of their commentary they point to certain problems and gaps in his analysis. These can be briefly summarised as follows:

- a. The analysis deals mainly with the 1950s and the early 1960s; what is required now is an extension of the work to cover developments in the 1970s.
- b. We need to understand more clearly how the experiences of the parent culture connects with its youth, and why different types of sub-cultural formations should arise in response, e.g. why did Skinheads pursue a traditional working class solution?
- c. We need to know the extent to which those choosing the same sub-cultural solution share a specific class situation.
- d. As well as the specific forms taken by youth sub-cultures, we need to know why they should follow a particular historical sequence, e.g. why did Mods appear before Skinheads?
- e. We also need to know the extent to which youth sub-cultures are ideological. By seeing them as an attempt to resolve

class contradictions on the ideological level, there is a danger of playing down the significance of the "material, economic and social conditions specific to the 'sub-cultural solution.'"

We might also add to these some further comments on Cohen's work. If, as Cohen argues, it was the respectable working class who experienced most acutely the changes taking place in the 1950s and the 1960s, and because of this acted as the source of most of the youth sub-cultures, how do the Teddy Boys fit into the picture? On available evidence,¹⁴ the Teds appear to have originated from the "rougher" working class rather than the respectable working class, and as the first real British example of a youth sub-culture they occupy a prominent position in the history of such sub-cultures. Also we need to account for the spread in popularity of the sub-cultures among working class young people. The Skinhead sub-culture, for instance, permeated throughout the country, implying that a range of other important factors are at work. Though I do not wish to undermine the "creative" element in sub-cultures, one might mention in this context the role of the mass media. I am thinking here of the media as amplifiers of deviant values, rather than popularisers of "sanitised" versions of youth sub-cultures.

More important, though, is the question of consciousness in Cohen's analysis. His use of the phrase, "The latent function of subculture is...to express

and resolve...contradictions", implies that those involved in the formation of sub-cultures did not have as a conscious aim the resolution of contradictions, but rather their actions fulfilled this (unintended) function. Bearing in mind Althusserian efforts to de-emphasise "subjectivism", this form of functionalism at the theoretical level seems to get round the problem of consciousness, yet at the same time it does lose sight of essential human creativity. Obviously Skinheads, for example, did not consciously devise or articulate a programme aimed at recapturing lost working class "community", but the sort of consciousness involved seems to me to be important. Cohen takes consequences and works backwards. Thus Skinheads presented an already existing representation of an "imaginary" solution, which focuses the analysis on sub-cultural consequences, but ignores the subjective input as part of the creative act of forming sub-cultures. The implications of this become more significant when we consider the political status of such sub-cultures.

One of the most important features of the work coming from the Birmingham Centre is the way in which Youth sub-cultures are related to their parent cultures. As well as addressing themselves to the experiences and conditions that are age-specific, researchers have placed the sub-cultures firmly within a particular class. The outcome of this is an appreciation of the fact that youth sub-cultures possess many of the values (though

in some cases in modified form) common to their parent culture. Important in this respect is the work of Clarke et al, mentioned earlier, and Clarke and Jefferson.¹⁵ They define the culture of a group or class as follows:

"The 'culture' of a group or class is the peculiar and distinctive 'way of life' of the group or class, the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, in the uses of objects and material life. Culture is the distinctive shape in which this material and social organisation of life expresses itself. A culture includes the 'maps of meaning' which make things intelligible to its members."¹⁶

Crucially for them these "maps of meaning" do not exist simply at a mental level, but are:

"...objectivated in the patterns of social organisation and relationship through which the individual becomes a 'social individual'".¹⁷

People exist within and are constrained by these cultural patterns, but at the same time they have the capacity to change and develop them. All cultures, they argue, are ranked hierarchically, with the dominant culture always striving to represent its own culture as the universal one. The outcome of this is

a historical, class-based, struggle: "the struggle between classes over material and social life."¹⁸

Thus the dominant and subordinate cultures will each develop distinct cultures. When one of these cultures is able, by virtue of its power, to impress upon the subordinate culture definitions and explanations of the experienced world, it then constitutes the basis of a dominant ideology.

Clarke and Jefferson outline the "social formation" into which people are born: for the working class this is by definition a subordinate social formation:

STRUCTURES - "all the elements of the productive system and the necessary forms of social relations and institutions that result from a given productive system."

CULTURES - "attempts to impose meaning".

BIOGRAPHIES - "an individual's personal experience of both structures and cultures."

Following this Clarke and Jefferson go on to explore the ways in which the working class respond to the social formation constituting their social world. In order to do this they make use of a formulation developed by Parkin,¹⁹ where he suggests that three types of working class consciousness may exist:

(a) DOMINANT - (which takes two forms)

1. Deferential: an acceptance of things as they are and one's subordinate place in the world.

- ii. Aspirational: an acceptance of things as they are, though at the same time not accepting one's lowly position in the world but aiming to "better oneself".
- b. NEGOTIATED - this form of consciousness represents neither acceptance, nor opposition to the dominant ideology. In this situation one carries, fatalistically, an "us" and "them" picture of the world, which leads to "public" support and "private" rebellion vis a vis the ideology. As Clarke and Jefferson put it: "Thus stealing, in principle, is likely to be condemned in such a neighbourhood (in public), but individual acts of pinching will probably escape such censure (in private)."
- Trade union consciousness is also in this category, though it involves more "constructive" actions, as is deviance and crime. Although trade union and criminal "negotiated" forms of consciousness are normally restricted in their conflict with the dominant ideology, they are seen as having the potential for a revolutionary form.
- c. OPPOSITIONAL - this form of consciousness rejects the legitimacy of the social formation, and is concerned to radically change it.

Applying this model to working class adolescents, Clarke and Jefferson suggest that three corresponding forms of consciousness can be seen. Within the "dominant" form the "aspirational" consciousness is represented by the "scholarship boy", and the "deferential" by the adolescent who accepts his place in society. The "negotiated" consciousness they see as present in three forms: "traditional" delinquency, "mainstream" youth culture and "deviant" youth culture. With "traditional" delinquency there is a strong "us" and "them" feeling, though opposition is limited to the extent of their illegal activities. In this context Parker's remarks on the working class adolescents in his participant observation study are apposite:

"the Boys... 'accept' large parts of the dominant value system but make reservations and exceptions in relation to their situation as part of an unskilled and semi-skilled manual worker population receiving, for instance, less than its share of the 'good life'." ²⁰

"Mainstream" culture refers to an "incorporated" commercialised version of deviant "style", and thus offers little in the way of opposition to the dominant ideology. "Deviant" youth culture is seen as expressing a "moment" of originality, a creative assertion of deviant consciousness, though it remains a negotiation of, rather than an opposition to, dominant ideology,

in that it is restricted to the area of leisure. Thus a "deviant" youth culture does not oppose the social formation as a whole. However, for Clarke and Jefferson:

"These styles offer a symbolic critique of the established order and, in so doing, represent a latent form of 'non-ideological politics'."²¹

Then they go on to say:

"Whilst there are no fully oppositional working class adolescent groupings, we feel that deviant youth cultural styles come nearest to being such."²²

Thus in their discussion of working class adolescent forms of consciousness they dispense entirely with the third case in Parker's typology: "oppositional" forms of consciousness. Now whilst it is true that working class adolescents are not involved in any large numbers with political organisations on the Left, working class adolescents do join such organisations and, I would argue, to an extent that does not justify writing them off completely. Modes of research being employed here in fact will tend to exclude such examples from consideration, simply because they begin with the sub-culture and work backwards. Murdock and McCron have drawn attention to this problem with sub-cultural approaches:

"Sub-cultural studies start by taking groups who are already card-carrying members of a particular sub-culture such as skinheads, bike boys or hippies, and working backwards uncover their class location. The approach therefore excludes adolescents who share the same basic class location but who are not members of the sub-culture."²³

Clarke et al discuss in detail working class negotiations of the social formation, and its representation in the form of dominant ideology, paying particular attention to the functions of youth sub-cultures. This struggle between dominant and subordinate cultures is viewed as a manifestation of endemic class conflict, though the acting out of the conflict can take many forms. As they put it:

"Class conflict never disappears. English working class culture is a peculiarly strong, densely-impacted, cohesive and defensive structure of this corporate kind. Class conflict, then, is rooted and embodied in this culture: it cannot 'disappear' - contrary to the ideology of affluence - until the productive relations which produce and sustain it disappear."²⁴

Only when the working class politicises, mobilises and organises these negotiations will it become a "class-for-itself". Youth sub-cultures are seen as being part of this struggle, though, again, because their responses are largely symbolic ("imaginary solutions") they remain negotiations.

Although the primary factor influencing the form taken by youth sub-cultures is class, the authors stress the importance of age as a mediator of class-based experiences. Thus they are suggesting a dialectical relationship between class consciousness and generational consciousness. The young experience major structures in the social formation in ways that are different to the experience of adults. Young people encounter education, work and leisure in age-specific ways, and this will influence the shape and content of the negotiation:

"It is at the intersection between the located parent cultures and the mediating institutions of the dominant culture that youth sub-cultures arise. Many forms of adaptation, negotiation and resistance, elaborated by the 'parent' culture in its encounter with the dominant culture, are borrowed and adapted by the young in their encounter with the mediating institutions of provision and control. In organising their response to these experiences,

working class youth sub-cultures take some things principally from the located 'parent' culture: but they apply and transform them to the situations and experiences characteristic of their own distinctive group-life and generational experience."²⁵

The rise of a post-war teenage consumer market enters into the analysis in that commercial interests provided the raw materials: dress, records, hi fi, etc. However, youth sub-cultures do not simply consume these objects according to the meanings, associations and social connections ascribed to them by the dominant culture. Youth sub-cultures transform the objects in the process of actively creating "style", so that the objects are endowed with new meanings. Objects have no intrinsic social qualities, rather they acquire social qualities within the context of social relations. And the objects appropriated by a youth sub-culture constitute a unity, a totality of social meanings, giving the sub-culture a unified identity. As Clarke et al put it:

"The new meanings emerge because the 'bits' which had been borrowed or revived were brought together into a new and distinctive stylistic ensemble: but also because the symbolic objects - dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music - were made to form a unity with the

group's relations, situation, experiences:
the crystallisation in an expressive form,
which then defines the group's public
identity."²⁶

Importantly for the Birmingham Centre the creation of style represents, at the symbolic level, opposition to other meaning systems, and thus, by implication, opposition to the dominant culture. Clarke et al argue that the dominant culture tends to play down the oppositional content of working class youth sub-cultures by defining their activities as "mere" delinquency:

"The objective oppositional content of working-class sub-cultures expresses itself socially. It is therefore often assimilated by the control culture to traditional forms of working class 'delinquency', defined as Hooliganism or Vandalism... Even when working-class sub-cultures are aggressively class-conscious, this dimension tends to be repressed by the control culture, which treats them as 'typical delinquents'."²⁷

Thus for Clarke et al when "delinquency" becomes part of "style" for a sub-culture, it can be viewed in oppositional terms. In a paper on "style", however, Clarke points out the limitations of this opposition:

"We want to fill out that idea of 'magical resolution' by considering

the limits of style in the context of the relation between a hegemonic culture and a subordinated one. By 'magical resolution' we understand not only an attempt to engage the problems arising from class contradictions, but also attempts to solve them which, crucially, do not mount their solutions on the real terrain where the contradictions themselves arise, and which thus fail to pose an alternative, potentially counter-hegemonic solution."²⁸

In what sense these "magical resolutions" are "political" will be examined in the next chapter, when the argument of Clarke et al will be related to specific youth sub-cultures.

As the title of their paper implies ("The Politics of Youth Culture") Corrigan and Frith confront head-on the question of how political youth cultures are. Although they develop an interesting argument around the theme of working class resistance to ideological incorporation, their paper is, in their own words, "tentative and, in a sense, negative."

They begin by briefly reviewing the existing literature on the theme of youth culture, which leads them to comment:

"The conclusion we draw from the existing literature on youth culture is that nothing

can be said about its political implications because politics hasn't been allowed into the analysis..."²⁹

Their main concern is to analyse working class youth cultures as primarily a response to working class experience of bourgeois institutions, in other words, class rather than youthfulness is seen as the crucial feature of youth cultures. And whilst they agree that young people do become involved with different institutions from their parents, their responses to these institutions are based upon values that are very similar to their parent's. Thus, as with Clarke et al above, Corrigan and Frith stress the notion of struggle in working class encounters with bourgeois institutions:

"...we are thinking, for example, of ways in which kids can use the symbols of pop culture as a source of collective power in their struggle with schools or police."³⁰

The working class can also resist in more concrete ways, however, such as the strike for adults and truancy for school children. It is working class youth culture at its "moment" of creation, though, that is seen as representing the most potent mode of resistance, in that youth cultures are the crystallisation of rebellion at the symbolic level. They are, from this vantage point, a manifestation of working class power to redefine and rework meaning systems.

Their whole paper constitutes an attack on those (on both the Left and the Right) who have argued that the working class are becoming increasingly incorporated into bourgeois culture. Their distinction between ideological incorporation and institutional incorporation (commented on earlier) allows the authors to show how working class teenagers (and indeed the working class as a whole) have little option but to be "incorporated" into major institutions - work, school, law, etc. but that does not necessarily mean that they have passively assimilated bourgeois values, that is, have been ideologically incorporated.

Corrigan and Frith argue that:

"...working class experience, even of bourgeois institutions, is not bourgeois experience; the working class situation, even within bourgeois institutions, is not a bourgeois situation - this is the reality of class conflict (in every sphere of life)..."³¹

Around this general framework they attempt to map out the guidelines for a political reading of working class youth culture; as they put it:

"The problem is to decide in what sense that response equals resistance and under what circumstances that resistance has political implications."³²

Unfortunately they then make the not very encouraging comment that:

"At present we just don't have the sort of knowledge on which clear answers to these questions can be based..."³³

Their conclusion is that future research should place politics at "the centre of the analysis", and organise itself around the following:

- a. Youth culture should be seen primarily as working class culture.
- b. It should be treated as a response to a "combination" of institutions, rather than as a response to just, say, leisure.
- c. The response should be seen as being as much a creative response as a determined or manipulated response.

Their paper, then, is congruent with other material from the Birmingham Centre, but one of the problems is that they avoid coming to terms with a clear definition of "political". Much of the discussion of the "politics" of youth culture infers, rather than clearly states, what is meant by "political". The political content of youth cultures is predicted on their existence as "struggles" against alternative value systems, but of interest here are the levels of consciousness involved, the extent to which the diffusion of youth cultures weakens this resistance, and the relationship between resistance at the symbolic level and resistance at the

concrete level, the two not being independent of each other. At the end of their paper they write:

"Our own, unsystematic, judgement is that even if youth culture is not political in the sense of being part of a class-conscious struggle for State power, it nevertheless, does provide a necessary precondition of such a struggle. Given the structural powerlessness of working class kids and given the amount of state pressure they have to absorb, we can only marvel at the fun and the strength of the culture that supports their survival as any sort of group at all. If the final question is how to build on that culture, how to organise it, transform resistance into rebellion, then that is the question which takes us out of youth culture and into analysis of working class politics generally."³⁴

I can agree that any mature political struggle must grow out of working class struggles at the cultural or sub-cultural level, the problem is one of fitting this proposition into a general theoretical framework, so that the connections can be made between the various forms of "political" activity. As the final part of this paper hopes to show this requires the rejection

of the narrow definitions of political found in traditional criminology, though at the same time an awareness that widening the definition too far makes the concept meaningless.

Murdock and McCron

Finally in this section I want to turn to the work of Murdock and McCron (who are not, incidently based at the Birmingham Centre). Much of their work has been aimed at exploding the myth of the classless teenager. Indeed they have stressed that teenage culture actually reaffirms, rather than destroys, class divisions among young people. Their study of a large comprehensive school in the Midlands³⁵ shows how strong class-related divisions existed between the top examination-oriented streams and the bottom "rougher" streams. These divisions were expressed through such things as musical affiliation, dress and stereotyping of the other groups.

In their paper on class and generational consciousness,³⁶ they are concerned with class consciousness as it is manifested in youth, and the ways in which young people conceive of social stratification. This means that we have to understand the common sense ways in which people see class structure, these being related to particular social contexts and the influence of hegemonic ideology. To illustrate the way in which people can talk about stratification without using the term class, they quote from "The Paint House":

"...when I was at school I thought I was middle class ya know. So I said to me mum' we're middle class' and she said 'You fucking ain't ya know, middle class is snobs', And I didn't know. I thought because you wasn't a tramp you was middle class. I thought this because there was always people at school poorer than you... so you might be 'igher.'"³⁷

Conceptions of class at a localised level derive from both the experience of inequality and the response to the dominant ideology:

"They are consequently the products not only of people's persistent efforts to impose meaning on their own immediate experience of inequality and subordination, but also of their attempts to appropriate and rework definitions of the situation offered by mass communications and education systems."³⁸

The authors argue that because of their generational experiences of institutions that continually play down the significance of class, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to confusion and contradiction in class consciousness.

The creation of sub-cultural "style" is seen as a "cumulative process of selection and transformation", where "objects, symbols and activities" are appropriated

from their original social meaning system and made into an alternative sub-cultural amalgam. As Murdock and McCron put it:

"Subcultural styles can therefore be seen as coded expressions of class consciousness transposed into the specific context of youth and reflective of the complex way in which age acts as a mediation both of class experience and of class consciousness."³⁹

Here they are in agreement with the model suggested by Clarke et al above. However, Murdock and McCron do present their argument in a way that more effectively brings out the importance of consciousness; their concept "coded expressions" may prove to be particularly useful. They also point out that by concentrating on the area of leisure - where there is greater freedom for action - sub-cultural studies have directed attention away from the world of work:

"Without a detailed grasp of the ways in which class inequalities are experienced and negotiated at the point of production however, any attempt to relate particular forms of consciousness and cultural response to particular class locations must necessarily remain partial."⁴⁰

Two further points that they make have already been commented on. Firstly, there is a need to explain why adolescents sharing the same class position do not

universally attach themselves to a particular sub-culture, and why some orientate to sub-cultures originating in other class factions. And secondly, sub-cultural analysis tends to exclude those who opt out of sub-cultural affiliation, that is "conventional" youth.

CHAPTER FIVE

WORKING CLASS DELINQUENCY AS POLITICS

Politics and Deviance

My aim so far has been to outline developments in the sociology of crime and deviance from the 1960s up to the present day, in so far as these developments relate to the theme of politics and deviance: especially the politics of working class delinquency. In the 1960s deviance was increasingly approached as a political issue, in the sense that the creation and application of rules prohibiting certain kinds of behaviour was a political process. At the same time wider cultural developments linked up with the radical ends of some academic disciplines and produced in some quarters a "politicisation" of deviance, leading to such things as the "politics" of homosexuality, the "politics" of madness and the "politics" of drug-use. Towards the end of the sixties some sociologists began to extend the argument put forward by the early labelling theorists, and argued that a convergence was taking place between "ordinary" deviants and political marginals, and that some deviant acts were in themselves "political". The 1970s saw a "hardening" of politics, and an attempt to develop an explicitly Marxist theory of crime and deviance. Notable here was the work of Taylor, Walton and Young, who argued that much deviance was a political act. Recent material from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies is important in that it focuses attention specifically on adolescent working

class sub-cultural formations. These are seen as providing symbolic modes of cultural resistance. The task now is to construct a theoretical framework within which to analyse the political status of working class delinquency.

In Chapter One I suggested that we could find within sociology five analytically distinct ways in which deviance and politics have been related to each other:

1. The creation and application of rules is a political process.
2. There is a convergence between deviant acts and political acts, and some, or most, deviance is in itself political.
3. Deviant acts can have political consequences.
4. Wider political structures can facilitate deviant responses.
5. Sociologists must emphasise the unity of theory and practice, so that sociological work is used in the socialist struggle.

Although all of these ways of connecting deviance with politics relate to some extent to the question of the political status of working class delinquency, it is number 2 that is of primary concern. In fact we can sharpen the issue even more by separating out three dimensions to number 2. Firstly, it has been argued that political minorities are increasingly having recourse to deviant modes of operation and life style. Secondly, it has been argued that deviant groups are

increasingly adopting strategies which are normally associated with political minorities. And thirdly, it has been argued that some, or most, deviant acts should in themselves now be seen as political. The first dimension does not directly concern us here; what is important is to distinguish between the second and third dimensions. With the second dimension we have a situation where a deviant group attempts to alter their position in and treatment by society by adopting new strategies usually associated with political minorities. Thus, for example, homosexuals have increasingly organised themselves and engaged in actions aimed at redrawing the moral boundaries. However, it is not the actual deviance that has become political: being a homosexual and indulging in homosexual acts have not now become political in themselves, rather it is the new modes of protest that are political. On the other hand, with the third dimension we have a situation where the deviance itself is seen as being political. Stan Cohen is referring to this case when he writes:

"There is confusion about the line beyond which 'stealing' becomes 'looting', 'hooliganism' becomes 'rioting'..."¹

Taylor, Walton and Young are also referring to this case when they say that "much deviance is in itself a political act."

Thus the question of the political status of working class delinquency corresponds to this third dimension to

number 2 above, for here we are taking a category of socially censured behaviour and trying to ascertain whether the behaviour can in itself in any way be defined as political.

The term "political" has a strong emotive content of course, and to designate a deviant act as political is to make a powerful statement about the act. Indeed, although those sociologists who have attempted to illuminate what they see as the political content of some deviant behaviour have done so from a variety of perspectives, they are united by a common desire to represent the actions of the deviant as rational and meaningful, and thus repudiate those traditional approaches which spoke of "meaningless pathology" or "senseless violence". And it is this injection of apparently "unearned" status into deviance such as paki-bashing and truanting that traditional criminologists have had difficulty accepting. One of the difficulties here is that different schools of thought have been operating with different initial definitions of "political". The issue is complicated by the fact that the orthodox Left has often fallen in line with traditional stances, whilst other Left factions have been attracted by the notion of deviance as rebellion against the capitalist system, especially when the working class have appeared to be at worst politically quiescent, and at best trapped within a trade union consciousness. Whilst I accept the

need to see deviant behaviour as being generally purposive and rational from the actor's point of view, there is still a danger of drifting into a romanticisation of deviance - in particular working class deviance. It should be stressed that even if one views certain acts as political, this does not necessarily mean that they are political in a socialist sense: certain types of deviance may more properly be viewed as reactionary rather than progressive.

At the centre of the enterprise is the need to construct an adequate definition of political, and then out of this a conceptual framework within which to locate delinquency. The paper so far has produced a number of working definitions. Pearson, for instance, suggests that deviance is political if it is an "attempt to right wrongs."² Stan Cohen argues that deviance becomes political when it becomes "a self conscious move to change the social order";³ political deviancy for Rock is "that activity which is regarded as expressly political by its participants"⁴, and by this he means that the deviant wishes to redraw the moral boundaries. Hall⁵ suggests that politically deviant groups are characterised by the following:

- a. The group's projects must contain some manifest political aim or goal as well as perhaps a latent content of deviant attitudes and life style.
- b. They use "illegitimate" means to further

or secure their ends.

- c. In life style, attitude and relationships they are socially unorthodox, permissive, even subversive.
- d. They are marginal to more powerful groups.
- e. They challenge the established political framework.
- f. They by-pass "left" "reformism" and trade union "economism".

Taylor, Walton and Young argue that "much deviance is in itself a political act."⁶

In spite of some variations in how writers have defined "political", the definitions are not so disparate as to reflect conceptual anarchy. There are at least basic similarities deriving from a common social scientific background; fundamentally they all use the exercising of power as a reference point. Traditional criminologists will agree with the "radicals" that politics is to do with power, though they will tend not to be enthusiastic about the argument that, for example, school truants are behaving politically when they "vote with their feet", because for them it is not that kind of power that makes an act political.

Thus at one level of analysis we can focus on the definition of political being used, and assesses its usefulness as a tool of sociological research. In order to reject a particular definition we would have to show its shortcomings as a sociological concept, or,

in extreme cases, show how it is just plain silly. Stan Cohen's argument that deviance is political when it is a "self-conscious attempt to change the social order" is of a different order to one which, for instance, said that deviance is political if it is carried out on a Wednesday night (when there was no social significance attached to Wednesday night of course).

In their own way all of the definitions of political deviance given above have validity, though none of them seems to be especially appropriate for an analysis of working class delinquency. The definitions offered by Cohen, Rock and Hall are essentially designed for analysis of "politicised" deviant groups such as Gay Liberation, and political groups lying at the margins of orthodox politics. And Pearson's definition, although it has been applied to certain types of working class delinquency, lacks sharpness. For the purposes of this paper I will define political actions as those actions that are conscious attempts to resist or contain the power of others. The definition makes no claim to universal application, for it is essentially a definition appropriate to those whose position in society is one of subordination. It is not, one would think, an especially controversial formulation, as it is to some extent an amalgam of other definitions; but it is broad enough to bring a significant number of responses into focus. This raw working definition, however, needs to be qualified.

Those sociologists who have argued that some types of so-called "ordinary" delinquency should really be seen as political have avoided simply using the term "political", and have searched for what perhaps can be described as a "softer" term. In other words they see these instances of delinquency as a form of politics. Thus delinquency has been variously described as "crypto-political", "latently political", "culturally political" and "primitive rebellion". We shall see examples of this in the research which follows. Given that we possess a working definition of political, it is necessary at this stage to spell out my own suggestions regarding the classification of different types of delinquency according to their political content. Taking as a basis the proposition that not all delinquent acts are political, my own position is that there are three basic categories into which delinquent acts can be placed:

POLITICAL: Delinquency which corresponds to one's definition of political and occupies a position on a "mature" - "immature" spectrum.

PRE-POLITICAL: Delinquency which cannot be defined as political, but represents a pre - or latently political form of behaviour. Here the delinquency indicates a potential for political action, may contain features associated with such action, and

may, under certain conditions,
presage such action.

NON-
POLITICAL Delinquency which has no political
status according to one's basic
definition.

Thus, for example, when Pearson (see below) argues that the paki-bashing in his study was "crypto-political", he presumably means that the political content of the delinquency was "real", though hidden from view, not apparent. If this were the case, then the paki-bashing would be located, in my scheme, in the first "political" category; the machine smashing would also be in this category.

The Search for a Politics of Delinquency

Once a definition has been arrived at in theory, the question of whether specific examples of delinquency are political or not can only be answered on the basis of empirical evidence, or, if we are keeping it at the level of theory, by the construction of ideal types. We cannot merely assert that, for instance, truants are behaving politically because they are resisting the power of the school; the statement must be verified empirically. In the same way that no deviant act is in an absolute sense deviant, so no deviant act is in an absolute sense political. The act must be situated in a specific socio-historical setting and, as I have indicated earlier, the analysis should also involve the notion of consciousness: deviant acts should be seen as having meaning for the

people committing them. Furthermore, from a Marxist standpoint the category "delinquent" has no validity except as a legal definition, which means that, amongst other things, it is useless to search for common forms of consciousness across the range of so-called delinquents. Of course for Taylor, Walton and Young the fact that delinquency is purposive behaviour is enough to give the delinquency political status, but as I attempted to show in my discussion of their work, whilst the delinquent is in effect breaking ideological rules, the crucial consideration is the consciousness involved when the rules are broken. Thus I am suggesting that it is not so much the fact of breaking rules that makes delinquency political, as the reasons for breaking rules.

Here we reach the heart of the problem. Given that we have a basic definition of political, how are we to assess whether or not particular types of delinquency are political? What indicators are we to use in order to carry out the classification? For the purposes of analysis we can separate out three broad dimensions to delinquency, all of which are inter-related:

- i. The act itself and its effects: its nature, when it was carried out, its target, and so on.
- ii. The structural context: the constraints, experiences and social conditions acting on the participants. These include

fundamental structural considerations such as economic and cultural disjunctions and a delinquent's position in the class structure, which will have long term pervading influences on behaviour and attitudes, as well as structural factors more immediate to the actual act, such as treatment by a particular teacher in the classroom.

iii. The forms of consciousness involved.

Contained within the above will lie potential indicators of the political status of delinquency; the problem, however, is to extract these indicators and use them in such a way that delinquent behaviour can be classified as "political", "pre-political" or "non-political".

I have argued that a consideration of forms of consciousness is crucial to an analysis of the political status of delinquency. To ignore this dimension is to deal with only part of the totality of the social reality of delinquency, though because they are closely interwoven with consciousness, the structural context and the nature of the act do provide indicators of the type of consciousness involved. However, to simply take the structural context of delinquency, or the nature of the act itself, to the exclusion of consciousness, opens the door to the possibility of all kinds of grandiose

assertions. For example, to argue that delinquency carried out by a black adolescent from the ghetto must be political simply because of his treatment by a white ruling class, rises little above the level of assertion. It is quite another thing to say that the conditions he experiences provides a potential climate for the development of a political consciousness. Likewise to focus on the act itself, for example hitting a Pakistani, even if it takes place in an area of "racial tension" (i.e. even including structural considerations) provides only partial evidence of its political nature. A complete analysis would have to involve all three dimensions to delinquent behaviour.

Pearson's Study of Paki-Bashing in a North East Lancashire Town

I will pay particular attention to Pearson's study for a number of reasons. Firstly it provides a good example of an attempt to relate a basic argument regarding the politics of delinquency to a concrete situation. Secondly, my knowledge of the town in which the study is set and the availability of relevant information because of this, allows me to present a detailed criticism of Pearson's work. Thirdly, having dealt at some length with Pearson's work in this paper, I feel it would be useful to pursue this through to what he offers as empirical evidence to support his general position.

"I have described paki-bashing in North East Lancashire as a response to cultural and economic change, and as an attempt to stamp a hold on the world." 7

Thus Pearson sums up his analysis of an outbreak of so-called paki-bashing in the town of Accrington in the early 1960s. In the study he argues that the paki-bashing represented a form of working class political deviance; those involved being compared to the power loom smashers who, in an earlier period of Lancashire's history, engaged in "primitive rebellion" (to borrow Hobsbawm's term) or "crypto-political" action.

The strongest aspect of the study is that he relates the life of the people of Accrington to the wider social and economic changes occurring around them. By imbuing his analysis with a sense of history (especially a "history from below") he not only attempts to show how cotton culture is a dynamic social phenomenon, but also to present a perspective on more recent violences pervaded by a strong feeling of *deja-vu*: of having been here before. And the fact that he was brought up in Accrington gives the essay "a distinctly personal quality" which, I would argue, allows Pearson to approach the study with a potentially useful and valid sensitivity.* As Pearson himself puts it:

"And rather than trying to disengage myself 'scientifically' from those personal roots, in what follows I have tried to picture for the reader how 'paki-bashing' makes itself felt, and finds its place in the everyday,

* This notion of "sensitivity" is taken up elsewhere in this paper as part of a general discussion of method.

working class world of this part of Lancashire. You could say that I claim the 'special' knowledge of autobiography in this essay."⁸

Coincidentally, I also make claim to the "special knowledge of autobiography" in this essay, for I too am a native of Accrington. I left the town in 1970.

"Trouble"

The event which sparked off the outbreak of paki-bashing occurred on the 21st July 1964. It seems that an argument developed in a small coffee bar on a main street in Accrington between two Pakistanis and a small group of white men. The argument continued outside and a fight broke out. One of the Pakistanis allegedly pulled out a knife and killed one of the white men with it: a Scottish demolition worker at that time working in the town. According to Pearson white youths were also involved, though I could find no evidence for this in the newspaper reports. I say this not simply as a quibble over ages, but because the involvement of young working class people in the violence during this period is an important point for Pearson. He also states that a group of Pakistanis were involved, though in court it was said that only two were present.

Because his workplace overlooked this main street Pearson had first heard news of the incident from some of his workmates who had seen some of the action. All this happened in the late afternoon, though it was early

in the evening, when he was walking home from work, that he experienced at first hand some of the repercussions from the stabbing. And it is here that Pearson begins to describe the events in a manner bordering on the sensational. Indeed one major criticism which can be made of his study is that in order to stress the similarities with the 19th century machine smashing violence he exaggerates the events in Accrington in 1964. If it is the same sort of principle at work in each case, then there is no need to try to amplify the scale of the violence in 1964. He describes what he saw when walking home early that evening:

"In the early evening, on my way home from work, I met with a large gang of about 100-200 white youths and men, ages ranging from 15 to 30. They were moving down the main street of the town in search of 'pakis' and many of the gang carried chains, belts and sticks. They also had some large menacing dogs with them most of which seemed to be alsations. It was not clear where they had gathered, or how they had come together, but they were coming from the direction of the same coffee bar which was also close to a pub and a small dance hall which was well known for minor trouble and toughness. Their appearance suggested they were 'the lads'. But these were not skinheads: this

was long before the days of the skinhead, in the time of the mod. But nor were they mods: mod fashions and styles had not yet reached this part of Britain, and it is doubtful whether they ever really did.

The style of the gang was that of the latter-day teddy boy...The mob, if it was a mob, moved down the street...A couple of police cars hovered about, but made no attempt to interfere, and as the gang went along a few Pakistanis who were standing at bus queues were knocked down, beaten and trampled on...I was walking a few yards behind the mob by now, not too sure what to do, going in the same direction. On one occasion as the gang passed a bus-stop, a 'paki' who had not been visible from within their ranks, emerged from under their feet - as if he had been 'heeled' from a rugby pack. "The lads' were literally walking on 'the pakis'... the 'paki' lay on the floor, bleeding from the head and face, dazed and struggling to get off the floor."⁹

This particular section of the study raises a number of issues. To begin with terms such as "large gangs", "the lads", and "mob", references to "large menacing dogs" and statements such as "'the lads' were literally

walking on 'the pakis'", do remind one of more sensational media accounts of activities such as football hooliganism. Stan Cohen has highlighted the exaggeration of adolescent violence by the media:

"The regular use of phrases such as 'riot', 'orgy of destruction', 'battle', 'attack', 'seige', 'beat up the town', and 'screaming mob', left an image of a besieged town from which innocent holiday makers were fleeing to escape from a marauding mob."¹⁰

The similarities with Pearson are remarkable, and strangely enough in a recent (and excellent) article on the "law and order" lobby in the country Pearson attacks those who sensationalise events involving young people:

"...the fear of lawlessness is not just a projection of the collective unconscious, in so far as it appears to be directly connected to the dwindling horizons of the political and economic future of the British state, it is the pulse of anxiety heightened by the sensational stories which preoccupy the news media."¹¹

It is also remarkable that 100-200 youths and men had assembled together at that time of the day. Normally the majority of them would have been working or at school during the day of course, but that particular week was the first week of Accrington's annual holiday period,

when most workplaces would be closed (or operating a skeleton staff) and possibly 'the lads' would have been more likely to be "available". However, the question of how they got there remains unanswered. Pearson's point that "they were coming from the direction of the coffee bar which was also close to a pub and a small dance hall" may be relevant to some extent, though at that time of the day the pub would only just have opened for the evening, or may not even have been open, and the dance hall would most certainly have been closed. The pub and the dance hall were set back a little from the main road, so it is possible that word of a get-together was circulated, and this space was the obvious venue, being close as it was to where the stabbing occurred, and outside the pub and dance hall popular with the "hard lads" of Accrington. Of one thing we can be certain: the so-called mob did not create itself spontaneously out of a clientele who happened to be in the pub and dance hall. Whatever it was that managed to convene such an awesome gathering, and even considering that it was holiday time, the estimate by Pearson of 100-200 people does seem quite remarkable, and there are no references in the local paper to this event.

His style of presentation seems to be calculated to reinforce what he perceives as similarities between this group and groups of machine smashers in 19th century Accrington, the most potent element being the use of the term 'mob'. He even draws a parallel between the role

of the law enforcers at the respective moments in history. He recounts that in 1826 a group of handloom rioters was met by troops called out to quell them. The troops did not turn them back, but on hearing their complaints and seeing their suffering gave the mob foot to eat. Of the 1964 "riot" he writes:

"It (the mob) sometimes moved into the road, but kept mainly to the wide pavements. A couple of police cars hovered about, but made no attempt to interfere."¹²

Curiously none of this was reported in the press, and no-one was arrested at this time. That the police sympathised with the mob in the same way that the troops had sympathised with the handloom weavers would be a difficult argument to sustain, as would be a "conspiracy of silence" argument on the part of the local press (in spite of that particular newspaper's shortcomings). The question then remains: why was such an unusual sight as a 100-200 armed mob, with alsations to reinforce their ranks, walking through the streets of Accrington early on a summer's evening, and trampling on any unfortunate Pakistanis who happened their way, not reported?

Pearson says:

"I would have found a battle between two rival gangs of white youths in the street something much more exceptional."¹³

In 1964 gangs of white youths fighting in the streets of Accrington at half-past five in the evening would not

have seemed to me to be any less exceptional; both occurrences would have been equally spectacular, and unusual.

A final point worth making on this concerns the types of men and youths taking part in this march through the town. This has certain important implications for his comparison with the machine smashers, and for this reason will be returned to later in more detail. Pearson describes the participants as "the lads", which presumably means that they were men and youths from the "tougher" end of the working class. As he says, skinheads appeared much later on in the youth scene. In 1964 Mods were beginning to catch on nationally, but these were not Mods according to Pearson, which, if one has knowledge of Accrington at that time is no surprise, but not because as he puts it "Mod fashions and styles had not yet reached this part of Britain, and it is doubtful whether they ever really did." In 1964 there were Mods in Accrington, and in all the surrounding towns, though not on the scale of a major city such as London, or even Manchester. It would have been surprising to find Mods on this particular demonstration of anti-immigrant feeling because in the main any Mods in the town came from the middle class, grammar school stratum, not from the working class. The tougher working class youth of Accrington were in general less than enthusiastic about becoming mods, in spite of the stress in the media on Mod-connected violence. "Mod" had a slightly

effeminate ring to it. In the next couple of years though some of these lads did lean towards the harder mod style.

As Pearson admits, the 'mob' was not only composed of youths though, and if his description is accurate, a fair sprinkling of ex-teds was in evidence, whilst any youths present would have been the harder, unqualified working class lads.

Pearson followed behind the column until they reached the centre of town, then he went off in a different direction:

"...and here the gang moved into another thoroughfare, the police cars shadowing them. Apart from the rioters there were only a few people about, on their way home from work."¹⁴

Again the point must be made that the use of a word such as "rioters" in the effort to make the group into latter day machine smashers serves to exaggerate what happened.

More Trouble

This, then, occurring only a couple of hours after the coffee bar stabbing, was the first of a small number of incidents involving whites and Pakistanis in the town. We can never know exactly how many incidents there were during this period, though we can refer to those incidents which led to court appearances. In all there were three such incidents, though one of them bordered on the ludicrous, and provided, as Pearson

puts it "almost comic relief". On August 1st a 34 year old man threw a piece of concrete at an Italian, accompanying his missile with the words: "This Pakistani is not going to stab me." He had a number of previous convictions (a point not mentioned by Pearson) and was goaled for two months. Of the other two incidents the first occurred on the same evening that the march had taken place, though some time afterwards. Severe local flooding pushed this story into second place on the front page of the "Accrington Observer". The story was headed "'We Will Stamp Out Mob Rule and Hooliganism' Bench Tell Goaled Three. Gang of thirty in street: Pakistanis attacked."

Pearson's description of what happened is as follows:

"The police had eventually moved in on a smaller crowd who had rushed some Pakistanis in a bus shelter. A handful of men were arrested and charged with being drunk and disorderly, and behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace. But the peace had already been breached, and for a couple of weeks there was a new flood hitting Accrington: 'paki-bashing.'"¹⁵

What Pearson fails to mention is that this incident happened at 9.50 p.m., that is about three hours after he parted company with the earlier "rioters". We do not know what happened during those three hours, except that

at least some of them spent the time drinking, but the crowd had certainly diminished in size from 100-200 to 30. According to the police evidence in court two policemen saw about 30 young men walking through the town, they split into two parties, then a group ran at two Pakistanis and struck them. One of the Pakistanis was knocked to the ground and kicked. This was seen by the two policemen, who arrested three of those involved. Later on the same night they arrested a fourth man on similar charges. Three of them (all in their twenties) were goaled for one month, whilst the fourth, a 17 year old local lad, was found not guilty of being drunk and disorderly, and bound over for a year for other offences. The three men goaled* were all Scotsmen, not locals, and one of them apparently told the police: "It was me. I will kick any more of the _____ I find. It was my mate they killed."

Pearson's description of this incident again ends on a sensational note in his reference to a "new flood hitting Accrington: paki-bashing". We have to ask what he means when he uses the metaphor "flood". According to Pearson there were during this period:

".....sporadic attacks on immigrants, the streets in which they lived invaded, windows broken, the curtains of their houses set on

* Pearson says two, but he overlooks the fourth man arrested later on the same night.

fire, Moslem food shops wrecked and vandalised."¹⁶

However, his information seems to have been gathered from the back page of the Accrington Observer, Saturday 1st August. Here was a report of a meeting of the Accrington Pakistani Friendship Association where one of the speakers said that a number of youths had attacked a house where a number of Pakistanis lived, and, after failing to break in, broke a window and set fire to the curtains. He went on to say that two attacks had been made on a Moslem food store, resulting in a cracked window and a broken glass panel in the front door. None of this was reported in the local newspaper as a story, and if we compare Pearson's account of the incidents with the original account a degree of exaggeration has certainly crept in, e.g. only one Moslem food shop was attacked, and it was hardly "wrecked".

The following week (July 30th) the second of the three incidents leading to court appearances took place. This merited a main headline in the local paper of: "Disturbances: Ugly Turn." Pearson describes what happened:

"...men were arrested when they appeared in the centre of the town with a double-barrelled shotgun. They shouted: 'Black bastards. Stop or we will shoot you.' There was a struggle and...the police were told: 'You — nigger lover. They all want shooting.'

'The lads' were charged and goaled for everything conceivable: threatening behaviour, behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace; possession of an offensive weapon; assaulting a police officer; and damage to the door of a police cell. But they were not charged with assaulting the Pakistanis, and nor was anyone else charged with assault during the brief season of paki-bashing."¹⁷

In fact 'the lads' were all men in their twenties. Two of them had previous convictions and were goaled; the third was fined £20. From newspaper coverage of the court case it seems that the gun was not loaded, and the men had no ammunition for it. The man found guilty of possession of an offensive weapon claimed in court that the gun was an antique. He was also quoted as saying:

"I never shouted at them. I have nothing against them. They are alright. It was only the other night I assisted one in a bus."

They were not charged with assaulting the Pakistanis mainly, one would think, because no Pakistanis had been assaulted. According to the newspaper report the men had threatened to shoot at Pakistanis as they walked along the road.

King Cotton Loses His Crown

Pearson's central thesis is that the actions of the paki-bashers in Accrington in 1964 were not the acts of mindless hooligans, carried out without rhyme or reason, but rational acts created out of the cultural and economic changes experienced by the people of Accrington in particular and the people of Lancashire in general. The decline of the cotton industry, marked out by the savage closure of one mill after another, especially in the post-war period, proceeded in the face of increasing competition from cheap imported cotton goods from India, Pakistan and Hong Kong. Pearson argues that the "trouble" is set:

"...in the context of Accrington's social and economic life, and alongside the peculiar place which the Pakistani migrant worker assumes in the drama of the collapse and transformation of the industrial base of the locality."¹⁸

Growing out of this, the townspeople had to cope with certain fundamental cultural changes in the early 1960s:

"a continuing preoccupation with anxiety about the stability of life: of work, worship and thrift."¹⁹

An emerging prosperity meant that people had to adjust to their new role of consumers, whereas traditionally 'thrift' had been a central value in the cotton culture. This "prosperity" in the "never

had it so good" period was facilitated to some extent by the new industries attracted to the town. It is important to bear in mind that the "troubles" did take place (perhaps paradoxically) within the context of relative prosperity; I shall return to this.

Pakistanis first entered Accrington to settle in 1960/61. By 1964 the number of Pakistanis living there was 250, and the total population of the town was 37,000. Pearson argues that the Pakistani migrant worker has a "peculiar place" in the modern history of cotton. Not only is he viewed in stereotypical ways - a "dark stranger" with funny habits - but he also represents a visible manifestation of the problems of the cotton industry. His country, using "cheap coolie labour" had flooded the globe with cheap cotton goods, and thus contributed to the demise of Lancashire's cotton industry. Certainly sporadic attempts had been made to get the importation of such goods banned. Now here he was on their doorsteps, actually taking jobs that previously Lancashire folk had done. In reality of course, Pakistani workers in the main took those jobs that the mill owners had difficulties filling from the indigenous population (e.g. shift work, nights). Pearson is suggesting that the economic competition from the Asian countries, coupled with a Pakistani presence, produced feelings in the local community akin to racism:

"It is difficult to say just where demands for tariff control end and racism begins,

but they often have that undertone:
what right did these foreign coolies
have to take away the livelihood of
honest Lancashire mill workers? Had not
the British Empire ruled the sea,
stamped half the map of the world with
imperial red, and dragged the 'wogs'
out of their jungle slumbers?"²⁰

For Pearson the incidents involving whites and
Pakistanis can only be understood when analysed within
the context of Accrington's social and economic dis-
junctions. The actions of the paki-basher are endowed
with a political dimension, in Pearson's analysis he
becomes a "primitive rebel":

"'Paki-bashing' is a primitive form
of political and economic struggle. It
is an inarticulate and finally impotent
attempt to act directly on the conditions
of the market...When it is understood at
an eye-to-eye level...it can be seen for
what it is: a rudimentary form of political
action, and a sad and hopeless rage."²¹

And later on:

"He is a 'primitive rebel', and the primitive
rebel directs his fury against culturally
prescribed symbols of cultural and economic
decay."²²

Spinning Jenny Gets Her Come-Uppance

Whilst some superficial similarities exist between

these paki-bashers and the machine smashing handloom weavers in this part of Lancashire in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Pearson's attempt to draw a parallel overlooks, I would argue, some fundamental differences. These differences occur on two levels: the scale of the "trouble", and, more importantly, its nature. His basic argument is that the cultural and economic disjunctions in the early stages of the industrial revolution led to periodic outbursts of violence. Specifically, the intense hardship and suffering experienced by the handloom weavers of Lancashire, which they saw as the direct result of the factory mechanisation of production, produced occasional violent retaliation against the machines, and sometimes the factories. As he puts it:

"This history (of working class life in the towns) is not peaceful, and we can obtain a better grasp of the nature of working class hooliganism if we compare paki-bashing with the violent eruptions which brought the cotton towns to life."²³

And violent they were. Even Pearson's potted version indicates the grand scale of this earlier "hooliganism". One of the most famous examples of power loom smashing by handloom weavers began in Accrington in 1826. Armed with crowbars and sledgehammers the mob destroyed 158 looms and two factories in Accrington, after which they moved on to other towns in the area. As one historian

puts it:

"by nightfall, there was not a single power-loom left standing within six miles of Blackburn."²⁴

As one might expect troops were called out, and a number of men were killed.

In the last half of the 18th century a number of mills which had installed spinning jennies (invented at Oswaldwistle by James Hargreaves) were destroyed. The Plug Riots in 1842 prevented production in many factories, and led to sporadic outbursts of rioting and fighting over the summer months.

Large gatherings of people on the moors above the towns were not unusual. In 1842, for example, 26,000 people attended a meeting on the outskirts of Accrington, where, apparently, the general feeling was that "they might as well die by the sword as by hunger."

For Pearson (following Hobsbawm) the handloom weavers were "primitive rebels" engaging in an "underdeveloped" type of political action:

"'Primitive rebels' - men who have not yet found, or who are only beginning to find, a mature political voice in which to express and act upon their grievances....The background to the hooliganism of the early 19th century

was, in fact, a growing sense of political strategy."²⁵

From my own position I would be much more comfortable arguing this with respect to the handloom weavers than with respect to the 1964 paki-bashers, though central to Pearson's work is the argument that the model applies to both of them:

"...thus machine-smashing and paki-bashing emerge at points of cultural and economic dislocations as a primitive resistance by men (as often as not young men) who cannot define what it is that they are resisting."²⁶

The Critique

We can now move on to a more detailed critical analysis of Pearson's position by taking up the two "levels" on which I will argue problems occur. The first concerns the relative scale of the violence. From the descriptions given it is clear that in comparison with the machine smashers the outbreak of trouble between whites and Pakistanis in 1964 was relatively trivial. Pearson's description of the march by 100-200 men and youths through the town does not contain any concrete evidence of the extent of the damage done either to Pakistanis or property during the march. As stated earlier, his use of sensational language seems to be part of his attempt to make it more like the marches of the machine smashers than was the case in reality. The fact

remains that nothing of this "riot" was reported in the press, and the police apparently stood by and did nothing. Pearson is also rather vague about the rest of the damage to the Pakistani community, and, apart from the three court cases, offers no specific examples as evidence. I could find none in the local press, though, I hasten to add, I am not saying that Accrington's local newspaper is the final arbitrator of truth. What I do feel, however, from my knowledge of life in Accrington at that time, is that if "sporadic attacks on immigrants occurred", and "Moslem food shops wrecked and vandalised", then at least some of these events would have appeared in the local paper. Little of the so-called 'flood' of paki-bashing actually resulted in legal proceedings. Court appearances arose out of only three incidents: three men and a youth rushed at two Pakistanis waiting for a bus and struck them; three men threatened to shoot passing immigrants with a gun for which they had no ammunition; and a man threw a lump of concrete at an Italian thinking he was a Pakistani. Seven men and one youth, then, appeared in court during the "flood": six of the men were goaled.

On a different, more important level, other problems arise in Pearson's study regarding the actual nature of the paki-bashing during those two weeks or so in the summer of 1964. However, before I begin it is worth pointing out, in passing, that

there is much in Pearson's study that I admire and agree with. His cultural and economic history of the region is well written, and he does provide a sensitive and very useful picture of life in Accrington in more recent times, where his "special knowledge of autobiography" is employed intelligently and sympathetically. We do part company, however, when it comes to the tricky business of explaining the outbreak of paki-bashing.

To return to his comparison with the machine smashers. It is obviously true that both in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, and more recently in the 20th century, Accrington was subjected to many far reaching changes. However, the "cultural and economic disjunctions" experienced by the people of the area in the early 19th century had a much more immediate and terrible presence than was the case in 1964. The handloom weavers were, quite apart from other considerations, plainly desperate; they witnessed their families literally starving to death. Even though the objective reasons may have been located in slumps in the U.K. economy, the power-looms provided (as Pearson says) an immediate, localised, explanation - a devil that could be exorcised by the satisfying action of smashing them up. Indeed Pearson points out that "the handloom weavers were forced into unthinkable poverty", and the fact that troops sent out to stop the rioters ended up giving them food suggests that their sufferings were in the extreme, even in those

days. He quotes the historian, Fay, who says that only 100 out of a population of 9,000 in Accrington were fully employed at the time of the Plug Riots, and that "numbers kept themselves alive by collecting nettles and boiling them down." In Accrington in 1964 the picture was quite different. Of course Pearson is not suggesting that the people were starving in 1964, but that comparable cultural and economic disjunctions had created a comparable situation of people trying to find their feet. Cultural spinoffs from the economic changes had produced a kind of anomie. Instead of smashing up power-looms, the people of Accrington (or some of them) took it into their heads to exorcise this devil by smashing up "pakis". Culturally they were coming out of a period of 'Prudence and Industry' - the town's motto - and into one of prosperous consumerism. The cotton industry, on which the town's earlier prosperity and culture had rested, has severely declined, so that new types of industrial production had to be coped with.

An apparent contradiction emerges here. On the one hand we have "prosperity", which the people are supposed to have had problems coping with, whilst on the other the economic life of the community is taking a hammering. Pearson's way out of this is to suggest that it is not so much an economic depression that is

important (for that was not being experienced) but a depression specifically in the cotton sector. For it was cotton that had orchestrated the 'tone' of life in the town. It is true that many aspects of working class culture in Accrington were intertwined with the historical experience of working in the mills (family life, the position of women, and even dialect, for instance); being born in Accrington was to be born into cotton culture. The closure of so many mills altered this, but we should also remember that by 1964 wider social changes were also playing their part. Some people did look back to the "good old days": a "Golden Age" when Lancashire cotton ruled the waves, and people lived in a "real" community, but to what extent did all this apply to the paki-bashers? Pearson writes:

"If machines appear to threaten the lives of working men, we must not be surprised if men knock them about a bit; and if migrant workers become the culture's symbol of industrial malaise, we should not be surprised if they suffer a similar fate."²⁷

Here Pearson is not consistent, for he has shifted the emphasis. From this quote he is simply saying that Pakistanis became scapegoats for the town's economic difficulties; but the town was growing relatively prosperous. And of the eight arrested in 1964, three were themselves migrant workers.

On the front page of the "Accrington Observer" on August 4th 1964 was the headline: "Accrington's Workless Figure Is Now Less Than 1%". In fact the unemployment rate for the town was a lowly 0.9%, the national rate being 1.4%. Prosperity, or the lack of it is important: it was the lack of it which seemed to provide the motive force behind the machine smashers. It is interesting that increases in paki-bashing in this area of North East Lancashire in the 1970s (reaching serious proportions in Blackburn) has accompanied steadily rising unemployment levels and a lowering of real living standards. Arguably, coping with unemployment is more of a problem for a community than coping with relative prosperity.

Concomitantly, extreme right wing racist parties such as the National Front have enjoyed increasing support, the classical argument being that when people experience an economic crisis simplistic explanations of a racist nature appeal to an increasing number of people.

The Pakistanis stereotype - the 'paki' - has, as Pearson puts it:

"points of contact with the reality of the life conditions of Pakistani workers."²⁸

And that these operate as points of tension between whites and immigrants:

"The points of contact are in relation to the struggle over housing conditions, women and jobs."²⁹

One wonders, however, to what extent these tensions were operative in Accrington in the years up to and including 1964. Perhaps his argument is more relevant to this and other areas in the country in the 1970s. These points of contact, Pearson seems to be arguing, act to ignite certain basic ill feelings felt towards the Pakistanis which have arisen out of a sense of cultural loss resulting from the closure of the mills: A Golden Age tarnished by Asian peoples.

If we take housing, there is no evidence of this sort of struggle over houses in the town in 1964. Not only was the immigrant community relatively small in numbers, but de-population of the area had itself eased pressure on homes. As far as jobs were concerned, as pointed out above, the unemployment rate was down to a level that by today's standards seems almost mythologically low. A "struggle" over women is a more acceptable notion, as immigrant women were only a small proportion of the total immigrant population then, but even here one would have to provide more evidence than Pearson does to show its importance in 1964. He can only guess that the initial stabbing incident was connected to this sort of tension.

He is aware that any trouble that arises at these points of "tension" would tend not to involve more "respectable" whites, and stresses the point by arguing that Pakistanis would not look for girls in "respectable" society, but would be forced into "low dives", and it is

in "low dives" that trouble is much more likely to flare up. This explains, he says, why the initial trouble started in a coffee bar next to a dance hall for teds. Pearson introduces his paki-bashing study into a paper he wrote in 1976 on Hooliganism, where he writes:

"The fact that migrants are excluded from 'nice places' means that the struggle is all the more intense between them and the working class men and boys who hang around in 'low dives' such as coffee bars..."³⁰

Certainly the dance hall he speaks of had for many years been a favourite haunt of teds, but the coffee bar was not a "low dive". I can say this with some certainty, for I used to go into the coffee bar myself two or three times a week in the evenings, and I never saw any fights. The dance hall was, admittedly, a different ball game altogether, but this particular fight did not start there.

One obvious difference between events in 1964 and events in the early 19th century was that the machine smashers were "ordinary folk"; they were the very people who had themselves experienced severe hardships because of, from their point of view, the power-looms. The eight paki-bashers who appeared in court in 1964 were not cotton workers acting

directly on what they perceived as the root of their troubles. Pearson's way out of this problem is to argue that the "less respectable" engaged in direct action, whilst the more respectable "ordinary folk" kept their response at a low key; they limited their response to "armchair paki-bashing".

According to Pearson the latter found themselves in an ambivalent situation, in that whilst they tended to think that paki-bashing was immoral, at the same time they did not want to condemn it outright: it was understandable considering what these foreigners had done to cotton culture. "The lads" are thus cast in the role of cultural mercenaries, resonating the true feelings of the people, who, because of their socialisation, feel inhibited about putting them into effect. It is as if "the lads" could carry cards on which is emblazoned: "Have toughness, will do your dirty work," (half of those who appeared in court had previous convictions). The paki-bashers, then, as is the case with the machine smashers, are looked upon as heroes:

"I have described the young hooligan of 1826 as a hooligan who was also a hero... it has been my intention to bring alive the mood of what the misdirected heroism of the paki-basher speaks to his culture about."³¹

He argues that just as the community felt sympathy for the actions of the machine smasher, so the community

in 1964 felt sympathy for the actions of the paki-bashers, and that this is partly reflected in the reactions of the law enforcers. I have already commented on his attempts to draw a parallel between the "leniency" of the troops and the police, and the supposed leniency of the courts in their respective treatment of the offenders. The suffering of the handloom weavers, coupled with the resistance of smaller mill owners to the new machinery, almost guaranteed them a certain amount of sympathy, but the evidence does not indicate that such sympathy was forthcoming for the paki-bashers.

Pearson shows how the weavers were highly selective in their destruction:

"....jennies with less than twenty spindles were spared, because they were thought to be a 'fair machine' which could be used in cottages. In some cases jennies with more than twenty spindles were not wrecked, but simply cut down to size."³²

He then tries very hard to draw yet another parallel with 1964, arguing that traditional criminological and psychiatric viewpoints (which I am not supporting) "do not even explain why he is beating up Pakistanis, and not throwing milk bottles at cats." If Pearson had looked closely at the "Accrington Observer" on 8th August 1964 he would have seen that the seventeen year old youth arrested for being one of those who rushed the Pakistanis in

a bus queue was again in court, a week later, this time for an unprovoked attack on a white man on a main street in Accrington. Apparently the youth was picked up by the police as he was kicking the man in the face. He had a long list of previous convictions, including some for violence, and was committed in custody to appear at Preston Crown Court. The machine smashers probably were heroes - to call the eight arrested for paki-bashing "heroes" is bordering on an insult to the people of the town.

A final point before summing up concerns the ages of those involved. Pearson's essay appears in a book which he co-edits on the theme of working class youth culture, thus his essay is ostensibly about young working class people. Consequently at certain points he attempts to show the heavy involvement of young people in both instances of violence:

"We can hardly describe paki-bashing as a 'youth problem'. But whenever there was bother, Edwin Chadwick noted in his 'Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population', in the form of riots, hooliganism and mobism, the greatest havoc was always caused by 'mere boys'".³³

"Mere boys" were very probably heavily involved in the early riots (and with older people's approval) but people started work in those days when they were still "mere boys"; youth was not sectioned off into a category

as it is today. Youths and boys involved in smashing up machinery were likely to work on handlooms themselves, and thus directly experienced the problems they were responding to. The extent of the involvement of youth in the paki-bashing in 1964 is difficult to ascertain, though what we do know is that of the eight sentenced only one was a youth, and he was only bound over for a year. It is likely that at certain moments youths did take part in the action, but their relationship to it was rather different to the relationship of 19th century youths to their actions.

As an empirical example of primitive political deviance, Pearson's analysis of the events in Accrington in 1964 is highly problematical. His attempt to draw a parallel between 1964 and the early 19th century is less than satisfactory, because at certain points the similarities are not as obvious as they might appear to be from a first glance. In essence what I have tried to show is that, using early 19th century machine smashing as a model of crypto-political action, the paki-bashing incidents of 1964 do not qualify as another example of "crypto-political" action.

Furthermore we are still left with the thorny problem of Pearson's definition of political deviance, and the place of consciousness in this definition. It is perhaps worth quoting again from "The Deviant Imagination":

"Vandalism in terms of the preceding discussion, is a primitive inarticulate attempt to 'right' wrongs: in that sense, it is a crypto-political act."³⁴

The 1964 paki-basher in so far as he is attempting to "right wrongs" is, according to Pearson's definition, engaging in a crypto-political act. At the same time he is also a "folk hero", expressing, in effect, what Durkheim calls "collective sentiments".

As far as the events in Accrington are concerned, I have questioned the idea that those involved were folk heroes. But if Rock is criticised for "reducing politics to a meaning", what status does Pearson give to meaning or consciousness during the 1964 incidents? It seems that for Pearson "meaning" does play a part. In the early 19th century the handloom weavers felt that the source of their problems lay in the machines (whether or not this was objectively correct) and so acted directly on the capitalist's means of production. In 1964, to be consistent and maintain this parallel, Pearson must see the paki-bashers as acting against what they felt was the source of their problems (again, whether or not this was objectively correct). My argument here is that the evidence does not support this parallel.

It is very difficult from a reading of Pearson's essay to establish exactly what he believes is going on in the paki-basher's head, given that he seems to

think that this is important. He implies that the stabbing served to ignite below-the-surface community sentiments wherein the Pakistani is viewed as a source of the community's problems, as he and his kind had helped to depose King Cotton. But, stating the problem in the simplest terms, did those men who appeared in court, and any others who got away with paki-bashing in 1964, take it out on the Pakistanis because they felt that they had a chance to get their own back on the Pakistanis for causing the mills to shut down, and cultural upheavals to occur? I think not. Whilst I agree with Pearson that there are connections to be made between the violence and social change, I feel that his reading of these connections ends up off course. Certainly in Accrington at that time a fair number of people would have held more or less racist views, though the extent of this is, of course, very difficult, if not impossible, to accurately assess.

Some of the townspeople would have had feelings along the lines of "They're taking our jobs" - but it is worth remembering that the Pakistani community was very small in Accrington in 1964, and unemployment was extremely low. Any racist views present were most probably derived basically from Britain's colonial history, although they may have been augmented by the run-down of the cotton industry. Racism would reflect the feeling that Pakistanis (as well as, incidently, many other foreigners) were in some generalised way

"not like us" and, indeed, inferior. The two communities on the whole kept their own company in these early years, although inside the cotton mills relations between whites and Asian immigrants were usually non-antagonistic, and often friendly: hardly the relationship that existed between the handloom weavers and the power looms. But even if cotton workers' sentiments were strongly anti-Pakistani, the men who appeared in court on "paki-bashing" charges were not Lancashire cotton workers anyway. The man who was stabbed to death outside the coffee bar was a Scottish demolition worker, and of the four in court for the first attack on Pakistanis, three appeared to be his mates, and were also from Scotland (it is also possible that the fourth was a mate). They were motivated, I would suggest, more out of a very unromantic desire for immediate revenge, rather than feelings about cotton culture. The danger in Pearson's approach is of blatant romanticism. If this aspect is not important, that is, revenge was only the sparking plug, with deeper community feelings lying behind them, then Pearson gives little evidence in support. In fact, taken to its logical conclusion, his argument becomes almost mystical, with the paki-bashers acting out the sentiments felt deep within their own and the community's consciousness, rather like cultural mercenaries. However, they are never conscious of these "true" feelings, and can only become conscious of them when a sociologist, perhaps, comes

along and explains to them what they are really feeling. We shall never know what was going on in their heads, but we should be careful when attempting guesses, no matter how inspired they might appear to be. As Pearson himself has said in another article:

"Drawing on a growing body of critical social research, I will attempt to articulate the viewpoint and problems of the young working class hooligan, a hazardous venture which involves the risk of putting words into the mouths of other people who have chosen to act and not to speak."³⁵

Clarke and Jefferson

I have already discussed in Chapter 3 the point that special problems are encountered when the notion of consciousness is introduced into analyses. It is not simply a question of asking a delinquent why he did it, and only accepting that the delinquency is political if his motivational account corresponds with some pre-determined definition of political. Verbal accounts are important, but they provide only one potential insight into consciousness. As mentioned above, there is the actual act and its structural context (i.e. the political economy of delinquency) to draw on, and Murdock and McCron's notion of "decoding", referred to earlier, may also be usefully employed. Here some understanding of the forms of consciousness involved may be achieved through

a "decoding" of such things as dress, leisure patterns, demeanour and "style". One must be wary, of course, of "over-reading" the signs, and imposing on the delinquent forms of consciousness he does not possess. In the Chapter on youth sub-cultures I outlined the general theoretical framework developed by Clarke and Jefferson when they were at the Birmingham Centre. Focusing on "style" or "cultural symbolisation", and taking the Teds and Skinheads as examples, we can see how they relate this framework to specific sub-cultures and their actions in such a way that the sub-cultures are seen as representing a form of politics. The question is how successful are they in linking up the creation of "style" with forms of consciousness?

The importance of cultural symbols is stressed early on in their paper:

"A look at culture simply through activities, attitudes, interests and values (observed or solicited) remains superficial so long as it ignores cultural symbols since, for us, such symbols (e.g. dress and music) are attempts, by people, to make meaningful, at the cultural level, their social reality."³⁶

The Teds emerged in the 1950s, in the main from the "lumpen", during a period in which the working class in South London (the area the Teds are thought to have originated in) was being subjected to severe social and economic dislocations. Lower class youth faced

relatively high levels of unemployment - in a period of "full" employment - and this exclusion from work was paralleled by an exclusion from educational success at school. In this situation leisure becomes the life sphere in which something worthwhile has to happen, and became for the Teds a "space" in which they developed their own cultural meanings. Clarke and Jefferson suggest three levels on which this occurred. Firstly, the vanity and fussiness regarding appearance invested the Ted with an identity of self. Secondly, through dress and music a "cultural extension" of the self was forged. And Thirdly, by relating these to group membership a "social extension" of self occurred. The sum total of this was the creation of "style". For Clarke and Jefferson this creation of style by the Teds represents a political response:

"The nature of their cultural response, as just outlined, becomes meaningful to them, comprehensible to us, and, in the final analysis 'political'. By recreating symbolically, at the cultural level, their relationship to the basic structures of society (which ultimately have their sources in the distribution of power and wealth within a society) we would argue that this is, latently at least, a political response."³⁷

The same sort of politics is said to exist within the Skinhead sub-culture. Arriving in the mid sixties in

opposition to the "affluent consumerism" personified by the Mod style, and the middle class intellectualism and bohemianism of the underground, the Skinheads are seen as representing a return to an earlier working class ethos. The close-cropped hair, and what amounted to a caricature of working clothes, expressed this orientation, whilst working class machismo values found their expression in fighting and general "toughness". At the same time working class communities were being subjected to urban redevelopment (cf. Phil Cohen) and in the process being destroyed. For Clarke and Jefferson, then, the Skinheads represent a sub-cultural defence of working class life, though, again, their resolution of problems is only at the symbolic level. The Skinheads did not stop the planners.

In their analysis Clarke and Jefferson recognise the structural constraints within which working class children grow up. This means that efforts to assert an individual or group identity, or to protest about what is happening to them, will be severely limited in the forms they can take. Because of this, they argue that we should not look for formalised explanations by Teds or Skinheads etc. of how or why they are constructing their own definitions of reality through style:

"We should not expect to find within these groups an articulate self-definition at a verbal level, that is, the level at which most of us would consider articulacy to be

primarily achieved: in most cases they come from those sectors of society where such articulacy is held in suspicion and to whom formal education offers only minimal training in such fine arts. Instead their self definition is articulate at the level of style."³⁸

The response is political (of a sort) because the creation of style represents a struggle with the experienced social formation (which has its origins in the distribution of wealth and power) over meanings. It is not political in the sense of being an attack on basic structures as structures: the political dimension is located in the attempt to control meaning:

"In turning to what we have called the politics of youth culture, we hope to draw some of the earlier themes together in terms of viewing youth culture as a struggle for control, an attempt to exert some control over one's life-situation. What characterizes most youth culture is the search for excitement, autonomy and identity - the freedom to create their own meanings for their existence and to symbolically express those, rather than simply accepting the existing dominant meanings."³⁹

And:

"In terms of its political content then, we would characterise youth culture as being involved in a struggle fundamental to the social order - that of the control of meaning."⁴⁰

The same points I made with respect to Phil Cohen's work could also be made here, in particular the one regarding the place of consciousness. Certainly a youth sub-culture can be seen as an alternative meaning system, albeit a temporary one. But sub-cultures are created by the people in them, constrained by their social situation, yet still able to create something within these constraints - as is testified by the fact of a sub-cultural formation. As active, rather than passive, creators of style, those involved will possess consciousness regarding what they are doing, and from the point of view of politics, the forms of consciousness is an important dimension. Unfortunately we do not have the knowledge necessary to relate specific youth sub-cultures to forms of consciousness, though if such sub-cultures have a potential for a politics which rises above the symbolic level, then consciousness becomes a crucial factor.

In their model Clarke and Jefferson are in effect using "ideal type" youth sub-cultures. In their discussion each of the sub-cultures is a "pure" example of a unified meaning system. However, in practice members of a youth sub-culture will attach themselves

to it, and share the meanings with varying degrees of commitment. Clarke has discussed the diffusion of style amongst conventional youth (through the activities of commercial interests),⁴¹ but also important is the diffusion of style within an identified sub-culture, and here again the notion of consciousness becomes important.

One further point concerning the Clarke-Jefferson thesis as outlined above is worth making. Given that youth sub-cultures do not offer "real" solutions to contradictions or problems, but only provide an "imaginary" solution at the symbolic level, an important question to ask is to what extent does the youth sub-culture provide even an "imaginary" solution? The political dimension in sub-cultures is seen as being located in the sub-culture's control of meaning; in Corrigan and Frith's language, their resistance to ideological incorporation. The problem with the concept "imaginary" solution is that it implies that from the individual's point of view life actually becomes (via his "imaginary relations") exciting, interesting, full of action, or whatever. Thus, although the real problems of life are not solved, it appears to the member of the sub-culture that they are. Sub-cultures are seen as a sort of sociological Valium. However, as with Valium, the effects of the sub-culture are only temporary, and "real relations" will break through into the lives of the members even in leisure time.

Whilst, say, the Skinhead is among the massed ranks on the terraces on Saturday afternoon enjoying the exhilaration of the ritualised (and sometimes real) aggression, or having a "bit of a laugh" at the pub in the evening, he may be experiencing a "magical" transcendence of problems, but his day-to-day leisure hours are not exclusively patterned by such experiences. The bleaker realities of life are not swept away totally in leisure time, even at the "imaginary" level. The degree to which "imaginary relations" will transcend "real relations" will obviously vary from one sub-culture to another; some will be extremely successful in insulating themselves from other institutions and other people, but to imply that working class youth sub-cultures provide a total symbolically constituted resolution of problems is to endow the kids concerned with unrealistic amounts of power.

"Mugging" and Race

Clarke and Jefferson introduce the notion of "control" into their paper on those robberies and assaults labelled as "mugging."⁴² They argue that in spite of a degree of "differential selection" occurring, the over-representation of "deprived" West Indian youth in the statistics reflects the greater involvement of black youths in crimes of "mugging". In the major areas where structural inequalities occur - education, unemployment, income and housing - West Indian youths suffer the same deprivations as white indigenous "lumpen" youths, however, the fact of being black introduces an

extra dimension into their deprivation. Significantly blacks have to contend with racism:

"...their problems are heightened both objectively and subjectively by the existence of white racism: objectively, in that racism acts in the various structural arrangements to worsen the relative position of West Indians in these areas; subjectively, in the increasing sense of exclusion and rejection felt by coloured communities in England." ⁴³

In the face of this challenge West Indians have adopted increasingly militant strategies, bringing a move towards dissociation from official agencies e.g. the Race Relations Board. At the same time there have arisen various local and national pressure groups and organisations, all centred around the need for black solidarity. Furthermore, since the 1960s the black community, and especially adolescents, has become increasingly critical of the police:

"Once regarded by all as fair and impartial, they are now regarded by many West Indians, especially the young, as racist 'enemies' who taunt, intimidate, assault, plant and 'trump up' charges: the face to face agents of repression against the 'man'." ⁴⁴

As well as experiencing the deprivations outlined above more acutely than their white counterparts, West Indian adolescents have also been in a worse position than their parents:

"Whereas their parents have never suffered the subtle racial inequalities of the British Educational system, were 'invited' here (albeit to take the heaviest, dirtiest and lowest paid jobs), eventually found accommodation (albeit substandard and decaying), and were left relatively unharassed by the police and public, the picture for their children is radically different. Their education has made them more expectant and aspirant, while simultaneously, through a subtle and pervasive (although often unwitting) racism, robbing them of the means (a firm identity, self respect and the qualifications) of achieving their higher aspirations; this situation is compounded by the job market, where even white unqualified working class youths are 'virtually unemployable', by homelessness, and by a changed 'mood' noticeable both in the public and the police. Enoch Powell, the National Front and the media's obsessive concern with the 'immigrant problem' have succeeded in providing a public focus for concern over housing, unemployment and a rampant inflation."⁴⁵

Clarke and Jefferson then go on to argue that because

of the structural constraints acting on West Indian youths there are few available responses from which they can choose:

"Those options remaining open, or opening, for them are those of politics and crime (and to a lesser extent, in that it may co-exist with others, drug use). The distinction between politics and crime here is a somewhat artificial one, for in fact the two are closely connected."⁴⁶

"Mugging" itself becomes for some, argue Clarke and Jefferson, the "best available solution":

"Both the politics and crime among West Indians have an increasing edge of desperation, involving more or less articulately the recognition that the system intends to repress and control them, to deny them their identity and a place in the society. Thus the stance becomes increasingly one of self assertive confrontation, whether black power groups against the police, or violence against 'whitey' on the streets."⁴⁷

"Mugging" offers a number of attractions. Firstly, it provides money; secondly, it expresses "machismo" values; and thirdly, it "strikes fear (individual and collective) into the white population."

Echoing Horowitz and Leibowitz,⁴⁸ Clarke and Jefferson argue that there is a false division made between politics and crime, and "mugging" should be seen as a form of politics:

"...the attempt to create and assert a collectively validated identity for blackness...and to assert at least temporary control over their own life situation, to seize it back from the hands of those in power."⁴⁹

"Mugging" is a different kind of crime to the crime typically associated with older West Indians, and this is seen as a reflection of a different mood on the part of the young:

"Risky, because of coming face to face with the victim, brazen and reckless, it indicates a growing desperation, an increased alienation, and latently at least, a 'non-ideological politics!'"⁵⁰

The last quote is the most significant one in their paper. Leaving aside the questions that arise from the notion that "mugging" is "risky" (e.g. those most likely to put up a good fight are less likely to be "mugged"), there is a certain vagueness about the statement that "mugging" is "latently at least, a 'non-ideological politics'", which implies that it may not yet be political. They make the same suggestion with respect to the Teds:

"We would argue that this is, latently at least, a political response."⁵¹

If we pose the question: are Clarke and Jefferson right, is "mugging" (latently) "political"? then we can see something of the complexities involved in a discussion of politics and deviance in general. As they are approaching the issue at the theoretical level, rather than dealing with a specific "case study", we cannot criticise their paper on the same level, as for instance, Pearson's. Because they are operating at the level of theory it means that they have constructed a model of "non-ideological politics", and then argued that "mugging" by West Indian adolescents conforms to this model. Thus we are left with two aspects of their analysis that can be scrutinised: the general description of the place of West Indian youth in Britain, and the nature of "mugging" and the basic definition of 'non-ideological politics'. Of course if one accepts their basic definition, and views events from their standpoint it is a question of deciding whether or not black "muggings" conform to this definition. However, the question arises of which black "muggings" are we speaking of? What features must a black "mugging" possess in order for it to be "political" in their terms? I would argue that, given that a basic definition of "non-ideological politics" has been suggested, the assessment of whether or not such "muggings" are political is an empirical one. We

cannot assert (as they seem to do) that they are. This leads on to the crucial question of how one assesses the "politicalness" of "mugging" by West Indian youth. It is not enough to show the structural setting and influences acting on black youth (what they write on this I agree with), or to show that the actions are functionally useful for them, it is also necessary to bring into the analysis the forms of consciousness involved: this point has already been discussed earlier on in this chapter.

Profane Culture

Finally, I want to turn to Willis's ethnographic study of bike boys and hippies, for this closely parallels the general ideas put forward by Clarke and Jefferson regarding the political content of sub-cultures. On the basis of a participant observation study of the two sub-cultures, one working class the other middle class in origin, Willis argues that each of them may be conceived of as a political response, though at the level of "cultural politics".

As ethnographic research Willis largely succeeds in his task of presenting the respective cultures as "living", creative enterprises. As he puts it:

"At its best ethnography does something which theory and commentary cannot: it presents human experience without minimizing it, and without making it a passive reflex of social structure and

social conditions. It reproduces the profane creativity of living cultures."⁵³

His central theme is the "transformation of their cultural fields" by the sub-culture. We are given a scenario in which the bike boys and the hippies, in their own ways, created their own cultural systems, their own unities of meaning, from the raw materials provided by "straight" society. The mass produced commodities of advanced capitalism were not simply taken and consumed, without any control over them, but rather were transformed by the sub-cultures, so that they were endowed with altogether different meanings to those originally intended. Willis's argument is that the commodities experienced at a day-to-day level express through their meanings the power of ideology; the bike boys and the hippies revealed this power:

"These cultures reveal the unsuspected power of commodities and of a minutely articulated ideology in everyday life. They also show the room and scope left by them and in them for struggle and change within the cells of everyday habit."⁵⁴

On this basis Willis is able to argue that in order for large scale social structural changes to be engendered, it is first necessary to change these apparently trivial things of life - something that the bike boys and hippies did, then, represents a precondition for wider social

change.

Using the hippies as an example, the following indicates what Willis understands by the notion of cultural politics:

"Seen in this light, the hippy culture makes a penetrating criticism of the philistinism and inner contradictions of modern capitalist society. The hippies accepted a degree of decentredness and external determination of their own consciousness - common to us all but usually disguised - and explored it with the heroism of a full commitment of life-style. There was no barrier between thought and states of consciousness, between ideas and their implications for personal change. It was from the basis of organic individualism and spiritual intensity that the rest of society was viewed, and from which arose a potent critique of its rationalism, technicism and bureaucracy."⁵⁵

He then outlines in detail the ways in which the hippies and the bike boys were political. The hippies challenged the central pillars of capitalism: the protestant work ethic, and the importance of time. The rejection of the work ethic by the hippies was a dramatisation of the developing contradiction between consumption and puritanism:

"More and more capitalism needs obvious, luxurious and unnecessary forms of consumption: it needs hedonism to maintain the driving force of it asceticism....The hippies did not make this contradiction but they dramatized it, exploited it...They were the caricatured nightmarish incarnation of the bourgeoisie's own developing contradictory other nature. They did not earn, yet sublimely expected to survive. They watched and experienced nature as if there were no work to be done. They did not produce yet they consumed without guilt."⁵⁶

Received notions of time were totally subverted by the hippy culture:

"To insist on the relativity of time, on its relation to subjective states, on its infinite philosophic variability, on its irrelevance to natural, cyclic or industrial routine, is to bewilder rationalist organisation and the capitalist calculation of profit."⁵⁷

The bike boys were also seen as "living out" important criticisms of society. In a society where man is becoming increasingly alienated and dehumanised by the impersonal forces of advanced technology, the bike boys had taken one form of technology - their bikes -

and mastered it. They had taken control of it. The bike boys had also, says Willis, subverted conventional expectations regarding relations with others:

"The directness and irreverence of the motor-bike boys is also a challenge to institutional forms of politeness. Their spontaneity and the lack of formality in social relations highlight the restrictions of a bureaucratic, neighbour-watching conformism."⁵⁸

Thus both the cultures represented critiques of the existing society:

"To the definite cultural achievements of the hippies and bike boys must be added therefore, in their different ways, real critical achievements - at least at the level of a cultural politics."⁵⁹

If Willis's study had terminated at this point then it would clearly have been wide open to the charge of romanticisation; however, he is fully aware of the "tragic" limitations of each of the cultures:

"Despite this, however, it is precisely in the larger arena of politics proper that these cultures met their final, tragic limits - limits which raise the whole question of the status and viability of cultural politics and of a struggle waged exclusively at the level of life style."⁶⁰

The hippies and bike boys, then, were not political in the sense of attacking the structural causes of those features of life they objected to; the struggle was kept only at the level of culture.

Willis's argument that day-to-day cultural change is a necessary precursor of wider political change is a convincing one. However, the forms taken by the alternative cultural formation, for instance in the meanings ascribed to commodities, can vary enormously. The fact that a culture, or sub-culture, creates a meaning system different to, or in opposition with conventional meaning systems does not by definition make it a precursor of a socialist society. It is quite possible for a sub-culture to develop which is more appropriate for a fascist society. Willis sometimes walks a fine line between losing himself in a celebration of the colourfulness of hippy and bike boy cultures, and being critically aware of the direction elements of such cultures are aimed in. At one point in the book he does, however, explicitly refer to the "unprogressive" elements extracted by the bike boys from their parent culture:

"There were further aspects of a larger political failing. If the bike boys took strands from their parent class culture and creatively developed them, they also unconsciously took and reproduced, often in more virulent forms, less progressive aspects of working class culture. Their racism, for instance, was quite marked..."⁶¹

As I have said before, it is important for Marxist oriented writers in any analysis of working class culture (or sub-culture) to guard against taking the ludicrous position of seeing every aspect of that culture as something to be admired, simply because it is located in that class which is conceived of as a revolutionary force.

As a final point, if the protests of the young are channelled into self-contained sub-cultures based on exclusivity and limited to reworking cultural meanings, then this would appear to make a welcome alternative, for the powerful in society, to the young developing mature progressive modes of political response. Crime and unconventional life styles may not be particularly approved of by the ruling class, but from their point of view they are preferable to socialist political protest.

A Conclusion

One of the common threads linking the work of those sociologists who have argued that some working class delinquency is a form of politics is to see those involved as occupying an especially subordinate position in capitalist society. The delinquencies cited - paki-bashing, football hooliganism, truancy, vandalism and "mugging" - are identified with working class adolescent males who have experienced such things as low achievement and ridicule at school, unemployment, relative poverty, upheavals resulting from urban development, white racism, and so on. In short, their subordinate position in a society structured around endemic class conflict, is

seen as crucial to an understanding of their delinquencies. My own position is congruent with this view. I also agree with those who have argued that the working class, and notably working class adolescents, do not necessarily resign themselves to their experiences and problems; in many cases they resist. And it is this resistance, in the form of delinquency, or through "rituals", that the above writers see as a form of politics. Certainly, if we are going to find a political or pre-political dimension to delinquency, then it is on this sort of basis that analyses would have to proceed. Some writers, as we have seen, have argued that some (or all) delinquency is a manifestation of resistance to bourgeois ideology via the individuals and institutions that are its representatives, and is thus a form of political struggle. I am arguing that whilst this may be the case in certain instances, the fact that a delinquent uses his delinquency to resist does not automatically make that action political. It is important to remember that the problems and grievances experienced by working class youth can give rise to a number of responses (cf. Clarke and Jefferson, 1976); delinquency is one of them. Furthermore, the individual concerned can be strongly committed to delinquency, or engage in such acts casually and intermittently (or be somewhere in between). Delinquency, of course, is a term covering a wide range of behaviour, and is engaged in for a variety of reasons, in many different kinds of situation,

and by different kinds of adolescents. Thus we cannot lump all working class delinquency together and assert that it is by definition political. And even the same types of delinquency, for example paki-bashing, cannot be assumed, in blanket fashion, to be either political, pre-political or non-political. Using the indicators outlined earlier, the task is to separate out one type of delinquency from another.

If one recognises that some delinquency represents resistance, it is fairly easy to drift towards the view that delinquency must be political (as some writers discussed in this paper have done), and this carries with it a parallel danger of using a concept of "political" that is so broad and flexible that it loses its strength as a sociological concept. One can still recognise purposefulness, rationality and resistance in the acts of delinquents without necessarily categorising their behaviour as political. My suggestion (in the form of a "raw" definition) that delinquency is political when it is a conscious attempt to resist or contain the power of others, is not meant to imply that in all instances where this occurs we are witnessing political behaviour. This characteristic is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. I would argue that the resistance to the power of others has to be such that the participants organise their behaviour around considerations beyond the immediate act. Thus, for example, a boy who hits a teacher because he is fed up with being picked on in class, is in a sense resisting the power of the teacher,

but his action is organised around a personal grudge, and according to the formulation I am developing here would not be political. To be political the delinquency must be a conscious attempt to resist on a longer term basis than the moment; the delinquent must orientate his actions towards a future, so that they are part of an on-going (though possibly loosely structured) programme. In the case of the pupil hitting the teacher, his action would be political if it was part of, say, a broader-based programme of terror aimed at restricting the institutionalised power of the teacher. As I have stated above, though, we are not dealing with two categories, but three: political, pre-political and non-political. Using the approach suggested here, examples of delinquency that can be placed in the "political" category are quite rare, in fact the range of delinquencies cited in this paper will tend to occupy the "pre-political" category. Thus I am not writing them off in terms of a political dimension, rather I am suggesting that in many cases delinquencies such as football hooliganism, paki-bashing and vandalism are potentially, rather than actually, political. This is based upon a recognition that working class adolescents can develop a consciousness of their social world arising from a perceived displacement between ideological accounts of that world and their own experiences of it. If this occurs then the preconditions exist for the development of a political consciousness. However, if this consciousness is manifested in resistance that is only orientated to the

immediacy of the act, then I am categorising it as "pre-political".

If we accept, for instance, Ian Taylor's argument that football hooliganism represents an attempt to regain control of the club - i.e. the hooliganism is a form of resistance to the power of the business interests controlling the club - then the delinquency taking place on Saturday afternoons is, according to my scheme, not political but pre-political. This is because those concerned are not utilising strategies aimed at resisting the power of the club, so much as expressing their allegiance to the club through short term actions aimed at opposing supporters. The fun, excitement, feelings of solidarity, derive from the delinquency as an end in itself - it is not part of a programme of reclamation. The consciousness involved does not result in inter-class struggles, but rather in intra-class struggles. This is not to say that all football hooliganism is even pre-political delinquency however. A further example will help to clarify my position. If a youth were to attack a Pakistani because he thought that the Pakistani had been staring at his girlfriend (and given that a background of racist feelings may exist), then the action would qualify as non-political delinquency, as it is simply motivated by revenge. If a youth were to attack a Pakistani on the street because he was overcome by a feeling that "they" were taking white men's jobs, then the action would be pre-political, for in this case a consciousness

exists which contains the potential for a more developed (political) response. If a youth were to attack a Pakistani as part of a broader-based programme, where he was looking beyond the actual attack to longer term goals (for example to scare them away from the area), then the delinquency would be political.

Having said this, it is not easy to answer the question, how do Pearson's Accrington paki-bashers fit into this scheme? The problem is that we do not have a clear-cut picture of the forms of consciousness involved. From my analysis of his study, and using the indicators that are present, I would suggest that the actions of the paki-bashers could not be described as political, though whether they were pre-political or non-political is debatable. This is because in this particular case I do not think that we can make a blanket judgement, and on available evidence I would argue that for some of those involved it was non-political action (because of personal grudge motivations), whilst for others it may have been pre-political, depending on more general attitudes towards Pakistanis in the town held by those concerned.

Finally, it is important to realise the severe limitations of what for the majority of working class adolescents is the most accessible mode of protest, that is, delinquency. This is especially so if it is restricted to the level of a cultural politics (cf. Willis, 1978). The fact that some delinquency is categorised as pre-political does not, of course,

mean that it will inevitably develop into a political response (delinquent or otherwise). Indeed, from a socialist standpoint there is room for some pessimism. Given the structural barriers preventing sections of the working class from translating their felt grievances into more mature political strategies, delinquency takes on the appearance of an alternative response. However, it is an alternative that often takes the participants down a cul de sac. The ruling class may not approve of delinquency, but from where they stand it does at least offer a more attractive alternative to revolutionary socialism. And socialists should not be too optimistic of pre-political delinquency becoming political in a socialist sense: the potential for a reactionary politics should not be ignored.

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23. Ibid. p.102.
24. Whether labelling theory is really a theory is of course debatable. As one of the most influential sociologists in this school puts it: "I have never thought the original statements by myself and others warranted being called theories, at least not theories of the fully articulated kind they are now criticised for not being." (Becker H.S. (1974) pp. 41-2).

* Full bibliographical details for titles cited in Notes and References are given in the Bibliography.

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